



Beyond the Screen: The Influence of Media Sources on Egyptian Tweens' Purchase Intentions with the Intervening Role of Para-Social Relationships

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to measure the impact of source influence on tweens' purchase intentions with the mediating role of para-social relationships. After reviewing the literature, the study hypothesized that: There is a positive significant relationship between source influence and para-social relationships; there is a positive significant relationship between para-social relationships and purchase intentions. In order to test these hypotheses, a quantitative research approach was used. Data was collected using an administrated questionnaire. A convenience sampling technique was used. The sample included both male and female pre-teens (9 - 13), social media users, educated, and from Alexandria. Once the questionnaires were filled out and collected back, the data was analyzed using the SPSS 20.0* (Statistical Package for Social Science) program. Correlation and Regression analyses were done in order to test the hypotheses. Results indicate that all sub-variables in source influence [similarity, expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness] have positive, and significant relationships with PSR; and PSR has a positive, and significant relationship with Purchase intentions.

Subject Areas

Social Science, Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Behavioral Science

Keywords

Social Media, Purchase Intention, Tweens, Para-Social Relationships, Social Media Influencers

1. Introduction

Children nowadays spend many hours online watching YouTube videos, scrolling reels on Instagram, or watching unlimited amounts of videos on Tiktok—in which their favorite vloggers (a person who regularly posts videos on a video log) are playing games, unboxing toys, reviewing products, making jokes or just going about their daily activities. These vloggers/influencers regularly post attractive and entertaining content in the hope of building a large follower base. The stars of social media today, also referred to as vloggers/influencers on social media platforms, have become important guides for the consumption decisions of their young audiences [1]. They give their followers an insight into the brands they love and use in their daily life and even give direct advice on the products their followers should use or not use [2]. Because of the credibility they exude and the reach they control, many brands have added these influencers to their marketing strategies, also referred to as influencer marketing. This sponsored content appears to be highly influential and may affect children's brand preferences. Given the limited advertising literacy skills (*i.e.*, knowledge of advertising and skills to critically reflect on this advertising) of children under the age of 12, (also referred to as “pre-teens” or “tweens” in this study), they are a vulnerable target group when it comes to persuasion. However, research on how influencer marketing affects pre-teens (youth under 12) is scarce and it is unclear how they can be empowered to critically cope with this fairly new form of persuasion-marketing [1]. This article therefore aims to shed light on why and how social media influencers have persuasive power over their young followers. We propose that tweens' interactions with influencers they are following, combined with how they are influenced by them, contributes to their relationship with them (PSR) which in turn, correlates with their materialistic beliefs.

2. Background

Social influence refers to the way individuals modify their thoughts or actions in response to others' behavior, opinions, or expectations [3]. Influencer marketing uses this “influence” on a platform of social media. Freberg *et al.* (2010) [4] describe a social media influencer as “a new form of independent, third-party endorsement in which the individual shapes the attitudes of the audience with tweets, blogs, and other social media implementations”. Ranga & Sharma (2014) [5] define social media influencer marketing as a modern form of marketing “which centers upon key individuals or types of key individuals as opposed to a focus upon the target market in its entirety”. The social media influencer represents the subliminal message that the consumer must subscribe to particular products and services in order to achieve a lifestyle that is comparative to that of the influencer [6]. The objective of social media marketing strategies is to create and cultivate business and consumer relationships since social media has become a ubiquitous presence in the daily lives of children and adolescents: with 95% of teens in the United States having access to a smart device and 45% of them report-

ing that they are constantly connected online [7]. One of the most efficient strategies to reach this segment is through influencer marketing, namely brands' promoting products via "someone like me" [8]. Indeed, 70% of adolescent YouTube users indicated that they treated YouTube influencers as peers and 60% YouTube users would follow influencers' advice on what to purchase over that of TV or movie celebrities [9].

Social media influencers are defined as content generators with domain expertise, who can shape followers' attitudes and purchase decisions [10]. Unlike traditional celebrities, who gained fame via mass media channels and hold a "one-to-all," non-reciprocal interactions with fans, social media influencers are more like "grass-roots" celebrities who shot to fame via constantly producing valuable content and cultivating reciprocal relationships with their followers via social media [10]. Accordingly, young social media users treat their relationships with influencers more like friendship rather than fan-ship [9].

Source credibility or endorser credibility is a crucial factor in determining persuasiveness of brand endorsements [11]-[13]. In influencer marketing, as influencers serve the same roles as celebrities do in brand endorsements, their credibility becomes an important determinant of the efficiency of their endorsements. Prior researchers conceptualized source credibility as a two-dimension construct: expertise and trustworthiness [11]. Further, McGuire [14] and Ohanian [15] both conceptualized source attractiveness as a third dimension, which refers to a source's perceived physical appeal or desirability. More recently, Munnukka *et al.* (2016) [16] extended the scope of source credibility by including a fourth facet—perceived similarity—when examining peer endorsers. This is more relevant to influencer marketing, as influencers cultivate relationship more like "friendship" with followers and function as peers to followers. Therefore, we adopted the four-dimension of source credibility to gauge the appeal of influencers.

Para-social interaction (PSI) or (PSR—since they have been used interchangeably in some studies) describes audiences' illusory and involved social experiences with media personae [17]. PSR refers to "a more enduring relationship that a media-user forms with a mediated performer" [18]. PSR thus signals more enduring feelings of "connectedness that audiences have with media personae beyond momentary exposure" [19]. PSR applies well to the case of influencer-follower relationship. As social media influencers, afford reciprocal relationships via regularly generating content and interacting with their followers, followers can develop lasting socioemotional attachment to the social media influencers. It is noteworthy that relationship formation often happens over a prolonged period of time.

3. Literature Review

The landscape of consumer behavior, particularly among tweens, has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, largely influenced by the rise of digital media and the proliferation of influencer marketing. As tweens navigate the complex world of purchasing decisions and materialistic tendencies, understanding

the underlying factors and mechanisms driving their behavior becomes increasingly imperative.

Social Networking Sites (SNSs), such as Facebook and Twitter, have become ubiquitous and well-established online social platforms in people's daily life [20]. Nearly every moment, a large number of people use SNSs to contact with others, express themselves, read current news, display beautiful pictures or just share their daily lives [21]. Meanwhile, the popularity of portable devices (smartphones and tablet PCs) and the application of the fourth-generation mobile technologies have further accelerated this trend [22].

Until this day, social media are considered digital applications that facilitate interactive information, user-created content, and collaborations. Social media exists entirely on the Internet or portals that can access the Internet (computers, tablets, and cell phones). Applications are different technological mechanisms to connect people and information. The most popular and well-known social media applications are Social Networking Sites (SNWs or SNS). SNS are a subset of social media and meet the following three broad criteria: 1) they are an online service that allows users to build a profile within the network, 2) they allow users to build a list of other users that they share a connection with, and 3) they allow users to view and to navigate the information created by other users on the social network [23]. Because of these unique features and vast popularity, SNS have been the focus of academic research in many areas [21]-[24]. They are defined social networking sites as those that allow visitors to register and connect to each other in order to communicate or share resources. Individuals have their private profiles, with a space for a biography, a photograph and the freedom to post anything they want [13].

On many of the large SNSs, participants are not necessarily "networking" or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network [25]. SNSs are defined as internet-based services that give individuals three major capabilities: First, the ability to construct a public or semi-public profile; second, the ability to identify a list of other users with whom a connection is shared; third, the ability to view and track individual connections as well as those made by others [23]. SNSs have become an important means of communication used for professional, private, recreational, and information purposes. At the same time, their rapid growth and wide popularity have stimulated scholarly interest in their social impacts [23].

A person determines the intention and purpose of their social media existence and their personality and intentions will be reflected through their profile and posts. Based on the profile and posts made, peers will form their own perceptions about what kind of person a particular user is and would react in accordance to the amount of pull associated with the person and how it will affect their relationship [26]. With the widespread proliferation and usage of Social Media across the different aspects of life in both our social and professional capacities, it became extremely important for us to understand the components of the social media.

Hundreds of SNSs have been created, but today, Facebook is by far the largest in terms of the number of users [27].

3.1. Aspects of Influencers Effect

There is a significant role of source creditability in the networking sector, as it directly impacts the extent of trust and credibility that followers place in influencers. Research has shown that influencers who are perceived as reliable and knowledgeable are more likely to have a stronger influence on their followers' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, marketers must cautiously select influencers who align with their brand values and have a track record of providing reliable information to maintain a positive perception among their target audience [28]. There is also a set of dimensions to the source influence of social media influencers, which encompasses: Attractiveness, Similarity, Trustworthiness, and Expertise. Therefore, the degree to which a celebrity is viewed as elegant, seductive, and attractive is known as their attractiveness. One of the main determinants of how an influencer endorsement affects customer purchasing decisions is attractiveness. The perceived honesty, dependability, and reliability of an endorser are referred to as their trustworthiness. As such, it is imperative that marketers select a celebrity endorsement that scores highly on these criteria [29]. Moreover, the degree to which an influencer is seen as seasoned, informed, competent, and, generally speaking, a reliable source is known as their level of expertise. The emphasis is not on the influencer's real skill, but rather on how the public views them and their content. Furthermore, similarities between the influencer and the customer might have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of an endorsement from a famous person. Consumers are inclined to place their confidence and be persuaded by an endorser who they believe shares their demographics, beliefs, or lifestyle. This sense of identification can create a stronger connection and make the endorsement more persuasive [29].

Therefore, source influence creditability is essential in evaluating the effectiveness of an influencer's effective authority on respondents. Clients are inclined to believe in the endorsement if they perceive the source as credible and reliable. Moreover, this credibility can be influenced by factors such as the celebrity's reputation, expertise in the endorsed product or service, and previous successful endorsements. Ultimately, a credible source enhances the overall impact of a celebrity endorsement on consumer behavior [30].

Mass media outlets like TV, radio, and newspapers are no longer the primary providers of information in today's media environment. Nowadays, people utilize virtual communities and social media platforms to build relationships and search for and/or exchange information. Social media users are frequently drawn to well-known online personalities for knowledge on certain topics and topics connected to consumption, such as travel, cuisine, lifestyle, cosmetics, clothing, and healthy living advice. Social media users progressively form close relationships with these online personae through regular interactions and repeated exposure to the user-

generated material provided by these powerful personae. Consequently, these virtual identities have the power to impact the purchasing habits of their followers [10].

3.2. Para-Social Relationship with Influencers

Para-social relationship refers to the psychological connection that individuals develop with media personalities, such as influencers. This connection is mostly one-sided, with followers feeling a sense of familiarity and closeness to the influencer, despite never having met them in person. Accordingly, this para-social relationship can be incredibly powerful in influencing consumer behavior and driving brand loyalty. Additionally, influencers have the ability to leverage this relationship to build reliability and credibility with their audience, making them accept and involve with the brand they are promoting [28].

It is critical to realize the dynamic between influencers and their audience. The term “para-social interaction” refers to audiences’ perceived social interactions with media characters. In certain literary works, the phrases para-social contact and para-social connection have been used synonymously. A para-social connection is a socioemotional link that forms between media personae and audiences. It is founded on para-social contact. While such connection refers to a longer-lasting link between media personae and audiences, para-social interaction refers to audiences’ relationship perception during a one-time exposure to media output (show, movie). Para-social relationships are formed by viewers’ engagement and responses to media personae, much like in real life relationships. In contrast to social relationships, para-social relationships are one-sided and do not require viewers and media personas to reciprocate [11].

The para-social link hypothesis explains the efficacy of influencer marketing on the internet. The para-social relationship theory has been used in marketing and consumer behavior research to investigate a variety of topics, including the strength of para-social connections in social media, para-social advertising, connections between consumers and brands in social media, the social media channels most likely to produce strong para-social relationships, and influencer characteristics. Even if their involvement in the conversation is minor, influencers encourage their audience to engage in conversation, giving the impression of friendship [31].

Brands are taking notice of influencer-based marketing as a fresh way to spread and impact their goal audience. Influencers and followers engage in para-social contact, which is a one-sided emotional connection type that the audience have to the influencer and may have a positive impact on marketing results. This emotional connection can lead to increased brand loyalty and trust, as followers perceive influencers as relatable and trustworthy individuals. Additionally, the accessibility of networking platforms allows influencers to engage directly with their followers, further strengthening the para-social relationship [32].

Moreover, the para-social relationship theory suggests that the more time fol-

lowers spend engaging with an influencer's content, the stronger their emotional connection becomes. This means that influencers have the potential to not only influence purchasing decisions but also outline the attitudes and behaviors regarding a brand. Therefore, understanding and leveraging the power of para-social relationships can be a valuable strategy for marketers looking to effectively reach and engage their target audience [26].

The position of para-social relationships encompasses the trust and authenticity that influencers bring to their partnerships with brands. By fostering these relationships, brands can establish a deeper connection with consumers and cultivate long-lasting loyalty. This sense of connection can lead to repeat business, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and ultimately, sustainable growth in the competitive marketplace. Marketers must prioritize building and maintaining these para-social relationships to ensure the achievement of their influencer marketing operations and drive continued success for their brand [33].

Accordingly, by creating authentic and relatable content, influencers can promote a glimpse of trust and loyalty among their followers, leading to increased brand awareness and customer loyalty. Additionally, influencers can serve as a bridge between brands and consumers, helping to humanize the brand and make it more relatable to their audience. This personalized approach can result in higher levels of engagement and conversion rates, ultimately driving business growth and success. Furthermore, by proactively collaborating with celebrities that connect with their brand values and their target demographic, advertisers may maximize the effect of their influencer marketing activities and achieve the intended objectives [34].

3.3. Purchase Intentions as a Result of Para-Social Relationship with Influencers

Purchase intentions refer to the likelihood or willingness of a consumer to make a purchase in the future. By recognizing and evaluating purchase intents, online businesses may acquire knowledge about customer tastes, wants, and motivations. This information may then be utilized to customize marketing campaigns, boost product offers, and enhance the entire consumer experience. Additionally, studying purchase intentions allows retailers to anticipate demand and make informed decisions regarding inventory management and resource allocation. Ultimately, by effectively addressing and satisfying consumer purchase intentions, online retailers can increase sales, build customer loyalty, and achieve long-term success in the digital marketplace [34].

The market for trade is quite competitive these days, and there are a lot of innovative ideas available to draw in clients. Customers in this situation have a lot of options when it comes to purchasing things, but a lot of factors affect both the success of the product and the intention of the client to buy. Purchase intention is defined by academics as individual behavior inclinations based on brand. They have also come to the conclusion that attitude and aim are not the same. Although

attitude encompasses a person's assessment of a product, intention encompasses a person's motivation in terms of their intended course of action [35].

Purchase intentions may be used to test a new distribution channel's implementation, which can assist managers in deciding which geographic areas and customer categories to target through the channel and if the concept merits further development. These intentions are significant since they are seen to be the primary indicator of actual action. As such, any online store hoping to succeed must pay close attention to these intents. Additionally, monitoring purchase intentions allows businesses to identify potential barriers or concerns that may be preventing customers from making a purchase, enabling them to make necessary adjustments and improvements to enhance customer satisfaction and drive sales [36].

The intent of the customer to purchase the good or service is known as purchase intention. Put in another context, a further component of purchase intention is the user's desire to purchase a product following assessment. A multitude of elements influence a consumer's purpose when choosing a product, and the final selection is contingent upon the consumer's intention in conjunction with several external influences. The group's decision-making process influences the choice of brand for well-known items. These external influences can include factors such as personal preferences, recommendations from friends or family, online reviews, and marketing efforts by the brand. Additionally, the group's decision-making process can also be influenced by social norms and cultural values. Therefore, understanding and effectively targeting these external influences is crucial for brands to successfully build customer loyalty and achieve long-term success in the digital marketplace [37] [38].

3.4. Hypotheses Development for Research

The Relationship between Source's Personal Characteristics and Para-Social Relationship between Influencer and Tween Follower.

Gong and Li (2017) [39] expounded on how source factors (credibility, attractiveness, and congruence) affected para-social relationships. An online survey was created and distributed to Sina Weibo users. The results clarified that credibility, attractiveness, and congruence had a significant influence on para-social contexts.

Yuan and Lou (2020) [10] explained the association between source credibility (expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and similarity) and para-social aspects. An online questionnaire was created and distributed to participants who interacted with social media influencers. The findings showed that expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and similarity had a positive significant influence on para-social relationships.

Ashraf *et al.* (2023) [40] showed the role of source credibility dimensions (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity) in enhancing para-social relationships with followers. A survey was conducted and 506 active social media users responded to this survey. The study found that there was a positive significant effect of source credibility dimensions (attractiveness, trustworthiness, ex-

expertise, and similarity) on para-social relationships. Fatima and Billah (2023) [41] investigated the impression of credibility of influencers (constructs of expertise, attractiveness, trust, and similarity) on para-social relationships. The study adopted a questionnaire and 280 Pakistan social media users responded to it. The study found that constructs of expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and similarity had a significant impact on para-social relationships. According to the previously discussed studies, the second hypothesis of the inquiry: There is a significantly positive relationship between the source's personal characteristics and the para-social relationship between influencer and adolescent follower, can be assumed based on the earlier studies that were mentioned. [H1] There is a positive significant relationship between the source's personal characteristics and the para-social relationship between influencer and tween follower.

The Relationship between Tweens' Perceived PSR with Influencers and their Purchase Intentions towards Influencer-Promoted Products.

Kim *et al.* (2015) [42] investigated the different influences of para-social concepts on purchase intention. A survey was conducted and distributed to undergraduate and graduate scholars at a university in South Korea. The study found that there was a significant relationship between para-social relationships and purchase intention. Hwang and Zhang (2018) clarified the association between para-social contexts and followers' purchases. A survey was administered to 389 Chinese social media users who followed digital celebrities. The outcomes indicated a positive significant link between para-social contexts and followers' purchases. Lou and Kim (2019) [43] examined the impact of para-social relationships on purchase intentions. A questionnaire was created and distributed to 500 United States tweens. The inquiry revealed that para-social relationships had a positive significant effect on purchase intentions.

Ashraf *et al.* (2023) [40] showed the impact of para-social interactions on buying decisions. A survey was conducted and 506 active social media users responded to this survey. The study found that there was a positive significant influence of para-social relationships on the purchase intentions of consumers. Ko (2024) [44] expounded on the link between para-social contexts and buying intentions. Using theories of uncertainty reduction, para-social relationships, and social influence, this investigation created a model to examine what influences viewers of live-streaming shopping to keep watching and making a purchase. The findings showed that para-social relationships significantly affected purchase intentions. According to the previously discussed studies, the fifth hypothesis of the inquiry: Tweens' perceived PSR with influencers will be positively related to their purchase intentions towards influencer-promoted products, can be assumed based on the earlier studies that were mentioned. [H2] Tweens perceived PSR with influencers will be positively related to their purchase intentions towards influencer-promoted products.

4. Research Methodology

A conclusive descriptive research design was deemed appropriate to gather the

primary data and attend to these research objectives. A cross-sectional design was used to carry out the study. In order to fulfill the research aims and objectives, a convenience sampling technique was used. The sample included both male and female pre-teen youth (9 - 13), social media users, and educated, and from Alexandria, due to convenience. The respondents included youth from different backgrounds, ages, income levels and genders. Research finds that 9- to 13-years old show that SNS are recognized by youth as a possible source of news and that many receive some of their news from these sites. This target sample popularly interacts with one another and spread various messages that are believed credible—a good source of information [45]. Data was gathered using a structured survey questionnaire. The scale measuring “Source influence” is composed of 4 sub-variables—Expertise, Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, and Similarity. The scale for expertise is a 4 item, 5-point scale to rate the extent to which the respondents agree with the statements while using social media. The scale includes Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), and Strongly Disagree (5). The items are: I feel like he/she knows a lot; I feel he/she is competent to make assertions about things he/she is good at; I consider he/she as an expert on his/her area; I consider he/she sufficiently experienced about his/her area. The scale measuring trustworthiness is a 4 item, 5-point likert scale that includes Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5). The items are: I feel he/she is truthful; I feel he/she is honest; I consider he/she to be trustworthy; I feel he/she to be sincere. The scale measuring attractiveness is a 4 item, 5-point likert scale that includes Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5). The items are: I feel he/she is attractive; I feel he/she is stylish; I consider he/she to be appealing; I feel he/she to be good-looking. The scale measuring similarity is a 3 item, 5-point likert scale that includes Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5). The items are: I feel he/she and I have a lot in common; I feel he/she are a lot alike; I can easily identify with he/she. The scale measuring “Para-social Relationships” is a 9 item, 5-point likert scale that includes Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5). The items are: he/she makes me feel comfortable as if I am with a friend; I look forward to seeing his/her posts; if he/she starts another social media channel I will probably follow; he/she seems to understand the kind of things I want to know; if I see a story about he/she in other places I would read it; I would love to meet he/she in person; he/she would fit in well with my group of friends; if something happens to he/she I will feel sad; he/she is the kind of person I would like to hang out with.

The scale measuring “Purchase Intentions” is a 3 item, 5-point likert scale that includes Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5). The items are: I am likely to buy certain products because of his/her posts; it is possible that I will visit some online/actual stores because of his/her posts; it is probable that I may purchase the products/brands that he/she has promoted if I happen to need one. All scales were adapted from Lou and Kim [43] and Makgosa and Mohube [46] (See **Figure 1**).



Figure 1. Research model, (adapted from [43] and [46]).

Questionnaires were personally administered and collected by the researcher. The questionnaire contained words that were simple and straight forward. The survey was originally created in the English language. The back-translation process was conducted in order to ensure that the language conversion was done accurately. Once the need questionnaires were filled out and collected back, the data were analyze using the SPSS 20.0* (Statistical Package for Social Science) program.

5. Research Findings and Discussion

The relationship between source influence (attractiveness, similarity, expertise, and trustworthiness) and para-social relationships (PSRs) plays a crucial role in shaping purchase intentions among tweens. Research suggests that individuals are more likely to develop PSRs with influencers they perceive as attractive and similar to themselves. These relationships are further strengthened by the influencer's perceived expertise and trustworthiness, which contribute to the credibility of their endorsements. Stronger PSRs lead to increased purchase intentions, as tweens rely on influencers for product recommendations.

Influencers with high attractiveness and similarity to their tween audience (e.g., fashion or gaming influencers) foster stronger PSRs. Brands leverage this by partnering with relatable influencers to promote products, leading to higher engagement and conversion rates. Example: A beauty influencer with expertise in skin-care may build trust among tweens, increasing their likelihood of purchasing recommended products.

As for Trustworthiness & Purchasing Decisions, Tweens, as digital natives, seek authenticity. Trustworthy influencers (e.g., those who share personal experiences or openly discuss product pros/cons) enhance brand credibility. Misinformation or over-promotion can weaken trust and break PSRs, reducing influencer effectiveness. Concerning Retail & E-commerce Growth, Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have seen brands investing in influencer-driven marketing campaigns targeting young audiences. Tweens exposed to repeated influencer recommendations develop brand affinity, shaping their long-term consumption patterns.

Finally, Regulatory & Ethical Considerations: The persuasive power of influencers over tweens raises concerns about responsible advertising. Policies regulating endorsements, transparency in sponsorships, and protection against manipulative marketing are essential.

6. Research Findings and Discussion

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shaping purchase intentions among tweens. Research suggests that individuals are more likely to develop PSRs with influencers they perceive as attractive and similar to themselves. These relationships are further strengthened by the influencer's perceived expertise and trustworthiness, which contribute to the credibility of their endorsements. Stronger PSRs lead to increased purchase intentions, as tweens rely on influencers for product recommendations. The relationship between source influence (attractiveness, similarity, expertise, and trustworthiness) and para-social relationships (PSRs) has significant real-world implications, particularly in digital marketing and consumer behavior among tweens.

Influencers with high attractiveness and similarity to their tween audience (e.g., fashion or gaming influencers) foster stronger PSRs. Brands leverage this by partnering with relatable influencers to promote products, leading to higher engagement and conversion rates. Example: A beauty influencer with expertise in skincare may build trust among tweens, increasing their likelihood of purchasing recommended products. As for Trustworthiness & Purchasing Decisions, Tweens, as digital natives, seek authenticity. Trustworthy influencers (e.g., those who share personal experiences or openly discuss product pros/cons) enhance brand credibility. Misinformation or over-promotion can weaken trust and break PSRs, reducing influencer effectiveness. Concerning Retail & E-commerce Growth, Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have seen brands investing in influencer-driven marketing campaigns targeting young audiences. Tweens exposed to repeated influencer recommendations develop brand affinity, shaping their long-term consumption patterns. Finally, Regulatory & Ethical Considerations: the persuasive power of influencers over tweens raises concerns about responsible advertising. Policies regulating endorsements, transparency in sponsorships, and protection against manipulative marketing are essential.

7. Conclusions

Understanding how source influence impacts PSRs helps brands optimize influencer strategies, enhance consumer trust, and drive purchase behavior among tweens. This has long-term implications for digital marketing, advertising ethics, and brand-consumer relationships. The objective of the study is to examine how Source Influence (Attractiveness, Similarity, Expertise, Trustworthiness), influence purchase intentions among 9 - 12-year-old Egyptian youth through their Para-Social Relationships with influencers/bloggers.

[H1] There is a significant positive relationship between the source's personal characteristics and the Para-social relationship between influencer and tween follower.

This hypothesis is divided into four-sub hypotheses, and the analysis revealed a significant positive association between Attractiveness and Para-Social Relationships. The attractiveness that the influencer has in their character represents a significant factor that helps him/her to gain more followers. Focusing on children, attractiveness could represent an important factor that force them towards certain

attitude, as in this age they get attracted to anything or their attention is easily grabbed. This simply explain the impact of attractiveness in personality towards the para-social relationship.

Gong and Li [39] expounded on how source factors (credibility, attractiveness, and congruence) affected para-social relationships of Sina Weibo users and assured that credibility, attractiveness, and congruence had a significant influence on para-social contexts. For the second sub-hypothesis, the results also showed a positive correlation between Similarity and Para-Social Relationships. The similarity in personality can represent a vital factor that affects the para-social relationships with influencers, certainty with children, as similarity makes them feel that they are really close to the celebrity or influencer, in which increase their attachment towards this influencer.

Similarity has been connected to appearance, emotional closeness, and, most recently, customer connection. Similarity can have an impact on behavior and attitude. Fatima and Billah (2023) [41] indicated that when focusing on high school students and their snacking and dessert choices aiming to know the impact of similarity with expertise on their eating habits. It was found that the higher level of similarity between the students and instructors led to a stronger impact on participants' nutritional habits. The sample on 280 Pakistani social media users proved the significant relationship between similarity and para-social relationships as well as it proved the positive significant influences of expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness towards the para-social relationships.

For the relationship between Trustworthiness and Para-Social Relationships, which is the third sub-hypothesis of the second hypothesis, the correlation and regression analysis showed that this relationship is positively correlated. Trustworthiness according to children especially in this sensitive age range is a strong driver that encourages them to communicate with others and to have relationships with strangers. It is expected before the analysis that trustworthiness towards the influencer can lead to a para-social relationship. The results of the fourth sub-hypothesis, the association between Expertise and Para-Social Relationships, demonstrated a positive correlation between the two variables. The results of this sub-hypothesis were expected as it is consistent with previous studies. Source expertise refers to a person's knowledge and abilities in a specific field or subject. Expertise was measured by Yuan and Lou, 2020 [10] with questions like "I feel [influencer name] knows a lot of his/her area", where this study proved a significant impact of expertise on para-social relationship.

Previous research indicated the significant impact of the four dimensions of source's personal characteristics (expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and similarity) on para-social relationships, for example; [10] [40]. Different studies used different methodologies to achieve the same result. Here the researcher depended on 400 tweens in Egypt. (Ashraf *et al.*, 2023) conducted a survey with 506 active social media users to examine the impact of source credibility dimensions on enhancing Para-social relationships with followers. As a consequence, H2: "There is a significantly positive relationship between the source's personal char-

acteristics and the Para-Social Relationship between influencer and tween follower” is fully supported based on the earlier results.

[H2] Tweens perceived PSR with influencers will be positively related to their purchase intentions towards influencer-promoted products.

The findings of the analysis showed that there was a positive and statistically significant association between Para-Social Relationship with influencers and Purchase Intentions. The idea of this hypothesis is very close to the previous hypothesis, where it is expected that the para-social relationship towards the influencers could extend to affect the tweens’ purchase intention. Tweens nowadays have the desire to purchase the same products that influencers use to purchase. The results of some of the earlier studies [40] [42]-[44] [47], are consistent with the earlier findings. These earlier results also showed that Para-social relationships have a significant impact on purchase intentions.

It is assured that the influences viewers of live-streaming shopping encourage them to keep watching for these live-stream as well as enhance them to make more purchase operations. This result is reached through applying the research with the help of three theories; uncertainty reduction, para-social relationships, and social influence [44]. Therefore, based on the previous results: “Tweens’ perceived PSR with influencers will be positively related to their purchase intentions towards influencer-promoted products” is fully supported.

8. Research Implications

8.1. Academic Implications

The present investigation drew upon an esteemed collection of earlier research. Nevertheless, these studies did not offer a comprehensive summary of the ways in which 9 - 12-year-old Egyptian youth’s para-social relationships with influencers/bloggers influence their purchase intentions. These relationships are influenced by Source Influence (Attractiveness, Similarity, Expertise, Trustworthiness). This is especially evident in a country like Egypt, which is highly crucial from an industrial and strategic standpoint. The study is significant due to its holistic approach and its potential for future research. It provides a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the purchase intentions features of 9 - 12-year-old Egyptian adults through their para-social relationships, benefiting scholars and researchers.

8.2. Practical Implications

This study provides valuable insights for marketers targeting younger consumers, enabling them to create ethical and effective campaigns while avoiding deceptive practices by identifying influential material and sources of influence. The relationship between source influence (attractiveness, similarity, expertise, and trustworthiness) and para-social relationships (PSRs) has significant real-world implications, particularly in digital marketing and consumer behavior among tweens. Understanding how source influence impacts PSRs helps brands optimize influ-

encer strategies, enhance consumer trust, and drive purchase behavior among tweens. This has long-term implications for digital marketing, advertising ethics, and brand-consumer relationships.

Brands leverage PSRs by partnering with influencers who are relatable and credible to tweens. Parents and policymakers need to be aware of how PSRs shape tweens' consumer behaviors and materialistic tendencies.

The study can provide insights into how brands can leverage influencers to create more authentic and engaging content that fosters stronger PSRs, ultimately enhancing purchase intentions. Also, Findings could help businesses and marketers identify the most effective influencers based on their ability to build strong PSRs and exert persuasive influence on adolescent consumers. By understanding how influencers shape consumer behavior through PSRs, brands can develop personalized marketing strategies that align with the emotional and cognitive engagement of their target audience.

The research can highlight potential ethical concerns, such as the vulnerability of tweens to persuasive marketing, leading to recommendations for ethical influencer marketing practices. Platforms can utilize insights from the study to optimize algorithms that enhance meaningful and engaging interactions between influencers and followers. Ethical concerns arise around advertising transparency and the potential for influencer manipulation. Understanding how tweens form emotional connections with influencers can help businesses predict consumer preferences and improve product recommendations. The study can also inform influencers on how to build sustainable and trust-based relationships with their audience, helping them develop long-term credibility and brand collaborations.

8.3. Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has limitations but it's significant as it aims to understand how social media influencers impact the youth segment, specifically tweens in Egypt, rather than the entire population. The cross-sectional nature of the study makes it difficult to capture the dynamic nature of consumer behavior, especially in social marketing. Thus, it is suggested for further research to work on understanding these factors through collecting time series data.

Furthermore, the sample size is 400, sourced from Alexandria, Egypt, a densely populated city, due to its high concentration in the target age group, making it an appropriate location for the study. However, the data was not proportionately acquired, making it impossible to generalize the results. Future research could increase sample size and use more representative sampling methods to ensure generalizability across various youth population subgroups.

The study focuses on a small age range of 9 to 12 years old, revealing unique traits that distinguish them from younger children or teenagers. Further research is needed to explore how Para-social interactions and their effects on materialism and purchasing intentions vary with age and development across a wider age range. The study's nature and target audience's age made it challenging for re-

spondents to express their opinions and beliefs about the chosen topic. They were under the impression that it was class work, believing in right and wrong answers, and younger children struggled to understand the questions and may not have expressed their opinions honestly. The study may not consider the diverse influencer types and content niches, which may impact youth differently. Future research should investigate the impact of different influencer types and genres on youth to understand their potential differential effects. Future research could incorporate control variables such as socio-economic status and prior exposure to digital marketing to better isolate the effect of influencer characteristics on tween behavior. These factors may play a significant role in shaping how tweens engage with influencer content and form PSRs. A categorization of influencers based on their content domains would allow for a deeper understanding of their varying impacts on PSRs and purchase intentions. Additionally, future research should explore how variations in influencer characteristics—such as age, gender, and ethnicity—affect the formation of PSRs and purchase intentions among tweens. Another important aspect for future investigation is the potential gender-based differences in response to influencer marketing. Examining how male and female tweens form PSRs and their respective purchase behaviors could provide a more tailored understanding of gender dynamics in influencer marketing. Addressing these gaps in future research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how influencer marketing shapes tween consumer behavior in an evolving digital landscape.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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