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Impact of Digital Influencers' Personal Branding Dimensions on the Success Indicators of Their Digital Business Ventures: A Quantitative Study from Followers' Perspective with Trust as a Mediator

أثر أبعاد العلامة الشخصية للمؤثرين الرقميين على مؤشرات نجاح مشاريعهم التجارية الرقمية: دراسة كمية من منظور المتابعين مع اختبار الدور الوسيط للثقة

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Abstract:
This study investigates the impact of digital influencers' personal branding dimensions (credibility, authenticity, expertise, interaction) on the success indicators of their digital ventures (trust, purchase intention, loyalty), testing trust as a mediator. A quantitative survey was administered to social media followers, yielding a validated sample of N = 58 respondents. Data were analyzed in Jamovi using multiple linear regression and bootstrapping mediation analysis.

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Results indicate high reliability across scales (α = .826–.910). Credibility emerged as the primary predictor of trust (B = 0.501, p = .001), purchase intention (B = 0.519, p = .011), and loyalty (B = 0.493, p = .005), whereas interaction influenced trust only (B = 0.257, p = .005). Crucially, trust strongly mediates the relationship between credibility and purchase intention (Sobel z = 5.814, p < .001) as well as loyalty (Sobel z = 5.345, p < .001). Digital entrepreneurs must prioritize credibility to ensure sustainable commercial success.

Keywords: Personal branding; digital influencers; digital entrepreneurship; trust; purchase intention; loyalty; mediation.

الملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى قياس أثر أبعاد العلامة الشخصية للمؤثرين الرقميين (المصداقية، الأصالة، الخبرة، والتفاعل) في مؤشرات نجاح مشاريعهم التجارية الرقمية (الثقة، نية الشراء، والولاء)، مع اختبار الدور الوسيط للثقة. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الكمي عبر استبيان إلكتروني وُجه لمتابعي المؤثرين، وبلغ حجم العينة النهائية الصالحة للتحليل (N=58) مفردة. تم تحليل البيانات ببرنامج Jamovi عبر الانحدار المتعدد وتحليل الوساطة بالبو تستراب.

أظهرت النتائج ثباتا مرتفعا للمقاييس(α بين 0.826 و0.910). وبرزت المصداقية كأقوى مفسر مباشر لكل من الثقة (B=0.501)، ونية الشراء(B=0.519) ، والولاء(B=0.493)، بينما اقتصر أثر التفاعل على الثقة (B=0.257) . وأكدت النتائج أن الثقة تتوسط، بدلالة إحصائية، العلاقة بين المصداقية وكل من نية الشراء (Sobelz=5.814) والولاء(Sobelz=5.345) .وتوصي الدراسة بالتركيز على المصداقية كأصل جوهري لتحقيق النجاح التجاري المستدام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلامة الشخصية؛ المؤثرون الرقميون؛ المشاريع الرقمية؛ الثقة؛ نية الشراء؛ الولاء؛ الوساطة الإحصائية.

1. INTRODUCTION

Therapid diffusion of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the landscape of consumer decision-making. Social media is no longer merely a communication channel; it has evolved into a dominant marketplace of attention where preferences, consumption values, and purchasing intentions are continuously shaped. Within this ecosystem, digital influencers have emerged as persuasive market actors capable of building perceived intimacy and credibility among followers, thereby influencing consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions.

In recent years, the influencer economy has expanded beyond paid endorsements and brand sponsorships. Many influencers have increasingly launched their own independent digital business ventures, including e-commerce brands, online coaching programs, subscription-based services, consulting, and digital products. This shift positions influencers not only as communicators but also as entrepreneurs competing directly in digital markets. However, the success of these ventures cannot be sufficiently explained by superficial performance indicators such as follower count or engagement rates. Instead, success is likely driven by deeper psychological and relational mechanisms that connect followers' perceptions to consumer behavior.

Prior research consistently suggests that trust is a critical driver of influencer marketing effectiveness and is often more influential than audience size alone (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In digital markets characterized by uncertainty and information asymmetry, followers are likely to evaluate influencer ventures through perceived personal brand signals such as credibility,

authenticity, expertise, and interaction. Accordingly, this study investigates how personal branding dimensions predict venture success outcomes, and whether trust serves as a key mediating mechanism translating credibility into purchase intention and loyalty.

2. Research Problem and Objectives

2.1Research Problem

This study addresses the following research question: To what extent do digital influencers' personal branding dimensions(credibility, authenticity, expertise, and interaction/communication) influence the success indicators ofinfluencers' digital business ventures (trust, purchase intention, and loyalty) from followers' perspective? Additionally, does trust mediate the relationship between credibility and both purchase intention and loyalty?

2.2Research Objectives

The study aims to fulfill the following objectives:

1- Examine the effect of personal branding dimensions on trust toward influencer-owned digital ventures.

2- Assess the impact of personal branding dimensions on purchase intention.

3- Investigate the impact of personal branding dimensions on loyalty.

4- Identify the most influential personal branding dimensions when modeled simultaneously.

5- Test the mediating role of trust in the relationship between credibility and both purchase intention and loyalty.

3. Significance of the Study

3.1Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the influencer marketing and consumer behavior literature by extending the focus from influencers as brand endorsers to influencers as entrepreneurs. It provides an

integrated framework linking personal branding dimensions to multiple venture success indicators and empirically tests trust as a mediating mechanism explaining how credibility translates into advanced consumer outcomes (Labrecque et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

3.2 Practical Significance

From a managerial standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for influencers, digital entrepreneurs, and marketing practitioners by identifying the most influential personal branding dimensions in shaping consumer trust, stimulating purchase intention, and building long-term loyalty toward influencer ventures.

4. Literature Review and Research Gap

4.1 Influencer Marketing and Consumer Trust

Influencer marketing research emphasizes that credibility and message value significantly influence consumer trust and purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Trust is particularly central in digital environments where consumers face heightened perceived risk. In e-commerce contexts, trust has been repeatedly validated as a key determinant of technology acceptance and purchase behavior (Gefen et al., 2003).

4.2 Personal Branding in Digital Markets

Personal branding refers to the strategic construction of an individual's market identity as a brand characterized by clarity, differentiation, and consistency (Montoya & Vandehey, 2009; Peters, 1997). In the social media context, self-branding practices enable influencers to cultivate a unique identity and monetize their symbolic capital (Khamis et al., 2017). Authenticity and consistency have been shown to be fundamental to sustaining online personal brands and maintaining follower trust (Labrecque et al., 2011).

4.3 Loyalty as a Long-Term Consumer Outcome

Consumer loyalty is considered a cumulative process that develops over time through repeated positive experiences, trust reinforcement, and emotional attachment (Oliver, 1999). In influencer-based ventures, loyalty reflects both the perceived quality of the venture and the relational bond with the influencer.

4.4 Research Gap and Study Contribution

Despite extensive research on influencer marketing, several limitations remain. First, most studies examine influencers as endorsers of external brands, while relatively few investigate influencers' own entrepreneurial ventures. Second, many studies rely on direct-effect models and do not empirically test mediating mechanisms explaining how personal branding translates into consumer outcomes. Third, limited evidence exists in Arabic or emerging market contexts. Finally, few studies integrate trust, purchase intention, and loyalty within a single empirical model.

This study contributes by shifting the analytical focus to influencer-owned ventures, integrating three success indicators (trust, purchase intention, loyalty), and empirically testing trust as a mediation pathway linking credibility to purchase intention and loyalty.

5. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

5.1 Theoretical Foundations

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives: (1) Source credibility theory to explain how credibility and expertise build trust and influence consumer outcomes (Lou & Yuan, 2019); (2) Parasocial interaction theory to explain how repeated interaction fosters closeness and relational comfort (Horton & Wohl, 1956); and (3) Behavioral intention theory to explain how cognitive evaluations translate into purchase intention and loyalty via trust (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975).

5.2 Personal Branding Dimensions

Credibility reflects followers' perceptions of honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity, reducing skepticism toward commercial motives (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Authenticity refers to the perception that influencers present themselves genuinely and consistently, supporting emotional attachment (Labrecque et al., 2011).

Expertise refers to perceived competence and knowledge within a domain, enhancing cognitive authority (Freberg et al., 2011).

Interaction and communication refers to the level of engagement between influencers and followers, fostering intimacy and relational bonding (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

5.3 Hypotheses Formulation

H1: Personal branding dimensions collectively exert a positive and significant effect on digital venture success indicators.

H1a: Credibility positively affects trust, purchase intention, and loyalty.

H1b: Authenticity positively affects trust, purchase intention, and loyalty.

H1c: Expertise positively affects trust, purchase intention, and loyalty.

H1d: Interaction/communication positively affects trust, purchase intention, and loyalty.

H2: Trust mediates the relationship between credibility and both purchase intention and loyalty.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design and Sampling

A quantitative explanatory cross-sectional design was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The target population comprised individuals who follow social media influencers. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was applied via an online questionnaire. A total of 105 initial responses were

collected. Following data screening and cleaning—specifically excluding respondents who indicated they do not follow influencers—the final sample was N = 58.

Table 1. Study Sample Screening and Final Sample Size Determination

Stage	Number of Responses	Procedure
Before cleaning	105	Initial responses collected
After cleaning	58	Exclusion of non-followers

Source: Prepared by the author, 2026

6.2 Measurement Scales and Data Analysis

The survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), comprising 16 items for personal branding dimensions and 10 items for venture success indicators, adapted from established scales (De Veirman et al., 2017; Gefen et al., 2003; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Data were analyzed using Jamovi through descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability testing, Pearson bivariate correlation, multiple linear regression, VIF diagnostics, and mediation analysis via the Sobel test and bootstrapping (5,000 resamples, 95% CI).

7. Results

7.1 Reliability Testing

Table 2. Internal Consistency and Reliability Levels of the Study Variables

Variable	Number of Items	α	Reliability Level
Credibility	4	0.829	High

Authenticity	4	0.826	High
Expertise	4	0.833	High
Interaction and Communication	4	0.884	Very High
Trust	3	0.909	Excellent
Purchase Intention	3	0.899	Very High
Loyalty	4	0.910	Excellent

Source: Prepared by the author using statistical outputs, 2026

7.2 Descriptive Statistics and Multicollinearity Diagnostics (VIF)

Mean values on a 5-point scale revealed: Credibility = 2.35 (Low), Authenticity = 2.53 (Low), Expertise = 2.72 (Medium), Interaction = 2.99 (Medium), Trust = 2.48 (Low), Purchase Intention = 2.64 (Medium), and Loyalty = 2.34 (Low).

VIF diagnostics showed values well below 5: Credibility (2.907), Authenticity (3.158), Expertise (2.553), and Interaction (1.476), confirming the absence of multicollinearity.

7.3 Multiple Linear Regression Results

Model 1 (Trust, $R^2 = 0.680$): Credibility ($B = 0.501$, $t = 3.441$, $p = .001$) and Interaction ($B = 0.257$, $t = 2.945$, $p = .005$) had significant positive effects. Authenticity ($p = .968$) and Expertise ($p = .065$) were not significant.

Model 2 (Purchase Intention, $R^2 = 0.500$): Credibility was the sole significant predictor ($B = 0.519$, $t = 2.652$, $p = .011$). Authenticity, expertise, and interaction were not significant.

Model 3 (Loyalty, $R^2 = 0.553$): Credibility directly predicted loyalty (B = 0.493, t = 2.931, p = .005), whereas other dimensions were not significant.

7.4 Mediation Analysis: Trust as a Mediator

Mediation analysis confirmed that trust significantly mediates the link between credibility and purchase intention (Sobel z = 5.814, p < .001; Bootstrap 95% CI [0.509, 0.995]), and the link between credibility and loyalty (Sobel z = 5.345, p < .001; Bootstrap 95% CI [0.371, 0.855]).

7.5 Empirical Discussion

The findings demonstrate that influencers' personal branding constitutes a powerful framework for understanding venture success. Credibility emerged as the most consistent predictor of trust, purchase intention, and loyalty, corroborating prior literature emphasizing credibility as the cornerstone of consumer trust (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The results also support e-commerce models where trust reduces perceived transactional risk (Gefen et al., 2003).

Interaction and communication significantly fostered trust but did not directly drive purchase intention or loyalty, indicating that parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) creates closeness but requires credibility to translate into commercial commitments.

The mediation analysis provides the central empirical contribution by confirming that trust functions as the vital bridge translating credibility into consumer behavioral intentions, aligning with behavioral intention theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) and cumulative loyalty models (Oliver, 1999).

8. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of digital influencers' personal branding dimensions on the commercial performance of their digital ventures, focusing specifically on the mediating

role of trust. Grounded in source credibility theory and parasocial interaction theory, the empirical findings demonstrate that commercial success in the influencer economy transcends vanity metrics like follower counts. Instead, long-term venture viability depends primarily on how followers evaluate an influencer's relational and psychological brand signals.

Empirically, credibility emerged as the primary direct driver of trust, purchase intention, and consumer loyalty. Although interaction and communication significantly reinforced trust, its direct effect on actual transactions remained statistically insignificant. This asymmetry highlights that while relational interaction builds perceived closeness, it cannot independently generate sales or sustainable loyalty in the absence of perceived integrity and truthfulness. Crucially, the mediation analysis confirmed that trust functions as a vital cognitive bridge transmitting the impact of credibility into both purchase intention and loyalty, serving as the essential mechanism through which personal brand equity is converted into commercial outcomes.

These findings offer practical implications for digital entrepreneurs and creator-led ventures. Influencers transitioning into business ownership should prioritize transparency, product quality, and ethical consistency over aggressive sales tactics or superficial engagement metrics. While these results provide meaningful insights, the sample size and cross-sectional design warrant caution; future research would benefit from testing larger, cross-cultural samples and exploring how different product categories moderate the role of trust in digital marketplaces.

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