

How TikTok Influencers' characteristics impact purchase intention? Reflection on crisis time

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Keywords

influencers, TikTok, influencers credibility, influencers expertise, customer purchase intention, crisis.

Abstract

Social media started off as a way for people to communicate with their close friends and family, but it quickly developed into a platform for news and product marketing as well as a way for businesses to market their brands. Additionally, it has grown to be the go-to source for alternative news, particularly with younger people and during crises. One of the most important factors on social media specifically TikTok is the influencers who can be considered as influential people playing a crucial role using social media to spread brand awareness among the general population. The purpose of this paper is to study the effect of influencers' characteristics on customer purchase intention during crisis, with the mediating role of online engagement. The empirical analysis was handled by collecting data through an online survey from a sample of 323 TikTok users. Results revealed that TikTok influencers' characteristics have a significant positive effect on customer purchase intention. Moreover, the results showed that this effect gets deeper in time of crisis and with the mediation role of online engagement. The results also revealed that TikTok influencers' characteristics have a significant positive effect on online engagement. This research adds a significant contribution to the existing literature by studying how TikTok influencers' characteristics influence the customer purchase intention especially during crisis.

Introduction

The rise and increasing popularity of social media has given growth to new marketing strategies, including influencer marketing (Guruge, 2018). Consumers have traditionally placed importance on the opinions of others. However, the increasing utilization of social networking platforms has given ordinary clients the ability to share their ideas and experiences with others. Influencer marketing diverges from conventional marketing through word of mouth by giving marketers greater authority and discernment over marketing outcomes. Marketers can obtain data on the quantity of views, likes, comments, posts by influencers, and feedback pertaining to the goods and services they sell (De Veirman et al., 2017). Companies nowadays are allocating a larger portion of their advertising budgets towards digital influencers (Contestabile, 2018). These influencers, especially TikTok influencers, are seen to be important resources for companies for promoting their products, services, and brands (Chu and Kim, 2011). According to Harmeling et al. (2017), their influence stems from factors such as the size of their contact network, their capacity to influence, their acquired expertise, and their innovative thinking. As a result, influencers are able to engage with their audience more effectively and authentically compared to brands themselves. Influencers are perceived as more genuine and trustworthy, which helps to combat consumer skepticism in today's market.

Furthermore, Consumers live in an interconnected global economy and are regularly confronted with a range of global crises, such as international political warfare (e.g., the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict and

Israel vs. Palestine), cultural or religious disputes (e.g., India vs. Pakistan), and trade limitations or economic sanctions (e.g., South Korea vs. Japan in 2019) (Kim, C. et. al, 2022). The rise of influencer marketing and the appearance of influencers who discuss different topics especially political topics, has made customers increasingly interested in political consumerism as they examine the transformation occurring in market-driven societies globally (Kim et al., 2022b; Lasarov et al., 2021; Lavorata, 2014; Neilson, 2010). Consumers frequently participate in boycotts to penalize a brand or an organization for negative actions, by abstaining from purchasing the brand or the organization offers. Conversely, they also engage in buycotts to honor a brand for positive behaviors, such as actively purchasing the brand's offerings. Customers often embrace values that are considered acceptable and attractive within their social circle or community for the purpose of getting a favorable sense of self-worth. Moreover, individuals enhance their self-esteem by engagement with companies, groups of people, and influencers that possess similar values (Puncheva-Michelotti & Michelotti, 2014). Given that customers engage in actively oriented consumption to attain specific goals, it is imperative for enterprises to comprehend behaviors and rationales behind political consumerism. It is also important to recognize the potential role that the TikTok influencers can play in shaping the customers' purchase intention, as TikTok users are constantly exposed to videos that either discourage shopping or promote the purchase of alternative items (Reeler, 2023). This study contributes to the literature by studying how influencers' characteristics can influence purchase intention in times of crises through the mediating role of online engagement.

Literature Review and hypotheses development

TikTok influencers' characteristics and purchase intention

The surge in digital social media platforms has revolutionized the landscape of endorsement activities, shifting the focus from conventional channels to social media. This tremendous shift has led to the rise of influencer marketing, a strategic approach to incorporating endorsements within the ever-evolving digital ecosystem (Martínez-López et al., 2020). According to Freberg et al. (2011), social media influencers (SMIs) are influential individuals who independently sway audience opinions through diverse social media platforms. Huang et al. (2017) stated that social media influencers are usually experts in specialized areas such as health, fitness, fashion, beauty, food, and technology. This expertise enables them to influence the behavior of their audience. (Raggatt et al., 2018; Klassen et al., 2018). The established social networks ultimately give rise to an online community consisting of individuals sharing similar beliefs, values, and interests to the one being followed (Nambisan, Watt, 2011). Other users regard them as role models and trust their thoughts and perspectives, leading them to follow their advice (Casaló et al., 2020). Since social media interactions provide the impression of in-person connections, consumers are more inclined to be receptive to the content of social media influencers especially TikTok influencers, who are seen as accessible, credible, and trustworthy (Knoll et al., 2015). They utilize their expertise, knowledge, and experience to consistently provide novel content with the aim of becoming opinion leaders and attracting a larger user base to their network community (De Veirman et al., 2017). TikTok influencers promote themselves and engage in self-branding, seeking new followers and maintaining existing ones to increase their social capital. They may have a significant following on diverse social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok application. Their generated content is seen as beneficial, inspiring followers to explore novel brands and products (Monteiro, 2021). Lou and Yuan (2019) have found that the more characteristics an influencer adopts, the greater the awareness of the message's acceptance. Therefore, this research categorized the characteristics of TikTok influencers into four main dimensions pertaining to one's expertise, trustworthiness, credibility and product involvement (AlFarraj et al., 2021).

TikTok influencers' Expertise

Expertise is the term used to describe the perceived ability of an influencer to put forward reliable assertions (Mc-Cracken, 1989). Consumers who seek relevant information in a specific domain relies heavily on those individuals who possess actual experience and comprehension of the current era (Khurshid et al., 2024; Gupta, Kishore & Verma, 2015). Customers are more likely to be influenced by and seek advice from expert sources than from non-expert ones. This is due to the fact that expertise mitigates the perceived risk that occurs when evaluating a purchase (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022). Nguyen (2021) asserted that the

extent of the endorser's product knowledge determines the extent to which the consumer is persuaded to buy it. In other words, the consumer's purchase intent would be significantly influenced by the expert's message.

Accordingly, consumers are more inclined to believe the advice, opinions, or recommendations of an influencer who is seen as a professional in his field. This belief can boost their intention to make a purchase. Although some studies did not reveal the positive effect between influencers expertise and purchase intention (Widyanto & Agusti, 2020; AlFarraj et al., 2021; Gomes et al., 2022) some others asserted this positive effect (Abdullah et al., 2020; Weismueller et al., 2020; Hmoud et al., 2022; Al-Muani et al., 2023). Xiong et al. (2021) contended that the higher the influencer's expertise, the stronger the consumers purchase intention might be. Therefore, expertise is considered one of the most critical aspects that significantly influences the audience (Khurshid et al., 2024).

TikTok influencers' Trustworthiness

Ohanian (1990) defined trustworthiness as the consumers' trust in influencers' intentions to communicate the claims they find most credible. Therefore, Tik Tok followers evaluate influencers' trustworthiness based on their perceived qualities of being reliable, honest, sound, believable or trustworthy in endorsing or recommending products. (Abdullah et al., 2020; Ceyhan et al., 2018; Munnukka et al., 2016).

Trust is seen as a quality of a relationship that develops over time through regular interactions. People may rely on their trust in their partners to predict and evaluate the value of future dealings. It plays a crucial role in sustaining the stability of relationships. Similarly, followers who trust their influencers believe their relationship will be beneficial. (Ao et al., 2023). Consequently, this highlights the crucial importance of the trustworthiness of social media influencers. Consumers actively seek to engage with influencers and express their intent to purchase endorsed products (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Many previous studies have demonstrated this direct link between influencer trustworthiness and online consumers' purchase intentions (Nan et al., 2022; Zhou, 2012; He & Jin, 2022; Saima & Khan, 2020). Moreover, the study of Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), explored a significant effect of online influencers trustworthiness and the purchase intention of younger females.

TikTok influencers' credibility

Credibility refers to the reliability of the information provided and the individuals or sources who offer it (Rebelo, 2017). Credibility is considered as a perceived construct, as discussed by Paquette (2013) and Lou & Yuan (2019). Historically, traditional media platforms limited content creation to individuals who possess financial eligibility and sound sovereignty. Currently, digital advancements have eliminated such obstacles. Paquette (2013) asserted that anyone can share messages with a larger audience through the internet and social media platforms, without the necessity of authority or excessive costs and risks. This allows individuals to achieve their goals and effectively communicate their messages (AlFarraj, 2021; Paquette, 2013; Geho and Dangelo, 2012). The success of a communicated message largely depends on the influencer's established level of competence and reliability, which is linked to their perceived credibility. Information obtained from credible sources significantly influences the formation of one's opinions, attitudes, and behaviors through socialization (AlFarraj, 2021; Lou and Yuan, 2019; Geho and Dangelo, 2012). Credibility of the source is considered by many studies to be essential to creating successful influencer marketing initiatives (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). According to Zietek (2016), the capability to persuade others is directly proportional to the influencer's credibility. Prior studies have demonstrated a favorable correlation between the credibility of an influencer and the intents of their followers (Khurshid et al., 2024; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

TikTok influencers Product involvement

According to Gong et al. (2020) and Chalke et al. (2023), consumers seek guidance on products from referral groups such as influencers. De Veirman et al. (2017); Renchen (2020) and Ying & Dikcius (2023), stated that influencers who demonstrate a prominent level of social presence and network involvement, such as frequent postings and active engagement in the network, are more likely to gain recognition and

establish consumer trust. Goldsmith & Clark (2008) found that consumers are more interested in and inclined to purchase products that are essential to them. This prompts them to make purchasing decisions. Similarly, social media influencers have a similar sentiment regarding the products they endorse. It's easier to attract more consumers when they show a high level of product involvement and knowledge about the products. However, in his study, Liu (2020) revealed that the relations between purchase intention and influencers' product involvement is not readily apparent. Consumers don't seem to be particularly concerned about how frequently opinion leaders use a product in their daily lives.

Purchase intention

The attitude towards a specific purchase and the willingness to pay are both factors that contribute to a consumer's purchase intention (Lin & Nuangjamnong, 2022). Therefore, purchase intention can be regarded as a psychological stage (Wells et al., 2011), involving consumers' intentional planning to purchase a product (Rebelo, 2017). The initial desire of consumers to purchase from online retailers, and live-streaming shopping can boost purchase intention if video content is enjoyable (Huang et al., 2022). Purchase intention is a good predictor of actual behavior, as it is influenced by personal needs and circumstances. Stronger intention indicates a higher likelihood of purchasing (Lin & Nuangjamnong, 2022). Regarding motivation, consumers' purchase intention is determined by comparing the product information with their own. Purchase intention is a crucial aspect of consumer behavior (Krithika & Rajini, 2017). According to Candra, W. K. S. (2023), Al-Mu'ani et al. (2023) and He and Jin (2022) influencers' characteristics including credibility, knowledge, likeability, trustworthiness and familiarity have an impact on people's attitudes towards them, which in turn affects their intention to make a purchase.

Consequently, this research puts forward the following hypothesis:

H1: Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics have a significant effect on customer purchase intention in times of crises.

TikTok influencers' characteristics and Online Customer engagement

Customer engagement refers to the psychological state in which individuals develop an emotional attachment to a particular brand or medium, resulting in regular interactions with this brand or medium that extend beyond the simple act of making a purchase (Thakur, R., 2018). Researchers have shown that online engagement can result in numerous outcomes, such as the act of repurchasing, expressing approval through likes and reviews, and actively participating in the collaborative creation of services and goods (Brodie et al., 2011a,b; Calder et al., 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010).

Researchers proposed a multi-dimensional model of engagement that includes affective, behavioral, and cognitive components (Bowden, 2009b; Calder et al., 2009; Hollebeek, 2011; Mollen and Wilson, 2010), which follows the ABC model of attitude. The ABC model, also known as the three-way model, is a frequently utilized framework for understanding attitudes. It incorporates affection, behavior, and cognition as factors that can predict attitude. This model has been supported by various studies (Breckler, 1984; Jackson et al., 1996; Millar & Tesser, 1989; Wolff et al., 2011). The term "affection" is commonly used to describe the collective emotions and intensity of feelings towards an attitude object (Ajzen, 2001; Watson et al., 1988). The term "behavior" acknowledges the interconnectedness of attitudes and behavior, where attitudes can be influenced by previous behavior and inversely. "Cognition" encompasses the assessments, convictions, and understandings of an item, which include both actual and perceived factual information accessible to a person (Ajzen, 2001; Haddock & Zanna, 1999).

Lamberton and Stephen (2016) referred to the beginning of the previous decade as the social networking era, which led to a period of digital change where the internet significantly impacted the lives of individuals. The interactive nature of social media, allowing for mutual communication, aligns with the reciprocal nature of relationships and customer engagement (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018; Vivek et al., 2012). Therefore, social media offers an excellent chance to enhance online customer engagement (Sashi, 2012). In this social media era Consumers became more involved and began to be perceived as faux marketers (Harmeling et al., 2017). Consumers participate in the digital world for the purposes of entertainment, brand exploration, brand discussion, feedback provision, and brand collaboration. Every behavior encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Eigenraam et al., 2018). Hollebeek and Macky (2019) and Hamilton et al. (2016) found that consumers engage with digital content such as influencers' shared

information for hedonic, utilitarian, or authenticity purposes. Diverse forms of engagement are generated by each of the three motives. Cognitive engagement is driven by utilitarian and authentic factors, which culminate in the development of cognitive maps regarding the brand. Brand identification is the outcome of affective engagement, which is driven by hedonistic and authentic factors. Conversely, behavioral engagement arises from utilitarian and hedonic factors associated with digital content, which may motivate consumers to contribute ideas, influence others, or assist the company. According to Coelho, R. L. F., (2021) The three categories of engagement that emerge from Digital Content Marketing will enhance brand trust and attitude, potentially resulting in enhanced brand equity, a vital element of differentiation and company value. AlFarraj et al. (2021) suggested that influencers' credibility dimensions (i.e., attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise) have a positive significant effect on cognitive, affective and behavior online engagement. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are developed:

H2: Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics have a significant effect on online engagement in times of crises

H2a: Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) have a significant effect on Cognitive online engagement in times of crises.

H2b: Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) have a significant effect on Affective online engagement in times of crises.

H2c: Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) have a significant effect on Behavior online engagement in times of crises.

Online Customer engagement and Purchase intention

Customer engagement is a crucial factor in forecasting and clarifying consumer behavior consequences, such as purchase intention. It is also seen as an effective strategy for acquiring and retaining customers and establishing long-term relationships with them (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014, 2016). Tiruwa, Yadav, and Suri (2016) discovered a correlation between customer engagement in social media brand groups and their desire to make a purchase. Toor, Husnain, and Hussain (2017) found that customer engagement has a noteworthy impact on purchase intention within the realm of marketing via social networks in Pakistan. They emphasized that the exchange, correspondence, and dissemination of information among consumers regarding products and services have improved their engagement, ultimately influencing their desire to make a purchase. Furthermore, according to AlFarraj et al. (2021) it has been proven that online customer engagement plays a mediating role between the characteristics of influencers and purchase intention. accordingly the following hypotheses are built:

H3: Online engagement has a significant effect on Customer purchase intention in times of crises.

H4: Online engagement mediated the relationship between Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics and customer purchase intention.

Research Objectives

This research aims to:

1. Study the effect of TikTok influencer's characteristics on purchase intention.
2. Investigate the effect of TikTok influencer's characteristics on online engagement.
 - 2.1. Explore the effect of Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) on cognitive online engagement in times of crises
 - 2.2. Assess the effect of Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) on affective online engagement in times of crises.
 - 2.3. Examine the effect of Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) on behavior online engagement in times of crises.
3. Explore the effect of online engagement on purchase intention.
4. Study the mediating role of online engagement in the relationship between TikTok influencers' characteristics and purchase intention.

Research Model

The research model is formulated based on the previous hypotheses as follows.

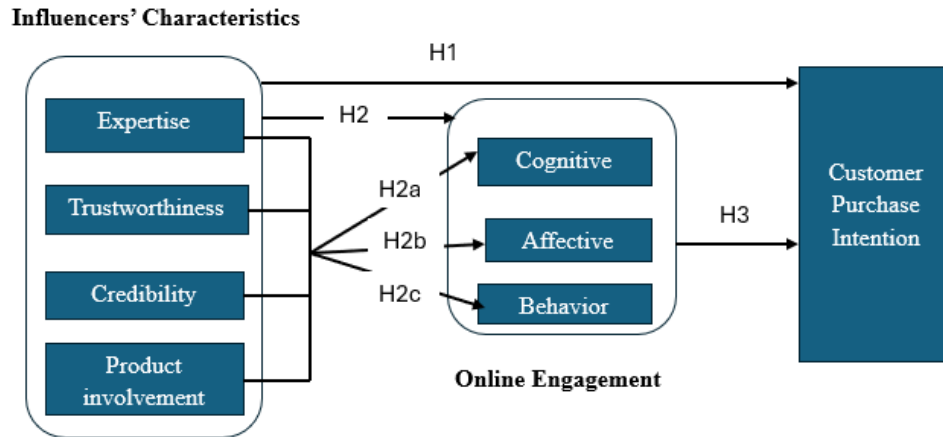


Figure 1: The proposed research Model.

Study Sector and Data Collection

TikTok, which was launched in September 2016, is a widely used social media application that enables users to produce, view, and distribute brief videos captured on smartphones or web cameras. The application is noteworthy for its captivating nature and extensive user involvement, as it offers customized streams of unique short videos accompanied by music and sound effects. The short-form video format of TikTok is well-suited for the purposes of entertainment and comedy. Nevertheless, there is a growing trend of utilizing it for infotainment purposes and the promotion and commercialization of various products through influencers (D'SOUZA, 2024).

According to data published in Byte Dance's advertising resources (the company that owns the app), TikTok had a total of 32.94 million users who were 18 years old and above in Egypt during the early months of 2024. The data reveals that possible advertising TikTok reach in Egypt witnessed a notable increase of 2.6 million users, representing a growth rate of 8.7 percent, during the period from October 2023 to January 2024 (Kemp S., 2024).

The data was gathered through the utilization of an online questionnaire. The study's population comprised TikTok users in Egypt. A total of 375 online questionnaires were distributed. A total of 323 questionnaires were successfully collected, resulting in a response rate of 85.6%.

Measurement Scales

The questionnaire consisted of 38 items, the first part consisted of 5 items concerning some demographic data such age, gender, education and occupation. The second part consisted of 33 items divided as follows: TikTok influencers' expertise (5 items) was measured using the scale proposed by Meng and Wei (2014). TikTok influencers' Trustworthiness (3 items) was measured using the scale proposed by Ramírez, L. J. et al. (2022). TikTok influencers' credibility (5 items) was measured using the scale proposed by Turcotte et al. (2015) and Cheung et al. (2015). TikTok influencers' product involvement (5 items) was measured using the scale proposed by Tejavibulya and Eiamkanchanalai (2011). The Online engagement with its three dimensions cognitive affective and behavior (10 items) was measured using the Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014) scale. And finally, the purchase intention (5 items) was measured using the scale proposed by Hong et al. (2016). The different items of the instruments were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Data Analysis and results

To assess the measurement scales and the structural model, the study used SmartPLS 4.0 in conjunction with the partial least squares (PLS) method. The results of the analysis are reported in the following section.

Sample profile and the Descriptive statistics

As shown in table 1 the percentage of males is 56.3 while the percentage of females is 43.7%. Most participants' ages were in the ranges 21-35 years (50.8 %), while only 3.4% of the participants were more

than 60 years. Moreover, 60.7% of the respondents have graduated. For the occupation of the respondents 33.1% were students, while 37.8% are working either in the public or the private sector. The majority of the respondents (61.3%) prefer to follow the Tik Tok reels on the TikTok application, while 25.1% prefer to follow the Tik Tok reels on Facebook.

Table 1: demographic characteristics of respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	141	43.7
	Male	182	56.3
	Total	323	100
Age	21 - 35	164	50.8
	36 - 45	91	28.2
	46- 60	57	17.6
	> 60	11	3.4
	Total	323	100
Education	undergraduate	106	32.8
	graduate	196	60.7
	Postgraduate	21	6.5
	Total	323	100
Occupation	Student	107	33.1
	unemployed (housewife, retired)	33	10.2
	Private sector	68	21.1
	Public sector	54	16.7
	Own Business	61	18.9
	Total	323	100
On which social media platforms do you prefer to follow the Tik Tok reels?	Tik Tok application	198	61.3
	Facebook	81	25.1
	Instagram	34	10.5
	others	10	3.1
	Total	323	100

Stability and reliability of the study variables

Table (2) Results of stability and reliability the study variables

Dimensions		items	Mean	outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Influencers' Characteristics	Expertise	EX1	3.19	0.997	0.753	0.994	0.866	0.876
		EX2	3.11	0.998				
		EX3	4.19	0.903				
		EX4	3.74	0.771				
		EX5	3.62	0.879				
	Trustworthiness	TR1	3.17	0.957	0.862	0.989	0.952	0.905
		TR2	3.37	0.756				
		TR3	3.70	0.906				
	Credibility	CR1	3.94	0.792	0.795	0.924	0.946	0.745
		CR2	3.17	0.965				
		CR3	3.20	0.959				
		CR4	3.46	0.862				
	Product Involvement	pro1	3.83	0.817	0.817	0.996	0.812	0.859
		pro2	3.67	0.864				
		pro3	3.17	0.998				
pro4		3.09	0.998					
pro5		4.04	0.896					
Online brand engagement	Cognitive	cog1	4.17	0.778	0.865	0.915	0.925	0.802
		cog2	3.89	0.798				
		cog3	3.27	0.975				
	Affective	Aff1	3.19	0.988	0.980	0.927	0.892	0.795
		Aff2	3.99	0.608				
		Aff3	3.72	0.682				
	Behavior	Beh1	4.05	0.722	0.890	0.915	0.903	0.820
		Beh2	3.33	0.960				
		Beh3	3.14	0.961				
Beh4		4.13	0.856					
Purchasing Intention	pur1	4.10	0.960	0.894	0.934	0.751	0.808	
	pur2	4.06	0.838					
	pur3	3.18	0.962					
	pur4	3.20	0.963					
	pur5	3.02	0.948					
	pur6	4.08	0.859					

Source: From smart-pls v4 output.

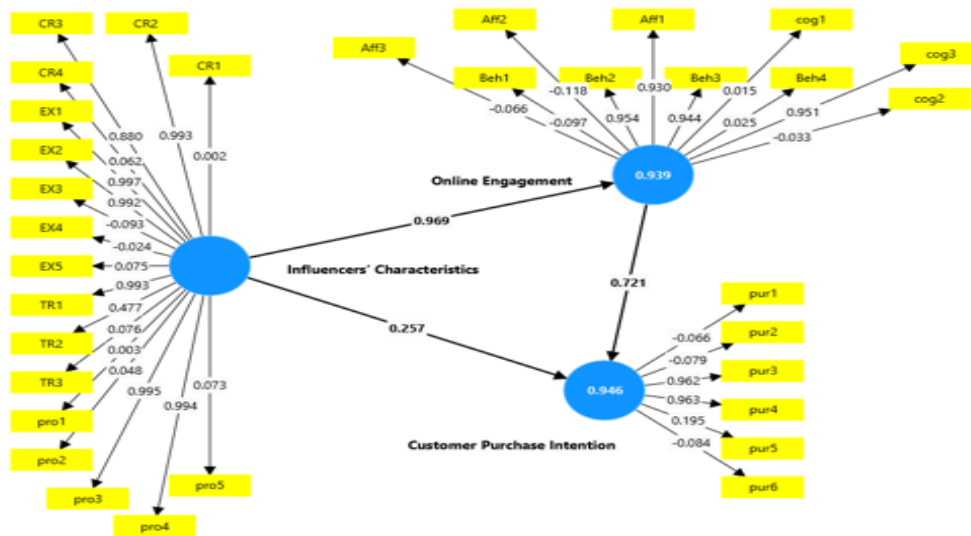
As shown in table (2) for the dimensions of Online brand engagement (Cognitive - Affective - Behavior), outer loading ranged between 0.608 to 0.988, and Average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.795 to 0.820. The composite reliability also ranged from 0.892 to 0.925, and the results indicate an appropriate degree of internal consistency between the statements. At the same time, Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.865 to 0.980, which is greater than 0.7, which impacted self-honesty, which means the ability to rely on these measures. While the outer loading dimensions of Influencers' Characteristics (Expertise - Trustworthiness - Credibility - Product Involvement) ranged between 0.756 to 0.998, with an average variance ranging from 0.745 to 0.905. Composite reliability also ranged from 0.924 to 0.996. The results indicate that there is an appropriate degree of internal consistency among the phrases used to measure the dimensions of Influencers' Characteristics. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.753 to 0.862, which is greater than 0.7, which impacted self-honesty, which means the ability to rely on these measures. Finally, the outer loading of the Purchasing Intention dimension ranged from 0.838 to 0.963, with an average variance of 0.808, and the composite reliability reached 0.934. The results indicate that there is an appropriate degree of internal consistency among the statements used to measure the Purchasing Intention dimension. Cronbach's alpha reached 0.894, which is greater than 0.7, which impacted self-honesty, which means the ability to rely on these measures.

The structural Model

Testing Hypotheses (H1-H2-H3-H4)

Figure (2) shows the results of path analysis for the main hypotheses.

Figure (2) Results of path Analysis of Main Hypotheses



Source: From smart-pls v4 output.

The results of path analysis in Figure 2 indicate that TikTok influencers' characteristics explain 93% of the variance in online engagement, while TikTok influencers' characteristics and online engagement explain 94.6% of the variance in customer purchase intention. The SRMR value in Table 3 shows that the model is consistent, as the chi-statistic is 0.18, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the model is suitable. The NFI values are around 0.95, indicating that the estimated model is good.

Table (3) Path analysis results for the main hypotheses of the study.

H	Impact Direction	cof.	T statistics	P values	Des.
H1	Influencers' Characteristics -> Customer Purchase Intention	0.257	4.820	0.000	Accepted
H2	Influencers' Characteristics -> Online Engagement	0.969	7.003	0.000	Accepted
H3	Online Engagement -> Customer Purchase Intention	0.721	4.248	0.000	Accepted
	SRMR	0.040	NFI	0.95	
	Chi-square	4.893	Ch2 p	0.18	

Source: From smart-pls v4 output.

As Shown in table (3) Influencers' Characteristics' have a positive effect on Customer Purchase Intention with a value of 0.257, so this means that increasing in Influencers' Characteristics dimension by one unit led to an increase in Customer Purchase Intention by 0.25. and this effect is significant at 0.05, indicating the acceptance of H1.

H1: Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics have a significant effect on customer purchase intention in times of crises.

Also, Influencers' Characteristics' have a positive effect on Online Engagement by 0.969, so this means that increasing in Influencers' Characteristics dimension by one unit led to an increase in Online Engagement by 0.96. and this effect is significant at 0.05, indicating the acceptance of H2.

H2: Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics have a significant effect on online engagement in times of crises.

Likewise, Online Engagement has a positive effect on Customer Purchase Intention by 0.721, so this means that increasing in Online Engagement by one unit led to an increase in Customer Purchase Intention by 0.72. and this effect is significant at 0.05, indicating the acceptance of H3.

H3: Online engagement has a significant effect on Customer purchase intention in times of crises.

The following table shows the impact of the mediated variable Online engagement on the relationship between Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics and customer purchase intention.

Table (4) Specific indirect effects

Path	indirect effects
Influencers' Characteristics -> Online Engagement -> Customer Purchase Intention	0.699

Source: From smart-pls v4 output.

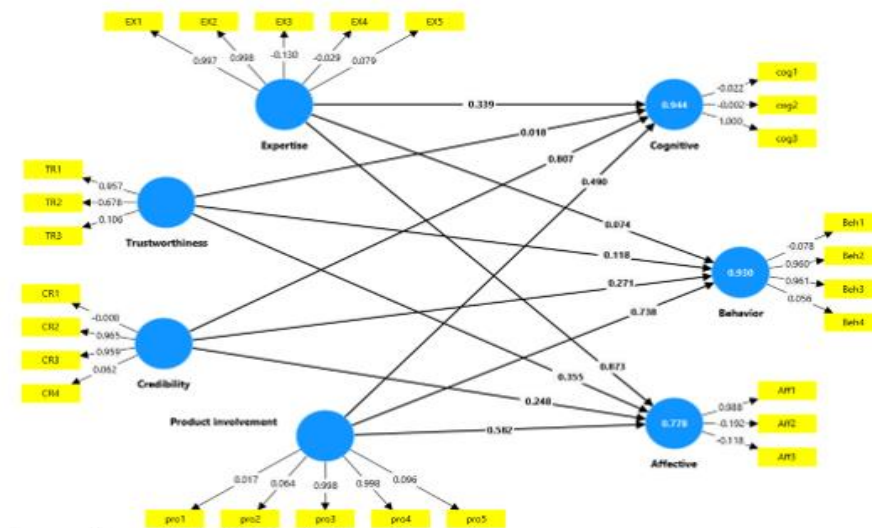
As shown in table (4), There is a positive effect for Online Engagement mediated variable on the relationship between Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics and customer purchase intention. with a value of 0.669, which indicates the acceptance of H4.

H4: Online engagement mediated the relationship between Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics and customer purchase intention.

Testing sub hypotheses (H2a-H2b- H2c)

Path analysis is a test aimed at verifying the relationships between study variables. Therefore, Figure No. (1) displays the results of path analysis for the sub-hypotheses. The results of path analysis showed that there is a positive effect of the dimensions of Influencers' Characteristics (Expertise - Trustworthiness - Credibility - Product Involvement) on Dimensions of Online brand engagement (Cognitive - Affective - Behavior).

Figure (3) Path analysis results for the sub-hypotheses



It is clear from the path analysis that the dimensions of Influencers' Characteristics (Expertise - Trustworthiness - Credibility - Product Involvement) explain 94.4% of the variance in Cognitive, and 93% of the variance in Behavior, and the dimensions of Influencers' Characteristics explain 77.8% of the variance in Affective.

Table (5) presents the results of estimating the suitability of the path analysis and model parameters

Table (5) path analysis results for sub-hypotheses.

H.	Impact Direction	cof.	T statistics	P values	Des.
H2a	Expertise -> Cognitive	0.339	5.089	0.005	Accepted
	Trustworthiness -> Cognitive	0.018	7.391	0.003	
	Credibility -> Cognitive	0.807	4.056	0.000	
	Product involvement -> Cognitive	0.490	3.987	0.008	
H2b	Expertise -> Affective	0.873	2.009	0.045	Accepted
	Trustworthiness -> Affective	0.355	2.840	0.005	
	Credibility -> Affective	0.248	2.049	0.041	
	Product involvement -> Affective	0.582	6.920	0.009	
H2c	Expertise -> Behavior	0.074	4.753	0.005	Accepted
	Trustworthiness -> Behavior	0.118	6.260	0.040	
	Credibility -> Behavior	0.271	6.998	0.009	
	Product involvement -> Behavior	0.738	2.228	0.026	
	SRMR	0.043	NFI	0.906	
	Chi-square	4.732	Ch2 p	0.213	

Source: From smart-pls v4 output.

As Shown in table (5) The SRMR value measures the suitability of the regression line for the data, it was 0.043, which is less than 0.10, which indicates that the model is well compliant, as the chi-statistic was 0.213 which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that the model is suitable, and the adjusted deviation coefficient (NFI) measures the extent to which the regression model improves the prediction of the dependent variable compared to a simple model that predicts the mean of the dependent variable, and the values of NFI range between 0 and 1, where a value of 1 indicates an ideal model, in this case, the value of NFI is 0.906, which indicates a good model.

The results of the impact factor values tests show the following:

- The dimensions of influencers' characteristics (Expertise, Trustworthiness, Credibility, Product Involvement) positively affect the cognitive dimension, with impact factor values ranging from 0.018 to 0.807. and statistical significance ranged between 0.000 to 0.008, which is statistically significant at a level less than 0.05. Based on the previous results, we accept the first sub-hypothesis H2a.

H2a: Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) have a significant effect on Cognitive online engagement in times of crises.

- Also, influencers characteristics dimensions (Expertise, Trustworthiness, Credibility, Product Involvement) positively effect on Affective, with impact factor ranging from 0.248 to 0.873. and statistical significance ranged between 0.005 to 0.045, which is statistically significant at a level less than 0.05. So, we accept the second sub-hypothesis **H2b: Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) have a significant effect on Affective online engagement in times of crises.**

- Likewise, influencers characteristics dimensions (Expertise, Trustworthiness, Credibility, Product Involvement) positively effect on Behavior, with impact factor ranging from 0.074 to 0.738. and statistical significance ranged between 0.005 to 0.040, which is statistically significant at a level less than 0.05. So, we accept the third sub-hypothesis H2c.

H2c: Tik Tok Influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, product involvement) have a significant effect on behavior online engagement in times of crises"

Discussion and conclusion

This Study is empirical research that assessed the effect of TikTok influencers' characteristics on customer purchase intention with online engagement as a mediating variable. Based on the findings of the previous literature, it was assumed. that TikTok influencers' characteristics have a significant effect on purchase intention and that TikTok influencers' characteristics have a significant impact on online engagement while online engagement has a significant impact on purchase intention also the researchers added that online engagement mediates the relationship between TikTok influencers' characteristics and

purchase intention. The following discussion elucidates the key insights that support the relationship between TikTok influencers' characteristics and customer purchase intention with the mediation role on online engagement.

The findings revealed that all TikTok influencers' characteristics: expertise, trustworthiness, credibility and product involvement have a significant positive effect on customer purchase intention. This is a logic result as customers in their search for the right product to purchase will be searching for advice from other people who have the knowledge and the experience and can be considered as experts that can help them take the right purchase decision. The TikTok influencers' expertise can increase the trustworthiness of those influencers because when customers perceive those influencers as experts in their field, they will trust their opinions which in turn will affect the customer purchase intention. Followers who trust influencers they are following do believe that those influencers are honest, sound, believable or trustworthy in endorsing or recommending products. Influencers' credibility also has a significant positive effect on the customer purchase intention. Credible influencers are those who can provide customers with reliable information about products and services, which can significantly influence the customers' opinions, behaviors and attitudes toward those products and services. Finally, this study as far as we now is one of few studies that have considered the influencers' product involvement which means the degree to which influencers are using the products they are endorsing, customers are more influenced by influencers who have the knowledge and endorse products that they use in their real life, this type of influencers product involvement has a deep influence on customer purchase intention as customers views this involvement as a clue on the credibility and trustworthiness of influencers. These results support the results obtained by several previous studies Abdullah et al., 2020; Weismueller et al., 2020; Nan et al., 2022; He & Jin, 2022; AlFarraj, 2021 and Ying & Dikcius (2023), who have proven that influencers characteristics have a significant effect on customer purchase intention. TikTok influencers' characteristics are far more important in times of crises. As we have mentioned, customers are living in an interconnected world and are confronting several types of crises either political, religious or economic which make customers interested in political consumerism and may take a position in front of those crises. Boycotting campaigns are an example of those positions taken by customers to respond to crises. During the Israeli Palestinian war customers started to get information not only from news platform but also from TikTok influencers about boycotting campaigns. Customers in choosing to boycott products or services tend to engage with trusted, credible influencers that share the same values and beliefs. They depend on these influencers to provide them with reliable information about whether to boycott or to buy products and services.

The results also proved that TikTok influencers' characteristics: expertise, trustworthiness, credibility and product involvement have a significant positive effect on customers' online engagement. This result shows that customer do not engage with any influencer, they interact and believe only with the influencers that they perceive as experts, trustworthy, credible who endorse only products that they use in real life. Those influencers with these characteristics increase the customer online engagement that can have an effect on the customers attitudes. This was clearly seen in times of crises as customers have increased their engagement with influencers on TikTok more than any other social platforms in the past nine months, the number of TikTok users has reached 1.67 billion users at the beginning of 2024. (Curry D.,2024). These results support the results obtained by several previous studies He & Jin, 2022; AlFarraj, 2021 who have proven that influencers characteristics have a significant effect on customers online engagement.

The results of the path analysis showed that there is a positive effect of the dimensions of TikTok influencers' Characteristics (Expertise - Trustworthiness - Credibility - Product Involvement) on Dimensions of Online engagement (Cognitive - Affective - Behavior). These results mean that for the influencers to increase customer online engagement, they need to deal with the three dimensions: cognitive with facts and numbers, behavior with the change of attitude and affective with emotions. The results also revealed that the highest effect of the dimensions of TikTok influencers' Characteristics (Expertise - Trustworthiness - Credibility - Product Involvement) is on the cognitive online engagement (94.4% in variance) followed by behavior online engagement (93% in variance) and the least effect of these characteristics is on the affective online engagement (77.8% in variance). These results shows that the influencers characteristics' highest effect is on the cognitive dimension which means that to increase customer online engagement influencers must provide these customers with information, facts, assessments

and logic ideas related to product or services that satisfy the customers' need for information that can have an effect on the customers purchase intention. The TikTok influencers characteristics also has a high effect on the Behavior dimension of the customer online engagement, this means that these characteristics have the power to change consumer behavior towards products or services, and that trustworthy, credible influencers have the power to influence consumer behavior which in turn can impact the customers' purchase intention. although the TikTok influencers characteristics' have least effect on the affective dimension of the customer online engagement, but this result is still significant which means that those characteristics have a significant positive effect on the collective emotions and intensity of customers feelings towards an attitude or an object, which means that trustworthy, credible influencers an increase the customer online engagement by triggering their emotions. These results can guide influencers during crises time to increase the customer online engagement by giving more attention to cognitive and behavior dimensions of the online engagement, as customers focus on gathering information during crises. These results support the results obtained by several previous studies He & Jin, 2022; AlFarraj, 2021 and Cabeza-Ramírez et al. (2022) who have proven that influencers characteristics have a significant effect on the three dimensions of the customers online engagement: Cognitive. Affective and behavior.

The results also revealed that online engagement has a positive effect on customer purchase intention. This result means that the effort made by customers in the exchange, correspondence, and dissemination of information with influencers regarding products and services have improved their engagement. And this engagement led to shape the customer purchase intention. Engaged customers extend an emotional connection to a particular brand or medium, resulting in regular interactions with this brand or medium that extend beyond the simple act of making a purchase. These results support the results obtained by several previous studies Thakur, R. (2018).; Toor, Husnain, and Hussain (2017) and Tiruwa, Yadav, and Suri (2016) who have proven that influencers characteristics have a significant effect on customer purchase intention.

The results finally showed that There is a positive effect for Online Engagement mediated variable on the relationship between Tik Tok Influencers' Characteristics and customer purchase intention. This result means that although TikTok influencers' characteristics has a positive significance effect on purchase intention, but the existence of customer online engagement as a mediating variable in this relation fortify that relationship and increase the influencers' capacity in affecting customers purchase intention. These results support the results obtained in the previous study AlFarraj, (2021) who have proven that online engagement mediates the relationship between TikTok influencers' characteristics and purchase intention.

This study highlighted the effect of TikTok influencers characteristics on purchase intention, with the mediating role of online engagement.

Implications, limitations and future research

This study is one of the few that emphasized the significance of influencers' product involvement over consumers' product involvement. During a crisis, consumers may be more likely to follow the advice of their favorite influencers. As a result, consumers may choose to "buycott" or boycott specific brands. Therefore, to create an effective social media strategy, marketers should choose social media influencers whose characteristics align with their brands and customers in order to boost consumer engagement and purchasing intentions.

The findings suggest that influencers can enhance their reputation and create impactful content by emphasizing their expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, and product involvement. This may ultimately increase their ability to influence their followers' decisions to buy, boycott, or support specific brands, thus shaping consumers' perceptions of the products and brands they promote.

This study contributes to our understanding of influencer marketing, but it only focused on four characteristics of influencers. Other important factors such as attractiveness, information quality, and perceived risk may also influence customers' intention to make a purchase and should be considered in future research.

Furthermore, the study did not specify any particular product category and only used TikTok as the main social media platform for communication. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable across different product categories or social media platforms. It would be beneficial to conduct the study focusing

on a specific product category and using other social media platforms. Additionally, considering demographic variables such as gender and age as moderators may impact the results.

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