



From trendsetters to tastemakers; How influencer marketing influences consumer dietary choices

*De marcadores de tendencia a referentes de gusto;
cómo el marketing de influencers moldea las
decisiones alimentarias de los consumidores*

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Abstract

This study examines the multidimensional world of influencer marketing and its significant effect on consumer food choices. It investigates how homophily, perceived value, and credibility impact consumers' views of influencers and, consequently, their dietary preferences. This study used a quantitative technique and included 364 individuals from Dhaka, Bangladesh. A complete survey instrument was used, which included demographic information, homophily, perceived value, credibility, attitudes toward influencers, and willingness to follow influencers. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as well as structural equation modelling (SEM) were employed to decipher the complex correlations between these variables. These findings highlight the significant impact of content created by influential people on consumer eating habits in the modern era of influencer marketing. Consumers' perceptions of influencers are shaped by homophily, perceived value, and credibility. Importantly, these beliefs have a direct impact on their proclivity to follow influencers, which influences their food choices. From a practical perspective, this study is important for marketing tactics. This highlights the ethical possibilities of influencer marketing to promote healthy eating habits. Influencers who disseminate nutritional information and advocate healthy eating habits can make a big difference in public health. This study is unique in that it is the first to investigate food influencer marketing in a developing nation like Bangladesh.

JEL Code: M31; D12; I15

Keywords: influencer marketing; structural equation model (sem); dietary habits; consumer behavior; digital marketing

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Resumen

Este estudio analiza el marketing de influencers y su impacto en las decisiones alimentarias de los consumidores. Analizamos cómo la homofilia, el valor percibido y la credibilidad influyen en la percepción de los influencers por parte de los consumidores y, por ende, en sus preferencias dietéticas. Se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo mediante una encuesta a 364 personas en Dhaka (Bangladés), con ítems sobre homofilia, valor percibido, credibilidad, actitud hacia los influencers y disposición a seguirlos. Se usaron análisis factorial confirmatorio y modelos de ecuaciones estructurales para examinar las relaciones entre estas variables. Los resultados indican que el contenido de los influencers impacta significativamente los hábitos alimentarios de los consumidores. Se encontró que la homofilia, el valor percibido y la credibilidad configuran la percepción de los consumidores sobre los influencers; estas percepciones influyen directamente en la disposición a seguirlos y, por ende, en sus elecciones alimentarias. Estos hallazgos destacan el potencial ético del marketing de influencers para promover hábitos alimentarios saludables. Los influencers que difunden información nutricional y fomentan hábitos de vida saludables pueden incidir positivamente en la salud pública. Este estudio es pionero al examinar el marketing de influencers en el ámbito alimentario en un país en desarrollo como Bangladés.

Código JEL: M31; D12; I15

Palabras clave: marketing de influencers; modelo de ecuaciones estructurales (SEM); hábitos alimentarios; comportamiento del consumidor; marketing digital

Introduction

Historical Background - The influencer marketing business is seeing an unparalleled global rise, indicating a fundamental shift in how companies interact with consumers (Martensen et al., 2018). In Bangladesh, a similar pattern may be observed. According to current estimates, Bangladesh's influencer marketing expenditure ranges from \$100 million to \$140 million. Statista's estimated 10.47% annual growth rate over the following five years, reaching \$45.3 million by 2028, emphasizes the industry's resilience (Jacome Guerrero & Jacome, 2023). This growing trend demonstrates the sector's durability and ability to attract significant investments from a variety of companies. While Bangladesh's venture into influencer marketing may appear to be in its infancy when compared to global heavyweights, it has an impressive growth narrative. The predicted compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.47% is higher than the worldwide average of 9.5%, indicating a dynamic expansion unique to the country (Bu et al., 2022; Schouten et al., 2021). The market in Bangladesh is distinguished by a diversified distribution of value across macro-influencers, micro-influencers, and nano-influencers, each of whom contributes uniquely to the growing environment. In Bangladesh, influencer marketing or advertising has a 39% higher success rate than traditional advertising (Dahl, 2021).

The choice to investigate influencer marketing in Bangladesh is strongly entrenched in the country's distinct socioeconomic landscape. As a developing country, the country has approached technological improvements with caution, as is characteristic of societies that abhor ambiguity

(Mozaffarian et al., 2018). Notably, internet connectivity in rural regions, a new development, has boosted the influencer marketing sector. Bangladesh is an intriguing location for our study because of its unique entry into the digital era. The country's changing socioeconomic situation, marked by the slow but increasing embrace of technology, provides a complex viewpoint (Consterdine, 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The cultural ethos' intrinsic uncertainty avoidance complicates the incorporation of digital innovations. As a result, the purpose of this research is to delve into the complexities of the influencer marketing industry in Bangladesh while also recognizing the country's unique position as a developing market navigating the unknown seas of the digital era (Ghouse et al., 2022).

Objective of the study - The paper looks to extend the topic and delve a bit deeper into emerging markets. Attention will then be focused on the analysis and debate in the background of the developing markets with particular regard to influencer marketing. This study tries to provide an overall idea about how the socio-economic background of Bangladesh affects the influences of influencer marketing, thereby adding to the existing literature. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to assess the impact of influencer marketing on consumer food choices, based on how homophily, perceived value, and credibility shape consumer perceptions about influencers and their dietary preferences in Bangladesh.

Influencer marketing, a potent force in modern digital advertising, comprises company alliances with influencers who use the internet to push items to their respective audiences (Levin, 2020). Despite substantial studies on the benefits of influencer marketing in sectors such as fashion and lifestyle industries, there is a significant research vacuum towards its impact on food choices (Kim et al., 2022). Limited research has been undertaken on the phenomenon in which individuals develop dietary preferences simply based on the inclinations of their favorite influencer, despite the fact that they have previously detested certain foods (Guo et al., 2021). Understanding this component of influencer marketing strategy is critical for both marketers and customers alike, as it sheds light on consumer behavior and possible public health ramifications (Truman, 2022).

Some studies have focused on consumer dietary habits and food safety with the primary goal of identifying purchase intentions for organic food (Sabater, 2022). On the other hand, researchers have examined how peers and customers impact each other's food purchasing intentions (Alaniz, 2022). Scholars have refined their emphasis to explore the tremendous influence of influencers on people's dietary decisions. Some researchers have sought to better understand the link between influencers' lives and customer purchase intentions, offering more insight into the fundamental processes at work (Lv et al., 2018). Furthermore, there is a growing amount of work focusing on the powerful function of marketing methods in altering influencers' lifestyles (Jacome Guerrero & Jacome, 2023).

The current literature lacks a substantial investigation of the impact of influencer marketing on consumer or individuals' food habits, especially the habits of consumers, to imitate the dietary preferences

of influencers despite prior variances. Our research provides useful insights into the distinct impact of influencer marketing on food choices in the digital era.

RQ: How does influencer marketing affect consumers' food choices?

Literature review and theoretical anchoring

Definition of core concepts

Influencer marketing has transformed the marketing environment, particularly in terms of influencing consumer dietary habits (Al-Debei et al., 2013). This method involves social networking influencers recommending items and services to influence their followers' purchasing decisions. The key elements of this association have been identified through research. However, the importance of credibility cannot be overstated. Influencers who openly disclose their brand relationships increase their reputation and favorably influence customer opinions. Thus, expertise is also important. Influencers who demonstrate nutritional expertise are viewed as credible, thus influencing consumers' willingness to adopt their dietary preferences (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022). Homophily is the level of similarity among people by which they associate with people much like themselves. Perceived value in this context, it is the consumer judgment about the benefits received from an influencer against the costs incurred. Credibility is the level of trust and expertise that exists about an influencer. Attitude towards the influencer is the feelings expressed by the consumer, either positive or negative, towards the influencer. Desire to follow every consumer tends to participate in and imitate the actions or recommendations of a particular influencer (Bin Alam et al., 2023).

Relevant theories

Several relevant concepts and frameworks have emerged in the field of marketing based on influence and its substantial impact on consumer dietary habits, providing a theoretical framework for comprehending the complex interaction of the forces at hand (Stubb et al., 2019). This section elaborates on five fundamental hypotheses that are used as the theoretical anchoring for our research: theories of planned behavior, attitude-change approach, conversion theory, cooperative principle, and amplification hypothesis.

Theory of planned behavior (TPB)

(Ajzen, 1991) Theory of planned behavior has become an integral component in understanding how behaviors that subjective standards are and what is considered behavioral control impact the decision of a person to undertake a given activity. TPB can clarify how consumers' attitudes toward suggestions from influential people about food choices, subjective norms about accepting such recommendations throughout their social circles, and their impression of control over embracing these recommendations contribute to their actual food choices in our context. Using TPB, we can investigate the interaction between influencer advertisements and consumer intentions, offering insights into the variables influencing consumer dietary habits (Sampene et al., 2023).

Attitude-change approach

The attitude-change method investigates the mechanisms that alter people's attitudes and, as a result, how these attitudes influence their behavior. This hypothesis provides insight into how influencer-generated content changes customers' perceptions of particular food items or dietary choices in a larger influencer marketing setting (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). We obtained a complete understanding of the effect exercised by these digital leaders of opinion on dietary habits by evaluating the persuasive strategies used by influences and the resulting alterations in consumer perceptions (Kelman, 1953).

Conversion theory

Conversion theory, which is frequently related to communication and marketing studies, is concerned with the process of converting people from prospects to customers (Moscovici, 1980). This theory may be applied to influencer marketing and eating habits to explain how influencers play a critical role in transforming customers' preferences and interests into actual behavioral modifications of their dietary choices (Greil & Rudy, 1983). This enables us to investigate the stages at which consumers go from simple exposure to influencer material to the real adoption of advised dietary behaviors.

Cooperative principle

Cooperative principle, in particular, is commonly associated with communication and marketing research, and deals with the technique of converting prospects into customers (Davies, 2007). This theory may be

used to analyze influencer marketing and dietary behaviors to clarify how influencers play an important role in converting customers' preferences into actual behavioral changes in their nutritional choices (Hadi, 2013). This allows us to analyze the stages during which consumers' progress from basic exposure to influencer material to the actual implementation of recommended dietary practices.

Amplification hypothesis

According to the amplification hypothesis, digital technology, namely social media platforms, enhances existing social mechanisms and behaviors (TOMKINS, 1980). This theory, when utilized in influencer marketing and dietary habits, elucidates the manner in which the digital ecosystem magnifies the impact of advocates on consumer decisions. This demonstrates the exponential reach and engagement that influencer-generated content may achieve in the digital age (Peters et al., 2013). Analyzing this assumption allows us to measure how much influencer marketing increases its impact on consumer food practices, making it a relevant theory for our investigation.

Conceptual framework; Model & hypothesis development

Development of constructs informed by pertinent literature

Table 1 shows the developed model, which is mostly anchored on the idea of planned behavior, attitude-change method, conversion idea, Cooperative Principle, and the Amplification Hypothesis. Additional components were drawn from previous studies (Al-Debei et al., 2013; Ao et al., 2023; Bergkvist et al., 2016; Borau-Boira et al., 2023; Bu et al., 2022; Consterdine, 2023; Dahl, 2021; Ghouse et al., 2022; Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022; Tafesse & Wood, 2023). The purpose of this research is to identify the characteristics that impact an individual's opinion about influencers. It then investigates how the latter drives a desire to follow a particular influencer.

Table 1
 Creation of constructs/variable based on relevant literature

Constructs/ Variables	Items Code	Items	Relevant Literature
Homophily	H1	Relatability	(Bu et al., 2022; Dahl, 2021; Martensen et al., 2018; Schouten et al., 2021; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023)
	H2	Cultural Homophily	
	H3	Aspirational Fit	
Perceived Value	PV1	Entertainment Value	

	PV2	Self-Image	(Ao et al., 2023; Consterdine, 2023;
	PV3	Personal Experience	Lou & Yuan, 2019; Mozaffarian et al., 2018; Nistor & Selove, 2023)
Credibility	C1	Knowledgeability	(Ghouse et al., 2022; Martínez-López
	C2	Reliability	et al., 2020; Özbölük & Akdoğan,
	C3	Consistency	2022; Xiao et al., 2018)
Attitude towards the influencer	AT1	Reliable Source	(Al-Debei et al., 2013; Bergkvist et al., 2016; Alam et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2021; Cooke & Sheeran, 2004)
	AT2	Altruistic Initiatives	
	AT3	Belief	
Desire to Follow	DF1	Niche	(Borau-Boira et al., 2023; Juszczak,
	DF2	Relevance	2023; Tafesse & Wood, 2023; Wang & Huang, 2023)
	DF3	Community Engagement	

(Source: Authors)

Hypothesis development

Homophily (H)

The Incorporating Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in influencer marketing illustrates whether influencer reliability, cultural homophily, and aspirational fit influence consumer eating decisions. TPB's normative mindset component, wherein consumers are impacted by perceived societal constraints, corresponds to relatability and the influencer's propensity to connect profoundly with various audiences (Dahl, 2021). Cultural homophily, which reflects one's perception of culturally relevant material, is related to TPB's subjective norm, emphasizing the impact of societal forces on individual behaviors (Schouten et al., 2021). TPB's perceived control over behavior is aligned with aspirational fit, which connects personal objectives with influencer attributes, demonstrating how influencers who coincide with their followers' ambitions impact their eating choices (Bu et al., 2022; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023). Understanding these interactions using TPB allows us to obtain insights into the complex link between influencers and consumer eating habits (Martensen et al., 2018). As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Homophily with influencers enhances positive attitudes towards the influencer.

Perceived value (PV)

Employing the Conversion Theory in influencer marketing investigates how consumers' dietary decisions are influenced by entertainment value, self-image, and personal experience. The theory focuses on creating an attractive and appealing atmosphere to induce conversions paralleled by entertainment value,

which is frequently represented through interesting culinary challenges arranged by influencers (Ao et al., 2023; Consterdine, 2023). Self-image, which focuses on consumers' self-perception along with identity, is consistent with Conversion Theory in that it emphasizes how customers mimic influencers who match their self-identity (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The theory's method of building deep relationships with clients through relevant tales is emphasized by personal experience, which includes unique life experiences provided by influencers (Mozaffarian et al., 2018). These concepts offer useful insights into the complex relationship between influencer marketing and individual eating habits, demonstrating how influencers operate as essential conversion catalysts (Nistor & Selove, 2023). As a result, the hypothesis would be as follows:

H2: The perceived value of an influencer cultivates a positive attitude towards the influencer.

Credibility (C)

The inclusion of conversion theory in the investigation indicates three critical influencer characteristics. First, an influencer's knowledge is dependent on their nutritional competence and ability to deliver well-researched dietary advice (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Influencers who consistently provide evidence-based food recommendations tend to acquire consumers' trust, which has a significant impact on eating habits (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022). Second, the term reliability emphasizes the significance of influencers' capacity to continuously provide trustworthy advice and support healthy eating habits. Consumer food decisions are significantly influenced by trustworthy influencers, who maintain their promises (Ghouse et al., 2022). Finally, consistency emphasizes the significance of influence in maintaining distinct styles and personalities. This consistency not only boosts audience trust but also increases their ability to influence consumer food selection (Xiao et al., 2018). As a result, the hypothesis would be as follows:

H3: Credibility elements amplify positive attitudes toward influencers.

Attitude toward influencers (AT)

The attitude change approach identifies many aspects that impact people's perceptions of influencers. For starters, homophily, which reflects common features, increases their relatability and favorability (Al-Debei et al., 2013). Second, the perceived worth of influencer material shapes views even more, especially when supported by honesty and competency (Bin Alam et al., 2023). Furthermore, confidence in an influencer's counsel, which stems from positive earlier experiences, contributes greatly to attitude development (Cooke & Sheeran, 2004). Finally, the trustworthiness of an influencer as a constant and

dependable source of factual information is critical for changing opinions (Bergkvist et al., 2016). Participation in philanthropic activities also promotes a happy outlook. Influencers who use their celebrity for the social good frequently earn praise from their fans. These interrelated factors have a tremendous impact on people's views, and hence, on their propensity to execute influencer advice, particularly in the overall setting of food decisions (Cheng et al., 2021).

Desire to follow (DF)

The amplification hypothesis explains the substantial relationship between a good opinion of influencers and their desire to imitate their food habits. When followers regard influencers as legitimate and important sources of information, they are inclined to adopt comparable eating practices (Borau-Boira et al., 2023). This tendency stems from the notion that the actions of influencers are consistent with their own beliefs and objectives (Juszczak, 2023). Furthermore, aligning influencer materials with followers' likes and lifestyles can improve their overall well-being. Relationships are strengthened by a specialized alignment, in which influencers cater to particular interests (Tafesse & Wood, 2023). Influencers who develop a sense of community among their followers foster a more positive mindset and increase the repetition of eating patterns (Wang & Huang, 2023). This phenomenon has considerable influence on consumers' food choices. As a result, the hypothesis would be as follows:

H4: Positive attitudes toward influencers correlate with a desire to emulate food choices.

H5: Attitude towards the influencer mediates the relationship between homophily and the desire to follow the influencer.

H6: Attitude towards the influencer mediates the relationship between the perceived value of the influencer and their desire to follow them.

H7: Attitude towards the influencer mediates the relationship between credibility and the desire to follow the influencer.

Conceptual framework

In Figure 1, directional arrows illustrate the hypothesized causal relationships between the study's variables. Specifically, the arrows represent the following relationships:

- Homophily → Attitude Toward the Influencer: This path reflects the influence of shared characteristics on favorable perceptions of the influencer.

- Credibility → Attitude Toward the Influencer: This arrow demonstrates how the trustworthiness of an influencer shapes attitudes toward them.

- Perceived Value → Attitude Toward the Influencer: This relationship highlights the role of perceived content quality in fostering positive attitudes toward the influencer.
- Attitude Toward the Influencer → Desire to Follow: This path represents the direct impact of favorable attitudes on the intention to follow the influencer.

This visual alignment, as shown in Figure 1, clarifies the theoretical model and strengthens the connection between the hypotheses and the study's conceptual framework, providing a clear representation of the proposed causal relationships.

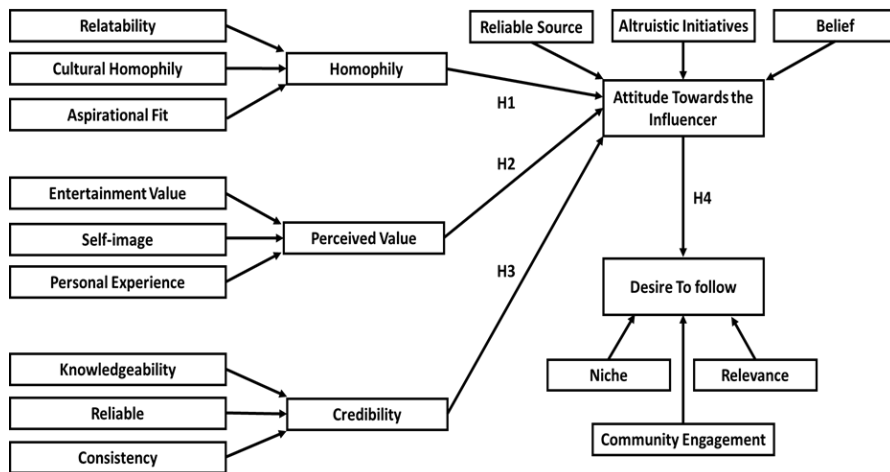


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model
 (Source: Authors)

Materials and method

Research design and methodology

This research uses a quantitative technique to assess the effect of influencer marketing on consumer dietary habits. It uses a cross-sectional research approach to gain insights into current consumer behavior. Data collection was accomplished by distributing a web-based questionnaire to accurately represent the participants. The study included several questions about influencer marketing exposure, views of influential individuals, and dietary habits.

Sampling method and calculation

The sample size for this study was calculated using Cochran's formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2} \tag{1}$$

Where:

- $Z = 1.96$ (Critical value for a 95% confidence level)
- $p = 0.5$ (Estimated population proportion, assuming maximum variability)
- $q = 1 - p = 0.5$
- $e = 0.0525$ (Margin of error, set at 5.25%)

Substituting the values into the formula:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot (0.5) \cdot (0.5)}{(0.0525)^2} \tag{2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \cdot 0.25}{0.00275625} = 348.47 \tag{3}$$

Based on these calculations, the minimum required sample size was determined to be 348 participants. To ensure robust statistical power, the study achieved a final sample size of 364 respondents, slightly exceeding the calculated threshold. Participants were selected using a randomized stratified sampling method across various social media platforms, which ensured a diverse representation of age groups and social media usage patterns. This approach enhanced the reliability and generalizability of the study's findings.

Survey design and instrument validation

The questionnaire of the survey consisted of 21 questions, divided into two parts. The first part consisted of six demographic items, which covered the following: age, gender, level of education, and patterns of

usage concerning social media. Each part contained 15 items for latent variables: three each regarding homophily, perceived value, credibility, attitude toward the influencer, and the desire to follow. A controlling question at the beginning was: Do you follow any influencer for dietary habits? This filtered out only the relevant response. To measure attitudes and perceptions, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) was used in the survey. To make the questionnaire robust, a pilot survey was distributed among 37 participants, and the data conducted were analyzed on aspects of validity and reliability (Malhotra et al., 2017). Positive results led to the launching of the full-scale survey. The details of the respondents are provided in Table 2.

Measurement

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize demographics and trends. Advanced multivariate statistical tools, particularly structural equation modeling (SEM), were used to examine the complex correlations between influencer marketing characteristics and consumer dietary habits, addressing the study's objectives and hypotheses (Ullman & Bentler, 2012). This research was divided into two parts: qualitative assessments based on literature and a quantitative investigation using a survey questionnaire and Likert scales. The digital questionnaire had two sections: one for demographic information and the other for questions on homophily, perceived value, credibility, attitude toward influencers, and willingness to follow, with responses ranging from "5" (strongly agree) to "1" (strongly disagree). Sex, age group, marital status, career, educational background, and monthly family income were all demographic factors (Malhotra et al., 2017).

Data analysis

Microsoft Excel 2019 was used for data cleansing, and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used for statistical analysis. A graphical model was created using AMOS version 24. The results are displayed in both graphical and tabular formats.

Results

Demographic analysis

This study included a diverse range of individuals in the demographic analysis, as detailed in Table 2. Among men (62.6%) and women (37.4%), the sex distribution revealed a small male predominance. A

sizable proportion of respondents (83.0%) were between the ages of 18 and 24 years, with fewer people in other age groups. The vast majority of respondents (90.7%) were single and had obtained honors or bachelor's degrees (67.3%). In terms of occupation, students made up a substantial majority (87.1%), although other occupations, such as executives, managers, and professionals, were also present. Monthly household income exhibited a diversified distribution, including many households (43.7%) earning less than 30,000 BDT but a substantial proportion in other income groups. This wide demographic mix leads to rich and thorough conclusions.

Table 2
 Respondents' profile

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	228	62.6 %
	Female	136	37.4 %
Age of the Respondent	Below 18 years old	3	.8 %
	18-24 years old	302	83.0 %
	25-29 years old	41	11.3 %
	30-39 years old	16	4.4 %
	40 years and above	2	.5 %
Marital Status	Divorced/Separated	1	.3 %
	Married	33	9.1 %
	Unmarried	330	90.7 %
Educational Background	Honors/Bachelors	245	67.3 %
	HSC	97	26.6 %
	Masters	22	6.0 %
Occupation	Executive/Manager	15	4.1 %
	Government Service	1	.3 %
	Job Holder	1	.3 %
	Professional	14	3.8 %
	Self Employed/Own Business	16	4.4 %
	Student	317	87.1 %
Monthly Family Income	Above 1,00,000 BDT	29	8.0 %
	30,000 - 50,000 BDT	87	23.9 %
	50,000 - 80,000 BDT	61	16.8 %
	80,000 - 1,00,000 BDT	28	7.7 %
	Below 30,000 BDT	159	43.7 %

(Source: Authors)

Confirmatory factor analysis

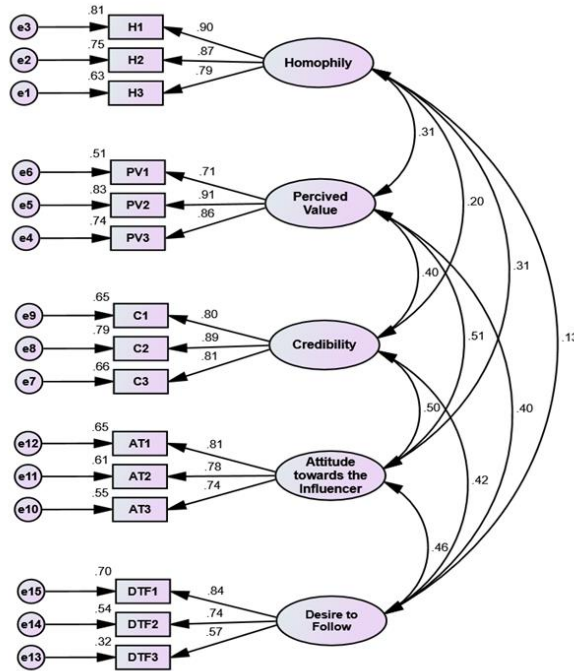


Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model (Source: Authors)

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used, utilizing AMOS version 24 to evaluate the model's reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The final CFA model is visually represented in Figure 2, and the corresponding results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
 Results of reliability along with convergent validity

Variables/ Constructs	Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Maximum Shared Variance
Homophily	H1	0.794	0.887	0.890	0.730	0.096
	H2	0.866				
	H3	0.900				
Perceived Value	PV1	0.862	0.866	0.870	0.693	0.261
	PV2	0.912				
	PV3	0.711				
Credibility	C1	0.811	0.870	0.874	0.698	0.246

	C2	0.888				
	C3	0.804				
Attitude towards the influencer	AT1	0.741				
	AT2	0.779	0.815	0.819	0.601	0.261
	AT3	0.805				
Desire to Follow	DF1	0.570				
	DF2	0.736	0.750	0.763	0.524	0.216
	DF3	0.839				
Model Fitness: X2= 146.699, df= 80, X2/df= 1.834, RMSEA=.048, RMR=.037, GFI=.952, CFI=.976, SRMR = .0378						

(Source: Authors)

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results show the model with excellent fit statistics that aligns well with recognized benchmarks. The chi-squared to degrees of freedom ratio (2/df) was 1.834, which is substantially within the acceptable bounds, as shown in Table 3. Similarly, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was determined to be 0.048, whereas the RMR was calculated to be 0.037. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is 0.952, and the Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR) is 0.0378. Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.976. These findings, presented in Table 3, are consistent with the generally accepted criteria established by (Cudeck & Browne, 1992; Hu & Bentler, 1999), indicating an excellent model fit (RMSEA=0.08, RMR=0.05, CFI > 0.90). Furthermore, all items had standardized factor loadings greater than 0.57, and the average variance extracted (AVE) was consistently greater than 0.50, indicating strong evidence of substantial validity with convergent validity (Sarstedt et al., 2021). Furthermore, for all variables, the maximum shared variance was consistently smaller than the corresponding average variance extracted, strengthening convergent validity. In terms of reliability, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients were above the 0.70 criterion for all variables, confirming our measures' good internal consistency and dependability. These findings support the soundness of the mode', proving its dependability in analyzing the underlying components of interest.

Table 4
 Results of discriminant validity

	Homophily	Percived Value	Credibility	Attitude_towards_the_Influencer	Desire_to_Follow
Homophily	0.854				
Percived Value	0.308***	0.833			
Credibility	0.204***	0.402***	0.835		
Attitude_towards_the_Influencer	0.310***	0.511***	0.496***	0.776	
Desire_to_Follow	0.131*	0.400***	0.418***	0.465***	0.724

*<.05, **<.01, ***<.001

(Source: Authors)

We used (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) parameters to measure discriminant validity. The bold diagonal items in the Table 4 reflect the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), while the others show inter-variable correlations. Bold diagonal values must outnumber non-bold values inside the corresponding rows and columns, suggesting strong discriminant validity. A close examination of the table reveals that our variables consistently fit this condition. The diagonal elements regularly outnumbered the off-diagonal components, indicating good discriminant validity. This guarantees that our measures efficiently differentiate across diverse constructs, thereby improving the measurement precision and research credibility.

The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was also employed to test the discriminant validity, with a commonly accepted threshold of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). According to the analysis of the data in Table 5, all latent constructs had HTMT ratios of less than 0.90. This result unambiguously verified the discriminant validity of each latent variable studied.

Table 5
 Descriptive statistics as well as discriminant validity based on htmt ratios.

	Homophily	Percived_ Value	Credibility	Attitude_towards _the_Influencer	Desire_to_ Follow
Homophily					
Percived_ Value	0.293				
Credibility	0.198	0.406			
Attitude_Towards_the _Influencer	0.327	0.524	0.505		
Desire_To_Follow	0.122	0.435	0.438	0.493	

(Source: Authors)

Path analysis and hypothesis testing

This study used structural equation modelling and AMOS route analysis to evaluate the relationships between homophily, perceived value, and credibility. The model was fed factor scores from the preceding confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS. This research investigated the mediating function of attitude toward the influencer as part of hypothesis testing and assessed the desire to follow the influencer as the dependent variable or construct. Figure 3 illustrates the structural model, depicting the hypothesized relationships among the study variables and their outcomes. Homophily, perceived value, and credibility are exogenous latent variables measured by their respective indicators: H1-H3, PV1- PV3, and C1-C3, respectively. These, in turn, lead to the mediating variable of attitude towards the influencer as measured by three indicators, ATT1-ATT3.

Directional arrows highlight the pathways, indicating that:

- Homophily is positively related to attitude towards the influencer: $\beta = 0.31$.

- The perceived value significantly influences the attitude towards the influencer, with a β -value of 0.35.
- Credibility leads to building up positive attitudes towards the influencer too: $\beta = 0.40$. Attitude towards the influencer as a mediating variable itself directly influences the desire to follow the influencer, with a β value of 0.50. Desire to follow is further measured by the three indicators: DTF1- DTF3. Coefficient values around each path provide the strength and significant level of the relationships.

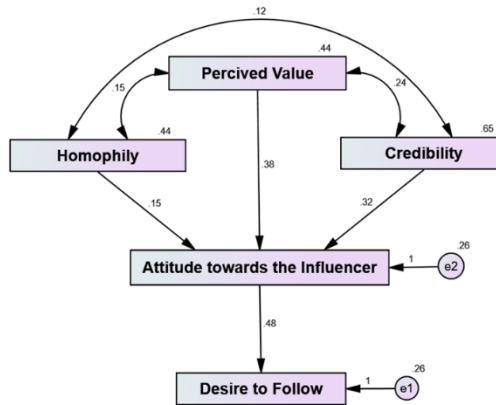


Figure 3. Measurement model-results of the proposed model
 (Source: Authors)

Table 6
 Results of regression weights

H. No.	Paths	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Remarks
H1	Attitude_towards_the_Influencer < Homophily	0.142	0.060	2.368	0.018	H1 Supported
H2	Attitude_towards_the_Influencer < Perceived_Value	0.385	0.068	5.674	***	H2 Supported
H3	Attitude_towards_the_Influencer < Credibility	0.313	0.055	5.718	***	H3 Supported
H4	Desire_to_Follow < Attitude_towards_the_Influencer	0.447	0.068	6.558	***	H4 Supported

Model Fitness: $X^2 = 116.379$, $df = 91$, $X^2/df = 1.279$, $RMSEA = 0.037$, $RMR = 0.029$, $GFI = 0.954$, $CFI = 0.962$, $SRMR = 0.0295$

* $<.05$, ** $<.01$, *** $<.001$

(Source: Authors)

The model demonstrated an excellent fit with a Chi-square/degree of freedom ratio (X^2/df) of 1.279, indicating strong parsimony. The Root Mean Residual (RMR) of 0.029 and Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR) of 0.0295 reflect minimal residual discrepancies, while the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of 0.954 suggests a strong alignment between the model and the observed data. Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.962 and the RMSEA of 0.037 further confirm the model's robustness and appropriateness.

Significant discoveries were provided by the hypotheses created by path analysis. First, homophily with the influencer has a favorable and statistically significant relationship with the influencer's attitude ($\beta=0.142$, $p<0.05$), as shown in Table 6. Second, the attitude toward the influencer is positively and substantially connected with the perceived value of the influencer and its content ($\beta=0.385$, $p<0.05$), as detailed in Table 6. Furthermore, influencer credibility has a positive and statistically significant relationship with attitude toward the influencer ($\beta=0.313$, $p<0.05$). Finally, the desire to follow an influencer has a positive and statistically significant link with the influencer's attitude ($\beta=0.447$, $p<0.05$). As a result, the investigation verifies hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4.

Mediation testing

Mediation analysis was carried out methodically, with homophily, perceived value, and credibility serving as independent factors; desire to follow serving as the dependent variable; and attitude toward the influencer serving as the mediator. The results, presented in Table 7, are based on a comprehensive investigation of the indirect effects, which adhered to the traditional approach defined by (Baron & Kenny, 1986). We used bootstrap techniques and produced bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals at the 90% level to ensure the statistical reliability of our findings.

Our findings clearly show that attitude toward the influencer plays a significant moderating role in the link between numerous critical variables. In particular, indirect impacts were statistically significant. To begin, attitude towards the influencer successfully mediates the association between homophily and the desire to follow the influencer ($\beta=0.063$, $P.05$). Furthermore, attitude toward the influencer becomes apparent as a significant mediator between perceived value and the desire to follow the influencer ($\beta=0.172$, $P.05$). Furthermore, it successfully mediated the relationship between the influencer's credibility and desire to follow them ($\beta=0.140$, $P.05$). The results are presented in Table 7, confirming that we accept hypotheses H5, H6, and H7.

Table 7
 Results of mediation analysis

H. No.	Path	Total Effects	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Remarks
H5	H > AT > DF	0.063*	***	0.063*	Hypothesis supported since indirect effects are statistically significant
H6	PV > AT > DF	0.172***	***	0.172***	Hypothesis supported since indirect effects are statistically significant
H7	C > AT > DF	0.140***	***	0.140***	Hypothesis supported since indirect effects are statistically significant

Note: H - Homophily; PV - Perceived Value; C - Credibility; AT - Attitude towards the influencer; DF - Desire to follow

* $<.05$, ** $<.01$, *** $<.001$
 (Source: Authors)

Implementation, recommendation, and conclusion

In this crucial phase, we proceed from evaluation to action. Here, we look at the practical consequences of our study's results and draw on a mix of theories and empirical information to chart a course ahead. Our adventure continues with the implementation phase, in which we examine how our study might be used in the real world. Following this, in the Recommendation subsection, we provide stakeholders with practical advice and strategic directions. Finally, in the Conclusion, we provide a complete overview and perspective on the relevance of our study and its possible impact on the changing environment of the influencer marketing industry and consumers' dietary choices.

Implications

The Implications section emphasizes the practical significance of our research findings. Our research on the impact of influencer marketing on individuals' food habits has enormous potential. Recognizing homophily, perceived value, credibility, and attitude toward influencers as crucial aspects provides stakeholders with useful insights (Dahl, 2021; Schouten et al., 2021). These insights enable marketers to create focused influencer programs that resonate with certain demographics, thereby increasing their capacity to influence customer behaviors. Furthermore, our study focuses on influencer authenticity, transparency, and trustworthiness (Ghouse et al., 2022). By connecting their content with audience preferences and objectives, influencers can establish genuine relationships with their followers. Consumers can make better judgments based on their greater awareness of the influencers' impact on

dietary habits (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022). As influencer marketing evolves, our research provides useful insights into properly navigating this changing terrain.

Recommendations

In line with the concepts of conversion theory, our findings show that influencer marketing has a major impact on consumer eating patterns (Moscovici, 1980). This effect is mediated by consumer attitudes toward influencers, a concept profoundly established in attitude-change strategies (Sampene et al., 2023). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is particularly important since it emphasizes the impact of consumers' intentions to act on influencer recommendations. Several elements must be considered to optimally utilize influencer marketing tactics and to match them with the aforementioned theoretical frameworks (TOMKINS, 1980). Marketers should broaden their selection of influencers to ensure representation from a diverse range of cultures and interests in accordance with the principle of cooperation (Davies, 2007). Furthermore, to promote public health and increase the ethical use of influencer marketing, influencers should offer instructive material about nutrition and good eating habits. Improving the reputation of influencers as trustworthy sources of correct information is critical in this process (Kelman, 1953). Furthermore, encouraging influencers to publicly reveal business affiliations builds trust and has a favorable impact on their followers' dietary choices, in accordance with the guiding principles associated with the attitude-change strategy.

In accordance with these research findings, numerous key suggestions for influencer marketing strategies and future research directions emerge. Our investigation shows that influencer marketing has a considerable impact on consumers' dietary habits, giving marketers the potential to ethically leverage this power, which aligns with (Bin Alam et al., 2023; Consterdine, 2023; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023). Marketers should broaden their influencer selection to guarantee representation across all cultural origins and interests to link influencer marketing with healthy eating choices (Al-Debei et al., 2013). Furthermore, fostering openness and authenticity is critical, with influencers publicly declaring corporate relationships to build confidence and favorably impact followers' dietary choices (Mozaffarian et al., 2018). Influencers may help improve public health by generating instructional materials about nourishment and healthy eating, which increases their reputation and has a favorable influence on their followers' eating habits.

Conclusion

This therefore presents a critical revelation into how influencer marketing pertains to consumer food choice underlining the important roles of homophily, perceived value, and credibility (Bu et al., 2022).

Generally, findings agree with the existing theory such as the Theory of Planned Behavior, which describes how attitude and perception lead consumers to choose foods because of the recommendations of influencers. The study highlights the fact that when the attitude regarding the influencers is positive, one sees a strong willingness regarding the adoption of dietary life, which reflects the Attitude-Change Approach. Our findings confirm the Conversion Theory, showing how an influencer can convert consumer preference into an actionable behavior. This shows that an influencer has the ability to transform consumer choices of food through effective content. Moreover, the results show the trustworthiness and credibility of influencers according to the Cooperative Principle. From these perspectives, therefore, influencers have the potential to influence dietary behavior provided they ensure transparency and authenticity in their relationships with audiences (Bergkvist et al., 2016). These findings therefore have great practical importance for marketers who might want to use influencer marketing strategies as a health communication tool in building healthier dietary choices among followers. Influencers that ingrain authenticity, transparency, and ethics in their practices tend to have better relations with followers; this, in turn, has a positive consequence on public health initiatives and consumer behavior in developing markets.

Limitations and scope of future research

This research has some minor drawbacks. The geographical reach of starters is limited to Dhaka, which limits their ability to generalize findings outside this region. Second, despite the rigorous selection, the sample size was small. Several solutions should be examined to alleviate these constraints and strengthen the fundamental basis of future research. First, future studies should aim for greater geographic coverage, spanning varied locations across the whole country, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Increasing the sample size by examining a wider and more varied pool of individuals would also improve the validity and representativeness of the study. These upgrades will allow future study projects to perform a more thorough and comprehensive investigation of the issue, perhaps by combining big data and replies to supplement research findings.

Declarations

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Ethical consideration

Human participants were provided with a comprehensive elucidation of the study's objectives and subsequently conferred their informed and voluntary consent for their engagement in the data collection process.

Availability of data statement

The data will be made available upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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