

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Effect of Influencer Credibility on Consumer Online Purchase Intentions: Empirical Insights from Pakistan's Online Private-Label Market

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**Abstract:** This research study examined the effects of various dimensions of social media influencer credibility, specifically trustworthiness, goodwill, and expertise, on shaping consumer intentions to purchase online private-label brands (PLBs). By integrating market signaling theory, the research investigated how consumer attitudes mediated this relationship, along with the moderating influence of perceived risk. An online survey targeting habitual private-label buyers in Pakistan was utilized for data gathering, documented on a 7-point Likert scale, resulting in 537 valid responses. Analytical tools, including SPSS and AMOS, were used to test the hypotheses. The results revealed that perceived goodwill and expertise significantly enhanced consumer attitudes and purchase intentions; however, perceived trustworthiness did not exert a direct positive influence. This highlighted a contextual divergence in the interpretation of trust for less-established brands. More importantly, the perceived risks weakened the attitude-intention link, exerting a negative influence. The results provide implications for strategic influencer partnerships to strengthen brand resonance and reduce consumer hesitation while buying PLBs. A major contribution of the study lies in advancing the understanding of a relatively underexplored domain through empirically examining influencer dynamics within the Pakistani online retail context.

**Keywords:** Online Private-Label Brand, Social Media Influencer Credibility, Attitude, Purchase Intention, Perceived Risk, Market Signaling Theory

### Introduction

Global e-commerce has seen exponential growth from \$5.3 trillion in 2022, projected to surpass \$8 trillion by 2027 (GlobeNewswire, 2025). Therefore, it is important to understand the context of online purchases due to increased financial viability. Digital financial literacy has helped consumers engage in more complex, convenience-driven, and trust-sensitive online purchase behaviors. This transformation is more visible in emerging economies, which have seen the combined effect of influencer marketing and increased digital literacy, giving power and opportunity to the online private label brands (hereafter referred to as online PLBs) to alter the value-convenience dynamics. So, to stay competitive, it has become important to decode why and how consumers indulge in online purchase behaviors for PLBs.

Digitization has also evolved the traditional retail channels and their profitability potential. It has also shifted consumer preferences, along with a heightened increase in availability and predilections for online PLBs across various sectors, particularly food and apparel. PLBs were once thought of as being cost-effective substitutes for national brands. However, the changing preferences have opened up more opportunities, resulting in competitive quality, variety, and a higher perceived value to increasingly astute consumers (Kansra et al., 2024). This diversification of the retail channels into physical, digital, and hybrid forms has

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opened up new and relevant arenas for the nuanced understanding of the drivers of consumer purchase intention for online PLBs, compared to the traditional purchase intention, and consumers increasingly rely on digital cues and influencer endorsements to guide their choices. This is essential for brand strategists and online retailers, highlighting a literature gap in understanding the dynamics of in-store PLB purchases and online purchase intention of PLBs.

It is interesting to note that social media influencers (hereafter referred to as SMIs) have catalysed the consumer preference shift and play a significant role in shaping brand preferences and reducing information asymmetry (a common observation in non-digital markets). This helps in cultivating consumer trust for online PLBs. Consequently, the understanding of the drivers of online purchase intention for PLBs is no longer confined to traditional retail dynamics; rather, it requires an investigation into the credibility of the SMI and the consumer attitude towards purchasing online and online PLBs.

Prior research had identified the ease of use, perceived value and trust as important determinants of consumers' attitudes towards PLBs, with growing acceptance attributed to improved quality and contextual value-for-money perceptions of PLBs (Kansra et al., 2024). Moreover, psychographic profiling revealed varied consumer segments, namely, the value seekers (price and value conscious), the brand loyalists (inclined towards national brands) and the balanced shoppers (equally weigh price, convenience and value) (Kumar & Chandra, 2019), indicating non-uniform consumer responses to private labels in virtual contexts and varying loyalty levels (Pangriya & Kumar, 2018). While prior literature offered valuable insights, it remains fragmented by category, often overlooking platform-specific risks and rarely integrating attitudinal dimensions. In addition to it, the role of SMI credibility in shaping attitudes towards online PLBs remains underexplored.

A significant literature gap exists in linking the socio-demographics, attitudinal constructs, online risk factors, and purchase intention dimensions for online PLBs in emerging markets like Pakistan. This research addresses the gap by investigating how SMI credibility and its aspects shape consumer buying behavior. It uses an integrated model grounded in market signaling theory while considering demographic and attitudinal factors alongside platform-specific risks.

This study makes an academic contribution by addressing the key literature gaps. It offers practical insights for retail managers, brand developers, and e-commerce strategists using evolving consumer psychographics to develop tailored offerings. Identifying the drivers of PLB adoption can help create a game-changing experience, compelling differentiation, and stronger consumer engagement, making it timely and strategically essential to meet evolving consumer expectations for value, authenticity, and convenience.

## **Review of Literature & Theoretical Development**

### **Market Signaling Theory**

Spence (1973) first introduced the market signaling theory to describe how two parties with asymmetric information can communicate message credibility through effective signaling. The theory, originating in the economics paradigm, later became relevant in marketing literature. To counter this concern of information asymmetry, marketers employ signals—observable, controlled cues that communicate unobservable attributes such as quality or trustworthiness (Bloom & Reve, 1990). Marketing signals usually include marketing mix elements, for instance, advertising expenditure, pricing, product warranties, endorsements, source reputation, guarantees, and symbolic gestures, which help consumers form a higher perceived value of the brand (Herbig & Milewicz, 1996). A credible marketing signal is an indicator of quality, and it hinges on the credibility and trustworthiness of the signaler. For example, a reputable brand or individual/endorser enhances the persuasive power of a signal, influencing consumers to make inferences about the product's quality.

Recent studies show that traditional signals like advertising and brand reputation still influence online consumer behavior, though their effect varies by context and familiarity (Jin & Ryu, 2020). Visual appeal and

endorser trustworthiness in social media ads shape perceived product quality (Lim et al., 2022). SMIs act as key signalers, bridging brands and consumers into digital spaces with limited direct experience. Through their credibility and expertise, SMIs signal brand trust and quality (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Market signaling theory now includes influencer attributes—persona, goodwill, trustworthiness—as cues that reduce consumer uncertainty (Jin et al., 2019), especially for unfamiliar or experience-based goods sold online.

### **SMI Credibility**

Source credibility is defined as 'believability' and is a key to persuasion (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019) and helps build strong customer relationships (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022). On social media, timely and accessible information shapes credibility and purchase intent (Rybaczewska et al., 2020). Influencers like bloggers and YouTubers significantly impact consumer decisions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) and are especially effective in fashion marketing due to their perceived authenticity (De Veirman et al., 2017). Trusted and transparent influencers foster strong consumer connections (Kramer, 2018), and their credibility is positively linked to followers' behavior (Weismueller et al., 2020). Factors like trustworthiness, entertainment, and information quality influence influencer credibility and consumer attitudes (Saima & Khan, 2020; Nafees et al., 2020) and positively affect consumer brand attitudes. This is similar to how Shahid et al. (2024) state that access to social/cognitive resources can reduce consumer uncertainty and foster positive attitudes. Credible influencers are effective social resources that help boost purchase intent (Mabkhot et al., 2022; Coutinho et al., 2023). Therefore, applying market signaling theory, we argue that SMI credibility helps shape favorable perceptions of online PLBs, offering a trusted, low-risk source of product information that can drive buying behavior by enhancing the viability of new ideas and products to others on social media platforms.

### **Perceived Trustworthiness & Online PLB Attitude**

Perceived trustworthiness is defined as the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions considered most valid. Perceived SMI trustworthiness powerfully affects consumer brand attitudes, instilling greater consumer confidence in the trustworthiness of the SMI (Zaman et al., 2024). A trusted SMI positively influences consumer attitude and subsequent behavior Chetoui et al. (2020), and this way, the consumers extend the SMI's trustworthiness to the brand they are promoting, thus mimicking the SMI's positive brand attitudes. The literature reveals that trustworthiness is a significant aspect of influencer marketing efficacy. The SMI's perceived trustworthiness is thought to drive behavior and customer sentiments. Influencers are perceived as trustworthy sources of information that positively affect consumer purchase intentions, as they foster a sense of reliability and authenticity (An et al., 2024; Saskara & Achmad, 2024).

**H1:** Perceived trustworthiness has a direct and a positive impact on consumer's online private-label brand attitude.

### **Perceived Goodwill & Online PLB Attitude**

Perceived goodwill is defined as the source's attitude toward the well-being of the receiver (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Goodwill highlights the element of "perceived caring," which comprises three elements: understanding, empathy, and responsiveness. It suggests that real knowledge is knowing another individual's needs, beliefs, ideas, and feelings. Prior studies demonstrated that goodwill is a more significant factor in predicting consumer brand perceptions (Nafees et al., 2021). Studies also confirmed a strong positive correlation between SMI credibility and consumer brand attitudes, suggesting that higher credibility leads to more favorable brand perceptions (Rezki, 2023).

**H2:** Perceived goodwill has a direct and a positive impact on consumer's online private-label brand attitude.

### Perceived Expertise & Online PLB Attitude

Perceived expertise is the consumer's belief in a source's knowledge, competence, and authority within a specific subject area (Kuuttila et al., 2023). The source expertise greatly impacted the perceived credibility of a brand's social media posts, particularly when the content aligned with the reader's prior beliefs (Kuuttila et al., 2023). Handayani et al. (2020) examined the use of mobile applications and found that both argument quality and source credibility significantly influenced user satisfaction and brand loyalty. Another research found that the expertise and attractiveness of SMI in their respective fields had the most substantial effect in shaping positive purchase intent (Hani et al., 2024; Kareem & Venugopal, 2023).

Following the above line of reasoning, this study extends the market signaling theory. It suggests that perceived SMI credibility dimensions altogether create a greater impact on consumer initial brand perceptions for online private-label brands for the following reasons. First, an SMI's credibility is developed over time due to its continued audience engagement, which makes it more likely to create a profound social bond with its followers. Second, as consumers rely on SMI to act as a sources of brand information, they are likely to model the attitude of SMI to form their own positive brand attitude. Finally, due to increased SMI credibility, the value of the SMI's marketing signal increases, which more likely generates a favorable consumer attitude towards online PLBs. These findings underscore the importance of influencer credibility in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors towards brands in the digital marketing landscape; hence the following hypothesis is proposed,

**H3:** Perceived expertise has a direct and a positive impact on consumer's online private-label brand attitude.

### Online PLB Attitude & Online Purchase Intention

Attitude is a 'multifaceted mental state shaped by an individual's knowledge, experience, emotions, values, and predispositions towards particular conditions, and to respond consistently and predictably to a stimulus' (Mandelbaum, 2016). The attitude positively and significantly impacts purchase intention and willingness to buy a product (Paul & Bhakar 2018). Purchase intention represents 'the possibility that the consumer will plan to buy a product' (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Consumers' attitudes towards private labels can be categorized into consumers' perceptions towards private-label brands and the introduction of consumer characteristics influencing retailers' private-label trends (Baltas & Argouslidis, 2007).

Positive brand attitudes often increase purchase intentions, especially when influencers highlight green attributes (Sameeni et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2025). While national brands are considered more quality-driven, private labels are considered reliable (Ndlovu, 2024). Affordable pricing and good quality can shift consumer preference towards online PLBs. Reducing perceived risk also strengthens attitudes (Arsalan et al., 2013). Factors like availability, price, shelf display, perceived quality, store loyalty, and product similarity all influence consumer attitudes toward PLBs (Jayakrishnan et al., 2016; Mumin & Phang, 2021). Recent research has shifted focus to online PLBs, examining consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors strongly influence buying behavior (Pangriya & Kumar, 2018). Brand credibility is key to customer relationships, with brand commitment as a strong mediator (Shah et al., 2020). Post-pandemic, a retailer's online reputation enhances PLB's image, boosting perceived quality, attitude, and purchase intent (Yadav & Kar, 2024). The discussion leads to our next hypothesis as follows:

**H4:** Online private-label brand attitude directly and positively affects consumers' online purchase intention.

### The Mediation of Online PLB Attitude

#### Perceived Trustworthiness & Online Purchase Intention

Research indicates that consumer attitudes not only influence purchase intention but also mediate the effects of different underlying factors (Omar et al., 2023). Consumers' perceived trust and intention to buy a product influenced by influencers have been researched in influencer marketing. Consumer trust is an SMI personality trait representing the influencer's credibility, reliability, and honesty (Kim & Kim, 2021). SMI credibility

encompassing trustworthiness shapes consumers' attitudes towards the promoted brand and the influencer, influencing their purchase intention (Lim et al., 2022; Boerman, 2020). Recent research highlights the significant impact of SMI credibility dimensions on consumer attitudes towards brands. An influencer's credibility characteristics positively affect brand equity and consumer purchase intention (Coutinho et al., 2023). Trust positively affects influencer and brand attitudes. The influencer's perceived trustworthiness is thought to drive behavior. These studies can help marketers and influencers create effective influencer marketing tactics that boost influencer trustworthiness and customer sentiments. A Fashion Influencer with high credibility is more likely to influence their followers' views, choices, and purchase intentions.

Based on this, it is stated that influencer credibility—composed of attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise—serves as a marketing signal that can significantly affect consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Market signaling is well integrated into the relationship between SMI credibility, attitude, and online purchase intention, especially for online PLBs. The SMI with high credibility acts as a strong market signal and an extrinsic cue, reducing uncertainty about the quality and reliability of lesser-known online PLBs. As these signals foster favorable consumer attitudes toward the brand, they enhance trust and perceived value, increasing consumers' intentions to purchase online PLBs.

**H5:** Online PLB attitude positively mediates the relationship between SMI's perceived trustworthiness and consumers' online purchase intention.

### **Perceived Goodwill & Online Purchase Intention**

The perceived goodwill of an SMI represents genuine concern and benevolence that they exhibit towards their followers, which plays a pivotal role in forming consumer attitudes. When SMIs are perceived as sincere, caring, and warm, consumers are more likely to build positive attitudes toward the endorsed product or brand (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This favorable attitude is a mediator, bridging the influencer's goodwill and the consumer's behavioral intention. Consumers who view SMIs as genuinely supportive are more inclined to internalize their endorsements, leading to more favorable brand evaluations and, ultimately, higher purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

This aligns with market signaling theory by framing influencer-perceived goodwill as a positive signal that consumers interpret to infer brand trustworthiness and quality standards. Especially for online PLBs, an SMI demonstrating genuine care would pass on positive signals that the endorsed product is credible, thereby shaping favorable consumer attitudes. This attitudinal shift acts as the mechanism through which the signal (goodwill) influences consumer's online PLB purchase intention, consistent with the signaling pathway outlined in theory. Therefore, the following hypothesis is stated:

**H6:** Online private-label brand attitude positively mediates the relationship between SMI's perceived goodwill and consumers' online purchase intention.

### **Perceived Expertise & Online Purchase Intention**

Perceived expertise is an endorser's knowledge, competence, and skills through which consumer attitude towards an SMI is formed, which impacts the consumer's overall evaluation of the influencer. Research studies have confirmed that the perceived expertise of an SMI positively affects attitudes toward the influencer and impacts brand attitudes (Chetioui et al., 2020). SMI product knowledge and sharing firsthand information regarding endorsed brands can boost the firm's sales. Perspective on the SMI and brand attitudes are positively correlated with perceived expertise. A more favorable recommendation from an expert source has been found to influence consumer attitudes towards SMI considerably (Schouten, 2019).

Under market signaling theory, SMIs perceive expertise signals as product quality and credibility, reducing the information asymmetry for online PLBs. This fosters favorable attitudes and purchase decisions.

Therefore, by conveying competence and sincerity, SMI recommendations shape consumer trust and intentions. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H7:** Online PLB attitude positively mediates the relationship between SMI perceived expertise and consumers' online purchase intention.

**The Moderation of Perceived Risk**

Risk can be described as the perceived risk resulting from a purchase or when a product or service's actual performance does not meet buyer expectations (Konuk, 2018). It could be associated with the quality of the product, time-related, financial, loss of social acceptance, physical, or functional (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2018). Consumers prefer to purchase brands with a good reputation to reduce these risks. Customers are most likely to encounter risk perceptions for unknown products, which are not merely a concern when buying national brands (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Suspicion about the product quality triggers risk perceptions, leading to avoidance of such products. Perceived risk is a key factor in private-label brand purchases as higher risk leads to lower purchase likelihood because consumers may still view PLBs as less safe than national brands (Zaman et al., 2025).

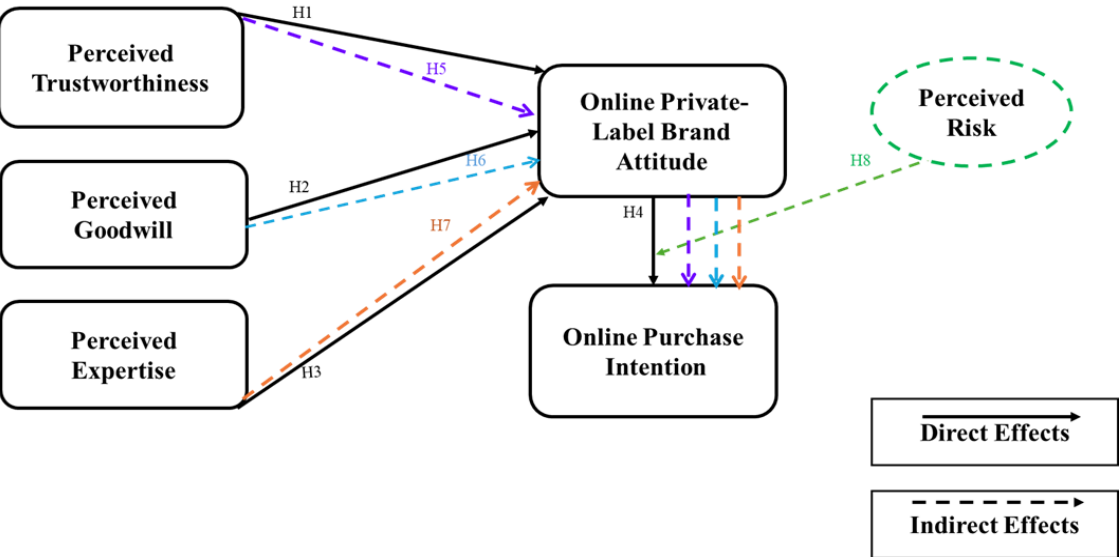
Risk perception remains a major barrier to online PLBs, as consumers often question their authenticity and quality (Mombeuil & Uhde, 2021). The lack of tactile experience and lower brand equity heightens this risk (Beneke & Carter, 2015). Consumers associate online PLBs with greater uncertainty, especially when brand familiarity and retailer trust are low (Thomas et al., 2021). Risk perceptions negatively affect attitudes and purchase intentions (Deshbhag & Mohan, 2020), and concerns about performance and financial risk persist despite rising PLB popularity (Gielens et al., 2021). Building positive brand attitudes can help reduce these perceived risks and build trust. According to market signaling theory, influencers serve as credible market signals that convey authentic product information and highlight quality aspects, thereby shaping consumer attitudes towards lesser-known online PLBs. When SMI credibility is high, it acts as a strong market signal that reduces uncertainty, thereby sustaining the positive impact of attitude on purchase intention and reducing the associated risks. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H8:** Perceived risk moderates the relationship between online private-label brand attitude and online purchase intention, such that the relationship is stronger when perceived risk is low and weaker when perceived risk is high.

**The Conceptual Framework**

**Figure 1**

*Research Conceptual Framework*





## Methodology

### Data Source

Primary data for this study were collected from individuals who had previously purchased online PLBs in the personal care product category through the retailers' official websites or social media platforms. The selected brands represent a diverse range of well-established online PLBs in the region, chosen due to their active presence in the digital marketplace and dedicated personal care offerings.

### Sample & Data Collection

The target population of the current study is the Pakistani Millennial private-label buyer who is an avid social media user and shops from virtual stores of large Pakistani retailers and is aware of online PLBs. Only those participants who indicated purchasing online private label brands with a "yes" continued the survey. A self-reported online survey was prepared via Google Forms for data collection. Data were collected in March 2025. Convenience sampling and snowball sampling approaches were used, where the survey link was posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, - which are popular and highly engaging platforms for influencer marketing (De Veirman et al., 2017). Participants were instructed to select one influential SMI from the given list of ten whom they considered credible enough to influence their attitudes toward the endorsed post of an online PLB. Then, participants were asked to indicate their intention to purchase and how they perceived the risk of buying an online private label. Of the 600 shoppers contacted to participate in the survey, only 537 agreed to participate and filled out the questionnaire, reflecting a 90% response rate.

### Approach to Empirical Investigation

A quantitative research design was adopted. This study was based on a positivist paradigm and hypothesis-driven, examining consumer responses regarding online PLB purchases. Given the increasing digital interaction between consumers and online PLBs, the web survey method offered both reach and contextual relevance (Callegaro et al., 2020). The study used a cross-sectional, post hoc design with minimal researcher interference.

### Data Analysis Tools & Techniques

Data have been analyzed using SPSS 21 and AMOS 24. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic profile characteristics of respondents. Following Podsakoff and Organ's (1986) procedure, common method bias was checked with EFA. Confirmatory factor analysis extracts factors and confirms their convergent and discriminant validities. Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the direct effect of predicting factors on consumers' online purchase intention. Structural equation modelling was performed using AMOS 24 to test direct and indirect effects, while moderation hypotheses were tested in SPSS using Hayes' PROCESS macro."

### Measures & Item Total Reliability

The total number of constructs is three, comprising 26 items to measure the study constructs. An item-total reliability analysis was conducted to measure the internal consistency and reliability of the constructs. The overall scale reliability score was .948, greater than the standard value of 0.70. The Cronbach's alpha values for each item, ranging from 0.9 to 0.728, are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1***Measurement of Scales & their Factor Loadings*

| Construct                                                | Survey measures ( <i>modified scale</i> )                                                  |               |                                   | Source                     | FL   |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|------|
| Perceived Trustworthiness<br>( $\alpha=.900$ )           | How would you evaluate your chosen social media influencer?                                |               |                                   |                            | .811 |
|                                                          | TW1: Honest                                                                                | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Dishonest                         |                            | .883 |
|                                                          | TW2: Untrustworthy                                                                         | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Trustworthy                       |                            | .759 |
|                                                          | TW4: Moral                                                                                 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Immoral                           |                            | .815 |
|                                                          | TW5: Unethical                                                                             | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Ethical                           |                            | .751 |
|                                                          | TW6: Phoney                                                                                | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Genuine                           |                            |      |
| Perceived Goodwill<br>( $\alpha=.892$ )                  | Please rate your chosen social media influencer.                                           |               |                                   | McCroskey and Teven (1999) | .799 |
|                                                          | GW1: Cares About Me                                                                        | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Doesn't Cares About Me            |                            | .885 |
|                                                          | GW2: Has My Interest at Heart                                                              | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Doesn't Have My Interest at Heart |                            | .897 |
|                                                          | GW6: Not Understanding                                                                     | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Understanding                     |                            |      |
| Perceived Expertise<br>( $\alpha=.895$ )                 | How would you describe your chosen social media influencer?                                |               |                                   |                            | .845 |
|                                                          | EXP1: Intelligent                                                                          | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Unintelligent                     |                            | .798 |
|                                                          | EXP2: Untrained                                                                            | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Trained                           |                            | .770 |
|                                                          | EXP3: Inexpert                                                                             | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Expert                            |                            | .682 |
|                                                          | EXP4: Informed                                                                             | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Uninformed                        |                            |      |
| Perceived Risk<br>( $\alpha=.883$ )                      |                                                                                            |               |                                   | Forsythe et al. (2006)     | .743 |
|                                                          | PR1. I feel the exchange process of online PLBs consumes less time.                        |               |                                   |                            | .746 |
|                                                          | PR2. I feel my personal and credit/debit information should be kept secure.                |               |                                   |                            | .532 |
|                                                          | PR3. I get the same product or the product as chosen.                                      |               |                                   |                            | .537 |
|                                                          | PR4. I feel it is easy to find appropriate websites and place an order online.             |               |                                   |                            |      |
| Online Private-Label Brand Attitude<br>( $\alpha=.853$ ) |                                                                                            |               |                                   |                            | .600 |
|                                                          | OPLB_ATT1. Buying online PLBs makes me feel good.                                          |               |                                   |                            | .819 |
|                                                          | OPLB_ATT2. I love it when online PLBs are available for the product categories I purchase. |               |                                   | Burton et al. (1988)       | .825 |
|                                                          | OPLB_ATT3. Best buy is usually the online PLBs for most product categories.                |               |                                   |                            | .842 |
|                                                          | OPLB_ATT5. Considering value for money, I prefer online PLBs to national brands.           |               |                                   |                            | .832 |
|                                                          | OPLB_ATT6. I always feel I get a good deal when I buy online PLBs.                         |               |                                   |                            |      |
| Online Purchase Intention<br>( $\alpha=.728$ )           |                                                                                            |               |                                   |                            | .600 |
|                                                          | OPI_1. The probability that I would consider buying online PLBs is high.                   |               |                                   | Grewal et al. (1998)       | .778 |
|                                                          | OPI_2. I would consider buying the online PLBs at the price shown.                         |               |                                   |                            | .805 |
|                                                          | OPI_3. The probability that I would consider buying online PLBs next time.                 |               |                                   |                            | .782 |
|                                                          | OPI_4. I would consider buying online PLBs next time.                                      |               |                                   |                            | .737 |
|                                                          | OPI_5. I will recommend buying an online PLBs.                                             |               |                                   |                            |      |

Notes: Items are measured on 7-Point Likert Scale, FL=Factor loadings, PR=Perceived risk; OPLB=Online private-label brand; ATT=Attitude; OPI=Online Purchase intention



Results & Findings

Sample Characteristics

Among the 537 respondents, 61 per cent were male, 44 per cent were graduates, 67 per cent were in the 18–30-year age group and 35 per cent were in the average monthly household bracket between 51k to 100k income group (See Table 2). Thus, the present study has a composition similar to that of the target market for private labels.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

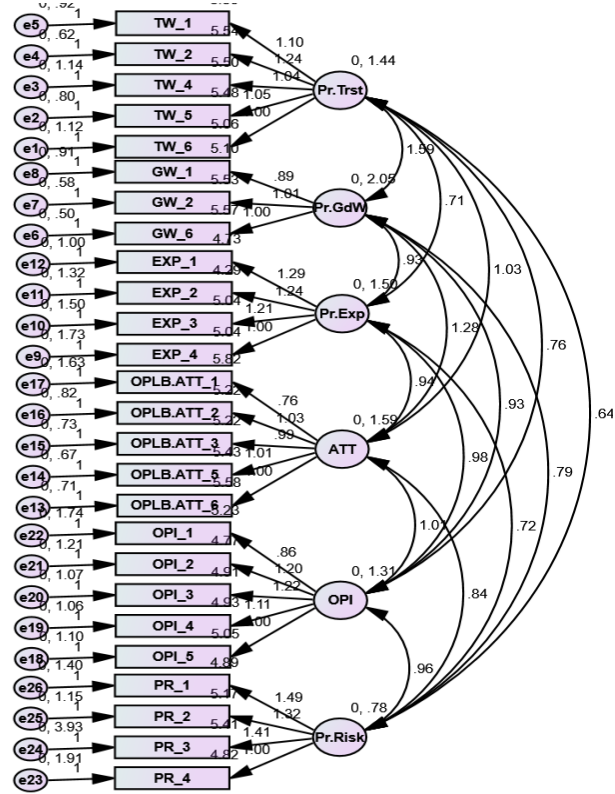
|                                 | Frequency | %     | Cumulative % |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-------|--------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                   |           |       |              |
| Female                          | 211       | 39.3  | 39.3         |
| Male                            | 326       | 60.7  | 100          |
| Total                           | 537       | 100.0 |              |
| <b>Age Group</b>                |           |       |              |
| Below 18                        | 22        | 4.1   | 4.1          |
| 18-30                           | 358       | 66.7  | 70.8         |
| Above 31                        | 141       | 26.3  | 97.0         |
| 41-50                           | 16        | 3.0   | 100.0        |
| Total                           | 537       | 100.0 |              |
| <b>Formal Education</b>         |           |       |              |
| 12 years                        | 69        | 12.8  | 12.8         |
| 14 years                        | 104       | 19.4  | 32.2         |
| 16 years                        | 235       | 43.8  | 76.0         |
| 18 or above                     | 129       | 24.0  | 100.0        |
| Total                           | 537       | 100.0 |              |
| <b>Social Class</b>             |           |       |              |
| Working                         | 79        | 14.7  | 14.7         |
| Middle                          | 340       | 63.3  | 78.0         |
| Upper                           | 118       | 22.0  | 100.0        |
| Total                           | 537       | 100.0 |              |
| <b>Household Monthly Income</b> |           |       |              |
| Below 50k                       | 114       | 21.2  | 21.2         |
| 51-100k                         | 188       | 35.0  | 56.2         |
| 101k-200k                       | 128       | 23.8  | 80.1         |
| 201-300k above                  | 107       | 19.9  | 100.0        |
| Total                           | 537       | 100.0 |              |

Validity & Reliability Analysis

Factor Analysis Results

Factor analysis – a data reduction technique was used to perform the analysis on the data comprising responses to 26 statements. Before moving into the analysis, preliminary analyses were performed. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy test was conducted to determine the sample adequacy for running factor analysis. It was found to be 0.948, above the accepted value, i.e., 0.70. Bartlett’s measure of sphericity was significant ( $p<0.001$ ), indicating adequate correlations among study variables for factor analysis. Hence, the scale was considered reliable.

**Figure 2**  
CFA Path Diagram



Notes: Pr. Trst= Perceived Trustworthiness, Pr. GdW= Perceived Goodwill, Pr. Exp= Perceived Expertise, ATT=Attitude, OPI=Online purchase intention, Pr. Risk=Perceived risk

### Convergent & Discriminant Validity

Average variance extracted (AVE) measures the amount of variance explained by an unobserved construct concerning the variance due to random measurement error. The AVEs exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017) with a minimum value of 0.602. For the model to have discriminant validity, the loading of an indicator on its allocated unobserved variable should be higher than its cross-loadings on all other unobserved variables. All indicator loadings exceeded their cross-loadings, confirming that the empirical model under consideration meets the criteria for convergent and discriminant validity (See Table 3).

**Table 3**  
Convergent & Discriminant Validity

| Constructs                | CR    | AVE   | 1            | 2            | 3            | 4            | 5            | 6            |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Trustworthiness           | 0.901 | 0.746 | <b>0.863</b> |              |              |              |              |              |
| Goodwill                  | 0.896 | 0.742 | .848**       | <b>0.861</b> |              |              |              |              |
| Expertise                 | 0.858 | 0.602 | .432**       | .469**       | <b>0.776</b> |              |              |              |
| Online PLB attitude       | 0.891 | 0.623 | .639**       | .656**       | .578**       | <b>0.789</b> |              |              |
| Online purchase intention | 0.860 | 0.554 | .509**       | .532**       | .618**       | .672**       | <b>0.744</b> |              |
| Perceived Risk            | 0.735 | 0.613 | .477**       | .495**       | .511**       | .615**       | .736**       | <b>0.783</b> |

Notes: \*\*p<0.05; CR= Composite reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted

### Multiple Regression Analysis- Model fit

The model is statistically significant ( $F = 153.465$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a good overall fit. The model accounted for approximately 46 per cent of the variance of consumers' intention to purchase online PLBs due to the predictor variables' impact, i.e., perceived trustworthiness, goodwill, and expertise (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.460$ ). Autocorrelation was checked using the Durbin-Watson test, and the value was found to be 1.87, which is very close to 2, suggesting no significant autocorrelation in the residuals of a regression model. The

summary of the regression model is presented in Table 4. ANOVA confirms the model is statistically significant at the 0.001 level (Table 5).

Table 4

Regression Model Fit Summary

| Model | R                 | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | SE of the estimates | Durbin Watson |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1     | .681 <sup>a</sup> | .463           | .460                    | .974                | 1.876         |

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Trustworthiness, Goodwill and Expertise

<sup>b</sup>Dependent Variable: Online purchase intention

Table 5

ANOVA results

| Model      | Sum of squares | Df  | Mean Square | F       | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Regression | 436.749        | 3   | 145.583     | 153.465 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 505.625        | 533 | .949        |         |                   |
| Total      | 942.375        | 536 |             |         |                   |

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Dependent variable: Online purchase intention

<sup>b</sup>Predictors: (Constant), Trustworthiness, Goodwill, Expertise

Descriptive Analysis, Multicollinearity & Correlation

Descriptive statistics summarize the dataset's key features. Table 6 shows that all variables, measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1–7), reflect a discrete structure. Trustworthiness (M = 5.37) and goodwill (M = 5.40) had high means and strong negative skewness, indicating generally positive ratings. Brand attitude also scored high (M = 5.45, skewness = -1.521), showing favorable perceptions. Perceived expertise (M = 4.78) and purchase intention (M = 4.98) showed moderate means with slight negative skewness. The perceived risk was neutral (M = 5.07) with mild positive skewness and kurtosis (1.308), suggesting a normal, centered distribution.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics

| Constructs                | Min  | Max  | Mean | SD    | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|-------|----------|----------|
| Trustworthiness           | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.37 | 1.372 | -1.488   | 1.906    |
| Goodwill                  | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.40 | 1.460 | -1.344   | 1.268    |
| Expertise                 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 4.78 | 1.567 | -0.541   | -0.680   |
| Online PLBs attitude      | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.45 | 1.276 | -1.521   | 2.183    |
| Online purchase intention | 1.00 | 7.00 | 4.98 | 1.326 | -0.843   | 0.192    |
| Perceived Risk            | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.07 | 1.381 | 0.435    | 1.308    |

Notes: Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum, SD = Standard deviation

Next, Collinearity diagnostics (Table 7) showed no multicollinearity issues, with all tolerance values above 0.10 and VIFs below 4 (Hair et al., 2019). The results also indicated no normality concerns among the variables.

Table 7

Multicollinearity Statistics

| Collinearity statistics |      |           |
|-------------------------|------|-----------|
| Constant                | VIF  | Tolerance |
| Trustworthiness         | 3.59 | 0.279     |
| Goodwill                | 3.74 | 0.267     |
| Expertise               | 1.29 | 0.776     |

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Dependent variable: Online purchase intention

The correlations among the study variables were examined (see Table 8). The results showed that all study variables positively correlated at the Sig. Level of 0.01, thus providing initial support for the hypothesized relationships. These findings suggest the proposed model is well-supported and likely to produce favorable results in the subsequent hypothesis testing.

**Table 8**  
*Correlations Among Constructs*

| Constructs                | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5    | 6 |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|---|
| Trustworthiness           | 1      |        |        |        |      |   |
| Goodwill                  | .848** | 1      |        |        |      |   |
| Expertise                 | .432** | .469** | 1      |        |      |   |
| Online PLB attitude       | .639** | .656** | .578** | 1      |      |   |
| Online purchase intention | .509** | .532** | .618** | .672** | 1    |   |
| Perceived Risk            | .477** | .495** | .511** | .615** | .736 | 1 |

Notes: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Hypothesis Testing**

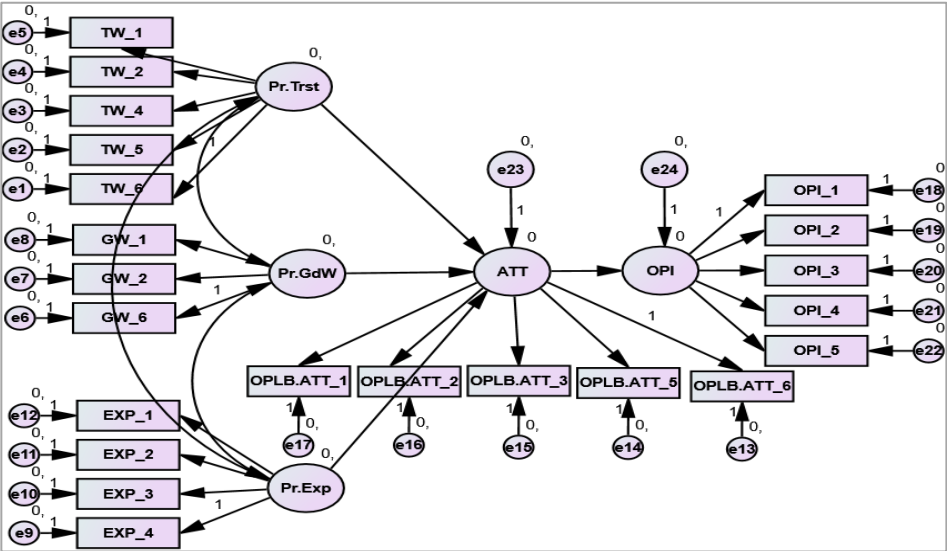
Before hypothesis testing, common method bias and model fit were assessed using Harman’s single-factor test via unrotated exploratory factor analysis. The single factor accounts for 45.079 % of the total variance and falls well below the standard 50% threshold that Podsakoff et al. (2024) suggested. This indicates no concerns related to common method bias in the data. The six-factor structural model was developed by AMOS 24.0 to assess the hypothesized relationships among the latent variables. Table 9 presents the structural model's fit indices, all falling within acceptable ranges and below the recommended cut-off values.

**Table 9**  
*Model Fit Summary for Structural Model*

|                  | $\chi^2$ | df  | $\chi^2 / df$ | NFI   | CFI   | TLI   | RMSEA |
|------------------|----------|-----|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Structural Model | 1142.674 | 284 | 4.023         | 0.883 | 0.910 | 0.887 | 0.750 |

Notes:  $\chi^2$ = Chi-square; df= Degrees of freedom;  $\chi^2/df$ =Normed chi-square; NFI, Normal fit index; CFI= Comparative fit index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA= Root mean square error of approximation.

**Figure 3**  
*Structural Measurement Model*



Notes: Pr. Trst= Perceived Trustworthiness, Pr. GdW= Perceived Goodwill, Pr. Exp= Perceived Expertise, ATT=Attitude, OPI=Online purchase intention, Pr. Risk=Perceived risk

Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis reveals that online PLB attitude (OPLB.ATT) significantly mediates the relationship between all three predictor variables and online purchase intention (OPI)—the indirect effect of perceived goodwill (Pr.GdW) on OPI via OPLB.ATT is showing a significant mediation effect ( $\beta = 0.225$ , with a 95% CI [0.025, 0.498], and a p-value of 0.032)—similarly, the indirect effect of perceived expertise (Pr.Exp) on OPI through OPLB.ATT also indicates strong and significant mediation ( $\beta = 0.273$ , with a 95% CI [0.194, 0.364] and  $p < 0.001$ )—however, the indirect effect of perceived trustworthiness (Pr.Trst) on OPI via OPLB.ATT is  $\beta = 0.171$ , but the 95% confidence interval [-0.086, 0.373] includes zero, and the p-value (0.158) is above 0.05, indicating non-significant mediation, resulting in the rejection of H1. Detailed results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Hypotheses Testing: Direct & Indirect Estimates

| Relationships                | $\beta$ Estimates | 95% CFI         | Decision                   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Pr.Trst --> OPLB.ATT         | 0.306***          | [-0.124, 0.511] | H1:Not Supported           |
| Pr.GdW --> OPLB.ATT          | 0.233***          | [0.029, 0.668]  | H2:Supported               |
| Pr.Exp --> OPLB.ATT          | 0.373***          | [0.275, 0.470]  | H3:Supported               |
| OPLB.ATT --> OPI             | 0.733***          | [0.642, 0.814]  | H4:Supported               |
| Pr.Trst --> OPLB.ATT --> OPI | 0.171***          | [-0.086, 0.373] | H5:Mediation Not Supported |
| Pr.GdW --> OPLB.ATT--> OPI   | 0.225***          | [0.025, 0.498]  | H6:Mediation Supported     |
| Pr.Exp --> OPLB.ATT--> OPI   | 0.273***          | [0.194, 0.364]  | H7: Mediation Supported    |

Notes: OPLBATT=Online private-label brand attitude; OPI=Online purchase intention; PR=Perceived risk; \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.10

Moderation Analysis

The moderation analysis indicates a significant interaction effect between Online Private Label Brand Attitude (OPLB.ATT) and Perceived Risk (PR) on Online Purchase Intention (OPI)—specifically, OPLB.ATT positively influences OPI ( $\beta = 0.324$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as does PR ( $\beta = 0.324$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, the interaction term OPLB.ATT  $\times$  PR yields a negative and significant effect ( $\beta = -0.035$ , 95% CI [-0.065, -0.005],  $p = .022$ ). This finding suggests that perceived risk weakens the positive effect of online private label brand attitude on purchase intention, indicating a moderating effect in the form of a negative interaction. As perceived risk increases, the influence of favorable brand attitude on purchase behavior decreases.

Table 11

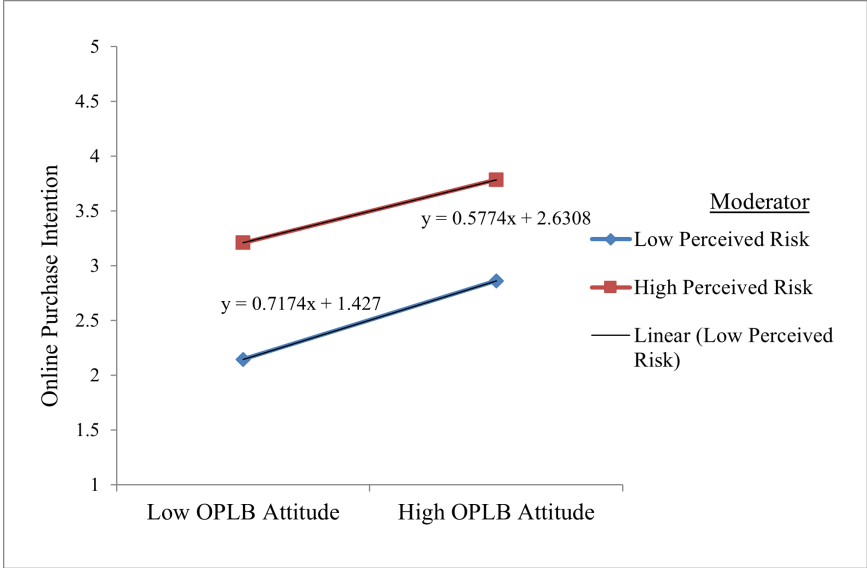
Summary of Hypotheses Including Moderating Effect of Perceived Risk

| Relationships               | $\beta$ Estimates | 95% CFI         | Decision                 |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| OPLB.ATT --> OPI            | 0.324***          | [0.246, 0.401]  | H8: Moderation Supported |
| PR --> OPI                  | 0.324***          | [0.433, 0.561]  |                          |
| OPLB.ATT $\times$ PR--> OPI | -0.035***         | [-0.065,-0.005] |                          |

Notes: OPLBATT=Online private-label brand attitude; OPI=Online purchase intention; PR=Perceived risk; \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.10

Figure 3 supports H8 by illustrating the moderated mediation effect of perceived risk between attitude and purchase intention. Using values at  $\pm 1$  standard deviation from the mean, the graph shows non-parallel lines with differing positive slopes—high perceived risk (slope = 0.577, intercept = 2.630) and low perceived risk (slope = 0.717, intercept = 1.427). This indicates that high perceived risk weakens the positive impact of favorable attitudes on purchase intention. Consumers perceiving higher risk are less likely to try unfamiliar online PLBs, dampening the attitude–intention link.

**Figure 4**  
*Moderated-Mediation Graph: OPLB.ATT-OPI*



**Results & Discussion**

The study did not find a positive link between SMI perceived trustworthiness and consumer attitudes toward online PLBs, rejecting H1. Though trustworthiness is key to influencer credibility (Ohanian, 1990), its impact may weaken with lesser-known brands like online PLBs, which lack substantial brand equity (Beneke & Carter, 2015). Consumers may also view such promotions as commercial rather than authentic, primarily if the SMI frequently endorses many brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019). A poor influencer-brand fit further reduces effectiveness, as trustworthiness alone may not sway attitudes toward budget-friendly PLBs. This mismatch helps explain the lack of support for H1.

The second hypothesis is supported, confirming a positive link between SMI-perceived goodwill and consumer attitudes toward online PLBs. This aligns with Rezki (2023), who found that goodwill enhances brand perception and attitudes. Jamil et al. (2024) also showed that influencers' kindness boosts consumer well-being and purchase intent. Likewise, Zaman et al. (2024) found that influencer credibility traits positively affect purchase behavior. These findings suggest that perceived goodwill fosters trust, leading to more favorable attitudes toward online PLBs. Therefore, H2 is supported.

The third finding supports a positive relationship between SMI perceived expertise and consumer attitude toward online PLBs. Research shows expertise significantly shapes brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Al-Mu'ani et al., 2023). SMI expertise and attractiveness strongly affect consumer intent (Hani et al., 2024; Kareem & Venugopal, 2023). Han and Balabanis (2024) also affirm expertise as a key factor in influencer credibility. For online PLBs, expert endorsements reduce perceived risk, enhance brand attitudes, and encourage purchasing. Thus, H3 is supported.

The fourth finding confirms a positive link between online PLB attitude and purchase intention. This supports prior research showing that perceived quality, brand image, and attitude influence PLB purchase intent (Yadav & Kar, 2024). Pangriya and Kumar (2018) noted that consumer thoughts and feelings strongly shape buying behavior, especially online. Positive attitudes help reduce perceived risks and guide decisions in the absence of physical interaction, making them crucial for boosting online PLB sales in a competitive market. Hence, H4 is supported.

The fifth finding confirms that online PLB attitude positively mediates the relationship between SMI's perceived trustworthiness and consumers' online purchase intention. The current findings support the prior research, which suggested that SMIs' trustworthiness greatly influences consumers' brand attitudes, positively affecting their purchase intentions (Al-Mu'ani et al., 2023). Coutinho et al. (2023) show that



maintaining consumer trust in an influencer is essential for building strong influencer–consumer relationships. This trust has a positive impact on both attitudes toward the influencer and the associated brand. Thus, it is contended that while buying online PLB, online shoppers rely more heavily on their attitudes toward the brand, shaped by trusted SMIs, to guide their purchasing decisions. Therefore, leveraging trustworthy SMIs can enhance consumer attitudes and drive purchase intentions for online private-label products. Consequently, H5 is supported.

The sixth finding confirms that online PLB attitude mediates the relationship between SMI's perceived goodwill and consumers' online purchase intentions. This aligns with Al-Mu'ani et al. (2023), who found that SMI trustworthiness shapes brand attitude, which in turn enhances purchase intention. Thus, goodwill alone may not directly drive purchase decisions unless it fosters a favorable brand attitude. Similarly, Özkan and Yerezhep (2023) showed that brand trust mediates the link between attitude toward influencers and purchase intention, highlighting the role of brand perception in consumer decisions. Online PLBs often lack strong brand recognition, so consumers rely on credible, sincere SMIs to guide their evaluations. Partnering with such influencers helps PLBs build emotional connections and positively influence buying behavior. As a result, H6 is supported.

The seventh finding affirms that online PLB attitude positively mediates the relationship between SMI's perceived expertise and consumers' online purchase intentions. The perceived expertise of social media influencers plays a key role in shaping consumers' brand attitudes, positively influencing their intention to purchase (Mu'ani et al. 2023), and enhancing brand credibility (Kareem & Venugopal, 2023). When consumers view influencers as knowledgeable, it boosts their brand attitude and purchase intent. Sharing firsthand product insights strengthens this effect, driving sales (Schouten, 2019). In the online PLB context, establishing brand equity is a challenge. Consumers tend to rely more on their attitudes toward the brand, which is significantly shaped by social media influencers' perceived expertise. Leveraging influencers seen as knowledgeable and credible can play a pivotal role in enhancing brand attitudes, ultimately leading to increased purchase intentions for online PLB offerings. Thus, H7 is supported.

The eighth finding is also supported by Majeed et al. (2024), who showed that perceived risk moderates the link between brand attitude and online purchase intention—the higher risk weakens this relationship. Similarly, Deshbhag and Mohan (2020) and Kamalul et al. (2018) found that perceived risk negatively affects attitudes and purchase decisions. Thus, using credible SMIs can help reduce perceived risk, strengthen brand attitudes, and boost purchase intentions for online private-label products. Accordingly, H8 is supported.

## **Theoretical Implications**

The extension of the marketing signaling theory is a significant literature contribution of this study in the realm of online private-label branding and influencer marketing, particularly where trust in new brands is still nascent. It highlights that trustworthiness is an aspect of influencer credibility and may not be universally impactful as opposed to conventional wisdom. It also reveals that all dimensions of influencer credibility do not uniformly translate into a favorable attitude. Moreover, in the context of the low-equity PLBs, the differentiated role of goodwill and expertise predominantly accentuates the nuanced mechanisms of attitude formation. The mediating role of consumer attitude and the moderating influence of perceived risk provide a layered understanding of PLB propagation and purchase.

## **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study provide practical insights for marketers and managers of PLBs, particularly in the digital and social media marketing domain. Firstly, the selection of the influencers should not be solely based on trustworthiness because it may not directly affect the purchase decision. Instead, coupling it with the

consumer values, goodwill, and perceived expertise convinces the consumer of the online purchase of PLBs. Therefore, the brands should collaborate with influencers who exhibit credibility and, at the same time, genuinely resonate with the brand's positioning and consumer base. Secondly, the perception of risk alters the purchase decision to a large extent. Addressing the various forms of risks in online marketing messages can reduce purchase anxiety and convert intention to actual purchase. This can be achieved through transparent policies, customer reviews, money-back guarantees, and content that builds emotional assurance, bridging the gap between intent and action in online purchases.

### **Limitations & Future Research**

A research study is bounded by several conditions that hinder generalizability. This study also had its share of limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional design limited the ability to infer causality over time. Future studies may engage in longitudinal methods to observe changes in consumer attitudes and intentions for PLBs. Secondly, this study did not differentiate between types of consumers, while there are various consumer clusters of PLB buyers, as discussed earlier. Therefore, future studies may segregate the multiple segments and then analyze the buying patterns. Thirdly, the sample is restricted to Pakistani online consumers, which may limit generalizability to other cultural and digital usage contexts. Comparative cross-segments and cross-country analyses could provide broader insights. Fourthly, the study only revolved around perceived risk in general; future studies could explore various risk dimensions, including time, performance, and psychological or delivery risks, that are important in online buying scenarios. Examining the role of influencer-brand or brand-consumer congruence and consumers' personality traits may yield deeper behavioral insights.

### **Conclusions**

This research highlighted the evolving role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behavior toward online PLBs. It demonstrated that credibility is multidimensional and context-dependent, especially when dealing with unfamiliar or low-equity online PLBs. It was interesting to note that trustworthiness alone may not be enough for purchase intention for online PLBs in the absence of brand familiarity or congruence fit. Although the two other drivers of influencer credibility, i.e., goodwill and expertise, emerged as strong drivers of favorable attitudes and purchase intentions, signifying different mechanisms working behind a trust for the celebrity and trust in the brand. Moreover, perceived risk played a critical preventive role in consumer decision-making, moderating even favorable attitudes. In emerging digital and online economies like Pakistan, these findings emphasized the importance of strategic influencer partnerships and risk mitigation for the augmentation of the online PLB's appeal and offerings.

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