


Effect of Instagram Influencer Parasocial Relationship on Follower Behaviors: A Moderated Moderation Model of Expertise and Involvement

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ABSTRACT

Social media influencers (SMI) are considered effective marketing weapons that firms increasingly use to endorse their products and brands. However, with the enormous diversity of social media and the multiplicity of SMI, marketers need to understand how to choose the right SMI on the right social media for a specific product or brand. This study aims to improve understanding of the influence of SMI followers' behaviors by studying how parasocial relationship (PSR) interacts with SMI's expertise for products with different levels of involvement to impact consumers' behaviors. The authors proposed a three-hypotheses (nine sub-hypotheses) model that was tested via a scenarios-based survey. Data was collected from 1230 Instagram users living in Qatar. These results confirm the importance of PSR, SMI's perceived expertise, and product involvement in predicting the effectiveness of an SMI endorsement. They also highlight the need to consider the different interactions between these three variables.

KEYWORDS

Moderated Moderation, Parasocial Relationship, Perceived Expertise, Product Involvement, Social Media Influencers

INTRODUCTION

Like celebrities in advertising, social media influencers (SMI) play the role of group of reference and will endorse companies' products and brands. In general, SMI could be described as ordinary social media (SM) users that can attract a sustainable number of followers, acquire a good reputation in a particular domain, and create valuable social media content that influences attitudes and behaviors (De Veirman et al., 2017; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020; Conde & Casais, 2023). They could be described as ordinary consumers who take advantage of SM's opportunity to create their

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notoriety and impact the opinions and behaviors of thousands of other consumers (McQuarrie et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2017). Since most SMI became famous by sharing their everyday life, including their consumption, purchase, and post-purchase behavior, they became models for other consumers (followers). They profoundly influenced their daily choices and purchase decisions (Rungruangjit, 2022). In effect, followers see SMI as authentic opinion leaders, creators of new trends, and experts in their specific area (Childers et al., 2019; Conde & Casais, 2023). Their messages are considered by followers as more reliable and convincing than those of traditional celebrities (Talavera, 2015), and their content as more reliable in comparison to classic brand-generated content (Cheung et al., 2022). Ultimately, they have a more profound influence on purchasing followers' behavior than traditional celebrities (Rungruangjit, 2022).

As a result, social media influencers are recognized as a crucial and effective marketing weapon and companies are increasingly investing in SMI for brands and products endorsement (Childers et al., 2019). According to Cheung et al. (2022), SMI marketing is 6.9 times more persuasive than traditional marketing, and 65% of global brands are considering SMI marketing in their marketing budget allocation.

One of the critical success factors of SMI is their capacity to create a parasocial relationship (PSR) with other social media users (their followers). In effect, the parasocial relationship is emerging as a focal concept in research dealing with SMI (Rosaen & Dibble, 2016; Slater et al., 2018) due to the profoundly positive impact of PSR on followers' behaviors (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Yuan et al. (2016) indicate that SMI's expertise and PSR are highly correlated and influence consumer behaviors. As for PSR, previous research presented expertise as a critical key success factor for SMI success. The SMI's perceived expertise and qualification in their field make followers trust them and accept their advice (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020; Cheung et al., 2022).

In effect, different types of SMI possess different levels of expertise related to different domains. For example, athletes are expected to be experts in sports products. In contrast, an entertainment star is expected to be an expert in cosmetics (Rungruangjit, 2022). Referring to Haenlein & Libai (2017), Conde & Casais (2023) considered that SMI could be divided into three categories depending on their level of expertise and popularity: the "mega-influencers" who are considered experts in a specific area and who are very popular and the "micro-influencers" who are ordinary consumers able to have a relative impact on a narrow circle of followers. They presented the "macro-influencers" as a third intermediate category.

Nevertheless, by observing the reality of SMI marketing, we can note that influencers, particularly the most popular influencers, endorse any product. For example, Ronaldo, an international football (soccer) player considered the world's number one influencer in terms of popularity with more than 778M followers (searchenginejournal, 2023), is endorsing a diversity of products and services that are not associated with football or sports. We can notice the same phenomenon with the number two influencer in terms of popularity, Messi, another football player recommending tourism in KSA. This means that in practice, the favorite SMI are endorsing products and services that are out of their circle of expertise. However, an important question emerges: Is a strong PSR between an SMI and his/her followers able to impact followers' behaviors effectively regardless of the type of product and the domain of expertise of the SMI?

The scope of this research is advancing in answering the previous question. More precisely, we aim to understand the following: how parasocial relationship interacts with SMI's expertise for different types of products (different levels of involvement) to impact consumers' behaviors? To achieve this goal, drawing on a literature review related to SMI, PRS, expertise, and involvement, we proposed a three hypotheses (nine sub-hypotheses) model that we tested via a scenarios-based survey. Data was collected from 1230 Instagram users living in Qatar during the spring of 2020.

On the one hand, we choose Instagram because it is considered the first social media that allows social interactions with other users behaving as real-life friends; it is also the favorite platform for influencer marketing (Kilipiri et al., 2023). On the other hand, Qatar is an interesting country for

studying the effect of Instagram influencers on followers' behavior as Qatar is the third country in the world regarding the percentage of the population using social media (96%) (Radcliffe et al., 2023). Likewise, Instagram is the second most popular social network among the Qatar population (Digital Marketing Community, 2023). To test our hypotheses and the quality of the measurement instruments, we used Smart-PLS4 (Ringle et al., 2022), SPSS 28, and version 4.2 of the Process Macro (Hayes, 2022). Our results indicate the importance of the main variables PSR, expertise, and involvement for understanding the effects of SMI on their followers' behaviors; they also highlight the need to consider the different interactions between our main variables. Theoretical and managerial implications are then discussed.

In what follows, we present our theoretical background, the research model, and the related hypotheses.

The Parasocial Relationship (PSR)

The concept of PSR has been a subject of academic research for an extended period. However, the interest of the most recent studies moved from traditional celebrities to the relationship between SMI and their followers (Aw & Chuah, 2021). In summary, previous studies on PSR and SMI defined parasocial relationship as one-sided and "pseudo" relationships that a social media user (a follower) develops with "a mediated performer" as a social media influencer (Yuan et al., 2016; Aw & Chuah, 2021; Sokolova, & Perez, 2021; Tafheem et al., 2022). The (para) relationship creates for the followers an illusion of actual, intense, and close interpersonal connections with the SMI (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Cheung et al., 2022). SM allows influencers and followers to interact intensely (Aw & Chuah, 2021). However, while it is easy for an influencer to share their daily life via social media, as in traditional media, they can only respond to some of their followers' comments (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Previous research indicates that PSR between SMI and followers are a robust gauge of influencers' capability to persuade the followers and impact their behaviors (Aw & Chuah, 2021).

Several studies indicate that PSR positively impacts followers' purchase intentions (Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Sokolova & Perez, 2021; Rungruangjit, 2022). Similarly, researchers confirmed that PSR with SMI positively influences followers' word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions (Jin & Phua, 2014; Hwang & Zhang, 2018). However, multiple works indicate that parasocial relationships are not only related to WOM or purchase intentions and can impact different types of consumer behavior to change their attitude toward the endorsed product and to be very focused on the information presented by the influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Sokolova & Perez, 2021).

Thus, we can expect that PSR can also stimulate online and offline information search about the endorsed products (trial of products). We can stipulate that:

H1: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' behaviors.

H1.a: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' purchase intention of endorsed products.

H1.b: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' trial of endorsed products.

H1.c: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' WOM intention about endorsed products.

Product Involvement

Deriving from psychology, perceived involvement has become one of the most crucial concepts in consumer behavior research (Lin et al., 2023). Mitchell (1979) describes product involvement as "an individual level, internal state variable whose motivational properties are evoked by a particular stimulus or situation." It corresponds to consumers' perceived personal importance with diverse product categories, depending on their needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Goldsmith & Emmert, 1991).

According to different authors, product involvement is a motivational variable that boosts consumers to search and process more information and to devote more physical and mental efforts

to the purchasing decision (Drossos et al., 2014; Ben Mimoun et al., 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Thus, some product categories are considered more involved than others, and high-involvement products are generally associated with higher risks, more complexity, and elaboration in the purchase process. Conversely, low-involvement products are considered simple, routine, and associated with low risk (Nguyen et al., 2020).

In addition to its direct effect on purchase behavior, product involvement can interact with other marketing stimuli and psychological variables. Referring to Petty & Cacioppo (1986), Drossos et al. (2014) indicate that the effect of mobile text advertising on consumer purchase advertising will be higher for low-involvement products (low elaboration condition) in comparison to high-involvement products (high elaboration condition). In the context of customer-to-customer interaction, Nguyen et al. (2020) indicate that involvement moderates the effect of consumer characteristics on purchase intention. Thus, we consider that:

- H.2:** Product involvement moderates the relationship between PSR and followers' behaviors.
- H2.a:** PSR has a higher effect on the intention to purchase in situations of low product involvement.
- H2.b:** PSR has a higher effect on the intention to try the product in situations of high product involvement.
- H2.c:** PSR has a higher effect on WOM in situations of low product involvement.

Perceived Expertise

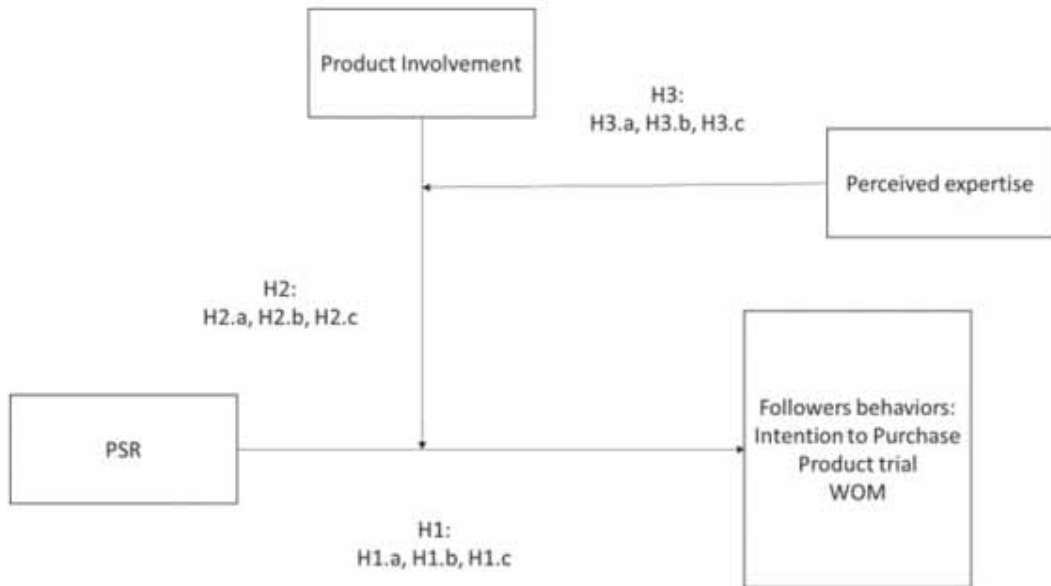
In general, expertise describes the magnitude to which a person is perceived as able to make accurate assertions (Nafees et al., 2021). SMI perceived expertise refers to their perceived experience, level of knowledge, skills, and qualification within a specific domain or in relation to a product or a brand (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020; Masuda et al., 2022; Rungruangjit, 2022). Expertise is a critical element for interpersonal interaction. The speaker's credibility and persuasiveness highly depend on his/her perceived expertise (Aw & Chuah, 2021). For social media, people will tend to create parasocial relationships with other users considered experts in a specific domain (Yuan et al., 2016). Expertise boosts the persuasiveness of SMI; followers will react differently to an influencer's recommendation depending on his/her level of expertise (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020; Yuan et al., 2016). Different studies verified empirically that SMI's perceived expertise positively impacts the purchase intention of the followers (Masuda et al., 2022; Rungruangjit, 2022; Chekima et al., 2020).

However, Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2020) highlighted the necessity to verify how SMI's perceived expertise will have different effects depending on the situation. Referring to previous research, Nafees et al. (2021) indicate that expertise can play a moderating role. Homer and Kahle (1990) indicate that source influence depends on the interaction between expertise and involvement. Thus, we expect that the moderating effect of product involvement (PI) on the relationship between PSR and followers' behaviors depends on the perceived SMI's level of expertise. Then we stipulate that:

- H.3:** The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and followers' behaviors depends on the SMI's perceived expertise.
- H3.a:** The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and intention to purchase evolves with the SMI's perceived expertise.
- H3.b:** The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and intention to try the product changes with the SMI's perceived expertise.
- H3.c:** The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and WOM evolves with the SMI's perceived expertise.

Figure 1 summarizes our research model and hypotheses.

Figure 1. Summary of research model and hypotheses



METHOD

We collected data during the spring of 2020 using an online survey on Google-form. Following previous research recommendations (Foroudi et al., 2020; Ben Mimoun et al., 2022), we adopted a non-probabilistic “snowballing” sampling technique. In total, 1230 consumers living in Qatar answered our questionnaire, but we eliminated 64 non-valid answers (e.g., participants who do not have an Instagram account).

The questionnaire was translated from English into Arabic (the official language in Qatar) using the back-translation technique; this technique is recommended for the translation of scales (Cohen & Jones, 1990).

To measure our main independent variable (Parasocial Relationship) and moderators (Involvement and Expertise), we used slightly modified versions of validated measurement scales from previous marketing literature (see Table 1). A five-point Likert scale measured all the variables.

To be able to ensure variation in terms of product involvement, respondents were randomly assigned to two different scenarios. In the first scenario (high involvement condition), after answering general questions about their favorite Instagram influencer and their PSR with this influencer, we asked participants to imagine the following situation. Their favorite influencer recommended a new smartphone and asked them to answer consequently to three different questions measuring three different behaviors: the possibility that they purchase the product (B1), the possibility that they will search for the product in a physical store to try it before making any decision (B2), and the possibility that they will recommend the product to others (B3). In the second scenario (low involvement condition), we adopted a similar approach but replaced the new smartphone with a new type of chocolate. Six hundred and twenty respondents were randomly assigned to the first scenario (high involvement condition) and 610 to the second scenario (low involvement condition).

The Sample

In total, 1230 responses were collected. Out of these, 1116 were valid (90%) and used for further analyses. Regarding demographics, 63% of participants in our survey were female, and 37% were

Table 1. Measurement scales

Construct	Description	Sources
Involvement	Inv1. Inv2. Inv3.	Adapted from Ratchford, (1987)
Expertise	Exp1. Exp2: Exp3.	Adapted from Ohanian (1990)
Parasocial relationship (PSR)	PSR1. PSR2. PSR3. PSR4. PSR5. PSR6.	Adapted from Kim, Ko, & Kim, (2015)
Purchase	B1. I will purchase the product.	Reactions to the different scenarios
Trial	B2. I will search for the product in physical stores for a trial.	
WOM	B3. I will recommend the product.	

male. Respondents were distributed into five age groups with the following results: 57.3% were between 18-24, 30.4% between 25-34, 9.2% between 35-44, 2.7% between 45-54, and .3% between 55-64. This distribution fits well with the demographics of Instagram users, as young consumers aged between 18 and 34 represent more than 61% of Instagram users worldwide (Statista, 2023). Finally, participants in our survey were 77.9% Qatari and 22.1% Non-Qatari living in Qatar.

Data Analysis Methods

To test our hypotheses, the quality of the dataset, and the quality of the measurement instruments, we used Smart-PLS4 (Ringle et al., 2022), SPSS 28, and version 4.2 of the Process Macro (Hayes, 2022). SPSS28 was used to obtain the descriptive statistics, test for common method variance and normality, and the manipulation check. We used Smart-PLS4 to evaluate the measurement model's reliability and validity. Finally, we utilized V4 of the Process Macro to test our hypotheses. We considered the Process Macro appropriate because our research model contains moderated moderation hypotheses (Hayes, 2022).

Common Method Variance

Considering the single source of data gathering for our dependent and independent constructs, we embraced three distinct approaches to reduce and control for the common method variance. First, we secured the anonymity of all the respondents to the survey to encourage them to complete the survey truthfully (Gao et al., 2021). Second, we used Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), indicating that the variance accounted for in the first factor is 28.01% (<50%). Third, we used the latent variables' correlations method to assess possible common method variance problems (Tehseen et al., 2017). We observe no substantively large correlation ($r > 0.9$) among latent constructs indicating the absence of a common method variance problem (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Thus, the three methods' results confirm that our model is free from common method bias.

Descriptive Statistics and Normality Test

We checked for normality by using the Kurtosis and Skewness indicators. As specified in Table 2, both Kurtosis and Skewness values are between -1 and 1, indicating that the data is normally distributed.

Manipulation Check

As indicated earlier, respondents were randomly assigned to two scenarios to ensure variation in product involvement. In the first scenario (high involvement condition, HIC), we asked participants to imagine that their favorite influencer recommends a new smartphone model. In the second scenario (low involvement condition, LIC), we replaced the new smartphone with a new type of chocolate. We used ANOVA to verify that there is a significant difference in terms of perceived involvement between the two scenarios. Results indicate a significantly higher score for the three involvement measurement items for the high involvement condition. Respectively for Inv1 ($F= 84.326, P<.001$, Mean for HIC=3.3, Mean for LIC= 2.64); Inv2 ($F= 149.064, P<.001$, Mean for HIC=3.21, Mean for LIC= 2.38); Inv3 ($F= 103.291, P<.001$, Mean for HIC=3.11, Mean for LIC= 2.38). However, it is important to note that we used the perceived product involvement and not the type of product (smartphone vs chocolate) in the analysis.

RESULTS

Measurement Model

We examined the validity and reliability of our measurement instruments using Partial Least Squares (PLS) structural equations (Hair et al., 2022).

Reliability

To attest to the reliability of an item, its outer loading must be higher than .70. We eliminated two items with loading lower than .70 (PSR1 and PSR5). All the remaining items have loadings ranging from .77 to 1 (see Table 3).

Regarding internal consistency, all composite reliability indices (CR) have higher values than the minimum acceptable value of .70 (Hair et al., 2022) and range from .86 to .93. The Cronbach's

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, kurtosis, and skewness

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
PSR1	1166	4	2.91	1.206	.094	-.779
PSR2	1166	4	3.34	1.202	-.190	-.805
PSR3	1166	4	3.34	1.214	-.193	-.855
PSR4	1166	4	3.18	1.258	-.106	-.898
PSR5	1166	4	2.55	1.230	.308	-.807
PSR6	1166	4	3.27	1.224	-.198	-.812
Inv1	1166	4	2.98	1.267	.049	-.902
Inv2	1166	4	2.81	1.238	.179	-.831
Inv3	1166	4	2.75	1.276	.220	-.907
Exp1	1166	4	2.54	1.192	.327	-.681
Exp2	1166	4	2.59	1.181	.253	-.709
Exp3	1166	4	2.61	1.194	.255	-.721
B1	1166	4	2.84	1.224	.093	-.791
B2	1166	4	2.96	1.200	.004	-.769
B3	1166	4	2.80	1.179	.109	-.689

Table 3. Outer loadings matrix

	Expertise	Involvement	Parasocial Relationship	Purchase	Trial	WOM
B1				1.000		
B2					1.000	
B3						1.000
Exp1	.904					
Exp2	.904					
Exp3	.909					
Inv1		.819				
Inv2		.777				
Inv3		.874				
PSR2			.832			
PSR3			.805			
PSR4			.847			
PSR6			.843			

alpha values confirmed the reliability of our scales, all the indices are above .7 and range between .76 and .89 (Hair et al., 2022) (see Table 4).

Discriminant Validity

Considering the recommendations of Henseler et al. (2015), we used the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) to evaluate the discriminant validity. HTMT matrix (see Table 5) indicates that all our construct HTMT correlations are lower than the threshold of .85, indicating the discriminant validity of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2022).

Convergent Validity

According to Hair et al. (2017), we established convergent validity if the AVE of the latent construct has a value that exceeds .5. As presented in Table 4, all the AVEs are above .5.

Hypothesis Tests

To test our three hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) and nine sub-hypotheses (H1.a, H1.b, H1.c; H2.a, H2.b, H2.c; H3.a, H3.b, H3.c) we used the model 3 of the version 4.2 of the Process Macro (Hayes, 2022). Model 3 allows us to test together the direct effect of parasocial relationships on the different types of behavior (Purchase, Trial, and WOM) (H1), the moderating effect of involvement (H2), and the moderated moderation effect of expertise (H3). However, as the macro process accepts one unique dependent variable at a time, we run three different models for the different types of behavior.

Table 4. Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Expertise	.890	.932	.820
Involvement	.768	.864	.679
Parasocial Relationship	.852	.900	.692

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) matrix

	Expertise	Involvement	Parasocial Relationship	Purchase	Trial	WOM
Expertise						
Involvement	.554					
Parasocial Relationship	.223	.314				
Purchase	.435	.185	.358			
Trial	.445	.364	.367	.553		
WOM	.485	.315	.339	.657	.538	

Test of Effects on Purchase Intentions (H1.a, H2.a, H3.a)

As indicated in Table 6, using the Model 3 of the Process Macro allows us to test different effects simultaneously. It tested the direct effects of Parasocial Relationship (PSR) (H1.a), Involvement (Invol), and Expertise (Expt) on intention to purchase. It also tests different two ways interaction effects (simple moderations): PSR * Invol (H2.a); PSR * Expt; and Invol * Expt. Finally, it tested a three ways interaction effect (moderated moderation): PSR * Invol*Expt (H3.a). Results show that the global model is significant and explains more than 25% of the variance in intention to purchase ($R^2=.2539$; $F=56.3090$; $p<.0001$). They also indicate that following H1.a, PSR positively and significantly affects intention to purchase ($\beta=.2666$; $t=7.2260$; $p<.0001$). Results also show that Involvement has a negative significant effect on intention to purchase ($\beta=-.1044$; $t=-2.8445$; $p<.01$) and that Expertise has a significant positive effect ($\beta=.4661$; $t=12.5029$; $p<.0001$).

Regarding H3.a, we observed non-significant effect for the three ways interaction (PSR * Invol*Expt) ($\beta=.0366$; $t=1.5292$; $p>.05$). Thus, we reject H3.a. Finally, considering the two ways interactions, two of them were significant: PSR * Invol ($\beta=-.0872$; $t=-2.4840$; $p<.05$) and Invol * Expt ($\beta=.1193$; $t=3.9862$; $p<.001$). However, model three gives elements for interpretation for the higher interaction order interaction. Thus, we run two separate analyses using model 1 of the Process Macro to obtain a better interpretation for (PSR * Invol) and (Invol * Expt).

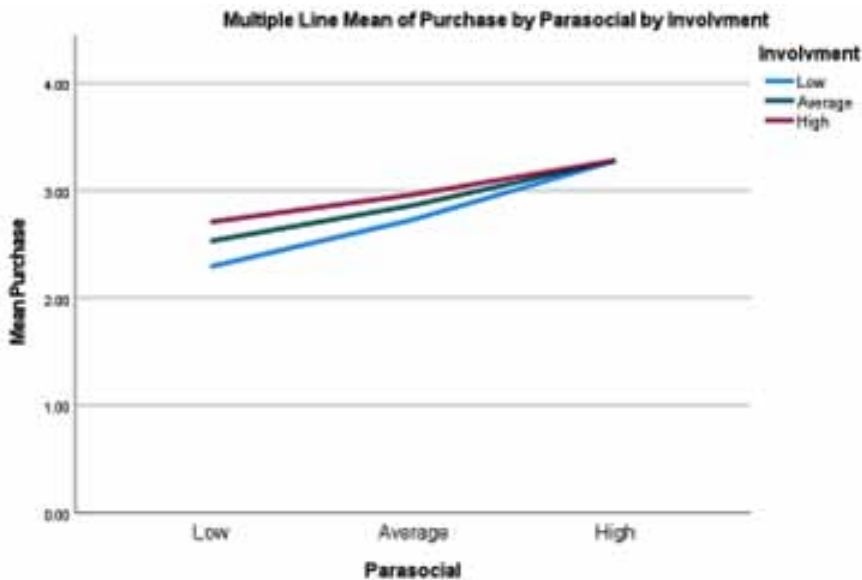
Table 6. Effects of the moderated moderation model on intention to purchase

Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5039	.2539	1.1238	56.3090	7.0000	1158.0000	.0000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.8189	.0334	84.3305	.0000	2.7534	2.8845
PSR	.2666	.0369	7.2260	.0000	.1942	.3389
Invol	-.1044	.0367	-2.8445	.0045	-.1764	-.0324
PSR x Invol	-.0872	.0351	-2.4840	.0131	-.1561	-.0183
Expt	.4661	.0373	12.5029	.0000	.3930	.5393
PSR * Expt	-.0624	.0345	-1.8083	.0708	-.1302	.0053
Invol * Expt	.1193	.0299	3.9862	.0001	.0606	.1780
PSR * Invol * Expt	.0366	.0239	1.5292	.1265	-.0104	.0835

Table 7. Model of Moderation of PSR * Invol

Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.3367	.1134	1.3310	49.5271	3.0000	1162.0000	.0000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.8608	.0346	82.7491	.0000	2.7929	2.9286
PSR	.3510	.0354	9.9096	.0000	.2815	.4205
Invol	.1015	.0350	2.8997	.0038	.0328	.1701
PSR x Invol	-.0833	.0301	-2.7661	.0058	-.1423	-.0242
Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):						
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p	
PSRxInvol	.0058	7.6510	1.0000	1162.0000	.0058	
Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):						
Invol	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-1.1308	.4451	.0445	9.9956	.0000	.3578	.5325
.1416	.3392	.0364	9.3131	.0000	.2677	.4106
1.0955	.2598	.0525	4.9461	.0000	.1567	.3628

Figure 2. Moderating effects of PSR * Invol on intention to purchase (B1)



First, we explored the PSR*Invol. Results indicate that involvement moderates the effect of PSR on intention to purchase ($\beta=-.0833$; $t=-2.7661$; $p<.05$). They indicate more precisely that the effect of PSR is significant, independently of the level of involvement. However, this effect decreases

with the level of involvement, as seen in Table 7 and Figure 2. When the level of involvement is low (Invol=-1.1308; β =.4451; t =9.9956; p <.00001), the effect is higher than when it is at an average level (Invol=.1416; β =.3392; t =9.3131; p <.00001) and the lower effect is obtained for the higher level of involvement (Invol=1.0955; β =.2598; t =4.9461; p <.00001). This result is in accordance with H2.a.

Second, we explored the effects of Invol*Expt. Results indicate Expertise moderates the effect of involvement on intention to purchase (β =.0806; t =2.8965; p <.05). More precisely and as we can see in Figure 3 and Table 8, involvement has a significant negative effect on the intention to purchase only at the lower level of expertise (Expt=-1.4658; β =-.1586; t =-3.0386; p <.01) and it has a non-significant effect for an average level of expertise (Expt=.0778; p >.05) and high level of expertise (Expt=1.0033; p >.05). This result is confirmed with the Johnson-Neyman Moderator value(s) significance region indicating that above an expertise level of -.4095 (64.5%), the effect of involvement on intention to purchase is not significant.

Test of Effects on Product Trial Intentions (H1.b, H2.b, H3.b)

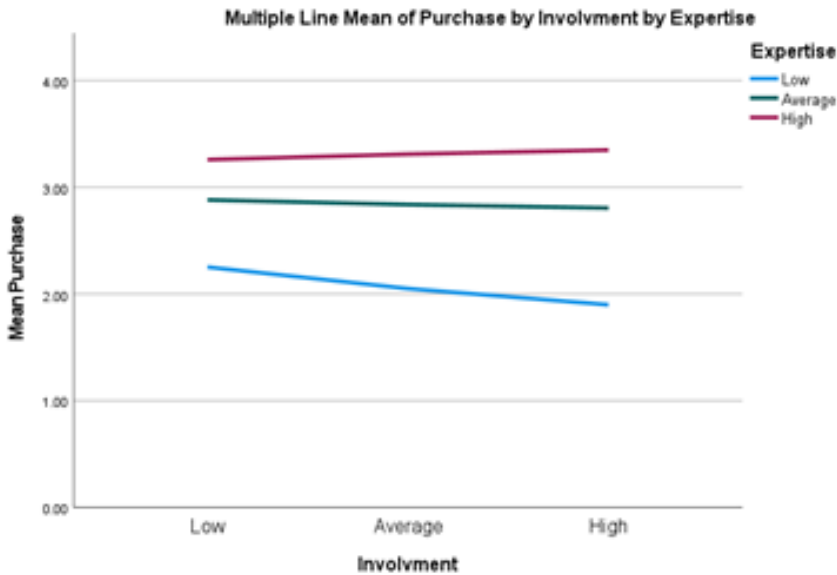
Similarly, to purchase intentions, we use the Model 3 of the Process Macro to test different effects simultaneously. The model tested the direct effects of Parasocial Relationship (PSR) (H1.b), Involvement (Invol), and Expertise (Expt) on product trial intentions. It also tested two ways interaction effects (simple moderations): PSR*Invol (H2.b); PSR*Expt; and Invol*Expt. Finally, it tested three ways interaction effect (moderated moderation): PSR*Invol*Expt (H3.b).

As indicated in Table 9, the global model is significant and explains about 25% of the variance in product trial intentions (R^2 =.2492; F =54.9170; p <.0001). We can observe that following H1.b, PSR has a positive significant effect on product trial intentions (β =.2692; t =7.4217; p <.0001). Results also indicate that Involvement has a positive significant effect on product trial intentions (β =.1391; t =3.8537; p <.001) and that Expertise significantly and positively impacts product trial intentions

Table 8. Model of moderation of Invol*Expt

Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.4131	.1707	1.2450	79.7077	3.0000	1162.0000	.0000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.8041	.0350	80.1145	.0000	2.7355	2.8728
Invol	-.0405	.0368	-1.0993	.2719	-.1127	.0318
Expt	.4988	.0372	13.4120	.0000	.4258	.5717
Invol x Expt	.0806	.0278	2.8965	.0038	.0260	.1352
Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):						
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p	
InvolxExpt	.0060	8.3896	1.0000	1162.0000	.0038	
Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):						
Expt	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-1.4658	-.1586	.0522	-3.0386	.0024	-.2611	-.0562
.0778	-.0342	.0371	-0.9220	.3567	-.1069	.0386
1.0033	.0404	.0483	.8368	.4029	-.0544	.1353

Figure 3. Moderating effects of Invol * Expt on intention to purchase (B1)



($\beta=.3583$; $t=9.7713$; $p<.0001$). However, results indicate that none of the moderating effects is significant (see Table 9). Thus, we reject H2.b and H3.b.

Test of Effects on WOM (H1.c, H2.c, H3.c)

We used Model 3 of the Process Macro to simultaneously test the effects of Parasocial Relationships and their moderators on WOM. We tested the direct effects of Parasocial Relationship (PSR) (H1.c), Involvement (Invol), and Expertise (Expt) on WOM. We tested the two ways interaction effects (simple moderations): PSR * Invol (H2.c); PSR * Expt; and Invol * Expt. Finally, we tested a three ways interaction effect (moderated moderation): PSR * Invol*Expt (H3.c).

Table 9. Summary of effects of the moderated moderation model on product trial intentions

Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.4992	.2492	1.0868	54.9170	7.0000	1158.0000	.0000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.9578	.0329	89.9780	.0000	2.8933	3.0223
PSR	.2692	.0363	7.4217	.0000	.1981	.3404
Invol	.1391	.0361	3.8537	.0001	.0683	.2099
PSR x Invol	-.0621	.0345	-1.7991	.0723	-.1299	.0056
Expt	.3583	.0367	9.7713	.0000	.2863	.4302
PSR x Expt	.0159	.0340	.4668	.6407	-.0508	.0825
Invol x Expt	.0362	.0294	1.2296	.2191	-.0216	.0939
PSR x Invol x Expt	.0222	.0235	.9428	.3460	-.0240	.0683

Results presented in Table 10 specify that the global model is significant and explains more than 27% of the variance in WOM ($R^2=.2770$; $F=63.3891$; $p<.0001$). They also indicate that in agreement with H1.c, PSR has a positive significant effect on WOM ($\beta=.2154$; $t=6.1556$; $p<.0001$). Results indicate that Involvement has no significant effect on WOM ($\beta=.0531$; $p>.05$) and that Expertise has a significant positive effect ($\beta=.4397$; $t=12.4342$; $p<.0001$). Regarding the two ways interactions, only $Invol * Expt$ ($\beta=.0695$; $t=2.4468$; $p<.05$) is significant. Moreover, in contradiction with H2.c, $PSR * Invol$ is not significant ($\beta=-.0872$; $t=-.0204$; $p>.05$). Consequently, H2.c is rejected. Finally, considering the three ways interaction ($PSR * Invol*Expt$) corresponding to H3.c, results indicate a significant moderated moderation relationship ($\beta=.0366$; $t=2.5006$; $p<.05$).

However, the Model 3 of the Process Macro gives additional information about the interpretation for the higher interaction order interaction ($PSR * Invol * Expt$) as presented in Table 11 and Figure 4. First, we can observe that $PSR * Invol$ is significant only when expertise is low ($Expt=-1.4658$; $\beta=-.1036$; $F=6.6197$; $p<.05$). This result means that the effect of the parasocial relationship is dependent on the value of involvement (significantly moderated) only when the level of expertise is low. By analyzing Figure 4 and the results of the conditional effects of the focal PSR at values of $Invol$ and $Expt$ (see Table 11) we can observe that when the level of expertise is low ($expt=-1.4658$), PSR has a higher positive significant effect when involvement is low ($Envol=-1.1308$; $\beta=.3922$; $t=7.9210$; $p<.0001$) than the situation of average involvement ($Envol=.1416$; $\beta=.2603$; $t=4.7222$; $p<.0001$). The impact of PSR on WOM is marginally significant in the situation of low expertise and high involvement ($Envol=1.0955$; $\beta=.1615$; $t=1.9411$; $0.1>p>.05$). This result is confirmed by the results of the Moderator value Johnson-Neyman significance region indicating that $PSR * Invol$ is significant only when expertise is lower than $-.7928$. These results are in accordance with H3.c.

DISCUSSION

As indicated in Table 12, hypothesis H1 is validated, whereas hypotheses H2 and H3 are partially validated. Five sub-hypotheses are accepted (H1.a, H1.b, H1.c, H2.a, H3.c) and four are rejected.

First, considering the effects of PSR on followers' behaviors, we can observe significant positive effects of PSR on the three types of behaviors that we considered (intention to purchase, intention to try the product, and WOM).

Table 10. Summary of effects of the moderated moderation model on WOM

Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5263	.2770	1.0112	63.3891	7.0000	1158.0000	.0000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.7788	.0317	87.6365	.0000	2.7166	2.8410
PSR	.2154	.0350	6.1556	.0000	.1467	.2841
Invol	.0531	.0348	1.5245	.1277	-.0152	.1214
PSR * Invol	-.0204	.0333	-.6131	.5399	-.0858	.0449
Expt	.4397	.0354	12.4342	.0000	.3704	.5091
PSR * Expt	-.0407	.0328	-1.2414	.2147	-.1049	.0236
Invol * Expt	.0695	.0284	2.4468	.0146	.0138	.1252
PSR * Invol * Expt	.0567	.0227	2.5006	.0125	.0122	.1013

Table 11. Summary of the moderated moderation PSR * Invol * Expt on WOM

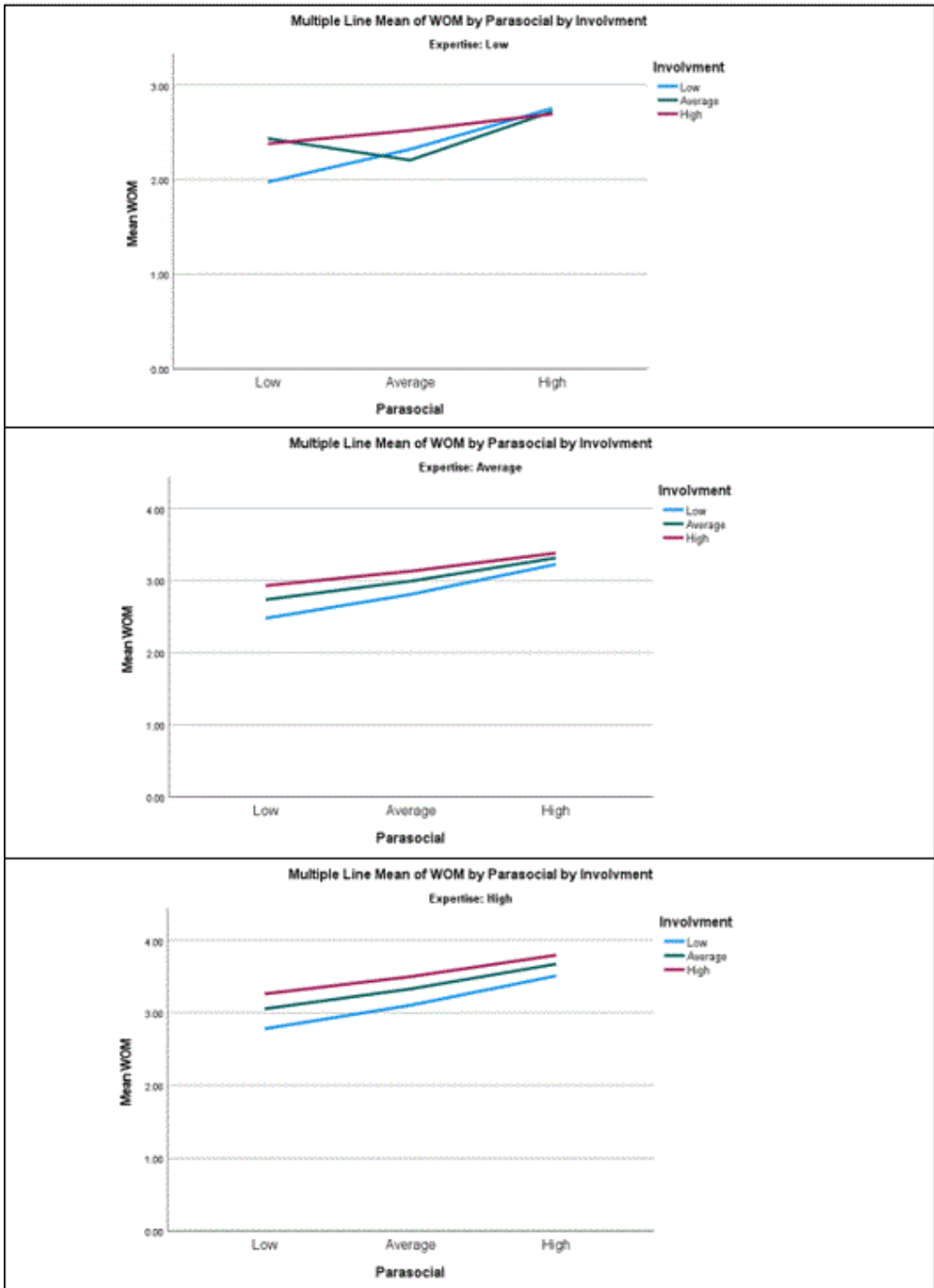
Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s)							
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p		
PSR * Invol * Expt	.0039	6.2529	1.0000	1158.0000	.0125		
Test of conditional PSR * Invol interaction at value(s) of Expt							
Expt	Effect	F	df1	df2	p		
-1.4658	-.1036	6.6197	1.0000	1158.0000	.0102		
.0778	-.0160	.2240	1.0000	1158.0000	.6361		
1.0033	.0365	.6553	1.0000	1158.0000	.4184		
Conditional effects of the focal PSR at values of Invol and Expt							
Invol	Expt	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-1.1308	-1.4658	.3922	.0495	7.9210	.0000	.2950	.4893
-1.1308	.0778	.2303	.0553	4.1631	.0000	.1218	.3389
-1.1308	1.0033	.1333	.0884	1.5073	.1320	-.0402	.3068
.1416	-1.4658	.2603	.0551	4.7222	.0000	.1522	.3685
.1416	.0778	.2100	.0354	5.9233	.0000	.1404	.2795
.1416	1.0033	.1798	.0511	3.5196	.0004	.0796	.2800
1.0955	-1.4658	.1615	.0832	1.9411	.0525	-.0017	.3248
1.0955	.0778	.1947	.0483	4.0309	.0001	.0999	.2895
1.0955	1.0033	.2146	.0550	3.9040	.0001	.1068	.3225

The effect of PSR on the intention to purchase the endorsed product confirms the results of Hwang & Zhang (2018), Sokolova & Perez (2021), and Rungruangjit (2022) in a different cultural context indicating the universality of the effect of PSR on purchase intention. The results related to WOM are in accordance with those of Jin & Phua (2014) and Hwang & Zhang (2018). However, the results related to the positive effect of PSR on product trial intention is a new insight into the theory as, to our knowledge, no previous research tested this relationship explicitly. In general, results prove that PSR can boost consumer behavior, making him/her recommend, search for and try, and purchase the products and brands endorsed by the favorite SMI.

Results give other interesting results not directly related to the hypotheses. As we can observe in Tables 6, 9, and 10, SMI perceived expertise has a positive significant effect on purchase intention confirming the results of Masuda et al. (2022), Rungruangjit (2022), and Chekima et al. (2020). It also has a positive significant effect on WOM and the intention to try the endorsed product. However, by comparing the effect of perceived expertise with the other direct or interaction effects presented in Tables 6, 9, and 10, we can observe that expertise has a higher effect on the three types of behavior, confirming the idea that expertise is a crucial element for interpersonal interaction and that the persuasiveness of the SMI is highly dependent from his/her perceived expertise (Aw & Chuah, 2021). We also observed that involvement impacts the intention to purchase significantly but negatively; it has a positive significant effect on the intention to try the product but no effect on WOM. Thus, endorsement of products will lead to a higher intention to purchase low-involvement products than high-involvement products. Conversely, the endorsement of a high-involvement product will be more effective than the endorsement of a low-involvement product in terms of product trial.

Our results also indicate that in accordance with the works of Drossos et al. (2014) and Nguyen et al. (2020), involvement plays a moderating role. In effect, confirming H2.a, we observed that PSR

Figure 4. Summary of the moderated moderation PSR * Invol * Expt on WOM



has a higher effect on the intention to purchase in situations of low product involvement. This means that involvement, in addition to directly reducing the intention to purchase an endorsed product (discussed earlier), makes PSR's positive effect on purchase intention less effective. However, Figure

Table 12. Hypotheses validation summary

Hypotheses	Results
H1: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' behaviors.	Validated
H1.a: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' purchase intention of endorsed products.	Validated
H1.b: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' trial of endorsed products.	Validated
H1.c: PSR with SMI positively impacts the followers' WOM intention about endorsed products.	Validated
H2: Product involvement moderates the relationship between PSR and followers' behaviors.	Partially Validated
H2.a: PSR has a higher effect on the intention to purchase in situations of low product involvement.	Validated
H2.b: PSR has a higher effect on the intention to try the product in situations of high product involvement.	Rejected
H2.c: PSR has a higher effect on WOM in situations of low product involvement.	Rejected
H3: The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and followers' behaviors depends on the SMI's perceived expertise.	Partially Validated
H3.a: The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and intention to purchase evolves with the SMI's perceived expertise.	Rejected
H3.b: The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and intention to try the product changes with the SMI's perceived expertise.	Rejected
H3.c: The moderating effect of PI on the relationship between PSR and WOM evolves with the SMI's perceived expertise.	Validated

3 and Table 8 indicate that the negative effect of involvement on the perceived expertise of the SMI is significant only if the endorser is considered a non-expert (low expertise).

Finally, as indicated in Table 11 and Figure 4, our results show that in accordance with H3.c, the effect of PSR on WOM depends on product involvement and perceived SMI expertise. Results indicate that in situations of low expertise, the effect of PSR is significantly higher if involvement is low compared to situations of average or high involvement. This result means that the endorsement of a product by a favorite SMI with a high PSR but perceived as a non-expert in the product category will be effective and conduct positive buzz about the endorsed product, particularly if the product is a low involvement product.

In general, our results confirm the importance of PSR and SMI's perceived expertise in predicting the effectiveness of an SMI endorsement. They also indicate that the effects of involvement will depend on the perceived expertise of the SMI.

CONCLUSION

Social media influencers are essential and effective marketing tools, and companies are investing in SMI to endorse their products. However, with the variety of social media and the multiplicity of SMI, marketers need to understand how to choose the right SMI on the right social media for a specific product or brand. The present study aims to improve marketers' and marketing researchers' theoretical understanding of how SMI influences followers' behaviors.

More precisely, we try to understand how PSR interacts with SMI's expertise for products with different levels of involvement to impact consumers' behaviors. To achieve this objective, we proposed a three hypotheses (nine sub-hypotheses) model that we tested via a scenarios-based survey. Data was collected from 1230 Instagram users living in Qatar during the spring of 2020. Our results confirm the importance of PSR, SMI's perceived expertise, and product involvement in predicting the effectiveness of an SMI endorsement and understanding the effects of SMI on their followers' behaviors. They also highlight the need to consider the different interactions between our main variables by indicating

that the effect of PSR could depend on expertise and involvement and that the effect of involvement is highly dependent on the perception of the SMI's expertise.

Our results present some interesting theoretical contributions. Previous research on SMI considered in the same model PSR and expertise or PSR and involvement or involvement and expertise (Chekima et al., 2020; Masuda et al., 2022; Rungruangjit, 2022; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020), but to our knowledge, this research is the first research that considered the three-way interaction PSR * Invol * Expt empirically. Results also confirmed previous findings about the effect of PSR on intention to purchase the endorsed product (Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Sokolova & Perez, 2021; Rungruangjit, 2022) and on WOM (Jin & Phua, 2014; Hwang & Zhang, 2018) in the Qatari cultural context. However, as far as we know, no previous study confirmed the positive effect of PSR on product trial intention. Finally, we can consider that our main contribution is to explain in what situation a popular SMI able to create a strong PSR is effective in endorsing products out of his/her circle of expertise and in what situations his/her endorsement will be ineffective.

In addition to the theoretical contributions, our results are interesting from the managerial angle. The findings of this study offer compelling implications in terms of SMI marketing. They help SMI acquire a better comprehension of improving their influence power and support marketers in identifying the right SMI endorser for the right product. Results highlight the importance of the SMI's perceived expertise and the PSR in building an influential endorsement. They show that SMI with high expertise and the ability to create a solid bond with their followers can profoundly influence the different phases of the purchase process. They can make followers try the product and search for information about it, purchase the product or brand, or become an advocate for the endorsed product or brand. In addition, results explain under what condition SMI endorsement of a product or a brand could be effective regardless of his/her perceived level of expertise.

However, despite its contributions, the present has some limitations able to open up possibilities for future research. First, we chose to study consumer behavior in one specific country with its cultural and economic context. We compared some of our results with previous work to confirm the universality of some findings. However, for other findings related to the three ways interaction PSR * Invol * Expt, conducting a cross-cultural study to understand how these three-way interactions work in different cultural contexts will be interesting.

We also decided to concentrate our study on Instagram, which reduces the generalizability of our findings to other social media. It will be interesting to duplicate our study for other social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, and to compare the results.

Finally, we did not focus our study on a specific product category, and we questioned followers about their favorite SMI from many domains. Future research could explore the role of expertise in different domains such as sports, fashion, or tourism.

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