

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

**MEDIATING ROLE OF CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION ON THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFLUENCER'S PERCEIVED  
CHARACTERISTICS AND CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOR**

Mert İNAL<sup>1</sup> & Erkan BİL<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract**

*This paper aims to explore the mediating role of purchase intention in the relationship between two selected characteristics of influencers and purchase behavior in the context of influencer marketing. In addition, the aim of this paper to examine these selected characteristics' (trust and similarity, as defined by Parasocial Interaction Theory and Planned Behavior Theory) impact on both purchase intention and purchase behavior. The main population of this paper comprises social media users who actively use social media platforms and follow at least one influencer. In order to represent the research population in the best possible way, participants were reached through convenience sampling technique. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed in IBM SPSS 20 program, and confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling analysis were performed using the SmartPLS 4 package program. The results showed that purchase intention has a mediating effect on the purchase behavior's relationships between trust and similarity. In addition, it was revealed that trust and similarity have positive and significant effects on purchase intention and purchase behavior. The main contribution of that paper to the literature is not only to reveal the mediating role of purchase intention in the purchase behavior's relationship between trust and similarity but also to show the effects of trust and similarity on purchase intention and to determine the effects of these variables on purchase behavior in the context of influencer marketing. As a result of this paper, it is observed that businesses can benefit from influencers in the context of Planned Behavior Theory and Social Interaction Theory to enhance the effectiveness of their marketing communication efforts. Influencers can contribute to businesses through their follower networks, personal positioning opportunities, communication content, follower trust, and the personas they create in their connections with consumers. Choosing the appropriate Influencer for businesses not only increases the sales of their products and services, but also positively affects brand positioning, brand image and brand value.*

**Keywords:** *Influencer Marketing, Social Media, Purchase Intention, Purchase Behavior, Mediating Effect*

**JEL Codes:** M3, M30, M31

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## TÜKETİCİ SATIN ALMA NİYETİNİN İNFLUENCERLARIN ALGILANAN ÖZELLİKLERİ İLE TÜKETİCİ SATIN ALMA DAVRANIŞI ARASINDAKİ ARACILIK ROLÜ

### Öz

*Bu çalışmanın amacı, influencerların seçilmiş iki özelliği ile satın alma davranışı arasındaki ilişkide satın alma niyetinin aracı rolünü etkileyici pazarlama bağlamında araştırmaktır. Ayrıca, seçilen bu özelliklerin (Parasosyal Etkileşim Teorisi ve Planlı Davranış Teorisi'ne dayanan güven ve benzerlik) hem satın alma niyeti hem de satın alma davranışı üzerindeki etkisini araştırmak amaçlanmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın evrenini sosyal medya platformlarını aktif olarak kullanan ve en az bir influencerı takip eden sosyal medya kullanıcıları oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma evrenini en iyi şekilde temsil edebilmek için kolayda örnekleme tekniği ile katılımcılara ulaşılmıştır. IBM SPSS 20 programında tanımlayıcı istatistiksel analizler, SmartPLS 4 paket programında ise doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ve yapısal eşitlik modellemesi (YEM) analizi yapılmıştır. Analiz sonuçlarına göre, satın alma niyetinin, güven ile satın alma davranışı ve benzerlik ile satın alma davranışı arasındaki ilişkilerde aracı etkiye sahip olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca güven ve benzerliğin satın alma niyeti ve satın alma davranışı üzerinde pozitif ve anlamlı etkilerinin olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışmanın literatüre katkısı, yalnızca güven ve benzerlik ile satın alma davranışı arasındaki ilişkide satın alma niyetinin aracı rolünü ortaya koymak değil, aynı zamanda güven ve benzerliğin satın alma niyeti üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya koymak ve bu değişkenlerin satın alma davranışı üzerindeki etkilerini etkileyici pazarlama bağlamında incelemektir. Araştırma sonucunda, işletmelerin pazarlama iletişimi etkinliğini artırmak amacıyla Planlı Davranış Teorisi ve Sosyal Etkileşim Teorisi bağlamında, influencerların; takipçi ağları, kişisel konumlandırma imkanı, iletişim içeriği, takipçi güveni ve yarattıkları persona ile tüketicilerle kurdukları bağdan faydalanabileceği görülmektedir. İşletmelerin ürün ve hizmetlerine uygun influencer seçimleri satışları arttırabileceği gibi marka konumlandırmasına, marka imajına ve marka değerine olumlu katkılar sağlayabilir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Influencer Pazarlama, Sosyal Medya, Satın Alma Niyeti, Satın Alma Davranışı, Aracılık Etkisi*

**JEL Kodları:** M3, M30, M31.

“Bu çalışma Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine uygun olarak hazırlanmıştır.”

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the internet is indispensable for humanity. Approximately 5.18 billion people use the internet and 4.80 billion of those use social media (We Are Social, 2023). Marketing can be considered a constantly evolving organism that adapts to changing circumstances and embraces new ideas and approaches. Once the internet's commercial and influential potential became evident, marketing adapted to the

internet age almost instantly. The emergence of the internet heralded a profound paradigm shift in how businesses could establish meaningful connections with their target demographics and strategically promote their array of products and services. In this context, consumer behaviors also change, resulting in the emergence of new marketing strategies and analysis methods. Therefore, some new notions come up to the surface, such as social media marketing, influencer marketing, and digital marketing. Studies show that companies must remain agile and open to embracing new technologies and strategies like these to stay competitive in today's fast-paced online environment.

Digital marketing refers to the utilization of digital technologies, predominantly on the internet, mobile phones, display advertising, and various digital platforms, to promote products or services effectively (Desai, 2019). Today digital marketing has become a critical and highly effective component of the modern marketing mix. Recently, many types of companies use the digital marketing due to the low cost of promotion and better efficiency (Mandal & Joshi, 2017).

Bil and Özkaya conducted a study in 2020 comparing digital marketing strategies with traditional marketing strategies, and their findings indicated that digital marketing strategies offer greater advantages when compared to traditional approaches. Wibowo et al. (2021) presented that the influence of social media marketing activities and customer experience on customer relationship quality results in favorable customer behavioral outcomes. Bil and Özkaya (2022) studied the effect of modern marketing techniques, such as big data, on marketing strategies and showed that it has increased the competition. Lestari et al. (2022), the examination of digital marketing's influence on competition revealed a notable and meaningful positive impact on competitive advantage.

The rise of social media and digital marketing has led to the growing prominence of social media influencers as well. A social media influencer is an individual who has established credibility, authority, and a significant following on one or more social media platforms. Influencers have the power to affect the purchasing decisions, opinions, and behaviors of their followers. According to Dhanesh and Duthler (2019), social media influencers are individuals who establish and nurture connections with their followers on social media by crafting their own personal brands. Influencers have become a significant force in the realm of marketing and communication due to their capacity to entertain, inform, and shape the perspectives and actions of their audience. Similarly, Bastrygina and Lim (2023) defined social media influencers as regular people who have built a grassroots online presence through their social media channels or pages, leading to a substantial network of followers.

The increasing usage and effectiveness of social media influencers in marketing have sparked significant interest among both academics and practitioners. This surge of interest has consequently resulted in a notable upswing in academic research focused on the phenomenon of influencer marketing. Vyatkina (2020) revealed that influencer marketing has had a notable impact on numerous brands and their marketing

strategies. Bil et al. (2022) analyzed the influence of influencers' perceived characteristics on purchase behavior and found that influencer marketing significantly and positively affects purchase behavior. Masuda et al. (2022) assessed personal traits and attributes of influencers as antecedents of purchase intention. The research revealed that the Parasocial Relationship (PSR) has a notably stronger positive impact on purchase intentions when compared to other traits and attributes. In their examination of the effects of influencer marketing on purchase intention, Niloy et al. (2023) find a positive correlation between purchase intention and influencer attitude, which is significantly affected by source attractiveness, product matching, and source familiarity.

Many other studies have also shown the positive impact of digital marketing, social media marketing, and influencer marketing on both companies and consumers (Melovic et al., 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2020; Koay et al., 2022; Niloy et al., 2023). In this context, the aim of this study is not only to investigate the mediating role of purchase intention in the relationship between similarity and trust based on the PSI and the TPB. In addition to show the impact of these selected characteristics on both purchase intention and purchase behavior.

This paper consists of four sections. The first section presents a general summary of the paper, the concept of influencer marketing and important statistics on influencer marketing, the definition of the variables in the research model and the relations between the variables. Section 2 offers the research methodology used in this paper is explained in detail and focused on the analysis of the research data using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM). Section 3 provides the data related to the results of the analyzes and the relationship of the results with the literature are mentioned. Section 4 presents valuable suggestions and practical applications are presented for researchers.

### **1.1. Influencer Marketing**

Spiryn (2021) defines influencer marketing as a social media strategy containing product placement and brand mentions from people accepted as experts in their field or defined as influencers by a large number of followers. The ongoing advancements in technology are reshaping how companies connect with consumers, prompting strategic adaptations to keep pace with the latest technological developments. Within this evolving landscape, companies are harnessing influencers in diverse ways to achieve their goals. And this study mainly focuses on influencer marketing which has grown to become a pivotal and influential component of modern marketing strategies.

As reported by Statista (2023), the global influencer marketing market value reached 16.4 billion U.S. dollars in 2022, showcasing a significant increase of more than double since 2019. Projections indicate that in 2023, the market is expected to reach a remarkable value of 21.1 billion U.S. dollars. Furthermore, projections indicate that the global influencer marketing platform is estimated to surpass 337 million dollars by 2027. The research shows that the number of influencer marketing related

companies increased from 11.450 to 18.900, which means 26% growth in a year. Influencer marketers select among many social media platforms to connect brands and consumers. Instagram stays on the top of the list of social media platforms for influencer marketing, and the size of Instagram influencer marketing surpassed 2 billion dollars for the first time (Statista, 2023). Marketers find Instagram posts the most effective form, and 78% of marketers select it (Bailis, 2022). In 2020, more than 90% of influencer campaigns use Instagram in their marketing mix (Moran, 2022). Among the social media platforms, Instagram is the most used for influencer marketing. Facebook, TikTok, and Youtube follow Instagram, respectively. In 2021, Zara on Instagram, Netflix on TikTok, and Steam on Youtube were the most mentioned brands on social media platforms (Santora, 2022).

According to eMarketer's Influencer Marketing 2022 Report, expenditure on influencer marketing in the United States is expected to reach approximately \$5 billion by the end of 2022. This estimation surpasses the 2021 figure by \$1 billion and exceeds the previous projection by \$850 million. Notably, 74.5 percent of U.S. marketers from companies with over 100 employees have expressed their intention to utilize influencer marketing strategies. The results of some recent academic studies show that the use of influencers positively affects consumers' purchase intention (Müller et al., 2018; Saima, 2020; Masuda et al., 2022; Niloy et al., 2023). Additionally, the consumers who are exposed to the influencers' posts of products perceive the source to be more trustworthy and show more positive behavior toward the product (Jin, 2019). Influencer marketing is profitable for not only the companies but also the influencer. The influencers get free products or good payments for their promotions. It is clear that influencer marketing has great potential for promoting products and reaching the consumer directly. Therefore, the share of influencer marketing in marketing strategies will increase over time.

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework and Definitions of Variables**

This section introduces the fundamental theories related to the research subject, along with the explanations of the endogenous and exogenous variables employed in the research model. The connections between these variables are briefly described based on existing literature. This paper is grounded in two primary theories: the Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

PSI was proposed by Horton and Wohl (1956). Horton and Wohl (1956) mentioned the relationships that media users develop with media performers. While some media users trust the media performers they watch, they also try to emulate them, and especially recently, influencer marketing has become one of the important tools used to create parasocial interaction. In this context, trust and similarity variables were added to the research model based on this theory. TPB (Ajzen, 1988; 1991) aims to forecast people's intentions to engage in a specific behavior. Furthermore, according to Ajzen (2015), intention is considered the most crucial factor for predicting behavior. Within this framework, the study also explores the impact of purchase intention on purchase behavior.

### **1.2.1. Similarity**

Similarity is identified as the closeness between a sender and a receiver (Martensen, 2018). According to Ruef (2003), “the similarity of people disposes them toward a greater level of interpersonal attraction, trust, and understanding than would be expected among dissimilar individuals”. Moreover, the perceived similarity between influencers and consumers plays a vital role in understanding the efficacy of influencer endorsements (Schouten et al., 2020). In this context, we expect that individuals who have a similarity with an influencer, would like the promoted product by the influencer. Therefore, we may expect an incensement in the purchase intention of the product.

### **1.2.2. Trust**

Ba and Pavlou (2002) defines trust as “the subjective assessment of one party that another party will perform a particular transaction according to his or her confident expectations, in an environment characterized by uncertainty.” In this definition of trust, two important features of trust arises. Two perspectives can be distinguished in this context. The first perspective involves a confident expectation that entails the possibility of a mutually beneficial outcome. On the other hand, the second perspective addresses an environment of uncertainty, suggesting that when authority is delegated from one party to another, it may have adverse effects on the party entrusting that authority. Trust plays a pivotal role in fostering favorable social exchanges among partners in a relationship and contributes significantly to relationship maintenance (Mayer et al., 1995; Gassenheimer et al., 1998; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Similarly, placing trust in an influencer assures followers that their association with the influencer will yield positive outcomes. In our analysis, we concentrate on investigating the impact of an individual's trust in an influencer on their purchase intention.

### **1.2.3. Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention, as defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), refers to the consumer's objective intention towards a particular product or service. On the other hand, Lu (2014) puts forth a definition of purchase intention as "consumers' willingness to buy a specific product at a particular time or in a specific situation." This paper investigates the effect of some factors on an individual's purchase intention. Then, it is examined whether the intention transforms into purchase behavior.

### **1.2.4. Purchase Behavior**

In the literature, many researchers have defined consumer purchase behavior as the sum of a consumer's behavior to satisfy their needs and wants by searching for goods and information, then forming a purchase intention, and then comparing goods to

make a decision when purchasing a product (Rossiter and Bellman, 2005; Moslehpour et al., 2014; Michael et al., 2014; Lee and Lee, 2015).

### **1.3. The Relationship between the Variables**

This paper presents the relationship between each variable in the research model proposed in this study. We give related literature about each relationship and explain the connection between the variables.

#### **1.3.1. Trust and Purchase Intention**

Trust in advertising in the context of influencer marketing has positive effects on purchase intention (Li and Peng, 2021). Kim and Kim (2021) were examined, it was determined that the trust in the influencers caused the followers to perceive the recommended product/service more positively and to increase their purchase intention. It has been established that the trust in the influencer is quite strong in influencing the ideas and behaviors of the followers and leads to loyalty. In addition, Masuda et al. (2022) claims that the trust in the influencer in the youtube ads made by the influencers has a positive and significant effect on the purchase intention.

**H1:** Trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

#### **1.3.2. Similarity and Purchase Intention**

Adnan et al. (2017) present a positive correlation between purchase intention and similarity. They also conclude that the similarity explains the consumer purchase intention with their model. Lou and Kim (2019) concluded the consistent results in the previous studies as there is a positive correlation between these variables and stated that similarity and purchase intention is associated with each other. In another study, it is demonstrated that there is positive and significant correlation between similarity and purchase intention. In this paper, similarity, and purchase intention have the highest relationship (Al-Darraj et al., 2020).

**H2:** Similarity has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

#### **1.3.3. Trust and Purchase Behavior**

Tung et al. (2012) determined that trust is an important variable that affects purchase behavior and willingness to pay premium prices. Xu et al. (2016) examined three trusting beliefs about satisfaction and purchase behavior in the context of buyer-seller and found that trust competence has a positive and significant effect on purchase behavior. According to Pop et al. (2022) it has been determined that trust in social media influencers has positive and significant effects on consumer decision processes.

**H3:** Trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase behavior.

#### 1.3.4. Similarity and Purchase Behavior

Lou and Yuan (2019), it becomes apparent that several factors positively impact followers' trust in the branded posts of influencers. These factors include the informative value of the influencer's content, the influencer's credibility, attractiveness, and similarity to the followers. This trust, in turn, significantly influences both brand awareness and purchasing behavior. Chen et al. (2021), the focus was on exploring the relationship between the characteristics of internet celebrities on YouTube and the impulse purchase behavior of their followers. The research revealed that parasocial interaction, which encompasses three latent constructs (cognition, similarity, and attraction), significantly influences impulse purchase behavior.

**H4:** Similarity has a positive and significant effect on purchase behavior.

#### 1.3.5. Purchase Intention and Purchase Behavior

Online purchase intention is frequently chosen as a fundamental variable in purchase behavior studies. The literature consistently suggests that intention can serve as the primary predictor of behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977; Ghosh, 1990). Yadav and Pathak (2017) shows that the hypothesis of purchase intention converts to purchase behavior in their findings. Zarei et al. (2019) is examined, it has been settled that the intention to purchase products over the internet has a significant effect on purchase behavior. In addition, it was established that purchase intention mediates the relationship between purchase attitude and purchase behavior. Pena-Garcia et al. (2020) demonstrate that purchase intention has a significant and positive effect on purchase behavior. Sun et al. (2022) and based on the Planned Behavior Theory (TPB), the factors affecting the purchase behavior of Chinese consumers in the post-pandemic period were investigated, and it was determined that the purchase intention affected the purchase behavior positively and significantly.

**H5:** Purchase intention has a positive and significant effect on purchase behavior.

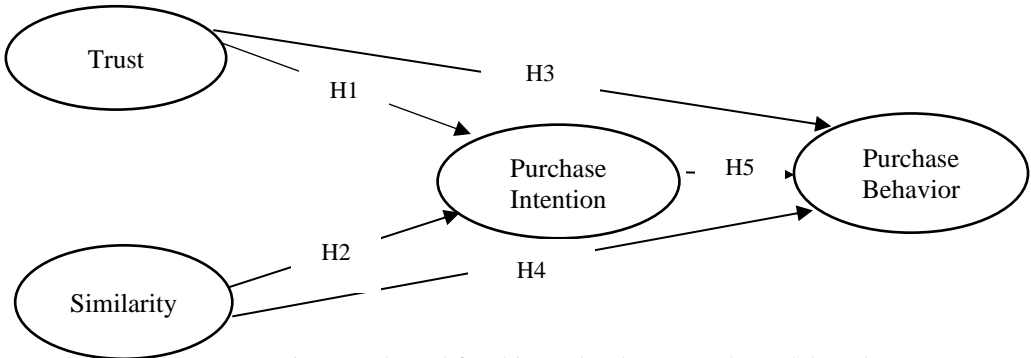
**H6:** Purchase intention has a mediating effect on the relationship between trust and purchase behavior.

**H7:** Purchase intention has a mediating effect on the relationship between similarity and purchase behavior.



The research model shown in Figure 1 is developed:

**Figure 1.** Research Model



Based on the literature review conducted for this study, the research model explores the impact of influencers' perceived characteristics, such as trust and similarity, on both purchase intention and purchase behavior.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This research primarily focuses on the mediating role of purchase intention in the relationship between trust and purchase behavior and between similarity and purchase behavior. Another purpose of the study is to examine the effects of similarity and trust on both purchase intention and purchase behavior in the context of influencer marketing, based on PSI and TPB. The main target population of this study comprises individuals who use social media and follow at least one influencer. To best represent this population and obtain specific characteristics, quantitative research techniques were employed, and a survey was utilized as the data collection tool. The sample was selected using the convenience sampling method, a non-random sampling technique, from individuals who use social media and follow at least one influencer.

The study's scales were developed based on a comprehensive literature review, drawing from works by Ohanian (1990), Putrevu and Lord (1994), Zeithaml et al. (1996), Yuan and Jang (2008), Lee and Watkins (2016), and Martinez-Lopez et al. (2020). The data collection involved an online survey technique, and a pilot test with 50 participants was conducted beforehand to ensure the clarity of survey items and identify any potential shortcomings. After the pilot study, the questionnaire was finalized without removing any items. Both the pilot and main surveys were conducted between 10 July and 10 September 2022, with 390 questionnaires being collected, all of which were deemed usable for analysis. The analysis of the descriptive statistical data was done with the IBM SPSS 20 program, and the CFA and SEM were done with the SmartPLS 4 package program.

**3. RESULTS**

**3.1. Findings Regarding Participants**

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive Statistics		Frequency	Percent	Descriptive Statistics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	202	51.8	Average Monthly Income	5499 TRY and below	102	26.2
					5500-8000 TRY	91	23.3
					8001-10000 TRY	55	14.1
	Male	188	48.2		10001-15000 TRY	85	21.8
					15001-20000 TRY	32	8.2
					20001 TRY and above	25	6.4
Total	390	100	Total	390	100		
Age	18-25	141	36.1	Education Level	Elementary	5	1.3
	26-33	133	34.2		High School	81	20.7
	34-41	72	18.5		Associate Degree	19	4.9
	42-49	25	6.4		Bachelor Degree	152	39
	50 and older	19	4.8		Postgraduate	133	34.1
	Total	390	100		Total	390	100

Based on the data regarding the demographic characteristics of the study participants, the results indicate that 202 individuals (51.8%) were female, while 188 individuals (48.2%) were male. In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants, 141 individuals (36.1%), fell within the 18-25 age range, closely followed by 133 participants (34.2%) in the 26-33 age range. Regarding the education level of the

participants, the data revealed that 39% held a bachelor's degree, and 34.1% had a postgraduate degree. Analyzing the average monthly income of the respondents, it was observed that 102 participants (26.2%) reported an income of 5499 TRY or below, while the second-largest group consisted of 91 participants (23.3%) with an income ranging between 5500-8000 TRY.

**Table 2. Social media usage habits**

<i>Social Media Platforms Used by Participants</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>How many influencers do you follow on social media?</i>		
			<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
<i>Instagram</i>	<i>342</i>	<i>87.7</i>			
<i>Twitter</i>	<i>248</i>	<i>63.6</i>	<i>1-3</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>38.7</i>
<i>Facebook</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>43.6</i>	<i>4-6</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>16.4</i>
<i>Youtube</i>	<i>315</i>	<i>80.8</i>	<i>7-9</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>10.3</i>
<i>Others</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>13.8</i>	<i>10+</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>34.6</i>

Table 2 presents the social media usage patterns among the participants. The data reveals that Instagram is the most popular platform, with 342 individuals (87.7%) using it, followed by YouTube with 315 individuals (80.8%), Twitter with 248 individuals (63.6%), and Facebook with 170 individuals (43.6%). Additionally, approximately 13.8 percent of the participants reported using other social media applications like TikTok and Twitch. Regarding the number of influencers followed, 151 participants (38.7%) follow 1-3 influencers, while 135 participants (34.6%) follow 10 or more influencers. Moreover, a significant 59.2% of respondents stated that they had previously made a purchase based on an influencer's recommendation.

**3. 2. Measurement Model**

Before commencing the analysis of the research model, CFA was conducted. Factor loadings were anticipated to be  $\geq 0.70$ , while both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability coefficients were expected to be  $\geq 0.70$ , adhering to established guidelines (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2006; Hair et al., 2014). Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value was expected to be  $\geq 0.50$ . The results of the constructs within the research context, concerning internal consistency reliability and convergent validity are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Measurement Model Estimates**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Factor Loadings</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<i>Similarity</i>	<i>SIM1</i>	0.841	0.935	0.951	0.794
	<i>SIM2</i>	0.914			
	<i>SIM3</i>	0.914			
	<i>SIM4</i>	0.881			
	<i>SIM5</i>	0.904			
<i>Trust</i>	<i>TRU1</i>	0.958	0.962	0.973	0.899
	<i>TRU2</i>	0.938			
	<i>TRU3</i>	0.957			
	<i>TRU4</i>	0.939			
<i>Purchase Intention</i>	<i>PURINT1</i>	0.968	0.954	0.970	0.916
	<i>PURINT2</i>	0.945			
	<i>PURINT3</i>	0.941			
<i>Purchase Behavior</i>	<i>PURBEH1</i>	0.960	0.921	0.950	0.864
	<i>PURBEH2</i>	0.930			
	<i>PURBEH3</i>	0.895			

The internal consistency reliability of the constructs is evident from Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, which range from 0.921 to 0.962, and the CR coefficients, which range from 0.950 to 0.973 (Table 3). Convergent validity is also clearly established, as indicated by the factor loadings ranging from 0.841 to 0.968 and the AVE values ranging from 0.794 to 0.916. Furthermore, the study meets the criterion proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Henseler et al. (2015) for discriminant validity, where the square root of the AVE values should exceed the correlations between the constructs in the research. Table 4 presents the analysis results in line with Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, demonstrating the fulfillment of discriminant validity. In summary, the observed variables adequately and consistently explain the scales to which they belong.

**Table 4. Fornell and Larcker's Criteria**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1-Purchase Behavior</b>	<b>0.930</b>			
<b>2-Purchase Intention</b>	0.774	<b>0.957</b>		
<b>3-Similarity</b>	0.620	0.572	<b>0.891</b>	
<b>4-Trust</b>	0.670	0.640	0.775	<b>0.948</b>

Upon analyzing the values in the table, it becomes apparent that each structure's average explained variance value surpasses its correlation with other structures. To assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) proposed by Henseler et al. (2015) is employed. As per their criteria, the HTMT value should be less than 0.90, and when comparing concepts with distinct characteristics, it is preferable for the value to be below 0.85. The HTMT values for this study are outlined in Table 5.

**Table 5. HTMT Criteria**

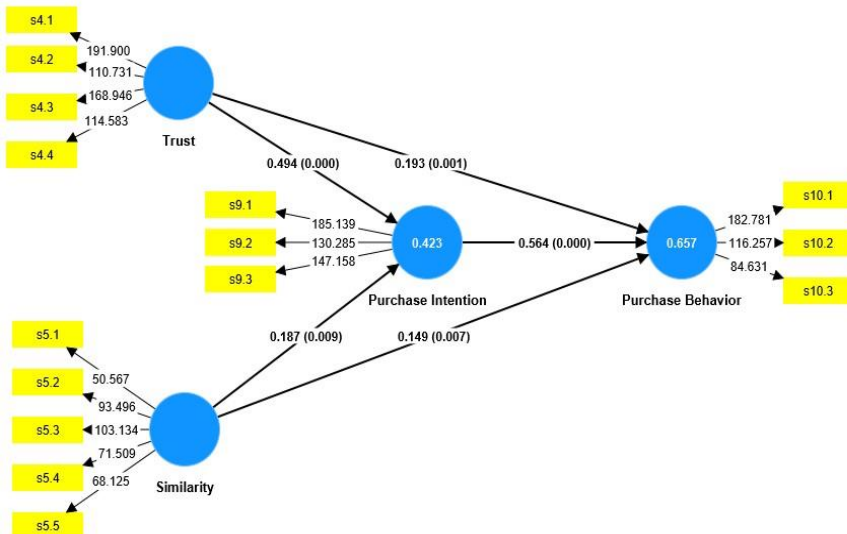
	1	2	3	4
<b>1-Purchase Behavior</b>				
<b>2-Purchase Intention</b>	0.819			
<b>3-Similarity</b>	0.665	0.599		
<b>4-Trust</b>	0.709	0.666	0.814	

According to Table 5, the HTMT values were found to be below the threshold value. Taking into account the outcomes presented in both Table 4 and Table 5, it can be concluded that discriminant validity has been established.

### 3. Structural Equation Modeling Analysis Results

Figure 2 illustrates the SEM that was developed to test the hypotheses of the study.

**Figure 2. Structural Model**



The research model was examined using PLS-SEM, and the data were analyzed using the SmartPLS 4 package program. The research outcomes, including  $R^2$ ,  $f^2$ ,  $Q^2$ , and VIF values, are provided in Table 6.

**Table 6. The Results of Hypothesis Testing and Structural Relationships (Direct Effects)**

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>VIF</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>f<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Q<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Trust-&gt;Purchase Intention</i>	2.503	0.423	0.169	0.385
<i>Similarity-&gt;Purchase Intention</i>	2.503		0.024	
<i>Trust-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	2.927		0.037	
<i>Similarity-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	2.564	0.657	0.026	0.561
<i>Purchase Intention-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	1.734		0.531	

Based on the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, all of them were found to be less than five. This indicates that there were no issues with collinearity among the constructs (Hair et al., 2014). By examining the  $R^2$  values of the model in Table 6, it was revealed that purchase behavior accounted for 65.6% variance, while purchase intention accounted for 42.3% variance. Regarding the effect size coefficient ( $f^2$ ), where values  $\geq 0.02$  are considered low,  $\geq 0.15$  are medium, and  $\geq 0.35$  are high (Cohen, 1988), Sarstedt et al. (2017) also stated that coefficients below 0.02 indicate an effect. Upon evaluating the effect size coefficient ( $f^2$ ), it was determined that similarity had a low effect on purchase intention (0.024) and a low effect on purchase behavior (0.026). On the other hand, trust had a medium effect on purchase intention (0.168), a low effect on purchase behavior, and purchase intention had a high effect on purchase behavior (0.531). In addition, the  $Q^2$  values in Table 6 being greater than 0 indicate a satisfactory level of predictive power.

The results of the SEM analysis are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. The Results of Hypothesis Testing and Structural Relationships (Direct Effects)**

	<i>Standardize <math>\beta</math></i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>t Statistic</i>	<i>p Values</i>
<i>Trust-&gt;Purchase Intention</i>	0.494	0.065	7.581	0.000
<i>Similarity-&gt;Purchase Intention</i>	0.187	0.071	2.630	0.009
<i>Trust-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	0.193	0.057	3.393	0.001
<i>Similarity-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	0.149	0.055	2.704	0.007
<i>Purchase Intention-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	0.564	0.042	13.545	0.000

Upon analyzing the results presented in Table 7, it was evident that trust exerts positive and significant effects on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.493$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), similarity also has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.189$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), and trust influences purchase behavior positively and significantly ( $\beta = 0.193$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, the relationship between similarity and purchase behavior was found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.149$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), and purchase intention significantly affects purchase behavior ( $\beta = 0.774$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

As a result, hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the research were confirmed and accepted.

#### 4. Mediation Analysis Results

Table 8 displays the results of the structural relationships. To calculate the total effect of trust and similarity on purchase behavior, the model was tested by excluding the mediating variables from it.

**Table 8. Direct Effects**

	<i>Standardize <math>\beta</math></i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>t Statistic</i>	<i>p Values</i>
<i>Similarity-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	0.257	0.062	4.160	0.000
<i>Trust-&gt;Purchase Behavior</i>	0.471	0.061	7.667	0.000

Baron and Kenny (1986) state that to establish a mediating effect, it is essential for the independent variables to demonstrate a significant impact on the dependent variables. Moreover, when the mediator variable is integrated into the model, the independent variables should exhibit a significant influence on the mediating variable, and the mediating variable should, in turn, significantly influence the dependent variable. Upon analyzing the data in Table 8, the study explored the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable after removing the mediating variable from the model. The findings revealed that similarity has a positive and significant impact on purchase behavior ( $\beta = 0.257$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), and trust also has a positive and significant influence on purchase behavior ( $\beta = 0.471$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Table 9 shows the results of the indirect effects.

**Table 9. Indirect Effects**

	<i>Standardize <math>\beta</math></i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>t Statistic</i>	<i>p Values</i>
<i>Trust -&gt; Purchase Intention -&gt; Purchase Behavior</i>	0.279	0.039	7.127	0.000
<i>Similarity -&gt; Purchase Intention -&gt; Purchase Behavior</i>	0.106	0.042	2.539	0.011

The analysis reveals that trust ( $\beta=0.279$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) indirectly influences purchase behavior through purchase intention. Similarly, similarity ( $\beta=0.106$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) also indirectly impacts purchase behavior through purchase intention. When the data in

Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9 are examined, it was determined that the independent variable affects the mediating variable and the dependent variable, and the mediating variable also affects the dependent variable. In this context, all the steps suggested by Baron and Kenny are provided.

After determining the mediating effect, the significance of the mediating effects can be tested as Hair et al. (2017; 2018) suggested by calculating the VAF (Variance Accounted For) coefficient instead of the Sobel test. In this context, the VAF coefficients were calculated. When the mediating role of purchase intention in the relationship between trust and purchase behavior is examined, the VAF coefficient is 0.37; when the mediating role of purchase intention in the relationship between similarity and purchase behavior is examined, the VAF coefficient is calculated as 0.29. When a mediating effect is detected in mediating effect analysis, an increase in  $R^2$  values is expected. The purchase behavior variable, which is the dependent variable of the research model, was explained at a rate of 47.4% in the model without a mediating variable and at a rate of 65.7% in the model with a mediating variable. The 18.3% increase in the  $R^2$  value is due to the mediating effect. In line with these findings, hypotheses 6 and 7 of the research were supported.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The use of social media by consumers has seen a notable increase, especially when seeking information to support their purchase decisions. As a result, the concept of influencers has emerged prominent users on social networks who are viewed as role models by other users. These individuals hold significant influence as others follow their advice and place trust in their opinions, particularly in areas like fashion, food, lifestyle, travel, beauty, and cosmetics (Nadanyiova et al., 2020; Jang et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2021; Abraham et al., 2022; Niloy et al., 2023). Influencers have become valuable channels for engaging with consumers (Bu et al., 2022), and research has shown that they cultivate stronger and more credible relationships with their followers compared to celebrities (Johnstone and Lindh, 2022).

The rise of social media and shifts in consumer behavior have created intriguing opportunities for both businesses and consumers through influencer marketing, making it an academically captivating subject. Despite the increasing number of academic studies on influencer marketing in recent times, there remains a need to explore the topic from various perspectives and add to the existing literature. Thus, this study sought to contribute to the literature by investigating the influence of influencers' perceived characteristics (trust and similarity) on both purchase intention and purchase behavior, while also exploring the mediating role of purchase intention. The research model, based on the predicted relationships, was developed, and examined using SEM after an extensive literature review.

Upon analyzing the data on the participants' social media usage, it becomes evident that Instagram is the most widely used platform, with 87.7% of participants utilizing



it, followed by Youtube with 80.8%. In terms of the number of influencers followed, 38.7% of participants follow 1-3 influencers, while 34.6% follow 10 or more influencers. This diversity in follower counts suggests that some participants prefer to follow a small number of influencers, while others opt for a larger number. This variation in preferences may be influenced by both the demographic characteristics of consumers and the specific social media platforms they use.

Before testing the research model, CFA was conducted, which confirmed the validity and reliability of the model. Subsequently, the SEM was applied to examine the relationships within the research model. The analysis conducted within the research framework revealed that trust significantly and positively influences both purchase intention and purchase behavior. Our findings align with similar studies in the literature (Pop et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2022; Wu and Huang, 2023; Kim et al., 2023), which further support the importance of trust in influencing consumer behavior.

Based on the analysis conducted within the research framework, it was established that similarity holds a significant and positive direct effect on both purchase intention and purchase behavior. The literature review also supports these findings, as various studies have demonstrated that similarity directly influences purchase intention and purchase behavior (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Alexander et al., 2020; Al-Darraji et al., 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Afifah, 2022; Ashraf et al., 2023). Another crucial discovery from the research analysis is that purchase intention plays a mediating role in both the relationship between trust and purchase behavior, as well as the relationship between similarity and purchase behavior. This finding is consistent with results from similar studies in the literature (Lim et al., 2016; Daud, 2021; Sun et al., 2022), further reinforcing its significance.

In conclusion, the research findings indicate that trust and similarity to influencers have substantial and positive impacts on consumers' purchase intention and purchase behavior. Furthermore, purchase intention was found to act as a mediator in both the relationship between trust and purchase behavior and the relationship between similarity and purchase behavior. As a result, all seven hypotheses proposed within the study's scope were accepted.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study makes several significant theoretical contributions. Firstly, it enhances our understanding of the impact of influencer marketing activities, frequently utilized in brand marketing communications, on consumer behavior in Turkey. While various studies have investigated the influence of influencer marketing on different aspects of consumer behavior (Kim and Kim, 2021; Jin et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Li and Peng, 2021; Farivar et al., 2021; Kurdi et al., 2022; Gomes et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2022; Barta et al., 2023; Niloy et al., 2023), the findings of this study align with and complement the results reported in the existing literature. Influencer marketing is gaining momentum around the world. This study makes a contribution to the existing

Influencer Marketing literature by validating the role of influencers' perceived characteristics of trust and similarity in purchase intention and purchase behavior.

Furthermore, this research offers significant practical implications, especially for marketers who are dedicating larger budgets to influencer marketing and exploring effective methods for choosing suitable influencers as partners. As influencer marketing becomes an essential aspect of brands' marketing strategies, marketers frequently encounter challenges related to understanding its scope, effectiveness, and potential risks. To bridge this knowledge gap, this article commences by providing an in-depth explanation of the phenomenon's context, defining influencer marketing, and subsequently examining the influence of trust and similarity on consumer purchase intention and behavior.

As a result of the study, in the context of the TPB and PSI, in order to increase the marketing communication efficiency of businesses, follower networks can benefit from personal positioning, communication content, follower trust, and the personality and similarity to consumers they create. Influencer selections suitable for the products and services of businesses can increase sales as well as make positive contributions to brand positioning, brand image, and brand value. Furthermore, certain studies in the literature reveal that everyday individuals as influencers gather substantial followings through their approachable personas and relatable lifestyles (Enke and Borchers, 2021; Chen and Ren, 2022). As a result, marketing practitioners should take into account the resemblance between influencers and their followers and integrate this aspect into their marketing strategies or messages to enhance relational trust.

This paper has some limitations. In the paper, no distinction was made between social media platforms. Future studies may examine influencer marketing within a single social media platform or by comparing two social media platforms, thereby assessing the efficacy of influencer marketing campaigns on different networks and their impact on diverse target audiences. Another limitation is that the convenience sampling technique was used to reach the research population. This may adversely affect the generalizability of the study.

## **TÜKETİCİ SATIN ALMA NİYETİNİN İNFLUENCERLARIN ALGILANAN ÖZELLİKLERİ İLE TÜKETİCİ SATIN ALMA DAVRANIŞI ARASINDAKİ ARACILIK ROLÜ**

### **1. GİRİŞ**

Influencer pazarlama, günümüzde markaların ürün ve hizmetlerini hedef kitlelerine ulaştırmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Sosyal medya platformlarının yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte, influencer'ların takipçi kitlesi üzerinde büyük bir etkiye sahip oldukları gözlemlenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Parasosyal Etkileşim Teorisi ve Planlı Davranış Teorisi temeline dayanan benzerlik ve güven kavramları, influencer pazarlama bağlamında tüketicilerin satın alma niyeti ve satın alma davranışları üzerinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.

Literatür incelendiğinde çok sayıda çalışma, dijital pazarlamanın, sosyal medya pazarlamasının ve influencer pazarlamanın hem işletmeler hem de tüketiciler üzerinde pozitif ve anlamlı etkilere sahip olduğunu belirtmiştir (Melovic et al., 2020; Trivedi and Sama, 2020; Koay et al., 2022; Niloy et al., 2023). Bu çalışma dört bölümden oluşmaktadır. Giriş bölümünde çalışmanın genel bir özeti, influencer pazarlama kavramı ve influencer pazarlama ile ilgili önemli istatistikler, araştırma modelindeki değişkenlerin tanımı ve değişkenler arasındaki ilişkilere yer verilmiştir. İkinci bölümde, bu çalışmada kullanılan araştırma metodolojisi ayrıntılı olarak açıklanmış ve araştırma verilerinin doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ve yapısal eşitlik modellemesi kullanılarak analizine odaklanılmıştır. Üçüncü bölümde, analiz sonuçlarına ilişkin veriler ve sonuçların literatür ile ilişkisine değinilmiştir. Son bölümde ise araştırmacılar için öneriler ve pratik uygulamalar sunulmaktadır.

## **2. YÖNTEM**

Bu çalışmanın evrenini sosyal medyayı aktif bir şekilde kullanan ve herhangi bir influencerı takip etmekte olan kişiler oluşturmaktadır. Evreni en iyi şekilde temsil edebilmek ve doğru verileri toplayabilmek için nicel araştırma teknikleri uygulanmış, veri toplama aracı olarak online anket kullanılmıştır. Online anket uygulaması sonucunda 390 adet anket toplanmış, verilerin analizi IBM SPSS 20 ve SmartPLS 4 paket programları kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Araştırma modelinde öne sürülen ilişkileri analiz etmek amacıyla öncelikle doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ardından da yapısal eşitlik modellemesi analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir.

## **3. BULGULAR**

Katılımcıların sosyal medya kullanımlarına ilişkin veriler incelendiğinde, en çok kullanılan platformun %87,7 ile Instagram olduğu ve bunu %80,8 ile Youtube'un takip ettiği görülmektedir. Takip edilen influencer sayısı açısından katılımcıların %38,7'si 1-3 tane influencer'ı takip ederken, %34,6'sı 10 ve üzeri influencer'ı takip etmektedir. Takipçi sayılarındaki bu çeşitlilik, bazı katılımcıların az sayıda etkileyiciyi takip etmeyi tercih ettiğini, diğerlerinin daha çok sayıda etkileyiciyi takip etmeyi tercih ettiğini göstermektedir. Tercihlerdeki bu farklılık, hem tüketicilerin demografik özelliklerinden hem de kullandıkları belirli sosyal medya platformlarından kaynaklanmaktadır.

Araştırma modelini test etmeden önce, modelin geçerlik ve güvenilirliği doğrulayıcı faktör analiziyle sınanmıştır. Daha sonra araştırma modeli içerisindeki ilişkileri incelemek için yapısal eşitlik modeli uygulanmıştır. Doğrulayıcı faktör analizi sonucunda ölçeklerin geçerli ve güvenilir olduğu tespit edilmiş ve yapısal eşitlik modellemesine geçilmiştir. Yapısal eşitlik analizine göre, güvenin satın alma niyeti ve davranışını pozitif ve anlamlı bir şekilde etkilediği belirlenmiştir.

#### 4. TARTIŞMA

Çalışmanın bulguları literatürdeki çalışmalarla karşılaştırıldığında; güvenin tüketicilerin satın alma niyeti ve satın alma davranışını etkilediğini belirten benzer çalışmalarla (Kim ve Kim, 2021; Li ve Peng, 2021; Pop ve diğerleri, 2022; Masuda ve diğerleri, 2022; Wu ve Huang, 2023; Kim ve diğerleri, 2023) uyumludur.

Araştırma kapsamında yapılan analizler sonucunda benzerliğin satın alma niyetini ve satın alma davranışını etkilediği tespit edilmiştir. Çeşitli çalışmalar benzerliğin satın alma niyetini ve satın alma davranışını doğrudan etkilediğini gösterdiğinden literatürdeki çalışma sonuçlarıyla çalışmanın bulguları örtüşmektedir (Lou ve Yuan, 2019; Alexander ve diğerleri, 2020; Al-Darraj ve diğerleri, 2020; Sokolova ve Kefi, 2020; Chen ve diğerleri, 2021; Afifah, 2022; Ashraf ve diğerleri, 2023).

Araştırma analizinden elde edilen bir diğer önemli bulgu ise satın alma niyetinin hem güvenle satın alma davranışı değişkenleri hem de benzerlikle satın alma davranışı değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkilerde aracılık etkisine sahip olmasıdır. Bu bulgu, literatürdeki benzer çalışmaların (Lim ve diğerleri, 2016; Daud, 2021; Sun ve diğerleri, 2022) sonuçlarıyla tutarlıdır.

Sonuç olarak, araştırma bulguları incelendiğinde, influencerlara olan güven ve benzerliğin, tüketicilerin satın alma niyeti ve davranışına pozitif ve anlamlı bir şekilde etki ettiği görülmektedir. Ayrıca, satın alma niyetinin hem güvenle satın alma davranışı değişkenleri hem de benzerlikle satın alma davranışı arasındaki ilişkilerde aracılık etkisine sahip olduğu görülmüştür. Bu bağlamda, çalışma kapsamında önerilen yedi hipotezin tamamı kabul edilmiştir.

#### SONUÇ

Bu çalışma literatüre bazı önemli teorik katkılar sunmaktadır. İlk olarak, pazarlama iletişiminde sıklıkla kullanılan influencer pazarlama faaliyetlerinin Türkiye'deki tüketici davranışları üzerindeki etkisi ortaya konulmaktadır. Influencer pazarlamanın tüketici davranışının farklı yönleri üzerindeki etkilerini araştıran çeşitli araştırmalar ile (Kim ve Kim, 2021; Jin ve diğerleri, 2021; Chen ve diğerleri, 2021; Li ve Peng, 2021; Farivar ve diğerleri, 2021; Kurdi ve diğerleri, 2022; Gomes ve diğerleri, 2022; Masuda ve diğerleri, 2022; Barta ve diğerleri, 2023; Niloy ve diğerleri, 2023), bu çalışmanın bulguları örtüşmektedir. Bu çalışma, influencerdan algılanan güven ve benzerlik özelliklerinin satın alma niyeti ve satın alma davranışındaki rolünü doğrularak mevcut Influencer Pazarlama literatürüne önemli bir katkı sağlamaktadır.

Ayrıca, bu araştırma, özellikle influencer pazarlamaya daha büyük bütçeler ayıran ve ortak olarak uygun influencerı seçmek için etkili yöntemler keşfetmeye çalışan pazarlamacılar için önemli pratik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Influencer pazarlaması, markaların pazarlama stratejilerinin önemli bir yönü haline geldikçe, pazarlamacılar sıklıkla kapsamını, etkililiğini ve potansiyel risklerini anlamayla ilgili zorluklarla

karşılaşıyor. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, fenomenin bağlamına ilişkin derinlemesine bir açıklama sunarak, etkileyici pazarlamayı tanımlayıp ardından etkileyicilerin algılanan özelliklerinin tüketici satın alma niyeti ve davranışı üzerindeki etkisini ortaya koymakta ve uygulayıcılara yönelik çeşitli öneriler sunmaktadır.

Araştırma sonucunda, işletmelerin pazarlama iletişimi etkinliğini artırmak amacıyla Planlı Davranış Teorisi ve Sosyal Etkileşim Teorisi bağlamında, influencerların; takipçi ağları, kişisel konumlandırma imkanı, iletişim içeriği, takipçi güveni ve yarattıkları persona ile tüketicilerle kurdukları bağdan faydalanabileceği görülmektedir. İşletmelerin ürün ve hizmetlerine uygun influencer seçimleri satışları arttırabileceği gibi marka konumlandırmasına, marka imajına ve marka değerine olumlu katkılar sağlayabilir. Ayrıca, literatürdeki bazı araştırmalar, etkileyici kişiler olarak sıradan bireylerin cana yakın kişilikleri ve ilişkilendirilebilir yaşam tarzları aracılığıyla önemli takipçiler topladıklarını ortaya koymaktadır (Enke ve Borchers, 2021; Chen ve Ren, 2022). Sonuç olarak, pazarlama uygulayıcıları, etkileyiciler ve takipçileri arasındaki benzerliği dikkate almalı ve ilişkisel güveni artırmak için markalarına uygun etkileyicileri pazarlama stratejilerine veya mesajlarına entegre etmelidir.

Bu çalışmanın bazı sınırlılıkları vardır. Çalışmada sosyal medya platformları arasında herhangi bir ayırım yapılmamıştır. Gelecekteki çalışmalar, influencer pazarlamasını tek bir sosyal medya platformu özelinde veya iki sosyal medya platformunu karşılaştırarak inceleyebilir. Bu sayede, influencer pazarlama kampanyalarının farklı sosyal ağlardaki etkinliği ve diğer hedef kitlelerle etkinlikleri karşılaştırılabilir. Diğer bir sınırlılık ise araştırma evrenine ulaşmak için kolayda örnekleme tekniğinin kullanılmış olmasıdır. Bu durum çalışmanın genellenebilirliğini olumsuz etkileyebilir.

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Veri Toplama ve İşleme / <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	Verileri toplamak, düzenlemek ve raporlamak / <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	Arş. Gör. Mert İNAL Doç. Dr. Erkan BİL
Tartışma ve Yorum / <i>Discussion and Interpretation</i>	Bulguların değerlendirilmesinde ve sonuçlandırılmasında sorumluluk almak / <i>Taking responsibility in evaluating and finalizing the findings</i>	Arş. Gör. Mert İNAL Doç. Dr. Erkan BİL
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