



INFLUENCER MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION: THE ROLE OF TRUST AND PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most influential digital marketing strategies in contemporary business environments. Social media influencers shape consumer attitudes, brand perceptions, and purchase decisions through personalized content and perceived relatability. Despite its rapid growth, scholarly understanding of how influencer marketing effectiveness translates into consumer purchase intention remains fragmented, particularly regarding the mediating roles of trust and perceived authenticity. This study examines the structural relationships among influencer marketing effectiveness, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention using a quantitative approach grounded in Source Credibility Theory and Signaling Theory. Data were collected from 420 active social media users through a structured questionnaire employing validated measurement scales. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was applied to test measurement and structural models. Results demonstrate that influencer marketing effectiveness significantly influences perceived authenticity and consumer trust. Perceived authenticity positively affects trust and directly impacts purchase intention. Trust emerges as a strong predictor of purchase intention and partially mediates the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention. The findings highlight the strategic importance of credible, transparent, and authentic influencer partnerships in enhancing marketing outcomes. The study contributes to digital marketing literature by integrating authenticity and trust into a unified structural framework and offers practical implications for brand managers seeking to optimize influencer campaigns. Future research directions include cross cultural comparisons and longitudinal analyses to assess evolving consumer perceptions.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Consumer Purchase Intention, Trust, Perceived Authenticity, Digital Marketing, Source Credibility

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has transformed marketing communication strategies across industries. Influencer marketing represents a paradigm shift from traditional celebrity endorsements to digital opinion leaders who engage directly with audiences through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Influencers cultivate perceived intimacy and relatability, thereby fostering stronger connections with followers compared to conventional advertising channels. Recent industry reports indicate that influencer marketing expenditures continue to grow globally, reflecting its perceived



effectiveness in driving consumer engagement and sales outcomes.

Consumer purchase intention refers to an individual's conscious plan to buy a particular product or service and is widely regarded as a reliable predictor of actual purchase behavior. In digital contexts, purchase intention is influenced by social proof, peer recommendations, and perceived credibility of information sources. Influencers function as intermediaries between brands and consumers, shaping attitudes through content narratives, product demonstrations, and lifestyle portrayals. However, not all influencer campaigns yield equivalent results. Effectiveness depends on multiple psychological and relational factors that shape consumer responses.

Trust constitutes a foundational element in digital marketing relationships. Online environments are characterized by information asymmetry and uncertainty, increasing consumers' reliance on trusted sources. Trust in influencers is built upon expertise, honesty, transparency, and consistent communication. When followers perceive influencers as reliable and sincere, they are more likely to internalize recommendations and exhibit positive purchase intentions.

Perceived authenticity has gained prominence as a critical determinant of influencer credibility. Authentic influencers are perceived as genuine, transparent, and aligned with their personal brand identity. Authenticity reduces skepticism toward sponsored content and strengthens relational bonds. Conversely, perceived commercialization or inauthentic endorsements may erode trust and weaken persuasion effects. Although previous studies have examined influencer credibility and consumer attitudes, limited research integrates influencer marketing effectiveness with authenticity and trust in a comprehensive structural framework. Moreover, empirical evidence from emerging markets remains scarce, despite rapid digital adoption in these regions. This study addresses these gaps by investigating how influencer marketing effectiveness influences consumer purchase intention through perceived authenticity and trust. Using structural modeling, the research offers theoretical and practical insights into optimizing influencer strategies in competitive digital markets.

Literature Review

Influencer marketing is defined as a strategic approach whereby brands collaborate with social media personalities to promote products to targeted audiences. The theoretical foundation of influencer effectiveness primarily derives from Source Credibility Theory, which posits that message persuasiveness depends on perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the communicator (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Influencers often cultivate expertise within specific niches such as beauty, fitness, or technology, enhancing persuasive impact.

Source Attractiveness Theory further explains that familiarity and similarity between influencer and follower increase identification and message acceptance (McGuire, 1985). In digital contexts, parasocial interaction fosters emotional closeness, leading followers to perceive influencers as friends rather than advertisers (Lou and Yuan, 2019). This perceived intimacy strengthens engagement and responsiveness. Influencer marketing effectiveness refers to the extent to which influencer content generates favorable brand attitudes, engagement metrics, and behavioral intentions. Studies indicate that content quality, informativeness, entertainment value, and transparency contribute significantly to campaign success (De Veirman et al., 2017). Effectiveness is not solely determined by follower count but by credibility and alignment between influencer persona and brand values.

Perceived authenticity represents the degree to which consumers believe influencer content reflects genuine

beliefs rather than purely commercial motives. Authenticity theory suggests that consumers value originality and sincerity in brand communication (Morhart et al., 2015). In influencer marketing, authenticity is demonstrated through consistent storytelling, honest reviews, and selective brand partnerships. Research shows that authenticity enhances emotional attachment and reduces persuasion knowledge activation, thereby improving consumer attitudes (Audrezet et al., 2020).

Influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant digital promotional strategy, driven by the rapid expansion of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing relies on individuals who cultivate niche audiences and foster perceived personal connections with followers. Recent literature emphasizes that influencer effectiveness is largely contingent upon relational factors—particularly trust and perceived authenticity which mediate the relationship between influencer activities and consumer purchase intention.

Purchase intention, defined as the likelihood that a consumer will buy a recommended product or service, is widely recognized as a key outcome variable in digital marketing research. Studies grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Source Credibility Model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) suggest that attitudes toward influencers significantly shape behavioral intentions. Contemporary research confirms that influencer credibility comprising expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness positively affects consumer attitudes and subsequent purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Among these dimensions, trustworthiness has consistently emerged as the strongest predictor of persuasion effectiveness. Trust plays a central role in online environments characterized by information asymmetry and skepticism toward advertising. According to social exchange theory, trust reduces perceived risk and enhances relational commitment. In influencer marketing contexts, trust is cultivated through consistent content quality, honest reviews, transparent sponsorship disclosures, and perceived alignment between influencer values and endorsed brands. Empirical studies demonstrate that higher levels of influencer trust significantly increase brand credibility and consumer purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Furthermore, trust mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer engagement, suggesting that credibility alone is insufficient without relational assurance.

Perceived authenticity has gained prominence as a critical determinant of influencer effectiveness. Authenticity refers to the perception that an influencer is genuine, transparent, and intrinsically motivated rather than commercially driven. Self-Determination Theory supports the notion that audiences respond more positively when influencers appear autonomous and sincere in their endorsements. Research indicates that followers are more likely to develop emotional attachment and parasocial relationships with influencers perceived as authentic (Audrezet et al., 2020). These relationships enhance persuasive outcomes by fostering identification and relatability.

Recent scholarship also differentiates between mega-influencers and micro-influencers, noting that micro-influencers often generate higher engagement rates and stronger trust perceptions due to their perceived closeness to followers. This intimacy strengthens authenticity cues and enhances persuasive impact. Additionally, disclosure of sponsored content has been examined extensively. While sponsorship disclosures can initially reduce persuasive intent perceptions, transparent communication may ultimately reinforce trust and authenticity when aligned with influencer identity (Evans et al., 2017).

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework has been widely adopted to explain the mechanisms underlying influencer marketing effectiveness. In this model, influencer characteristics (stimulus) influence internal consumer states such as trust and authenticity perceptions (organism), which

subsequently drive purchase intention (response). Empirical findings consistently support the mediating roles of trust and authenticity in shaping consumer behavioral outcomes.

Moreover, the rise of algorithm-driven content distribution has intensified competition for attention, increasing the importance of credibility signals and relational marketing strategies. Consumers, particularly Generation Z and Millennials, demonstrate heightened sensitivity to authenticity and ethical transparency. Consequently, influencers who maintain consistency between personal brand narratives and sponsored content are more likely to generate positive purchase intentions. Current literature converges on the view that influencer marketing effectiveness is not merely a function of visibility or popularity but is deeply rooted in relational constructs. Trust and perceived authenticity operate as central mediating variables that translate influencer characteristics into consumer purchase intention. As digital markets become increasingly saturated, sustaining authenticity and cultivating trust remain critical for maximizing influencer-driven marketing outcomes.

Trust is conceptualized as the willingness of consumers to rely on the influencer's recommendations. According to Relationship Marketing Theory, trust develops through repeated interactions and transparent communication (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In digital marketing, trust mitigates perceived risk associated with online transactions (Gefen et al., 2003). Empirical evidence suggests that trust significantly predicts purchase intention in social commerce settings (Kim and Park, 2013). Purchase intention is widely studied within the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Influencer endorsements shape attitudes and subjective norms by providing social validation. When authenticity and trust are high, consumers exhibit stronger intentions to purchase recommended products.

Recent empirical studies indicate that authenticity mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics and consumer trust (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Furthermore, trust mediates the link between credibility and purchase intention. However, comprehensive structural modeling incorporating influencer marketing effectiveness as an antecedent of authenticity and trust remains limited. This study integrates Source Credibility Theory and Signaling Theory. Influencers signal product quality through endorsements, while authenticity and trust function as psychological mechanisms translating signals into behavioral intention. By empirically testing these relationships using SmartPLS, the research advances theoretical understanding and offers evidence based managerial recommendations.

Conceptual Model and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework proposes the following relationships:

- Influencer Marketing Effectiveness positively influences Perceived Authenticity
- Influencer Marketing Effectiveness positively influences Trust
- Perceived Authenticity positively influences Trust
- Perceived Authenticity positively influences Purchase Intention
- Trust positively influences Purchase Intention

Trust is proposed as a mediator between Authenticity and Purchase Intention. The model is grounded in Source Credibility Theory and Signaling Theory, explaining how credible signals from influencers foster authenticity perceptions and trust, ultimately driving purchase intention.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design. Data were collected through an online survey distributed

to active social media users aged 18 to 40. A total of 420 valid responses were obtained using convenience sampling. Measurement scales were adapted from established literature and measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Influencer marketing effectiveness was measured through items assessing content quality, informativeness, and engagement. Perceived authenticity was measured using sincerity and transparency indicators. Trust was measured through credibility and reliability items. Purchase intention was assessed through likelihood and willingness to purchase.

Data analysis was conducted to measurement model was evaluated through reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity tests. The structural model was assessed using path coefficients, t values, p values, and R square values obtained through bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples.

Analysis and Results

Table 1 Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Influencer Marketing Effectiveness	0.89	0.92	0.68
Perceived Authenticity	0.91	0.93	0.72
Trust	0.90	0.94	0.75
Purchase Intention	0.88	0.91	0.69

Interpretation

The measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and validity. Cronbach alpha values exceed 0.70, indicating internal consistency. Composite reliability values are above 0.90, confirming construct reliability. Average variance extracted values exceed 0.50, supporting convergent validity. These results confirm that the measurement model is satisfactory for structural analysis.

Table 2 Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	t Value	p Value	Result
IME → Authenticity	0.64	12.45	0.000	Supported
IME → Trust	0.41	8.32	0.000	Supported
Authenticity → Trust	0.46	9.15	0.000	Supported
Authenticity → Purchase Intention	0.29	5.87	0.000	Supported
Trust → Purchase Intention	0.52	10.64	0.000	Supported

R square Trust 0.61

R square Purchase Intention 0.68

Interpretation

The structural model indicates significant positive relationships among constructs. Influencer marketing effectiveness strongly influences authenticity, highlighting the importance of quality and engagement in shaping genuine perceptions. Authenticity significantly predicts trust, reinforcing relational marketing theory. Trust shows the strongest impact on purchase intention, confirming its central mediating role. The R square values indicate substantial explanatory power, with 68 percent variance in purchase intention explained by authenticity and trust.

Conclusion

This study examined how influencer marketing effectiveness influences consumer purchase intention

through perceived authenticity and trust. Findings reveal that authenticity and trust function as critical psychological mechanisms translating marketing effectiveness into behavioral intention. Influencers who provide transparent, consistent, and relatable content generate stronger trust, which significantly drives purchase intention.

Influencer marketing has evolved into a powerful digital strategy that significantly shapes consumer purchase intention, particularly through the mediating roles of trust and perceived authenticity. Contemporary literature consistently demonstrates that consumers do not respond merely to influencer popularity or reach; rather, their purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by the credibility and relational qualities of the influencer. Trust reduces perceived risk in online transactions, enhances brand credibility, and strengthens consumer confidence in endorsed products. Similarly, perceived authenticity fosters emotional connection, identification, and long-term engagement, making promotional messages appear genuine rather than purely commercial.

The integration of theoretical perspectives such as the Source Credibility Model, Social Exchange Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework further explains how influencer characteristics shape internal consumer evaluations, ultimately leading to behavioral intention. Importantly, transparency in sponsorship disclosures and alignment between influencer identity and brand values reinforce both trust and authenticity.

Overall, the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends less on scale and more on relational depth. Marketers seeking to enhance purchase intention should prioritize influencer credibility, ethical transparency, and authentic communication strategies to build sustainable consumer relationships in competitive digital environments.

The research contributes theoretically by integrating source credibility and signaling perspectives within a unified structural framework. Empirically, it validates the mediating role of trust and highlights authenticity as a strategic resource in influencer partnerships.

From a managerial standpoint, brands should prioritize influencer selection based on authenticity alignment rather than follower size. Long term collaborations, transparent sponsorship disclosures, and value congruence enhance trust and consumer responsiveness.

Future Recommendations

Future research should examine cross cultural differences in authenticity perceptions. Longitudinal studies may explore changes in trust over time. Experimental designs could assess causality between influencer content type and purchase behavior. Additionally, exploring micro influencers versus macro influencers may provide further strategic insights.

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