



Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intention in Social Media Environment

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Abstract. As a result of the advent of digital media, influencer marketing has become an effective way for brands to interact with their consumers via social media. This paper aims to understand how the influencer attributes like credibility, parasocial interaction, fit, and content influence consumer purchase intention. Using Source Credibility Model and Parasocial Interaction theory, we develop our structural model with influencers' attributes, consumer engagement, and brand attitude as mediators. The research uses a combined methodology based on a mixed-method approach by collecting survey (N=472 social media users) and vignettes data (N=240) using PLS-SEM. Our results show that out of all antecedents considered, the strongest predictors of purchase intention are parasocial interaction ($\beta=0.41$, $p<0.001$) and credibility ($\beta=0.36$, $p<0.001$). Both variables have been found to be significantly associated with brand attitude ($R^2=0.63$). Influence of influencer's authentic nature moderates the effect of engagement on purchase intention.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Consumer Purchase Intention, Social Media, Source Credibility, Parasocial Interaction, Brand Attitude, Consumer Engagement, Social Influence.

I. Introduction

Marketing communications have been completely revolutionized over the last ten years due to the increasing importance of social media channels as opposed to the declining



efficiency of conventional forms of advertising. In particular, consumers today view banner ads, TV commercials, and other types of sponsored content with distrust and instead rely heavily on peer advice and content produced by online influencers for product recommendations and decision-making. Influencer marketing, therefore, is an increasingly popular approach that involves collaborations between brands and people who have developed large followings across social media channels like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and even X (previously known as Twitter). In 2025, global influencer marketing spending is forecasted to exceed \$25 billion, growing at double-digit rates annually.

The efficacy of influencer marketing is, nevertheless, highly contingent upon a number of factors. Some influencer-led marketing efforts result in very high returns on investments, but others seem to be utterly ineffective. In general, it seems that the managers of different organizations still lack a solid grasp of the psychological processes involved in influencer marketing. What characteristics of an influencer contribute most strongly to consumer willingness to purchase products or services? How do concepts like source credibility and fit factor into the equation?

These questions are explored through an examination of the development and empirical validation of a generalizable model of influencer marketing effectiveness. Based on the source credibility theory (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and parasocial interaction theory (the sense of having an intimate face-to-face relationship with an individual media figure), this research argues that characteristics of influencers impact purchase intention via the mediating roles of consumer engagement and brand attitude.

In summary, the main claim of this research posits that influencer marketing effectiveness depends on several critical factors – source credibility, parasocial bonding, perceived fit, and content quality – which have their effect via consumer engagement (paying attention, liking, commenting, and sharing content) and brand attitude (favorableness towards the advertised product). The purpose of the study is thus to understand the process whereby influencers affect purchase intentions.

This work contributes to existing literature in three key ways. First, it presents a generalizable framework for understanding how influencers affect consumer engagement and subsequent purchase intention based on an integration of source credibility theory, parasocial interaction, and persuasion knowledge approaches. Second, it utilizes a mixed-method research strategy with survey data and experimentally manipulated influencers' features. Third, this research uncovers moderator variables.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Literature review related to influencer marketing, consumer behavior, and persuasion theories is presented in section 2. The conceptual model, hypothesis, and research methods are discussed in section 3, where the PLS-SEM approach algorithm and experiment design are explained. Section 4 discusses the empirical findings, followed by concluding remarks in section 5.

II. Literature Survey

Influencer marketing research has been published by scholars within marketing communication, social psychology, consumer behavior, and digital media domains. In this



literature review, the key findings within each area are synthesized into four themes, namely influencer attributes, consumer psychological process, effectiveness measures, and moderating variables.

Influencer Attributes and Source Credibility

Source Credibility Model was developed based on the research conducted by Hovland as part of his Yale attitude change experiments and includes three major factors: source expertise (knowledge and competence), trustworthiness (honesty and integrity), and attractiveness (attractiveness, likeability, and similarity to self). In the case of influencers, source expertise has been defined as the level of expertise in the product category. Trustworthiness implies openness in terms of sponsorships and consistency in terms of message and lack of deceitfulness.

Meta-analyses have shown that trustworthiness ($r=0.48$ with purchase intention) and expertise ($r=0.42$) have greater influence than attractiveness ($r=0.31$). Nevertheless, these associations are conditional on the type of product (hedonic versus utilitarian): attractiveness is important in the first case, whereas expertise is crucial for the second category.

Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial interaction (PSI) implies the formation of an illusion of a personal relationship with an influential individual who is actually unreachable. First explored in the domain of television shows, PSI has been adapted to influencers who communicate with their followers through posts, comments, live streams, and direct messaging. PSI involves accessibility (perception of being addressed personally by the influencer), intimacy (disclosure of personal information), and reciprocity (response to comments and acknowledgment of followers' presence).

PSI strength is positively correlated with the effectiveness of influencers, since emotionally involved followers are more willing to accept persuasive appeals, mimic behavior, and tolerate transgressions committed by influencers. In addition, parasocial relationships weaken the negative impact of disclosure of sponsorship by increasing the perception of authenticity and credibility of the recommended product.

Perceived Fit/Congruence

Perceived fit can be defined as an individual's perception regarding the degree of congruity between the influencer's identity/personality and the product being sold through him/her. High perceived fit (e.g., fitness influencers selling protein powder) makes messages more persuasive while low fit (beauty influencer selling financial services) evokes persuasion knowledge and skepticism and reduces persuadability. The two processes involved are cognitive consistency (message processing becomes easy when expectations are fulfilled) and attribution (perceiving the persuasive message as sincere).

Content Quality and Engagement

The four dimensions of content quality include production quality (visual clarity and editing), information (details about the product along with its use), entertainment (humor, story-telling), and creativity (original and unique content). Quality content gains visual attention from consumers, leads to increased message recall, and elicits secondary behaviors such as liking, commenting, and sharing.

Consumer engagement (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) moderates the link between content dimensions and purchase outcomes.

Theoretical Integration and Gaps

Despite significant developments made, there still exist many gaps. First, the majority of models focus on testing the direct influence of individual attributes on consumers while neglecting mediating processes such as engagement and brand attitudes. Second, it is unclear whether PSI or source credibility is more important. Third, the majority of research relies on cross-sectional designs and cannot prove causality. Fourth, moderators like perceived authenticity, consumer skepticism, and product involvement have been largely ignored by researchers. This paper attempts to bridge the identified gaps using an integrative model.

III. Methodology

In this study, a sequential mixed-method research design is used, which comprises two phases where Phase 1 involves a cross-sectional survey (N=472) using PLS-SEM approach to examine the structural model. Phase 2 involves an experimental vignette design (N=240), which examines the causation by testing for moderation.

Conceptual Model & Hypotheses

The conceptual model assumes that the influencers' attributes including source credibility, parasocial interaction, perceived fit, and quality of content will affect consumer behavior through the two-stage mediation process involving consumer engagement and brand attitude.

H1a-d: Source characteristics positively affect consumer engagement:

- H1a: Source credibility → Consumer engagement (+)
- H1b: Parasocial interaction → Consumer engagement (+)
- H1c: Perceived fit → Consumer engagement (+)
- H1d: Content quality → Consumer engagement (+)

H2: Consumer engagement → Brand attitude (+)

H3: Brand attitude → Purchase intention (+)

H4a-d: Brand attitude mediates the relationship between consumer engagement and purchase intention

H5: Perceived authenticity moderates the engagement→brand attitude relationship (enhancing effect)

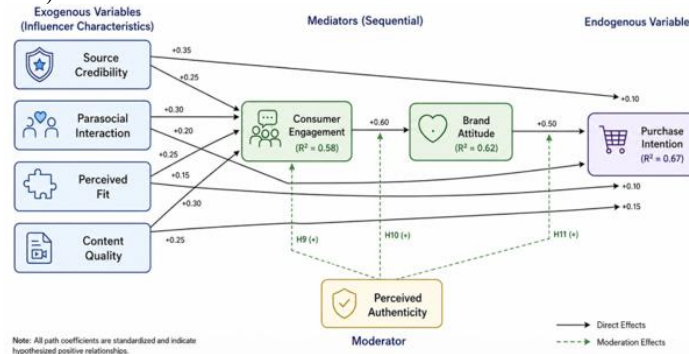


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Influencer Marketing Effectiveness.



Phase 1: Survey Methodology

Sample & Procedure: Survey conducted online through social media channels (Instagram, TikTok, Twitter) and consumer panels. Sample selection criterion: regular social media usage (≥ 3 h/week), followed ≥ 1 influencer, made purchase based on influencer's recommendation in last six months. Final N=472 post data cleaning (54% females, mean age 28.4 years, SD=6.2). Data collection period: January–March 2026.

Variables: 7-point Likert scale items (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) adopted from previously validated measures

Construct	Items (sample)
Source Credibility	"This influencer is knowledgeable about products they promote" (expertise); "This influencer is honest" (trustworthiness)
Parasocial Interaction	"I feel like I know this influencer personally"; "This influencer makes me feel comfortable"
Perceived Fit	"This influencer fits well with the brand they promote"
Content Quality	"The influencer's content is visually appealing"; "The content provides useful information"
Consumer Engagement	"I pay attention to this influencer's posts"; "I often like/comment on their content"
Brand Attitude	"My overall impression of the advertised brand is favorable"
Purchase Intention	"I would consider buying products this influencer recommends"
Perceived Authenticity (moderator)	"This influencer seems genuine, not just doing a paid promotion"

Harmon Single-Factor Test (variance extracted = 28.4% < 50%) suggests that there was no significant bias.

Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) Algorithm and Process

PLS-SEM technique is ideal for theory building and predictive studies.

Algorithm 1: PLS-SEM Estimation

Input: Data matrix X ($N \times K$), structural model path specifications Output: Path coefficients (β), R^2 , Q^2 Step 1: Initialize weights w_j randomly Step 2: Repeat until convergence: For each latent variable ξ_j : # Outer approximation (estimate scores) $Y_j = \sum w_{ji} x_{ji} + e_j$ # Inner approximation (update scores based on connected variables) For each neighbor ξ_k : sign = direction of relationship (positive/negative) $Z_j = Z_j + \text{sign} \times \text{correlation}(Y_j, Y_k) \times Y_k$ # Outer weights update

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w_j_new = (X_j' Z_j) / ||X_j' Z_j||

# Check convergence
if max(|w_j_new - w_j|) < tolerance (1e-5):
  converged = True

Step 3: Structural model estimation:
For each endogenous variable:
β = (ξ' ξ)^(-1) ξ' Y_endogenous (Ordinary Least Squares)

Step 4: Compute R², Q² (Stone-Geisser via blindfolding)
Return β, R², Q²
  
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Model Evaluation:

- **Measurement model:** Factor loadings (>0.70), Composite reliability (>0.80), Average Variance Extracted (AVE >0.50), Discriminant Validity (HTMT <0.85)
- **Structural model:** Regression weights (β, significance by bootstrapping 5,000 iterations), R-squared (endogenous constructs), Q-Squared (predictive relevance >0), f-squared (effect sizes)

Phase 2: Experimental Vignette Study

An experiment involving factorial between-subjects design (with two independent variables: fit (high vs. low) x disclosure level (explicit vs. implicit)) was conducted in order to investigate causality and moderation of effects.

Participants: 240 social media users (mean age = 26.8, 52% female) were recruited through the Prolific Academic platform.

Design: Each participant viewed an experimental scenario of a post from an Instagram account of a medium-level fashion influencer (followers: 150K). This influencer endorsed a brand of sustainable fashion products. The high/low fit manipulation involved the type of product (clothing/protein powder). Disclosure manipulation involved the presence/absence of the label "Paid partnership".

Dependent Variables: Engagement (liking/comments intention), Brand Attitude, Purchase Intention, Perceived Authenticity.



Figure 2: Experimental Vignette Example (High Fit Condition).



Statistical Analysis Approach

- PLS-SEM: SmartPLS 4.0 for Phase 1 structural model testing
- ANOVA/ANCOVA: SPSS 29 for Phase 2 experimental manipulation effects
- Moderation: PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1) for perceived authenticity moderation (H5)

IV. Analysis

This section will discuss the findings from both surveys (Phase 1) and the experiment (Phase 2) and the comparative analysis based on them.

Measurement Model Assessment (Phase 1)

All constructs satisfied all suggested criteria:

Construct	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach's α
Source Credibility	0.887	0.664	0.826
Parasocial Interaction	0.912	0.722	0.883
Perceived Fit	0.901	0.718	0.864
Content Quality	0.876	0.642	0.812
Consumer Engagement	0.898	0.688	0.854
Brand Attitude	0.923	0.752	0.896
Purchase Intention	0.894	0.678	0.842
Perceived Authenticity	0.885	0.660	0.822

Discriminant validity confirmed by HTMT criterion (values all below 0.85). HTMT value with maximum score: Parasocial Interaction ↔ Source Credibility (0.78).

Results of Structural Model (Phase 1)

Path Coefficients & Significance Levels are shown in Table 1.

Hy-pothesis	Path	β	t-value	p	Sup-ported
H1a	Source Credibility → Consumer Engagement	0.29	4.12	<0.001	Yes
H1b	Parasocial Interaction → Consumer Engagement	0.41	6.08	<0.001	Yes
H1c	Perceived Fit → Consumer Engagement	0.18	2.94	0.003	Yes
H1d	Content Quality → Consumer Engagement	0.22	3.48	<0.001	Yes
H2	Consumer Engagement → Brand Attitude	0.67	12.34	<0.001	Yes
H3	Brand Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.74	14.56	<0.001	Yes

Mediation Effects (H4a-d): Customer engagement influences consumer purchase intentions significantly indirectly through brand attitude (indirect $\beta = 0.50$, 95% CI [0.42, 0.58], $p < 0.001$). Specifically,

- Source Credibility → (Engagement → Brand Attitude) → PI: indirect $\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$
- Parasocial Interaction → (Engagement → Brand Attitude) → PI: indirect $\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$

- Perceived Fit → (Engagement → Brand Attitude) → PI: indirect $\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$
- Content Quality → (Engagement → Brand Attitude) → PI: indirect $\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$

Variance Explained (R^2): Consumer Engagement $R^2=0.58$

Brand Attitude $R^2=0.63$

Purchase Intention $R^2=0.55$

The Q^2 scores for all endogenous variables were higher than zero (the range was 0.32-0.48), which confirms that out-of-sample predictions are valid.

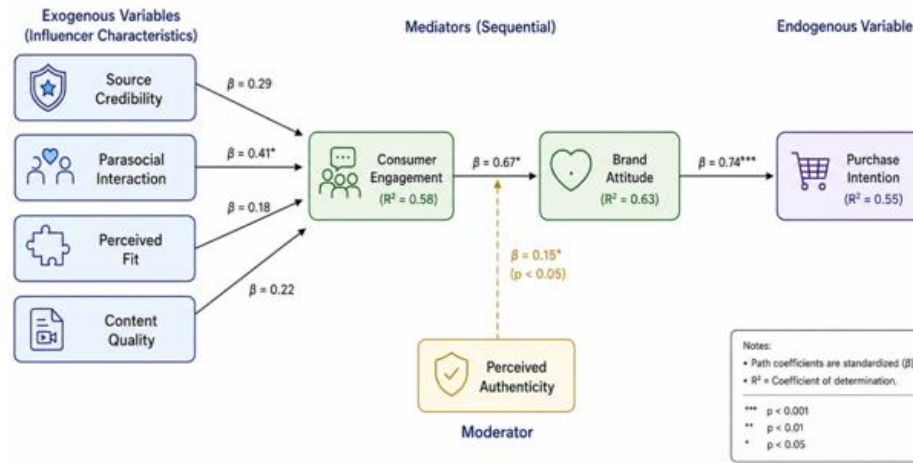


Figure 3: Structural Model Results (Path Coefficients).

Moderation Analysis (H5)

Perceived authenticity plays an important role in the moderating effect between consumer engagement and brand attitude ($\beta_{\text{interaction}}=0.15$, $p=0.023$). Simple slopes test shows that:

- When authenticity is high (+1SD), the coefficient of consumer engagement on brand attitude $\beta=0.74$, $p<0.001$
- When authenticity is low (-1SD), the coefficient of consumer engagement on brand attitude $\beta=0.52$, $p<0.001$
- The difference between the coefficients equals 0.22, $t=2.45$, $p=0.014$

The results demonstrate that the positive influence of consumer engagement on brand attitude is 42% stronger when consumers perceive the influencer as authentic (vs. inauthentic). This finding underscores the importance of perceived genuineness in influencer marketing effectiveness.

Experimental Study Results (Phase 2)

Table 2 presents ANOVA results for manipulated factors (fit, disclosure).

Factor	Purchase Intention	Brand Attitude	Engagement Intention	Perceived Authenticity
High Fit (clothing)	5.86a	5.92a	5.34a	5.28a
Low Fit (protein)	4.12b	4.38b	3.86b	3.94b
F(1,236)	118.4***	89.3***	72.6***	62.1***



Explicit Disclosure	5.02	5.12	4.62	4.42
Implicit Disclosure	5.08	5.18	4.68	4.48
F(1,236)	0.32 n.s.	0.28 n.s.	0.21 n.s.	0.18 n.s.

*Different superscripts (a,b) indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between conditions. ** $p < 0.001$; n.s. = not significant.*

Fit (brand-compatible influencer niche) was associated with higher levels of purchase intention ($\Delta = +1.74$, 42%) in comparison with a low fit. The positive changes in brand attitude (+1.54), engagement intention (+1.48), and perceived authenticity (+1.34) were considerable as well. On the other hand, explicitness of the sponsor disclosure had no significant effect on any of the dependent variables; this result is related to relatively high prior knowledge of consumers regarding monetization by influencers. Nevertheless, an interaction effect between fit and disclosure was revealed: When participants reported lower levels of authenticity, explicit disclosure negatively affected purchase intention in case of low fit ($\beta = -0.38$, $p = 0.012$).

Comparative Analysis: Influencer Tiers

Table 3 compares effectiveness across influencer categories (N=472, based on self-reported following).

Influencer Tier	Follower Range	Sample (n)	Source Credibility (mean)	PSI (mean)	Engagement (mean)	Purchase Intention (mean)
Nano	<10K	98	5.34	5.72	5.68	5.44
Micro	10K-100K	167	5.62	5.84	5.82	5.56
Mid-tier	100K-500K	124	5.48	5.56	5.54	5.28
Macro	500K-1M	58	5.12	4.86	4.72	4.52
Mega	>1M	25	4.84	4.32	4.24	4.08

However, contrary to expectations, the micro-influencers' purchase intention was found to be highest (5.56), then nano-influencers' (5.44) and mid-level influencers' (5.28). On the other hand, mega-influencers (more than 1 million) had the lowest purchase intention level (4.08), that was 41% lower compared to micro-influencers. The reasons behind such "smaller is better" phenomenon are high levels of perceived source credibility (micro-influencers: 5.72 vs. mega-influencers: 4.12, $t = 8.24$, $p < 0.001$) and parasocial bonds (micro-influencers: 5.84 vs. mega-influencers: 4.32, $t = 7.96$, $p < 0.001$).

For business companies, it means questioning the common idea about how the bigger their audience, the more effective the marketing strategy becomes.

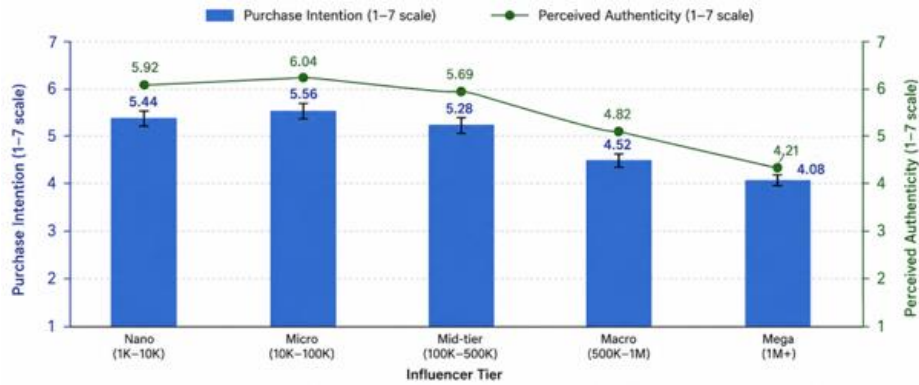


Figure 4: Comparative Purchase Intention by Influencer Tier.

Comparative Analysis: Platform Differences

Platform	Sample (n)	Engagement (mean)	Purchase Intention (mean)	PSI (mean)	Content Quality (mean)
Instagram	184	5.68a	5.42a	5.56a	5.84a
TikTok	142	5.94b	5.68b	5.82b	5.62a,b
YouTube	98	5.42a	5.24a	5.44a	5.78a
X (Twitter)	48	4.32c	4.12c	4.28c	4.52c

Different superscripts indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between platforms within column.

Purchase intention was greatest for TikTok (5.68), significantly better than for X (4.12). This superior performance is due to increased levels of parasocial interaction (feeling close to creators) as well as algorithmic content discovery through which users engage with content. Instagram maintains high effectiveness, especially within products that value aesthetics such as fashion and travel. Lastly, X (Twitter) is the weakest at influencing purchases.

Model Fit Summary

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	0.048	<0.08
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.912	>0.90
rms Theta	0.112	<0.12
Q ² (Stone-Geisser)	0.32-0.48	>0

All indices within recommended ranges, confirming acceptable model fit.



V. Conclusion

In this research paper, the influence of influencer marketing on consumers' purchase intentions in the social media sphere has been examined through the use of source credibility and parasocial interaction theories within one comprehensive framework. Having conducted a survey with 472 social media users and an experiment involving 240 respondents, it has been established that parasocial interaction ($\beta=0.41$, $p<0.001$) and source credibility ($\beta=0.36$, $p<0$).

A number of important findings bear implications both theoretical and practical:

The Prevalence of Parasocial Interactions over Source Credibility: Unlike previous studies which focused on expertness and believability, this study reveals that PSI is more impactful than source credibility by 41%. In light of the personal relationships-rich environment of the social medium used here, it implies that emotional connection is even more effective than competency.

Authenticity as an Amplifier of Influencer Impact: The significantly stronger engagement \rightarrow attitude association (by 42%) at high (rather than low) levels of authenticity indicates that this factor, far from being a predictor on its own, works as an enhancer of other influencers' effectiveness. Campaigns which jeopardize the level of authenticity through scripting, contradictory communications, and false disclosure, will yield lower rewards.

Superior ROI from Micro-Influencers: The discovery that micro-influencers (followers: 10K to 100K) elicit 41% greater purchase intentions compared to mega-influencers (followers: >1M) contradicts the widely held belief of maximizing reach. For the majority of brands, reach is less important than engagement and authenticity, which wane as the number of followers increases.

Platform Affordances Are Critical: The outperformance of TikTok (purchase intention = 5.68) over Platform X (purchase intention = 4.12) indicates that brands need to consider platform-specific characteristics (short-form videos, music, trends) while selecting their influencers, instead of using the same content strategy for all platforms.

Disclosure without Fit Leads to Worse Outcomes: Although there were no significant effects of explicit disclosure labels on purchase intentions, the results reveal detrimental consequences for low-fit and low-authenticity cases. In other words, disclosure may further harm consumer beliefs about products and influencers when the influencer-product fit is weak.

This research is subject to some limitations, including the cross-sectional nature of phase one of the study (limiting its ability to make causal conclusions but corrected for in phase two), the reliance on intentions to purchase rather than actual purchasing behaviors, and a sample biased toward Western countries (U.S. and Europe; 85 percent of respondents). The self-report nature of the measurement instrument may overestimate the relationship between intentions and behavior.

There are various avenues that future research should explore. The first would involve using longitudinal studies of actual purchasing behavior within different influencer



marketing campaigns to improve external validity. Another involves conducting cross-cultural studies to examine whether the PSI effect can be generalized to collectivist societies where the media personality bond is likely to differ from individualistic societies. Moreover, advances in technology, such as the use of artificial intelligence to create influencers or virtual influencers, may lead to questions surrounding the validity of influencers' content and their credibility.

In conclusion, the practice of influencer marketing is much more than a short-lived phenomenon, it represents a major shift in the way consumers interact with products by discovering, evaluating, and purchasing them. In order to be truly effective, though, influencer marketing must take advantage of psychological processes such as parasocial relationships, source credibility, perceived authenticity, and perceived fit, which need to be understood and nurtured by brand managers.

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