# Analysing The influence of Moderating and Mediating Variables in Social Influencers Effect on Global Consumers Purchase intention and Brand Preference

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*Abstract*

*Social media influencer marketing is becoming an increasingly important part of consumer decision-making, but how influencer characteristics are translated into purchase-related behaviours remains poorly understood. This research developed and tested a PLS-SEM-based framework to examine how influencer characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and authenticity) affect brand trust and, ultimately, drive brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Data were gathered via a structured survey distributed to active social media users who had been exposed to influencer-promoted products. The data analysis supported the reliability and validity of the measurement model (all composite reliabilities > 0.85, all average variance extracted > .66, and all Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations < 0.90), and identified the following structural relationships: Influencer authenticity has the most significant effect on brand trust, and both influencer expertise and trustworthiness have a statistically significant effect on brand trust. However, influencer attractiveness did not have a statistically significant effect on brand trust at the .05 level. Brand trust was found to affect brand attitude positively, and both brand trust and brand attitude positively affected purchase intention, supporting partial mediation (brand trust → brand attitude → purchase intention). Additionally, there was no evidence that product type moderated the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. These findings support the idea that establishing trust with consumers is key to creating effective influencers, and therefore that marketers should focus on partnering with authentic, credible influencers when seeking to create positive brand evaluations and purchase behaviour among their target audience.*

*Keywords: Social Media, Moderating and Mediating, Global Consumers, Purchase Intention, Brand Preference, Marketing Strategies.*

## 1.0 Introduction

The growth of social media has dramatically changed how businesses communicate with their customers, establishing social media influencers as an important bridge between brands and consumers. Social media influencers now represent many consumers' influential opinions, which can affect how consumers perceive brands, think about brands, and make purchasing decisions (Afzal et al., 2024; Rajput & Gandhi, 2024). Social media influencers have therefore become a top digital marketing method across several industry categories, including, but not limited to, fashion, beauty, food, travel, and sustainability (Yu et al., 2025; Fariz & Winarsih, 2025; Garg & Bakshi, 2024).

While there is a wealth of research examining the influence marketing outcomes of social media influencers, most research has concentrated on the relationship between the characteristics of influencers and the likelihood of consumers making a purchasing decision based on those characteristics, without considering the underlying psychological processes that cause consumers to react to influencers (Siddiqui et al., 2025; Pandey & Goutam, 2024). Research suggests that the effects of influencers typically do not occur immediately, but instead operate indirectly through intervening variables such as trust, the evaluation of a brand's quality, and consumers' attitudes toward a brand (Khan et al., 2024; Zaman et al., 2024). Because of the importance of social media influencer marketing

and because of this commercialization of social media, we feel that a complete model is needed that describes the influence of social media influencers on consumer decision-making. There are three dimensions of influencer credibility that are generally accepted as being the most influential and these are expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Xiong & Tseng, 2024) although other research has demonstrated that a new dimension of authenticity may be relevant (Jamil et al., 2024; Renganathan et al., 2025). Authenticity is defined as the extent to which an influencer appears to be sincere, consistent with the brand he/she endorses and genuinely committed to their own personal values (Afzal et al., 2024; Cheah et al., 2024). Research indicates that when an influencer exhibits authentic behaviour it can reduce scepticism, promote a relationship with the customer, increase trust in the brand endorsed by the social media influencer (Jamil et al., 2024; Renganathan et al., 2025). As such, we believe that trust is the single-most important factor in determining whether a customer will purchase from a particular brand. By reducing the amount of risk and uncertainty associated with making purchases, especially online, when customers may be relying on influencers for information about the brand instead of being able to communicate directly with the brand (Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Zaman et al., 2024), trust can help facilitate the development of customer relationships with brands.

In addition to creating a sense of trust in a brand, the way that customers evaluate a brand also includes their attitudes toward the brand. Evaluative processes like this are important because they capture consumers' general positive or negative perceptions of a brand (Le & Ngoc, 2024). Research has shown that there is typically a sequence in which the development of trust in a brand occurs before the evaluation of attitudes toward a brand (Alqaysi et al., 2024). The development of trust toward a brand can increase the likelihood that a consumer will have a positive attitude toward a brand and ultimately develop a higher level of purchase intention (Le & Ngoc, 2024).

Although research has identified the importance of understanding both the development of trust toward a brand and the subsequent evaluation of attitudes toward a brand, few studies have explored the role

that influencers play in the development of brand trust, brand attitudes, and ultimately influencing purchase intention (Danaswari & Hidayati, 2024; Pandey & Goutam, 2024; Horrich et al., 2024; Hafyana & Alzubi, 2024). Influencers are increasingly becoming important as a tool for promoting products to consumers. Some researchers believe that influencers are particularly effective at persuading consumers to purchase hedonic products (products that provide emotional satisfaction) by eliciting emotional responses (Hafyana & Alzubi, 2024; Horrich et al., 2024).

In addition to the context above, the current study developed and tested an empirical PLS-SEM model investigating how influencers' attributes — expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and authenticity — influence brand trust and how brand trust influences brand attitude and purchase intention. The study also investigated the sequential mediating roles of brand trust and brand attitude in the relationships among these variables, as well as the moderating role of product type in the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention.

The study contributes to the literature by adopting a mediation-focused PLS-SEM method, making three key contributions. It extends the influencer marketing literature a describing the processes linking influencers' characteristics to consumers' purchase intentions. It provides evidence for the growing relevance of authenticity compared to traditional credibility aspects in the development of consumer-based brand trust. Finally, the study evaluated the stability of attitudinal pathways across different product categories, contributing to existing debates about the boundary conditions for influencers' effectiveness (Cheah et al., 2024; Xiong & Tseng, 2024; Trisnawati et al., 2025).

## 2.0 Literature Review

The majority of existing research has focused on the influence of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intentions and brand-related outcomes. Research is expanding to explore the mechanisms and pathways by which these social media influencers influence consumers' behaviours (mediating variables) and the situational factors that may determine those influences (moderating variables).

Recent research supports the idea that social media influencers typically have an indirect effect on consumers' behaviours rather than a direct one; their influences occur through psychological and relational processes, including, but not limited to, trust, parasocial interaction, engagement, and attitudes toward the product or service being promoted.

Trisnawati et al. (2025) investigated the effects of two dimensions of social media influencers-the degree to which an influencer discloses intimate aspects about themselves (intimate self-disclosure) and how closely an influencer's self-concept aligns with that of the target audience (influencer-self congruence)- on purchase intentions. They highlighted the role of parasocial relationships (a mediated relationship) and the potential moderating effect of congruence between an influencer and the product or service she/he is promoting.

Their results indicate that both forms of influencer self-disclosure have a significant mediated effect on purchase intentions through parasocial relationships with an influencer, whereas the congruence between an influencer and the product or service being promoted did not moderate this effect.

In another study, Renganathan et al. (2025) studied the effects of social media influencer attributes on Generation Z's purchase intentions toward counterfeit fashion products in Malaysia. This study also identified self-determination as a mediator in this relationship. The researchers found that social media influencer attributes had a statistically significant positive effect on purchase intentions; autonomy, ideality, and relatedness were all important mediators in this relationship.

In addition, Basalamah et al. (2025) also investigated the relationship between social media usage, beauty influencers and local Indonesian beauty product purchasing behavior. In their study, Basalamah et al. (2025) found that social media usage was a mediator in this process. They further found that beauty influencers have an indirect effect on purchasing behavior; however, they do have an effect on social media usage, which increases the likelihood of purchasing behaviour.

In another study, Siddiqui et al. (2025) examined the influence of digital marketing strategies on fashion apparel purchasing decisions. In their study, the authors demonstrated that eWOM is a mediator between social media marketing, content marketing and consumer preferences.

The effects of dimensions of social media marketing on the purchasing behaviors of young consumers in developing countries using social media was the focus of Ismael et al.'s (2025) study of the effects of dimensions of social media marketing (quality of social media content, quality of interactions with the company, brand awareness and influencer marketing) on the purchasing behaviors of young people in Bangladesh. Ismael et al. (2025) found that all three of these factors had a very significant, positive effect on the purchasing decisions of young people.

Jayasingh et al. (2025) also researched the impact of social media influencers on consumers by studying virtual influencers created through Artificial Intelligence (AI). They found that an influencer's credibility, informativeness, and human-likeness significantly increase a consumer's engagement with and likelihood of purchasing the influencer; however, an influencer's attractiveness and entertainment value may cause a consumer to engage with them, but does not cause a consumer to make a purchase.

The study by Yu et al. (2025) is another example of the increasing relevance of virtual and digital influencers, exploring how they can be used for tourism and hospitality e-commerce live streaming. The researchers found that two factors drive consumers' purchase intentions: emotional engagement and a parasocial relationship with the influencer, and that when an influencer-product relationship is present, it enhances both.

Taalohi (2025) researched the role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) on influencing the purchase intentions of consumers, and found that brand equity acts as a moderator of the relationship between eWOM and consumer purchase intentions; in other words, when a brand has high levels of brand equity, eWOM will positively influence consumer purchasing decisions.

The authors of the studies mentioned above also identified the main factors underlying the three credibility dimensions of a fashion influencer and their effects on consumers' behaviour and their intention to buy from or recommend a specific

brand. Specifically, they found that trustworthiness and perceived expertise have a significant impact on consumers' attitudes toward fashion influencers and are related to both purchase and recommendation intentions. However, attractiveness has a less significant impact than the other two dimensions. On the other hand, Ginting et al. (2025) studied the moderating role of brand image in the relationships among loyalty, price sensitivity, consumer reviews, purchasing decisions, and influencer marketing. According to their results, brand image is a very important moderator because it increases the probability of making a purchase and decreases price sensitivity; in contrast, loyalty and influencer marketing do not directly affect purchase intent.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature provides evidence of the importance of intermediate variables (i.e., trust, engagement, parasocial interaction, and attitude) as possible explanations for influencer effectiveness. In contrast, it provides mixed results on the moderating variables (e.g., product congruence and brand image). Therefore, there is a need for integrative models capable of analysing influencer characteristics, brand trust, brand attitude, and purchase intention simultaneously in a single analytical framework—this is the task addressed by the current research through a PLS-SEM approach.

## 3.0 Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative, cross-sectional research design** to examine the impact of social media influencer attributes on consumers' purchase intention through the mediating roles of **brand trust** and **brand attitude**, and the moderating role of **product type**. A structured questionnaire-based survey was employed to collect primary data from active social media users who had prior exposure to influencer-endorsed products. The proposed conceptual framework was empirically tested using **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)**, which is well suited for complex mediation models and prediction-oriented research objectives.

### 3.2 Conceptual Framework and Variables

The study framework consists of:

- **Independent variables**: Influencer Expertise (EXP), Trustworthiness (TRU), Attractiveness (ATT), and Authenticity (AUT)
- **Mediating variables**: Brand Trust (BT) and Brand Attitude (BA)
- **Dependent variable**: Purchase Intention (PI)
- **Moderating variable**: Product Type (PT)

### 3.3 Variable Definitions and Literature Support

### 3.3.1 Influencer Attributes

Influencer expertise is defined as the perceived knowledge base, skills and professionalism of social media influencers relative to the products they endorse. This helps to explain why consumers who perceive an endorser as having relevant expertise will view that endorser as a source of reliable information, which will enhance the likelihood that the consumer will have positive attitudes toward the endorsed brand.

Influencer trustworthiness is the extent to which a consumer believes an endorser to be honest, trustworthy and reliable. An endorser with high levels of trustworthiness will reduce scepticism on the part of the consumer and increase the level of confidence that the consumer has in the recommendation of the influencer.

Influencer attractiveness represents the degree to which a social media influencer is physically appealing, is liked by others and has a charismatic personality. Historically, researchers have indicated that the attractiveness of an influencer was one of the most important variables in explaining how influential an endorsement would be. However, recent research suggests that while an attractive influencer can contribute positively to the effectiveness of an advertisement, it may not be enough to generate the desired level of trust or to produce the intended response of purchasing the product being endorsed by the influencer.

Influencer authenticity is the degree to which a social media influencer is seen as genuine, sincere and consistent in their communications and endorsement behaviours. When social media influencers appear to be authentic in their communications and endorsement behaviours, they are more likely to be perceived as being transparent and values-based. These perceptions of transparency and values-based communication will directly affect

the trust that consumers place in the influencer and ultimately affect whether or not consumers will make purchases based on the recommendations of the social media influencer.

### 3.3.2 Brand-Related Mediators

**Brand Trust (BT)**

Brand trust represents consumers' confidence in a brand's reliability, integrity, and ability to fulfil its promises. In influencer marketing contexts, brand trust acts as a psychological mechanism translating influencer credibility into favourable brand evaluations.

**Brand Attitude (BA)**

Brand attitude reflects consumers' overall evaluative judgment of a brand, encompassing affective and cognitive responses. Positive brand attitudes increase the likelihood of favorable behavioural outcomes such as purchase intention.

### 3.3.3 Dependent and Moderating Variables

**Purchase Intention (PI)** Purchase intention denotes consumers' willingness and likelihood to buy products endorsed by influencers. It is a widely used proxy for actual purchase behaviour in consumer behaviour research.

**Product Type (PT)** Product type distinguishes between different categories of products (e.g., hedonic vs. utilitarian) and is used in this study as a moderating variable to assess whether the strength of the brand attitude–purchase intention relationship varies across product contexts.

### 3.4 Literature Matrix Supporting Study Variables

**Table 1.0 Literature Support for Constructs**

| Construct | Definition (Brief) | Key Supporting Studies |
|---|---|---|
| Influencer Expertise (EXP) | Perceived knowledge and competence of influencers | Garg & Bakshi (2024); Fariz & Winarsih (2025); Jayasingh et al. (2025) |
| Influencer Trustworthiness (TRU) | Perceived honesty and credibility of influencers | Afzal et al. (2024); Garg & Bakshi (2024); Zaman et al. (2024) |
| Influencer Attractiveness (ATT) | Physical appeal and likability of influencers | Fariz & Winarsih (2025); Jayasingh et al. (2025) |
| Influencer Authenticity (AUT) | Perceived genuineness and sincerity | Jamil et al. (2024); Cheah et al. (2024); Renganathan et al. (2025) |
| Brand Trust (BT) | Confidence in brand reliability and integrity | Zaman et al. (2024); Garg & Bakshi (2024); Khan et al. (2024) |
| Brand Attitude (BA) | Overall evaluation of the brand | Alqaysi et al. (2024); Le & Ngoc (2024) |
| Purchase Intention (PI) | Willingness to purchase endorsed products | Afzal et al. (2024); Ismael et al. (2025); Yu et al. (2025) |
| Product Type (PT) | Product category differentiation | Danaswari & Hidayati (2024); Pandey & Goutam (2024) |

### 3.5 Measurement Instrument

Measurement items were adapted from established scales used in prior influencer marketing and consumer behavior studies. All latent constructs were measured using **multiple items** on a **seven-point Likert scale** ranging from *1 = Strongly Disagree* to *7 = Strongly Agree*. Product type was measured as a single-item variable and treated as an observed moderator.

A pilot test was conducted to ensure clarity, content validity, and reliability of the questionnaire. Minor wording adjustments were made based on respondent feedback.

### 3.6 Sampling and Data Collection

Active social media users that follow social media influencers and are likely to purchase products as a result of being influenced by them were the target population of this study. Data were collected from a large number of active social media users via an on-line questionnaire distributed throughout social media platforms. Total 350 responses were collected. A convenience sampling strategy was used because of the accessibility issues associated with collecting data from a large number of people in order to conduct an exploratory research design; and to satisfy the requirements of the sampling

strategy for conducting PLS-SEM analysis (the data collection instrument) based on the minimum required sample size to provide a sufficient amount of statistical power to test the hypotheses generated by the PLS-SEM analysis.

### 3.7 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analysed using **SmartPLS** following a two-step approach:
1. **Measurement model assessment** to evaluate reliability and validity.
2. **Structural model assessment** to test hypothesized relationships, mediation, and moderation effects.

Bootstrapping with **5,000 resamples** was employed to assess the statistical significance of path coefficients. Model evaluation criteria included **$R^2$**, **$f^2$**, **SRMR**, and **HTMT**, in line with PLS-SEM best practices.

### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was collected, and the study complied with standard ethical guidelines for academic research.

### 3.9 Hypotheses of the Study

#### 3.9.1 Influencer Attributes and Brand Trust
**H1:** Influencer expertise has a positive effect on brand trust.
**H2:** Influencer trustworthiness has a positive effect on brand trust.
**H3:** Influencer attractiveness has a positive effect on brand trust.
**H4:** Influencer authenticity has a positive effect on brand trust.

#### 3.9.2 Brand Trust, Brand Attitude, and Purchase Intention
**H5:** Brand trust has a positive effect on brand attitude.

**H6:** Brand attitude has a positive effect on purchase intention.
**H7:** Brand trust has a positive effect on purchase intention.

### 4.0 Data Analysis and Interpretation

A Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method with the SmartPLS software was used to investigate the conceptual framework developed in the present study. The reasons that PLS-SEM was selected as the method for this study are because it has been demonstrated as being particularly effective for analysing complex mediation models; it is particularly well-suited for studies whose primary objective is predictive; and it can analyse data from non-normal distributions. In addition to these characteristics, a two-stage methodology was utilized to evaluate the measurement model and the structural model for the purpose of this analysis.

### 4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed to establish **internal consistency reliability**, **convergent validity**, and **discriminant validity** of the latent constructs.

#### 4.1.1 Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency was examined using **Cronbach's alpha (α)**, **composite reliability (ρc)**, and **rho_A (ρA)**. As shown in Table 4.1, all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of **0.70**, confirming adequate reliability.

#### 4.1.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**. AVE values for all constructs range from **0.663 to 0.813**, exceeding the minimum criterion of **0.50**, indicating that the constructs explain more than half of the variance in their indicators.

**Table 2.0  Reliability and Convergent Validity**

| Construct | Cronbach's α | ρA | Composite Reliability (ρc) | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ATT | 0.746 | 0.757 | 0.855 | 0.663 |
| AUT | 0.870 | 0.873 | 0.911 | 0.720 |
| BA | 0.856 | 0.859 | 0.912 | 0.776 |
| BT | 0.890 | 0.893 | 0.924 | 0.752 |
| EXP | 0.850 | 0.853 | 0.899 | 0.690 |
| PI | 0.885 | 0.892 | 0.929 | 0.813 |
| TRU | 0.866 | 0.874 | 0.909 | 0.714 |

*Note: PT1 is a single-item variable; reliability statistics are not interpreted in the same manner as multi-item reflective constructs.*

### 4.1.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the **Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT)**. All HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of **0.85**, confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct.

**Table 3.0 Discriminant Validity (HTMT – Selected Values)**

| Construct Pair | HTMT |
|---|---|
| BA ↔ PI | 0.677 |
| BT ↔ BA | 0.627 |
| BT ↔ PI | 0.552 |
| BT ↔ AUT | 0.555 |
| TRU ↔ ATT | 0.593 |
| EXP ↔ ATT | 0.523 |

Overall, the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity, permitting further analysis of the structural relationships.

### 4.2 Structural Model Assessment

### 4.2.1 Model Fit

Model fit was evaluated using the **Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)**. The SRMR value for the estimated model is **0.056**, which is below the recommended threshold of **0.08**, indicating an acceptable model fit.

### 4.2.2 Coefficient of Determination ($R^2$)

The explanatory power of the model was examined using $R^2$ and **adjusted $R^2$** values. As shown in Table 4.3, the model explains a **moderate proportion of variance**, which is acceptable for consumer behaviour research.

**Table 4.0 Coefficient of Determination**

| Endogenous Construct | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|
| Brand Trust (BT) | 0.359 | 0.352 |
| Brand Attitude (BA) | 0.301 | 0.299 |
| Purchase Intention (PI) | 0.394 | 0.387 |

### 4.2.3 Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses were tested using **bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples**. Table 4.4 presents the standardized path coefficients, t-values, and p-values.

**Table 5.0 Structural Path Results**

| Path | β | t-value | p-value | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EXP → BT | 0.163 | 3.213 | 0.001 | Significant |
| TRU → BT | 0.193 | 3.404 | 0.001 | Significant |
| ATT → BT | 0.088 | 1.838 | 0.066 | Not significant (5%) |
| AUT → BT | 0.363 | 7.632 | <0.001 | Significant |
| BT → BA | 0.548 | 14.699 | <0.001 | Significant |
| BA → PI | 0.464 | 9.149 | <0.001 | Significant |
| BT → PI | 0.240 | 4.504 | <0.001 | Significant |

**Interpretation:**
Influencers' expertise, credibility, and authenticity are all very influential to a consumer's perceived trust in the brand; however, authenticity was found to be the most significant influencer of brand trust. The consumers' perception of the brand is influenced by their perception of the brand's trust in the brand and this perception of the brand directly influences

the consumers' intent to make a purchase. Additionally, the consumers' attitude towards the brand is also a significant predictor of the consumers' intent to make a purchase. Finally, the attractiveness of an influencer has no statistical significance to a consumers' perception of the brand's trust at the 95% confidence interval.

### 4.3 Mediation Analysis

To examine the underlying mechanism, mediation was assessed by evaluating both **direct** and **indirect effects**.

### Structural Equations

$$BT = 0.163(EXP) + 0.193(TRU) + 0.088(ATT) + 0.363(AUT) + \varepsilon_{BT}$$
$$BA = 0.548(BT) + \varepsilon_{BA}$$
$$PI = 0.464(BA) + 0.240(BT) + \varepsilon_{PI}$$

The direct effect of **brand trust on purchase intention** remains significant, while the indirect path **BT → BA → PI** is also significant. This indicates **partial mediation**.

### Interpretation:

Brand attitude partially mediates the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention, suggesting that brand trust influences consumer purchase behaviour both **directly** and **indirectly through attitudinal mechanisms**.

### 4.4 Moderation Analysis (Product Type)

The interaction of product type (PT1) as a moderator in the relationship between brand attitude (BA) and purchase intention was tested using an interaction term (BA × PT1). Since the interaction effect is not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.030$, $p = 0.422$), it can be inferred that the differences in the strengths of relationships between BA and PI are not significantly different among various product types.

### Interpretation:

While brand attitude is a strong predictor of purchase intention, its effect appears consistent across different product categories, suggesting limited boundary conditions for product type in this model.

### 4.5 Effect Size Assessment (f²)

Effect size analysis shows that:

- **BT → BA** exhibits a **large effect** ($f^2 = 0.430$),
- **BA → PI** shows a **medium-to-large effect** ($f^2 = 0.247$),
- **AUT → BT** demonstrates a **medium effect** ($f^2 = 0.181$).

Other paths exhibit small or negligible effects, reinforcing the central role of **brand trust and brand attitude** in the model.

### 4.6 Summary of Findings

The results show how influencer related attributes such as, particularly, authenticity influence consumers' perceptions of their level of trust toward brands, ultimately to affect both brand attitude and purchase intentions. The findings also indicate that a serial mediation framework supports the role of brand trust and brand attitudes as the key psychological drivers of consumer purchase intentions. Ultimately, the hypothesized moderating effects of product category were not shown to exist and thus demonstrate the consistency of the attitudinal path across product categories.

## 5.0 Discussion and Implications

### 5.1 Discussion of Findings

Beginning with the study's objectives and findings, this research examines how an influencer's attributes affect the consumer's purchase intent by influencing brand trust and attitudes toward the brand, and provides evidence for the moderating effect of product type.

The current research contributes some essential theoretical and empirical knowledge.

First, it was found that influencer authenticity is the most influential attribute in creating brand trust; that is, it will create the most significant amount of brand trust compared to the other two influencer attributes (i.e., expertise and trustworthiness). This finding is consistent with the growing body of research on digital marketing, which describes a trend among consumers of perceiving genuineness, transparency, and alignment of values with the influencers they follow as more important than merely seeing that the influencer has technical competence or can promote a particular brand.

This finding supports the idea that authenticity functions as a credibility signal to reduce consumer

scepticism and build relational trust between the consumer and the brand endorsed by the influencer.

Second, influencer expertise and trustworthiness each have a significant positive effect on brand trust, supporting the continued importance of these two credibility attributes in building consumer perceptions. The results of this research support previous studies which suggest that while authenticity is becoming a significant factor in the use of social media for endorsements, credibility (traditional) still play a significant role in the building of trust in endorsement contexts. Third, and most importantly, attractive influencers do not have a statistically significant positive relationship to build trust in brands at the conventional 0.05 alpha level. While physically attractive individuals are still influential on social media, the fact that there is no positive relationship, suggests that the trend away from using superficial factors (such as physical appearance) to evaluate the credibility of an influencer promoting a product/service is continuing.

Therefore, while attractive individuals may have previously been able to build trust solely on their good looks, the current digital environment now requires a greater degree of substance when evaluating an influencer's credibility with consumers.

The third finding supports the authors' model of serial mediation. The results show that brand trust positively influences brand attitude; in turn, brand attitude has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Additionally, the link from brand trust to purchase intention remains significant. Therefore, trust functions as a cognitive-affective mechanism (a preliminary stage in the formation of brand attitudes) and as an unconscious risk-reduction mechanism (influencing purchase decisions). As such, consumers can use trust as a conscious basis for forming attitudes toward a brand and/or as a subconscious mechanism for reducing perceived risk.

The final finding from the moderated regression analyses shows that the product category did not moderate the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. Thus, regardless of the product category being promoted, if a consumer forms a positive attitude toward a brand (because of an influencer), they will likely translate that positive attitude into purchasing that product. Therefore, the attitudinal processes underlying purchase intentions are relatively stable across products and potentially applicable to all types of product categories within influencer-based marketing strategies.

## 5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways.

In its first application to the literature on influencer marketing, this research extends our understanding of how marketers can use influencers to build brands by developing and testing a serial mediation model that includes the following variables: attributes of the influencer; the relationship or trust with the brand; attitudes toward the brand; and the intention to purchase from the brand. Specifically, the study demonstrated partial mediation (rather than complete mediation), thereby providing empirical evidence for the multidimensional psychological processes that influence consumer behaviour following a influencer endorsement.

In its second contribution to the literature, this research extends credibility theory in digital marketing by identifying authenticity as the primary credibility dimension in establishing brand trust among consumers. These results provide strong evidence for the need to modify traditional source credibility theories to reflect the relative importance of perceptions of the influencer's genuineness and values.

The third contribution lies in the study's failure to find a significant moderating effect of product category on the relationships it established. As such, the study demonstrates that trust-attitude paths are likely to be generalizable across a wide variety of product types.

## 5.3 Managerial Implications

The findings offer several actionable insights for marketers, brand managers, and influencer strategists.

By using authentic influencers, brands can identify them by assessing their engagement with the content they post, their consistency in posting, and whether they provide transparency about who is behind the content.

Secondly, the focus of influencer marketing campaigns should be building trust before driving conversions; therefore, it would be more beneficial for brands to utilise long-term partnership strategies and provide users with an authentic, honest product experience rather than using users as a means to promote a product.

Thirdly, the manager should understand that brand attitude is a primary method for generating conversions from influencer content; therefore, when creating influencer content, the goal should be to both educate the consumer and create a positive emotional and evaluative response to the brand, which will directly correlate to the consumers' intent to purchase the product.

Lastly, since there is no significant difference in the relationship between attitude and intention (regardless of product category), managers can use the same influencer engagement methods across product categories by focusing on building trust and shaping attitudes rather than developing product-specific influencer marketing strategies.
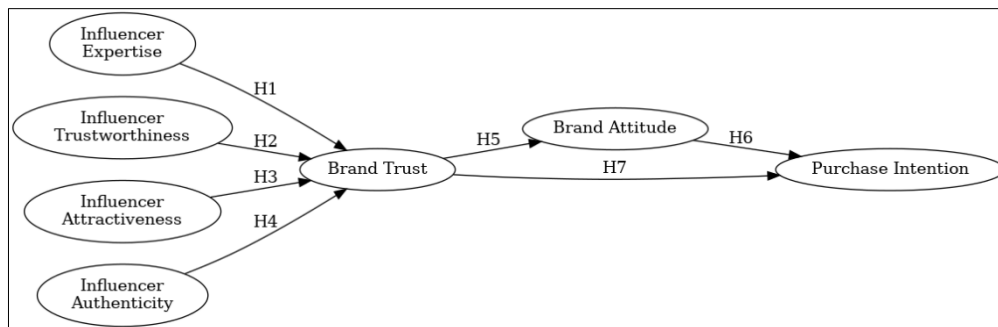


**Figure 1 Hypothesised research model illustrating the relationships between influencer attributes, brand trust, brand attitude, and purchase intention.**

The hypothesised model illustrates how influencer attributes influence purchase intention through the mediating roles of brand trust and brand attitude. Influencer expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and authenticity are proposed to enhance brand trust, which subsequently shapes brand attitude and directly and indirectly affects purchase intention.

## 6.0 Conclusion

In this study, we find empirical support for how different aspects of influencers are associated with influencing consumer intent to make a purchase (i.e., purchase intention) in the context of digital marketing. The study uses a PLS-SEM methodology to demonstrate that two variables (brand trust and brand attitude) sequentially mediate the relationship between an influencer's credibility and consumer-related outcomes (e.g., purchase). Additionally, the study found that among the different influencer attribute characteristics, "authenticity" is the most important determinant of brand trust, indicating a transition from relational/credibility-based to value-based and relational credibility in modern influencer marketing.

Overall, our results indicate the importance of building trust and fostering positive attitudes toward brands and suggest that the ways these constructs impact consumer behaviour are similar across multiple product categories. Finally, the study adds to the existing body of knowledge on the effective use of influencers and enables practitioners to design better, more trustworthy, and attitude-driven influencer marketing strategies.

### 6.1 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study contributes to understanding how social media can build customer trust and support brand attitudes, it is limited in several ways. For example, because of the cross-sectional nature of the data collection, we cannot determine whether trusting a company on social media leads to the formation of positive attitudes toward the company. Therefore, for the following study, researchers might collect data over time (longitudinal) or manipulate consumers' attitudes toward companies and measure the impact of these manipulations on their willingness to trust them (experimental). Additionally, the specific cultural and industry contexts included in this study may limit its applicability to other cultures and industries. As

such, future studies could include samples from different cultures and/or industries and investigate potential differences in how social media affects trust and brand attitudes among these groups. Finally, many other factors can influence an individual's willingness to trust a company on social media, such as the level of involvement with the company and the degree of scepticism about marketing messages, which have not been addressed here. The inclusion of these variables into the model will help researchers better understand the mechanisms underlying social media's effect on building customer trust and brand attitudes.

## Appendix A: Measurement Items

All constructs were measured using previously validated scales adapted to the context of social media influencer marketing. Responses were captured on a **seven-point Likert scale** ranging from **1 = Strongly Disagree** to **7 = Strongly Agree**.

### Influencer Expertise (EXP)

- EXP1: The influencer has sufficient knowledge about the product/brand.
- EXP2: The influencer is experienced in reviewing products in this category.
- EXP3: The influencer provides accurate and useful information.
- EXP4: The influencer is competent in evaluating the product.

### Influencer Trustworthiness (TRU)

- TRU1: The influencer is honest in their product recommendations.
- TRU2: The influencer can be trusted.
- TRU3: The influencer provides unbiased opinions.
- TRU4: The influencer is reliable when promoting brands.

### Influencer Attractiveness (ATT)

- ATT1: The influencer is physically attractive.
- ATT2: The influencer is likable.
- ATT3: The influencer has an appealing personality.

### Influencer Authenticity (AUT)

- AUT1: The influencer appears genuine.
- AUT2: The influencer promotes products that align with their personal values.
- AUT3: The influencer is sincere in their endorsements.
- AUT4: The influencer's recommendations feel natural rather than forced.

### Brand Trust (BT)

- BT1: I trust the brand endorsed by the influencer.
- BT2: The brand keeps its promises.
- BT3: The brand is reliable.
- BT4: The brand is dependable.

### Brand Attitude (BA)

- BA1: I have a positive opinion about the brand.
- BA2: I like the brand promoted by the influencer.
- BA3: The brand has a favourable image.

### Purchase Intention (PI)

- PI1: I am likely to purchase the product endorsed by the influencer.
- PI2: I would consider buying the product in the future.
- PI3: I would recommend purchasing the product to others.

### Product Type (PT)

Product type was measured as a single-item variable capturing respondents' perception of the endorsed product category (e.g., hedonic vs. utilitarian) and was used as a moderating variable in the analysis.

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