



The Effect of Content Credibility and Attractiveness on Purchase Intention: A Systematic Literature Review

Nisrina Hasna Safardianti¹, Ratih Hasanah Sudradjat¹

¹ Universitas Telkom Bandung, Indonesia

nisrinahasnaa@telkomuniversity.ac.id

Abstract

Marketing strategies through digital influencers have become a key pillar in influencing purchase intention on social media. This study revealed that source credibility, including expertise, trustworthiness, and physical attractiveness, is a key determinant of message effectiveness. Key findings indicate that consumer engagement plays a moderating role in the persuasion process. Highly engaged consumers tend to use the central route (in-depth argument evaluation), while those with low engagement rely more on peripheral cues such as visual aesthetics. This paper aims to identify the credibility and attractiveness of influencers in significantly increasing purchase intention. A major challenge remains, namely ad avoidance. The method used was a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Searches were conducted in Scopus, SINTA, and Google Scholar databases for open-access journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. The results show that consumer behavior is significantly influenced by the level of distraction and relevance of the content presented. Overall, content success depends heavily on the influencer's ability to align credible content with audience needs.

Keywords: Source Credibility, Attractiveness, Purchase Intention, Influencer Marketing, SLR

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INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing communication has become a primary strategy for organizations in reaching and engaging audiences in the digital era. The rapid development of social media platforms has transformed how companies interact with consumers, enabling more direct, personalized, and interactive communication processes. Within this context, influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant form of digital marketing communication, where influencers individuals with substantial social media presence act as intermediaries in delivering persuasive marketing messages to targeted audiences (Khamis et al., 2017).

The growth of influencer marketing continues to accelerate alongside the increasing adoption of digital platforms. Influencers are no longer limited to promoting products but also function as opinion leaders who shape consumer perceptions and influence purchasing decisions. Recent studies highlight that influencer marketing enhances consumer engagement and strengthens brand-consumer relationships, making it a crucial strategy in contemporary marketing practices (Ampornklinkaew, 2025).

A key determinant of influencer marketing success is influencer credibility, which refers to the degree to which an influencer is perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and attractive. This concept is commonly divided into three main dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Empirical evidence suggests that these dimensions significantly influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Saskara & Achmad, 2024). Furthermore, studies indicate that

expertise and trustworthiness tend to have a stronger impact compared to attractiveness in shaping consumer decisions (Azzahra & Roslina, 2025).

In addition to its direct influence, influencer credibility also plays an important role in enhancing consumer engagement and trust toward brands. Prior research demonstrates that engagement and customer trust function as mediating variables in the relationship between influencer credibility and digital marketing effectiveness (Sherbaz Khan, 2023). This indicates that the influence of credibility is not only direct but also operates indirectly through psychological mechanisms that affect consumer behavior.

However, despite its growing importance, the effectiveness of influencer marketing is increasingly challenged by issues related to authenticity and trust. The rapid rise of influencers has led to practices such as fake followers, excessive endorsements, and low congruence between influencers and promoted products. These issues contribute to increasing consumer skepticism, particularly when marketing messages are perceived as overly commercial or lacking authenticity (Fadli et al., 2025). Many influencers purchase followers, likes, and comments to create the illusion of popularity and credibility, causing audiences to question the authenticity of influencer-generated content. Excessive commercialization has also contributed to declining trust because audiences increasingly perceive influencer endorsements as transactional rather than genuine recommendations.

The emergence of parasocial relationships further complicates influencer marketing dynamics. Audiences often develop emotional attachments to influencers and perceive them as trustworthy figures or relatable companions. However, repeated sponsored content and excessive product promotions can damage these emotional connections, leading to audience skepticism, trust fatigue, and ad avoidance behavior. Consumers increasingly ignore influencer advertisements when they perceive them as manipulative, repetitive, or lacking relevance. This issue is especially significant among Generation Z consumers, who tend to value transparency, honesty, and relatability more strongly than previous generations. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are more capable of identifying inauthentic endorsements and are more likely to reject overly commercialized influencer content.

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between influencer credibility and digital marketing communication effectiveness. Findings generally indicate that influencer credibility significantly affects variables such as purchase intention, brand trust, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Khairul Aini et al., 2025). Additionally, research shows that influencer credibility, together with brand image and e-WOM, simultaneously influences consumer purchase intention (Ramadhani & Fitriyadi, 2026). However, inconsistencies remain in the literature. Some studies suggest that certain dimensions of credibility, such as attractiveness, do not significantly influence purchase intention, while others report that all dimensions have a positive and significant effect. These inconsistencies indicate that the impact of influencer credibility is highly contextual, depending on factors such as platform characteristics, product types, audience involvement, and communication style (Hadi et al., 2025). Previous studies also reveal differences across industries, suggesting that influencer effectiveness depends on product involvement, audience characteristics, and communication context.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding how consumers process influencer marketing messages (Migkos et al., 2025). According to ELM, persuasion occurs through two different routes: the central route and the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Consumers with high involvement in products such as skincare, health, or financial services tend to evaluate information critically through the central route, focusing on expertise, argument quality, and trustworthiness. Meanwhile, consumers purchasing low-involvement products such as fashion or lifestyle items are more likely to rely on peripheral cues, including attractiveness, popularity, and visual aesthetics. Engagement also functions as an important moderating variable because highly engaged consumers are more likely to process information deeply, while low-engagement consumers rely more on emotional and visual cues (Migkos et al., 2025).

In recent years, influencer marketing has also entered a new technological phase characterized by the rise of artificial intelligence, virtual influencers, algorithmic recommendation systems, and social commerce. Platforms such as TikTok increasingly rely on algorithm-driven personalization to determine what content audiences consume. The emergence of AI-generated influencers and virtual influencers raises important questions regarding whether authenticity and credibility can still exist when influencers are no longer human figures. Additionally, the dominance of short-form videos, live

shopping, and interactive commerce has transformed how consumers interact with influencer-generated content, creating new opportunities and challenges for digital marketing communication.

Based on these conditions, several research gaps can be identified. First, there is limited research that comprehensively integrates the dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness within a unified analytical framework. Second, inconsistencies persist regarding which dimensions of credibility have the strongest influence on purchase intention across industries and platforms. Third, most existing studies employ quantitative cross-sectional methods using SEM-PLS and focus mainly on Gen Z respondents in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, limiting the generalizability of findings across cultures and demographic groups. Fourth, there remains limited discussion regarding the interaction between influencer credibility, artificial intelligence personalization, TikTok algorithms, and virtual influencers. Finally, there is still a lack of systematic literature review (SLR) studies that synthesize these findings comprehensively and critically.

This study offers novelty by applying a systematic literature review approach to integrate and evaluate existing research on influencer credibility and digital marketing communication effectiveness. Through this approach, the study identifies patterns, trends, contradictions, and emerging issues within influencer marketing research while providing a more holistic understanding of how influencer credibility contributes to engagement, trust, and purchase intention. Furthermore, this study expands previous discussions by incorporating authenticity crisis issues, cross-industry comparisons, ELM perspectives, and future trends such as AI influencers and algorithmic personalization into the broader discussion of influencer marketing effectiveness.

The objective of this study is to systematically review the literature on influencer credibility and its role in digital marketing communication effectiveness. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify the most influential dimensions of influencer credibility, (2) analyze the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer behavior, (3) examine differences in influencer effectiveness across industries, and (4) provide strategic insights and future research directions for optimizing influencer-based digital marketing strategies in increasingly dynamic digital environments.

Literature Review

The Concept of Influencer Credibility

An influencer's credibility is a multidimensional construct that determines the extent to which followers accept and are influenced by the messages conveyed. Based on an updated classical model, this credibility is primarily built on three main pillars: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. In the context of modern social media, expertise is no longer judged solely by formal credentials but by the consistency of content and deep knowledge within the specific niche the influencer specializes in (AlFarraj et al., 2021).

The aspect of trustworthiness is the most critical factor distinguishing influencers from traditional celebrities. Followers tend to assess credibility based on their perception of the influencer's honesty and objectivity when reviewing a product. When an influencer is perceived as sincere and not solely driven by commercial motives, follower engagement increases, which ultimately strengthens the effectiveness of the marketing message being conveyed (Vrontis et al., 2021).

In addition to personal attributes, credibility today is heavily influenced by perceptions of authenticity and shared life experiences (homophily) between influencers and their audiences. Consumers feel more connected to influencers who showcase a real side of life that is relevant to their daily routines. This strong parasocial relationship makes advice from influencers considered on par with recommendations from close friends, making the dimension of emotional engagement a new component in measuring credibility on digital platforms (Lou & Yuan, 2018; Masuda et al., 2022).

In the increasingly competitive world of digital marketing, influencer credibility has been proven to have a direct impact on consumer purchase intent. High levels of credibility can reduce consumer skepticism toward advertisements and build a positive brand image. Recent research indicates that companies that select influencers based on value congruence and credibility, rather than solely on the number of followers, achieve significantly more effective and sustainable conversion results (Putri & Handriana, 2023).

Source credibility in the context of social media generally refers to the audience's perception of a message sender as trustworthy and possessing relevant knowledge. According to the literature, this credibility is built on three main dimensions (Octaviani & Selamat, 2023):

1. Expertise: The extent to which an influencer is perceived to possess knowledge, experience, or skills in a specific product category
2. Trustworthiness: The level of the audience's confidence in the influencer's honesty, objectivity, and integrity when providing reviews.
3. Attractiveness: The physical and non-physical qualities that make the audience feel connected to or want to emulate the figure.

Research shows that an influencer's credibility significantly increases consumer trust in a brand. When consumers feel that an influencer possesses integrity, the perceived risk of making a purchase decreases, thereby increasing purchase intent.

The Role of Mediation in Shaping Purchase Intentions

The mechanism by which purchase intent is formed often does not occur directly, but rather through mediating variables that bridge marketing stimuli and consumer decisions. One of the most dominant mediating variables is consumer trust. Trust acts as an emotional filter; even if a brand runs a massive promotional campaign, purchase intent will not emerge if the message does not cross the trust threshold. In the context of digital marketing, trust mediates the relationship between source credibility (such as influencers or advertisements) and purchase intent, where consumers assess risk before committing to a transaction (Masuda et al., 2022). In addition to trust, brand image serves as a psychological mediator that transforms perceptions of quality into a desire to own. External stimuli such as service quality or corporate social responsibility (CSR) often.

Customer engagement also serves as a key mediator within the social media ecosystem. The interactions that occur between users and brand content foster deep parasocial relationships. This mediating role of engagement explains why informative and entertaining content can increase purchase intent; not merely because of the information itself, but because the interaction process creates an emotional bond. Without active engagement, product information may remain merely passive knowledge without the motivation to buy (Vrontis et al., 2021).

Finally, within the framework of modern consumer behavior, attitude toward the brand serves as the final mediator that integrates all cognitive and affective stimuli. This attitude represents a comprehensive evaluation made by consumers after processing various information and experiences. Based on the theory of planned behavior, purchase intention is a direct result of a positive attitude mediated by subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. By understanding these mediating variables, marketers can design strategies that not only target the result but also strengthen critical points in the consumer decision-making journey (AlFarraj et al., 2021).

The relationship between credibility and purchase intent is often not direct but is mediated by psychological and informational variables.

1. Brand Trust: An influencer's high credibility is transferred into trust in the brands they promote. This trust serves as a crucial foundation for consumers before deciding to make a purchase.
2. Electronic Reviews (e-Reviews): The credibility of the source also influences the perceived quality of the reviews provided. Reviews deemed credible become the primary reference for potential buyers in validating a product's value, which ultimately sparks purchase intent.
3. Brand Image: Effective social media marketing can build a positive brand image, which acts as a bridge to purchase intent.

Trends in Research Findings Across Various Sectors

Research findings on the effectiveness of credibility may vary depending on the industry category:

1. Fashion Industry: Influencer credibility has a very strong and direct impact on brand trust and purchase intent, as visual and lifestyle aspects are highly dominant in this sector.
2. Beauty/Skincare Industry: While credibility remains important, some studies suggest that overall social media marketing factors (such as posting frequency and engagement) sometimes have a more dominant impact than the individual influencer's credibility alone. This indicates that for high-involvement products, consumers may seek validation from various sources, not just a single figure.

Based on a review of recent studies (2023–2025), most of the research employs an explanatory quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Sample sizes range from 100 to 150 respondents who are active on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, indicating that current research focuses on the digital generation audience that is intensively exposed to visual content.

Collectively, the literature confirms that the credibility and appeal of content are key pillars of digital marketing strategies. Although their impact may vary across industries, the primary mechanism lies in influencers' ability to translate their personal credibility into brand trust or convincing reviews, which then become the main drivers of consumer purchasing interest.

The growing commercialization of influencer marketing has raised concerns regarding authenticity. Practices such as fake followers, excessive endorsements, and artificial engagement may reduce audience trust and increase skepticism toward influencer-generated content. Previous studies suggest that authenticity plays an important role in maintaining emotional connection, engagement, and persuasive effectiveness, particularly among Generation Z consumers who value transparency and relatability.

The effectiveness of influencer credibility varies significantly across industries because different products require different forms of consumer evaluation and persuasion.

Tabel 1. Differences in Influencer Credibility Across Industries

<u>Differences in Influencer Credibility Across Industries</u>	
Industry	Dominant Credibility Factor
Fashion	Attractiveness & lifestyle congruence
Beauty/Skincare	Expertise & authenticity
Tourism	Visual storytelling & trust
Food	Relatability & review honesty
Health	Professional expertise

In the fashion industry, physical attractiveness and lifestyle congruence are highly influential because consumers often purchase products based on identity expression and aspirational lifestyles. Fashion consumers tend to rely on peripheral cues such as aesthetics, popularity, and visual presentation.

In contrast, beauty and skincare products involve higher levels of consumer risk and product involvement. Consumers are more likely to evaluate expertise, authenticity, and product knowledge before making purchasing decisions. They often seek detailed explanations, tutorials, and evidence-based reviews regarding product effectiveness.

In the tourism industry, influencers function as visual storytellers who shape destination images and travel aspirations. Trust and immersive storytelling become critical because audiences rely heavily on influencers' experiences when evaluating travel destinations.

Food-related influencer marketing depends strongly on relatability and honesty. Audiences prefer influencers who provide realistic reviews and authentic reactions rather than overly scripted promotional content. Meanwhile, in the health sector, professional expertise becomes the most critical factor because consumers associate health information with higher perceived risk and credibility requirements.

These differences can be explained through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). High-involvement products such as skincare and health products encourage consumers to process information through the central route, requiring stronger expertise and argument quality. Low-involvement products such as fashion and lifestyle products rely more on peripheral cues such as attractiveness and emotional appeal.

METHOD

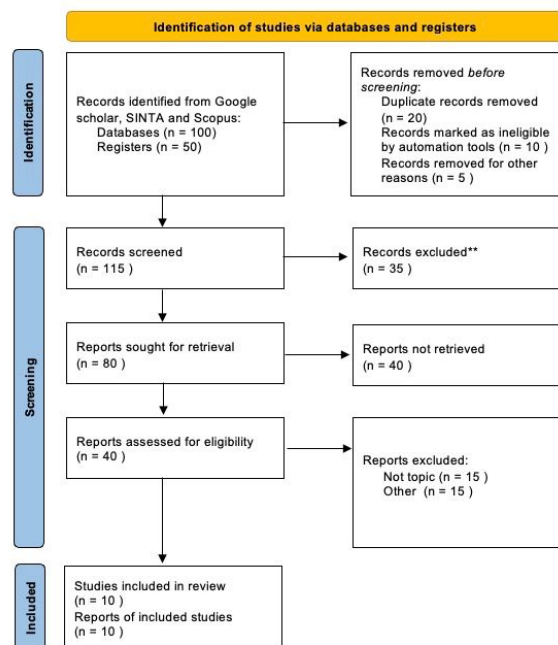
The use of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method in this study aims to map, evaluate, and interpret all relevant research findings related to the phenomenon of influencer credibility and purchase intent. By adopting the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, this study ensures transparency and accountability in the literature selection process, thereby minimizing researcher bias. These systematic steps are crucial for producing a robust synthesis of various empirical findings scattered across various academic platforms.

The initial phase began with identification using three primary databases: Scopus, SINTA, and Google Scholar. Scopus was selected based on its reputation as a reputable international database that includes journals with high impact factors, ensuring the theoretical quality of the articles

reviewed. Meanwhile, SINTA (Science and Technology Index) was used to capture research dynamics within the local Indonesian context, providing a perspective relevant to the characteristics of the domestic market. Google Scholar served as a complementary tool to minimize the risk of publication bias by accessing a broader range of literature, including journal articles that may not yet be indexed in major databases but possess substantial relevance. The keywords used in the search were structured using Boolean operators to improve result accuracy, such as: “Influencer Credibility” AND “Purchase Intention,” as well as “Digital Marketing Strategies” AND “Consumer Behavior.” The search was limited to the past five years (2021–2026) to ensure that the trends analyzed represent current digital marketing phenomena that remain relevant amid the highly dynamic changes in social media algorithms.

Following the initial data collection, a screening phase was conducted based on titles and abstracts. At this stage, the researchers applied strict inclusion criteria, namely: (1) articles must be from peer-reviewed scientific journals, (2) the primary focus of the research must address influencer credibility as a driver of purchase intent, and (3) articles must employ clearly defined quantitative or qualitative methods. Conversely, exclusion criteria included popular articles, opinion pieces, or studies for which full-text access was unavailable. Duplicate articles appearing in more than one database were systematically removed to ensure the uniqueness of each data point.

The next crucial step was an eligibility assessment, which involved a full-text review of the articles that passed the initial screening. The researchers analyzed the methodologies used in these articles, the sample sizes, and the mediating or moderating variables tested. From this rigorous selection process, 10 core articles were chosen that were deemed to make a significant contribution to the development of credibility theory in the digital age. Data was then extracted from the selected articles to identify consistent patterns in their findings. For example, how the dimension of trustworthiness consistently emerges as a strong predictor of purchase intent across various industry sectors. This synthesis process not only summarizes what is already known but also identifies research gaps for future studies. Through this structured PRISMA approach, this study provides a solid theoretical foundation for understanding how source credibility transforms into concrete action in the form of consumer purchasing decisions within the digital ecosystem. The results showed that 10 articles met the criteria and were analyzed further in this study.



Picture 1. Flow chart Prisma

SLR is a systematic process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing all research relevant to a specific topic in this case, influencer credibility and the effectiveness of digital marketing communication. The purpose of this method is to provide a comprehensive overview of the

relationship between influencer credibility and the effectiveness of digital marketing communication, as well as to identify opportunities for future research.

This study follows the SLR method proposed by Xiao and Watson (2019), which consists of three main stages: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting the results.

The first stage involves formulating the research problem and study objectives. In this stage, the researcher defines the research focus: analyzing the relationship between influencer credibility comprising the dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness and the effectiveness of digital marketing communication, measured through engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention. Additionally, during this stage, search keywords such as “influencer credibility,” “digital marketing communication,” and “purchase intention” were identified to locate relevant literature.

The second stage involves the selection and quality evaluation of articles. The researcher collected articles from various scientific databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar published between 2020 and 2025. In the initial stage, approximately 40 articles relevant to the research topic were identified. Subsequently, a screening process was conducted based on the title, abstract, and content of the articles, resulting in approximately 10 articles meeting the inclusion criteria specifically, those directly addressing influencer credibility and the effectiveness of digital marketing communication.

The third stage involves reporting the analysis results. In this stage, the researcher synthesizes findings from the selected articles to identify patterns of relationships, similarities, and differences in previous research outcomes. The analysis was conducted by grouping research results based on the dimensions of influencer credibility and indicators of digital marketing effectiveness. The results of this synthesis are then used to address the research objectives and provide strategic recommendations for businesses to optimize the use of influencers in digital marketing.

By employing the SLR method, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive and structured understanding of the role of influencer credibility in enhancing the effectiveness of digital marketing communication, as well as to serve as a foundation for future research in the field of digital marketing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research conducted on 10 selected articles regarding influencer credibility and attractiveness on purchase intention demonstrates that influencer credibility remains one of the most important determinants of digital marketing communication effectiveness, particularly in influencing consumer attitudes, trust, engagement, and purchasing behavior. Across the reviewed studies, credibility consistently appears through three dominant dimensions namely expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness all of which contribute differently to shaping audience responses toward influencer-generated content. This finding confirms that in digital communication environments, message effectiveness is determined not only by the quality of the message itself but also by how audiences perceive the credibility and authenticity of the message source (Muthia Kalita Putri et al., 2024). However, the reviewed literature also reveals that influencer credibility operates in a far more complex and multidimensional manner than earlier marketing studies initially suggested.

Several studies indicate that influencer credibility significantly affects purchase intention because audiences often perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy compared to traditional advertising actors. Consumers tend to interpret influencer recommendations as personal experiences rather than direct commercial promotions. This condition creates stronger emotional closeness and increases message acceptance. Nevertheless, this review also found that credibility alone is often insufficient to directly generate purchase intention. Instead, credibility frequently functions through psychological mediating variables such as brand trust, customer engagement, e-WOM, and brand image. In this context, influencer credibility acts as an initial trigger that shapes audience perceptions before eventually influencing purchasing decisions (Octaviani & Selamat, 2023). This finding suggests that digital persuasion is not linear but involves a multistage psychological process where consumers evaluate, interpret, and emotionally process marketing messages before responding behaviorally.

The role of mediation variables becomes increasingly important in highly saturated digital environments where consumers are continuously exposed to promotional content. Brand trust, for example, appears consistently as one of the strongest mediators between influencer credibility and purchase intention. Consumers are more likely to trust brands promoted by influencers perceived as honest, knowledgeable, and authentic. This indicates that trust transfer mechanisms play a central role in influencer marketing effectiveness. In other words, audiences do not simply evaluate the product itself but also assess whether the influencer genuinely believes in the promoted brand. As

social media users become more experienced and digitally literate, emotional trust becomes increasingly valuable in reducing perceived purchasing risks.

In addition, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and e-reviews also emerge as critical communication mechanisms strengthening influencer marketing effectiveness. Several studies reveal that influencer credibility positively influences the perceived quality and reliability of digital reviews. Consumers often use influencer-generated reviews as validation tools before making purchasing decisions, particularly for products associated with higher financial or psychological risk. This finding demonstrates that influencer marketing no longer functions as one-way communication from brand to audience, but rather as part of a broader interactive communication ecosystem involving discussions, comments, recommendations, and audience participation (Tabrizi & Rohman, 2024). Consequently, influencers increasingly function not merely as communicators but as catalysts that stimulate broader online conversations and social influence processes.

However, findings across previous studies are not entirely consistent. While many studies identify credibility as the dominant factor affecting purchase intention, other studies suggest that factors such as content creativity, posting strategy, and platform engagement sometimes exert stronger influence than credibility itself. Hakim et al. (2025), for instance, found that creative digital content and interactive social media strategies significantly contribute to consumer purchasing decisions, in some cases even exceeding the influence of influencer credibility (Hakim et al., 2025). This contradiction indicates that audiences are not influenced solely by who delivers the message, but also by how the message is packaged, distributed, and experienced within digital platforms. Consumers increasingly seek entertaining, relevant, emotionally engaging, and personalized content experiences rather than purely promotional communication.

The study further revealed that expertise and trustworthiness have stronger effects on purchase intention than attractiveness, especially for products with higher involvement levels such as skincare, health, and functional products. This suggests that consumers increasingly prioritize authenticity, knowledge, and argument quality rather than relying solely on visual aesthetics or celebrity appeal. In digital environments characterized by information overload and advertising saturation, audiences appear to value credibility that feels informative and trustworthy rather than excessively commercialized.

The reviewed studies also reveal important differences across industries. In fashion and lifestyle industries, attractiveness and lifestyle congruence often become dominant persuasion factors because consumers process information emotionally and symbolically. Fashion products are strongly associated with identity expression, trends, and aspirational lifestyles, causing audiences to rely heavily on visual cues, aesthetics, and emotional appeal. In contrast, consumers within skincare, health, and beauty sectors tend to evaluate influencer expertise, authenticity, and product knowledge more critically due to higher perceived product risk. This finding indicates that product involvement level significantly influences how consumers process influencer messages.

These industry differences strongly support the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which explains that persuasion occurs through two routes: the central route and the peripheral route. Consumers with high involvement tend to evaluate messages through the central route by focusing on information quality, expertise, and logical arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Meanwhile, low-involvement consumers rely more on peripheral cues such as attractiveness, popularity, and emotional appeal. Therefore, influencer effectiveness depends heavily on audience motivation, product category, and communication context rather than operating universally across all sectors.

The concept of parasocial relationships also becomes highly relevant in explaining influencer effectiveness. Audiences often develop emotional attachments to influencers and perceive them as trusted companions or relatable figures. However, excessive commercialization can damage these emotional bonds. When influencers repeatedly promote unrelated products or appear overly profit-oriented, audiences may feel emotionally disconnected and betrayed. As a result, trust declines and engagement weakens despite high visibility or follower numbers. This finding suggests that authenticity is becoming increasingly important as audiences grow more critical and digitally aware.

Methodologically, this review identifies several important research gaps within existing influencer marketing literature. Most studies employ quantitative cross-sectional approaches using SEM-PLS analysis and focus heavily on Generation Z respondents within Indonesia and Southeast Asia. While these methods effectively test conceptual relationships, they also create limitations regarding external validity and long-term behavioral analysis. Very few studies utilize longitudinal, experimental, or cross-cultural approaches capable of capturing changes in consumer trust and engagement over time. Consequently, current influencer marketing research still lacks broader

comparative perspectives, particularly regarding cultural differences between collectivistic and individualistic societies.

Furthermore, most previous studies focus primarily on traditional credibility dimensions while paying limited attention to technological developments such as algorithmic personalization, artificial intelligence, and virtual influencers. Platforms like TikTok increasingly shape audience exposure through recommendation algorithms rather than follower-based visibility systems. This means that influencer effectiveness may no longer depend solely on credibility but also on algorithmic visibility and platform optimization. The rise of AI-generated influencers and virtual influencers further raises important questions regarding whether audiences can still perceive authenticity and emotional trust when influencers are no longer human figures.

Overall, this systematic literature review demonstrates that influencer credibility should not be understood as a simple or isolated variable. Instead, influencer credibility operates dynamically through complex interactions involving audience psychology, content value, technological systems, platform characteristics, authenticity perceptions, and social relationships. While credibility remains a central factor in digital marketing communication effectiveness, successful influencer marketing increasingly depends on authenticity, meaningful engagement, content relevance, and audience trust. Therefore, companies and marketers should move beyond purely follower-oriented strategies and prioritize long-term credibility, transparency, and audience-centered communication approaches to maintain sustainable digital relationships with consumers.

Tabel 2. Findings from 10 Articles Concerning the Sources of Influencer Credibility and Attractiveness

No	Research Approach	Identity
1	Quantitative	Jurnal Muara Ilmu Ekonomi dan Bisnis Felly Octaviani Frangky Selamat
2	Quantitative	Jurnal Manajemen Pemasaran dan Perilaku Konsumen Tasya Tabriza Fatchur Rohman
3	Quantitative	Kompleksitas: Jurnal Manajemen, Organisasi dan Bisnis Ireine Florencia Moniaga Patria Laksamana
4	Quantitative	TUTURAN: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi, Sosial dan Humaniora Muthia Kalita Putri Rd. Funny Mustikasari Elita Putri Trulline
5	Quantitative	Innovative Marketing Ahmad Shaheen Abdullah Khataan Abdelrehim Awad Anwar Yahia Shams Eldin Awadia Elnour
6	Quantitative	Cogent Business & Management Sheryl V I De Araujo Amol S. Dhaigude Giridhar B. Kamath Rajesh R. Pai Smitha Nayak

		Siddharth Ganesh
7	Systematic Literature Review	Cogent Business & Management Erzsébet Buglyó-Nyakas Tímea Gál
8	Quantitative	Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Business (RIGGS) Lukman Hakim Elang Nurtirtayasa Tri Rahma Melati Purwanto Budi Setiawan Abdul Rohim
9	Quantitative	Sustainability Edar Añaña Belem Barbosa
10	Quantitative	Tourism and Hospitality Elena Fernández-Blanco Mercedes Ramos Gutiérrez Sandra Lizzeth Hernández Zelaya

One of the strongest studies identified in this review is the research conducted by Shaheen et al. (2025), which provides a more comprehensive explanation regarding how influencer credibility operates in shaping purchase intention. Unlike many previous studies that only focused on direct relationships between credibility and consumer behavior, Shaheen et al. introduced content value as an important mediating variable. This approach offers a deeper understanding that audiences are not only influenced by influencer popularity or attractiveness, but also by how meaningful, informative, and emotionally engaging the delivered content is (Shaheen et al., 2025).

The study employed a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationship between expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and perceived content value. The findings revealed that trustworthiness and expertise had a stronger influence on purchase intention compared to attractiveness, particularly for products with higher levels of consumer involvement. This finding indicates that consumers increasingly prioritize informational quality and authenticity rather than relying solely on visual appeal. In the context of digital communication saturation, audiences appear to become more selective and critical toward influencer-generated content.

Another important contribution of Shaheen et al. (2025) lies in its relevance to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The findings suggest that consumers with high product involvement tend to evaluate influencer messages through the central route by focusing on argument quality, expertise, and informational relevance. Meanwhile, consumers with lower involvement are more likely to rely on peripheral cues such as attractiveness, popularity, and visual aesthetics. This indicates that influencer effectiveness is highly dependent on audience involvement and product characteristics rather than functioning uniformly across all communication contexts.

However, despite its theoretical contribution, the study also demonstrates several limitations that reveal important research gaps within influencer marketing literature. First, the research relied heavily on cross-sectional survey methods, which only capture consumer perceptions within a limited time frame. This creates difficulties in understanding how trust and engagement evolve over time, particularly in rapidly changing social media environments. Second, the sample focused primarily on social media users from a specific demographic category, limiting the generalizability of findings across cultures, age groups, and digital behaviors. Third, the study did not extensively discuss the influence of platform algorithms such as TikTok recommendation systems, which increasingly shape audience exposure and engagement with influencer content.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that expertise and trustworthiness tend to have stronger and more sustainable effects on purchase intention compared to attractiveness, particularly for products associated with higher consumer involvement such as skincare, health, and financial services. Consumers in these sectors are more likely to evaluate influencer messages critically and seek informative, authentic, and evidence-based communication before making purchasing decisions. In contrast, attractiveness and lifestyle congruence are more dominant in industries such as fashion and lifestyle, where emotional appeal, aesthetics, and aspirational identity play more important roles in influencing consumer behavior. This indicates that persuasion mechanisms differ significantly across industries, suggesting that influencer effectiveness cannot be generalized without considering the nature of the promoted product and audience motivation.

Another important conclusion emerging from this review is that influencer credibility rarely operates independently. Instead, credibility often functions through mediating variables such as brand trust, e-WOM, customer engagement, and brand image. Influencers with high credibility tend to create stronger emotional and psychological connections with audiences, which subsequently increase trust toward promoted brands and enhance purchase intention. Therefore, digital marketing effectiveness is not simply determined by exposure or visibility, but by how successfully influencers build meaningful and trustworthy communication with audiences. This finding highlights the importance of relational and emotional dimensions in digital persuasion strategies.

The review also identifies that the effectiveness of influencer marketing increasingly depends on content quality and relevance rather than influencer popularity alone. One of the strongest studies reviewed, conducted by Shaheen et al. (2025), demonstrated that perceived content value significantly mediates the relationship between credibility and purchase intention. This finding indicates that audiences are becoming more selective and critical toward influencer-generated content in highly saturated social media environments. Consumers no longer respond solely to popularity metrics such as follower count, but instead evaluate whether the delivered content provides informational, emotional, or practical value. Consequently, influencer marketing strategies that rely only on visibility and reach without emphasizing authenticity and meaningful communication may become less effective over time.

This review highlights authenticity as one of the most critical challenges in contemporary influencer marketing. The rise of fake followers, excessive sponsorships, and artificial engagement has increased audience skepticism and weakened emotional trust toward influencer-generated content. This issue is particularly significant among Generation Z consumers, who value transparency, honesty, and relatability more strongly than previous generations. Consequently, authenticity should be viewed as a fundamental factor for maintaining long-term audience engagement and persuasive effectiveness.

Generation Z audiences appear to be particularly sensitive to authenticity issues. As digital natives who have grown up within highly commercialized digital ecosystems, Gen Z consumers demonstrate stronger awareness of advertising strategies and are more capable of identifying inauthentic or exaggerated endorsements. This generation tends to value transparency, relatability, honesty, and realistic communication rather than highly curated and overly promotional content. The emergence of “deinfluencing” trends on TikTok further reflects changing consumer attitudes toward influencer culture, where audiences increasingly criticize overconsumption and manipulative marketing practices. Therefore, authenticity should no longer be viewed as an optional branding strategy but rather as a fundamental requirement for maintaining long-term audience trust and engagement.

The findings of this review also strongly support the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as an important theoretical framework for understanding influencer marketing effectiveness. Consumers with high product involvement tend to process influencer messages through the central route by critically evaluating expertise, argument quality, and informational relevance. Meanwhile, consumers with low involvement are more likely to rely on peripheral cues such as attractiveness, popularity, visual aesthetics, and emotional appeal. This distinction explains why different industries produce different research outcomes regarding influencer credibility. It also suggests that successful influencer marketing strategies should align message characteristics, content style, and influencer attributes with audience involvement levels and decision-making processes.

Furthermore, this review demonstrates that engagement functions as a significant moderating and mediating factor in digital marketing communication. High engagement levels increase message relevance and reduce ad avoidance because audiences perceive influencer content as more

personalized and meaningful. However, the literature still shows inconsistencies regarding how engagement interacts with credibility and purchase intention. Some studies position engagement as a mediating variable, while others treat it as a moderating factor. These inconsistencies indicate that current influencer marketing literature still lacks a fully integrated conceptual framework explaining the dynamic relationships among credibility, engagement, trust, and consumer behavior.

In addition, contradictions across previous studies reveal that influencer credibility does not produce universally consistent outcomes. Several fashion-related studies emphasize attractiveness and lifestyle congruence as dominant persuasion factors because consumers in fashion industries tend to process information emotionally and aesthetically. In contrast, skincare and health-related studies prioritize expertise and authenticity because consumers perceive these products as higher-risk and therefore evaluate information more critically. This contradiction suggests that product involvement level significantly influences how consumers process influencer messages.

Another research gap emerges from the inconsistent role of engagement within influencer marketing studies. Some studies position engagement as a mediating variable that strengthens purchase intention, while others identify engagement as a moderating variable influencing how consumers process persuasive messages. This inconsistency indicates that engagement may operate differently depending on audience characteristics, platform dynamics, and communication styles. As a result, current literature still lacks a unified explanation regarding how engagement interacts with credibility and purchase intention.

Methodologically, most previous studies employ SEM-PLS and quantitative cross-sectional approaches with respondents dominated by Generation Z university students. While these methods are effective for testing conceptual relationships, they also create limitations regarding external validity and long-term behavioral analysis. Very few studies use longitudinal, experimental, or cross-cultural approaches to examine how influencer credibility changes over time and across different social contexts. Consequently, current influencer marketing literature still lacks broader comparative perspectives, particularly regarding differences between collectivistic and individualistic societies.

Methodologically, this study identifies several critical limitations within existing influencer marketing research. Most studies rely heavily on quantitative cross-sectional designs using SEM-PLS analysis and focus primarily on Generation Z respondents in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. While these methods are effective for testing conceptual relationships, they also limit the generalizability of findings across cultures, demographic groups, and long-term behavioral contexts. Very few studies employ longitudinal, experimental, or cross-cultural approaches to investigate how influencer credibility evolves over time or differs between collectivistic and individualistic societies. Consequently, future research should move beyond repetitive quantitative survey designs and develop more diverse methodological approaches capable of capturing the complexity of digital consumer behavior.

Another major conclusion from this review is that influencer marketing is entering a transformative technological era shaped by artificial intelligence, algorithmic personalization, social commerce, and virtual influencers. Platforms such as TikTok increasingly determine audience exposure through recommendation algorithms rather than follower-based systems, fundamentally changing how influencer content is distributed and consumed. At the same time, the rise of AI-generated influencers and virtual influencers raises critical questions regarding the future of authenticity, emotional trust, and human connection in digital communication. While virtual influencers may offer consistency, controllability, and reduced reputational risk for brands, audiences may still question whether genuine emotional attachment and credibility can exist in non-human digital figures.

From a practical perspective, this study emphasizes that companies should prioritize influencer authenticity, expertise alignment, and audience relevance rather than focusing exclusively on follower counts or popularity metrics. Selecting influencers who possess strong credibility and genuine alignment with brand values can generate more sustainable engagement and long-term brand trust. Additionally, marketers should develop more audience-centered communication strategies that emphasize transparency, storytelling, interaction, and meaningful content experiences rather than excessive promotional messaging. In highly competitive digital environments, authenticity and trust are likely to become more valuable than visibility alone.

Finally, this study contributes theoretically by integrating influencer credibility, authenticity crisis, engagement mechanisms, ELM perspectives, and emerging technological trends into a broader understanding of digital marketing communication effectiveness. The findings suggest that

influencer marketing should be viewed not merely as a promotional strategy, but as a complex psychological and sociotechnical communication process shaped by evolving audience expectations, technological systems, and cultural transformations. Therefore, future research should continue exploring the intersections between influencer credibility, AI personalization, algorithmic influence, consumer psychology, and cross-cultural communication to develop more comprehensive and adaptive frameworks for understanding digital marketing in the future.

Overall, these findings indicate that influencer credibility should not be understood as a static or universal concept. Instead, credibility operates dynamically depending on industry characteristics, audience involvement, platform algorithms, authenticity perceptions, and communication contexts. Therefore, future studies should move beyond purely descriptive approaches and develop more integrative frameworks that combine psychological persuasion theories, technological developments, and evolving digital consumer behaviour patterns.

CONCLUSION

Based on the systematic literature review conducted, this study concludes that influencer credibility remains one of the most significant determinants of digital marketing communication effectiveness in contemporary social media environments. Across the reviewed studies, credibility consistently appears as a multidimensional construct consisting of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, all of which contribute differently to shaping consumer attitudes, engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention. However, this review also demonstrates that influencer credibility should not be understood as a universal or static concept because its effectiveness is strongly influenced by contextual factors such as product category, audience involvement, communication style, platform characteristics, and the evolving dynamics of digital culture.

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