

# Influencer credibility and purchase intention: a proposed conceptual model integrating the mediating role of attitude toward the influencer

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## **Influencer credibility and purchase intention: a proposed conceptual model integrating the mediating role of attitude toward the influencer**

### **Résumé :**

Situé à l'intersection du marketing digital, du comportement du consommateur et de la communication persuasive, cet article conceptuel examine la manière dont la crédibilité des influenceurs façonne l'intention d'achat dans les environnements de médias sociaux. Malgré l'importance croissante du marketing d'influence dans les stratégies de communication des entreprises, les mécanismes transformant les perceptions relatives à l'influenceur en intentions comportementales demeurent insuffisamment intégrés dans un cadre théorique unifié. Pour répondre à cette limite, l'article articule la théorie de la crédibilité de la source et la logique attitude-intention issue de la théorie du comportement planifié. La crédibilité de l'influenceur est conceptualisée comme un construit d'ordre supérieur de nature réflexive-formative : l'expertise, l'attractivité et la fiabilité sont des dimensions de premier ordre spécifiées de manière réflexive qui, conjointement, forment la crédibilité globale. Le modèle considère que ces dimensions contribuent positivement à la crédibilité, laquelle est susceptible d'influencer l'intention d'achat directement, en réduisant l'incertitude associée à la recommandation, et indirectement, en favorisant une attitude positive envers l'influenceur. L'attitude constitue ainsi le mécanisme psychologique reliant l'évaluation de la source à l'intention comportementale. Six hypothèses structurent les relations proposées, tandis que la médiation résulte de la combinaison des relations entre la crédibilité, l'attitude et l'intention d'achat. Le modèle pourra faire l'objet d'une validation empirique future au moyen de la modélisation par équations structurelles basée sur la variance (PLS-SEM), afin d'évaluer le modèle de mesure hiérarchique et les relations structurelles proposées selon différentes plateformes de médias sociaux, catégories de produits, profils d'influenceurs et contextes culturels.

**Mots-clés :** Crédibilité de l'influenceur ; intention d'achat ; attitude envers l'influenceur ; médias sociaux ; marketing d'influence ; théorie de la crédibilité de la source

**Classification JEL :** M31

**Type du papier :** Recherche théorique

### **Abstract :**

Positioned at the intersection of digital marketing, consumer behavior, and persuasive communication, this conceptual article examines how influencer credibility shapes purchase intention in social-media environments. Despite the growing importance of influencer marketing in corporate communication strategies, the mechanisms through which perceptions of influencer characteristics translate into behavioral intentions remain insufficiently integrated within a unified theoretical framework. To address this limitation, the article combines Source Credibility Theory with the attitude-intention logic derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior. Influencer credibility is conceptualized as a reflective-formative higher-order construct: expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness are reflectively specified first-order dimensions that jointly form overall credibility. The model assumes that these dimensions contribute positively to credibility, which is expected to influence purchase intention directly by reducing uncertainty associated with the recommendation and indirectly by fostering a favorable attitude toward the influencer. Attitude therefore constitutes the psychological mechanism linking source evaluation to behavioral intention. Six hypotheses structure the proposed relationships, whereas mediation results from the combined relationships among credibility, attitude, and purchase intention. Future empirical validation using variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) will enable assessment of the hierarchical measurement model and the structural relationships across different social-media platforms, product categories, influencer profiles, and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Influencer credibility; purchase intention; attitude toward the influencer; social media; influencer marketing; Source Credibility Theory

**JEL Classification:** M31

**Paper type:** Theoretical Research

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media influencers have become key actors in digital marketing strategies, as brands increasingly rely on creator-led communication to shape consumer perceptions and behaviors (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This development is also reflected in advertising investment. In the United States, creator advertising expenditure was projected to reach USD 37 billion in 2025, representing a 26% year-on-year increase from USD 29.5 billion in 2024; moreover, 48% of surveyed creator-ad buyers regarded creators as a must-buy advertising channel (Interactive Advertising Bureau [IAB], 2025). These statistics illustrate the growing economic importance of creator-based promotion and reinforce the need to understand how influencers affect consumers' purchase decisions across platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube.

Unlike traditional celebrity endorsers, social media influencers frequently develop interactive and relational connections with their audiences through recurring content and direct engagement. This perceived closeness can strengthen identification with the influencer and enhance endorsement effectiveness (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2020; Taillon et al., 2020). However, the professionalization of influencer marketing also places influencers in an ambiguous position between ordinary social-media users, opinion leaders, content creators, and commercial endorsers. Although this hybrid status can strengthen persuasion by embedding recommendations in apparently personal communication, it can also generate skepticism when followers perceive excessive commercialization or a weak fit between the influencer and the promoted offer.

Among the determinants of influencer effectiveness, credibility remains a fundamental construct. Rooted in Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990), credibility is commonly conceptualized through expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. These dimensions provide evaluative cues that shape how audiences process persuasive messages (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Credibility therefore cannot be reduced to visibility, popularity, or follower counts; it reflects an evaluation of whether the influencer possesses relevant knowledge, appears dependable, and generates a favorable interpersonal impression. Although prior studies show that credible sources can influence attitudes and behavioral intentions (Erdogan, 1999; Weismueller et al., 2020) and confirm a positive relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention (Mabkhot et al., 2022; Sesar et al., 2022), the mechanisms underlying this relationship remain insufficiently integrated within a unified theoretical framework.

Purchase intention is the dependent construct and the central outcome variable of the proposed model. It refers to consumers' conscious willingness or plan to purchase an influencer-endorsed product in the future (Spears & Singh, 2004). In influencer marketing contexts, attitude toward the influencer may explain how consumers' evaluation of the source translates into purchase-related intentions (Bergkvist et al., 2016; Chetoui et al., 2020). Treating attitude toward the influencer as a mediating construct thus clarifies the transition from source evaluation to behavioral intention (Lim et al., 2017; Magano et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this theoretical article seeks to explain how expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness jointly form influencer credibility and how this overall evaluation influences purchase intention directly and indirectly through attitude toward the influencer. It addresses three connected questions: Which source-related dimensions form influencer credibility? How does overall credibility influence attitude toward the influencer and purchase intention? Why should attitude toward the influencer transmit part of the effect of credibility to purchase intention? By addressing these questions within one framework, the article moves beyond a fragmented list of influencer attributes toward an integrated account of persuasion in social-media settings.

This article offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it integrates Source Credibility Theory with the attitude-intention logic of the Theory of Planned Behavior to explain both the formation of influencer credibility and its direct and indirect relationships with purchase intention. It further conceptualizes influencer credibility as a reflective-formative higher-order construct composed of expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness, while positioning attitude toward the influencer as the psychological mechanism connecting source evaluation to behavioral intention. From a practical perspective, the framework may help brands and marketing professionals move beyond visibility-based influencer selection by evaluating whether potential endorsers possess the attributes required to establish credibility and foster favorable consumer attitudes. It may also support the development of more coherent influencer-selection criteria and campaign-evaluation practices. Because the model remains conceptual, these managerial implications require future empirical validation.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature and develops the hypotheses. The subsequent section presents the proposed conceptual model, followed by a discussion of its theoretical contributions and boundary conditions. The article then outlines an agenda for future research before concluding with its principal implications.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **2.1. Source Credibility Theory and Influencer Marketing**

Source Credibility Theory posits that the effectiveness of persuasive communication largely depends on the credibility of its source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Credibility is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct composed of expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990), which influence the extent to which audiences accept persuasive messages. In influencer marketing contexts, this framework is particularly relevant as social media influencers act as opinion leaders who communicate brand-related content to their followers. Compared with traditional celebrities, influencers often develop closer and more interactive relationships with audiences, which may strengthen the role of credibility in shaping consumer responses.

Beyond judgments of expertise and trustworthiness, persuasive responses may reflect different processes of social influence, including compliance, identification, and internalization (Kelman, 1961). This perspective complements the source-credibility framework by clarifying how recipients may internalize, identify with, or comply with persuasive communication.

As digital environments become increasingly saturated with sponsored content, consumers rely more strongly on credibility cues to evaluate the authenticity and reliability of influencer recommendations. Consequently, understanding how credibility dimensions operate in social media contexts remains essential for explaining consumer purchase intentions.

In conventional endorsement contexts, source credibility is assessed in relation to a relatively discrete persuasive message. Social-media environments complicate this assessment because followers encounter influencers repeatedly and across heterogeneous content. Credibility is gradually constructed through accumulated observations of expertise claims, disclosure practices, consistency, interaction with followers, and the perceived fit between the influencer's identity and endorsed products. The judgment is thus relational and dynamic rather than limited to a single advertisement (Breves et al., 2019; Schouten et al., 2020; Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Source Credibility Theory explains why identical claims may produce different responses depending on who communicates them. A credible source reduces uncertainty and lowers the perceived risk of accepting a recommendation, whereas a doubtful source encourages counter-argumentation and resistance. In influencer marketing, this logic is especially salient because the consumer often cannot directly verify product quality before purchase. Expertise and

trustworthiness provide informational assurances, while attractiveness facilitates attention and identification. Their combination can therefore increase the persuasive value of branded content without implying that all dimensions operate through identical psychological routes (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Ohanian, 1990).

The Theory of Planned Behavior complements this source-centered explanation by locating attitude upstream of behavioral intention. Although the complete theory also includes subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, the present model deliberately focuses on the attitudinal route that is most directly activated by influencer communication. The proposed integration is therefore selective rather than exhaustive: Source Credibility Theory explains how the communicator is evaluated, while the attitude-intention logic explains how this evaluation can be translated into a purchase-related intention (Ajzen, 2011; Armitage & Conner, 2001).

**Table 1. Synthesis of selected literature informing the conceptual model**

| Authors                       | Empirical context                        | Constructs examined                                     | Principal finding                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ohanian (1990)                | Celebrity endorsement; scale development | Expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness              | Established and validated the three-dimensional source-credibility scale.                                 |
| Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)  | Young female Instagram users             | Online celebrity credibility; purchase decisions        | Credibility and perceived relatability shaped followers' purchase-related responses.                      |
| Lou & Yuan (2019)             | Branded social-media content             | Message value, credibility, trust, purchase intention   | Informative value and credibility strengthened trust in branded content and consumer responses.           |
| Sokolova & Kefi (2020)        | Instagram and YouTube followers          | Credibility, parasocial interaction, purchase intention | Credibility and parasocial interaction contributed to purchase intention.                                 |
| Schouten et al. (2020)        | Celebrity versus influencer endorsements | Identification, credibility, product-endorser fit       | Identification and fit qualified endorsement effectiveness.                                               |
| Chetoui et al. (2020)         | Fashion influencers; Moroccan consumers  | Credibility, attitude, purchase intention               | Attitude toward the influencer helped explain purchase intention.                                         |
| Weismueller et al. (2020)     | German Instagram users                   | Disclosure, credibility dimensions, purchase intention  | Credibility dimensions were positively associated with purchase intention.                                |
| Mabkhot et al. (2022)         | Social-media users in Saudi Arabia       | Influencer credibility; purchase intention              | Influencer credibility positively predicted purchase intention.                                           |
| Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2024) | TikTok users                             | Influencer credibility; purchase intention              | Credibility strengthened purchase intentions in the TikTok context.                                       |
| Edelblum et al. (2025)        | Experimental studies of fitfluencers     | Extreme attractiveness, relatability, engagement        | Extreme attractiveness reduced engagement through lower relatability, revealing a beauty backfire effect. |

*Source: Authors' synthesis.*

## 2.2. Dimensions of Influencer Credibility

Building on Source Credibility Theory, credibility is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct composed of distinct yet interrelated dimensions. Prior research consistently identifies expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness as the core components shaping perceived source credibility (Ohanian, 1990). In influencer marketing contexts, these dimensions operate jointly to influence how audiences evaluate the communicator. The following subsections examine each dimension in detail.

### • Expertise

Expertise refers to the perceived knowledge, competence, and experience of a communicator within a specific domain (Ohanian, 1990). According to Source Credibility Theory (Hovland

et al., 1953), expertise enhances persuasive effectiveness by increasing the perceived diagnostic value of the message. In digital environments, where information asymmetry is high, expertise becomes a critical heuristic for credibility assessment. Empirical studies confirm that influencer expertise significantly predicts perceived credibility and strengthens behavioral intentions (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Mabkhot et al., 2022). Particularly in product categories requiring evaluation or technical understanding, expertise serves as a central driver of persuasive influence.

Expertise is particularly relevant when the promoted product requires technical, experiential, or category-specific knowledge. Followers are more likely to regard advice as diagnostic when the influencer demonstrates mastery through explanations, comparisons, demonstrations, or a coherent history of content in the relevant field. Expertise does not require formal credentials in every context; it may also emerge from sustained experience and the ability to communicate complex information in an accessible manner. However, popularity alone cannot substitute for competence, because a highly visible influencer may still be judged incapable of evaluating a specific product (Ohanian, 1990; Weismueller et al., 2020).

- **Attractiveness**

Attractiveness encompasses physical appeal, likability, similarity, familiarity, and the overall presentation of the communicator (Ohanian, 1990). In visually oriented social-media environments, these cues can attract attention, facilitate identification, and support favorable evaluations (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Their contribution is nevertheless contingent on relevance. Attractiveness is more likely to support credibility when the influencer's image is congruent with the content domain and the endorsed product; incongruence may instead draw attention to the commercial nature of the endorsement and weaken the diagnostic value of the recommendation (Breves et al., 2019; Schouten et al., 2020).

In endorsement research, the persuasive meaning of a public figure cannot be reduced to attractiveness alone, because endorsers may transfer culturally constituted meanings to products and consumers (McCracken, 1989).

Evidence on attractiveness is therefore not uniformly confirmatory. Consistent with source-derogation logic, an appearance cue perceived as excessive, strategically manufactured, or unrelated to the promoted offer may provoke skepticism rather than credibility. Recent experimental evidence documents a beauty backfire effect: extremely attractive fitfluencers generated lower engagement than moderately attractive counterparts because they were perceived as less relatable (Edelblum et al., 2025). This counter-effect is context dependent rather than universal, but it challenges a simple linear assumption that greater attractiveness invariably produces greater credibility. Attractiveness should consequently be treated as a potentially weaker and more conditional formative component than expertise or trustworthiness, particularly when relatability and influencer-product congruence are low.

- **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness reflects the extent to which a communicator is perceived as honest, sincere, and reliable (Ohanian, 1990; Saima & Khan, 2021). Within Source Credibility Theory, trustworthiness is frequently considered the most fundamental determinant of persuasive effectiveness (Pornpitakpan, 2004). In influencer marketing, where sponsored content may raise skepticism, authenticity and transparency become critical cues. Empirical evidence consistently identifies trustworthiness as the strongest predictor of credibility across various contexts (Mabkhot et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, trustworthiness is expected to exert a substantial influence on credibility formation in digital environments.

Trustworthiness concerns the follower's belief that the influencer is honest, sincere, and unlikely to manipulate the audience solely for commercial gain. This dimension becomes

decisive when sponsored content blurs the boundary between personal expression and advertising. Consistency between words and behavior, transparent disclosure, balanced product evaluations, and the refusal of implausible partnerships can all sustain trust. Conversely, repeated promotions without credible justification may weaken the perceived integrity of the source, even when the influencer is knowledgeable and attractive (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sesar et al., 2022).

The present article specifies influencer credibility as a reflective-formative higher-order construct. At the first-order level, expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness are modeled reflectively because their respective indicators are manifestations of each underlying dimension and are expected to covary. At the higher-order level, the three dimensions form overall influencer credibility: they capture conceptually distinct and non-interchangeable facets, and omitting one would alter the meaning and conceptual domain of the aggregate construct. The direction of the higher-order relationship therefore runs from the three first-order dimensions to influencer credibility rather than from credibility to the dimensions (Jarvis et al., 2003; Becker et al., 2012). This specification is also consistent with a future PLS-SEM validation, in which the reliability and validity of the reflective first-order measures and the collinearity, significance, and relevance of the formative higher-order weights would be assessed separately. A formative specification does not imply that expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness contribute equally. Their relative weights are expected to be estimated empirically and may vary across product categories, platforms, and sponsorship conditions. Expertise should be especially salient for technical or high-involvement products, whereas trustworthiness should become more decisive when commercial motives and disclosure-related skepticism are prominent. Attractiveness may facilitate initial attention and identification, but its contribution is expected to be more dependent on influencer-product congruence and perceived relatability. Accordingly, H1-H3 predict positive formative contributions without imposing equal weights or a universal ranking among the dimensions.

The hypotheses formulated below specify the principal relationships of a deliberately parsimonious conceptual model. Their positive direction reflects the convergence of the literature reviewed, but it does not imply that their magnitude is identical or invariant across all contexts. Influencer-product congruence and product involvement may shape the applicability and relative strength of these relationships. However, because the present model focuses specifically on the credibility-attitude-purchase intention mechanism, these conditions are treated as boundary conditions defining the scope and generalizability of the framework rather than as formal moderating variables. Their influence should be examined in future empirical extensions of the model.

**H1:** *Expertise contributes positively to the formation of influencer credibility.*

**H2:** *Attractiveness contributes positively to the formation of influencer credibility.*

**H3:** *Trustworthiness contributes positively to the formation of influencer credibility.*

Accordingly, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 specify the direction of the formative contributions, whereas their relative magnitude remains an empirical question that may depend on the boundary conditions identified above.

### **2.3. Credibility and Attitude Toward the Influencer**

Maintaining engaged online communities requires influencers to preserve their perceived credibility (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). When influencers collaborate with brands, credibility becomes a key persuasive mechanism shaping followers' evaluations of both the advertising message and the promoted brand (Breves et al., 2019; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Schouten et al., 2020). Prior research consistently identifies perceived credibility as an important antecedent of favorable attitudes toward influencers. When followers perceive

influencers as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and authentic, they are more likely to develop positive evaluations and stronger relational bonds (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Empirical evidence supports this relationship across contexts. For instance, Belanche et al. (2021) show that credibility significantly enhances followers' attitudes on Instagram, while Chetoui et al. (2020) demonstrate a similar effect in a Moroccan context. From a theoretical perspective, Source Credibility Theory suggests that expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness shape evaluative judgments (Ohanian, 1990). In social media environments, influencers act as endorsers whose credibility influences attitudinal formation (Batra & Keller, 2016). When information comes from credible sources, consumers tend to perceive it as more reliable and relevant, leading to more favorable attitudes (Ooi et al., 2023). Recent studies further support this relationship by highlighting the role of credibility in strengthening parasocial relationships and positive evaluations toward influencers (Yuan & Lou, 2020; Lee & Eastin, 2020; Taillon et al., 2020; Jansom & Pongsakornrungrasit, 2021). Although some research suggests that credibility effects may weaken when expertise is perceived as insufficient (Lim et al., 2017), the majority of studies confirm a strong positive relationship between perceived credibility and attitude toward the influencer (Immanuel & Bianda, 2021; Ooi et al., 2023). Taken together, the literature supports the view that perceived influencer credibility constitutes a central cognitive determinant of followers' attitudinal evaluations. Accordingly, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

Attitude toward the influencer represents a global evaluative orientation rather than a judgment about one isolated message. It incorporates affective reactions, perceived affinity, and the follower's readiness to continue engaging with the influencer. Credibility supplies cognitively defensible reasons for this favorable orientation: competence makes the content useful, trustworthiness makes the relationship feel safe, and attractiveness makes interaction more pleasant. Repeated exposure can consolidate these assessments into a stable positive attitude, which subsequently colors the interpretation of endorsed products (Bergkvist et al., 2016; Chetoui et al., 2020).

*H4: Influencer credibility fosters a favorable attitude toward the influencer.*

## **2.4. Credibility, Attitude, and Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention refers to an individual's conscious plan or stated willingness to purchase a particular product or brand in the future (Spears & Singh, 2004). As a behavioral intention, it reflects consumers' readiness to consider a future purchase but remains conceptually distinct from actual purchasing behavior. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior, intention constitutes the most immediate antecedent of behavior, although its translation into action may remain subject to situational constraints (Ajzen, 2011). In the present model, purchase intention is the dependent construct and the central outcome explained by influencer credibility and attitude toward the influencer.

### **2.4.1 Credibility as a Direct Predictor of Purchase Intention**

Perceived credibility plays a central role in shaping consumers' behavioral responses. When influencers are considered credible, audiences are more likely to trust their recommendations and develop stronger purchase intentions. From a risk-reduction perspective, credibility decreases perceived uncertainty and increases the expected utility of the promoted product (Immanuel & Bianda, 2021).

Within the source credibility framework (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990), expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness jointly contribute to persuasive effectiveness. Empirical studies consistently show that these dimensions positively influence purchase intention in influencer marketing contexts (Mabkhot et al., 2022; Sesar et al., 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020). Research drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model also indicates that credible communicators can facilitate message acceptance when consumers rely on heuristic source cues

(Añaña & Barbosa, 2023; Masuda et al., 2022). In the present article, however, this insight serves only as a complementary explanation of the direct credibility-purchase-intention path; the Elaboration Likelihood Model is not introduced as an additional theoretical foundation of the conceptual architecture, which remains grounded in Source Credibility Theory and the attitude-intention logic of the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Across various digital environments, including Instagram and product endorsement contexts, prior research confirms a direct and positive relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention (Añaña & Barbosa, 2023; Sesar et al., 2022). Consequently, credibility functions not only as a cognitive evaluation mechanism but also as a direct driver of behavioral intention.

The direct path is theoretically justified because credible recommendations may function as decision heuristics. When consumers face limited time, information asymmetry, or uncertainty, they can use the perceived quality of the source as a shortcut for evaluating the promoted offer. Expertise signals that the recommendation is informed, while trustworthiness reduces suspicions about hidden motives. This mechanism does not require the follower to develop a strong interpersonal attachment; credibility itself may be sufficient to increase confidence in the product and the likelihood of considering purchase (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Mabkhot et al., 2022).

**H5:** *Influencer credibility directly strengthens purchase intention.*

#### **2.4.2 Attitude Toward the Influencer and Purchase Intention**

The relationship between attitude and behavioral intention is well established in the Theory of Planned Behavior, which states that intention is shaped by individuals' evaluative judgments toward a behavior or object (Ajzen, 2011). Attitude reflects the degree to which an individual evaluates an object favorably or unfavorably, and positive attitudes generally strengthen behavioral intentions (Al-Debei et al., 2013; Armitage & Conner, 2001). In influencer marketing contexts, favorable attitudes toward influencers significantly increase consumers' purchase intentions. Empirical studies confirm that attitude toward the influencer is a strong predictor of behavioral intention (Bergkvist et al., 2016; Chetioui et al., 2020; Niloy et al., 2023). Influencers, as opinion leaders, shape consumer perceptions and preferences through their expertise and authenticity, which foster favorable attitudes that subsequently translate into purchase decisions (Rogers & Cartano, 1962; Casaló et al., 2020).

Prior research across digital and offline contexts consistently demonstrates that positive attitudes toward influencers significantly enhance purchase intention (Immanuel & Bianda, 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore:

A favorable attitude can increase purchase intention through affect transfer and evaluative consistency. Followers who appreciate an influencer are more inclined to process recommendations with openness, attribute benign motives to the endorsement, and perceive the promoted product as compatible with the influencer's identity. The intended purchase then becomes not only a response to product information but also an extension of a valued relationship with the communicator. This reasoning is consistent with findings that attitudes toward endorsers or influencers transmit persuasive effects to downstream consumer responses (Lim et al., 2017; Immanuel & Bianda, 2021; Magano et al., 2022).

**H6:** *A favorable attitude toward the influencer strengthens purchase intention.*

#### **2.5. The Mediating Role of Attitude**

Beyond direct effects, prior research suggests that credibility may indirectly influence purchase intention through attitudinal mechanisms. Credibility strengthens trust and relational bonds, which foster favorable attitudes and ultimately enhance behavioral intention (Chetioui et al.,

2020; Immanuel & Bianda, 2021). Empirical evidence also confirms that attitude toward the influencer mediates the relationship between perceived credibility and purchase intention (Magano et al., 2022), highlighting the importance of attitudinal processes in digital persuasion. Accordingly, this study examines whether attitude toward the influencer functions as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between credibility and purchase intention.

Mediation is expected to be partial rather than necessarily complete. Credibility can affect purchase intention directly by reducing informational uncertainty, and indirectly by creating a favorable attitude toward the influencer. These routes capture different but complementary processes. The direct route is primarily diagnostic: the follower relies on the source as evidence about the product. The indirect route is evaluative and relational: credibility improves the overall attitude toward the communicator, which then increases receptiveness to the recommendation. Recognizing both routes avoids reducing influencer persuasion either to rational information processing or to interpersonal affinity alone.

This dual-process interpretation also clarifies why credible influencers may not always generate the same level of purchase intention. If credibility is acknowledged but the follower remains indifferent or unfavorable toward the influencer, the attitudinal route will be weak and only the direct informational effect may remain. Conversely, a favorable attitude unsupported by credibility may attract attention but fail to sustain confidence in purchase-related advice. The strongest persuasive configuration is therefore expected when positive source evaluations and favorable attitudes reinforce each other.

Taken together, H4 and H6 describe the indirect mechanism through which influencer credibility can affect purchase intention via attitude toward the influencer. The mediating role is therefore examined as the combined theoretical consequence of these two hypothesized relationships, rather than as a separate hypothesis.

### **3. Proposed Conceptual Model**

The proposed model treats expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness as reflectively measured first-order dimensions that form overall influencer credibility at the higher-order level. Credibility is expected to affect purchase intention both directly and indirectly through attitude toward the influencer. The framework therefore combines a reflective-formative hierarchical credibility structure with an attitudinal mediation mechanism.

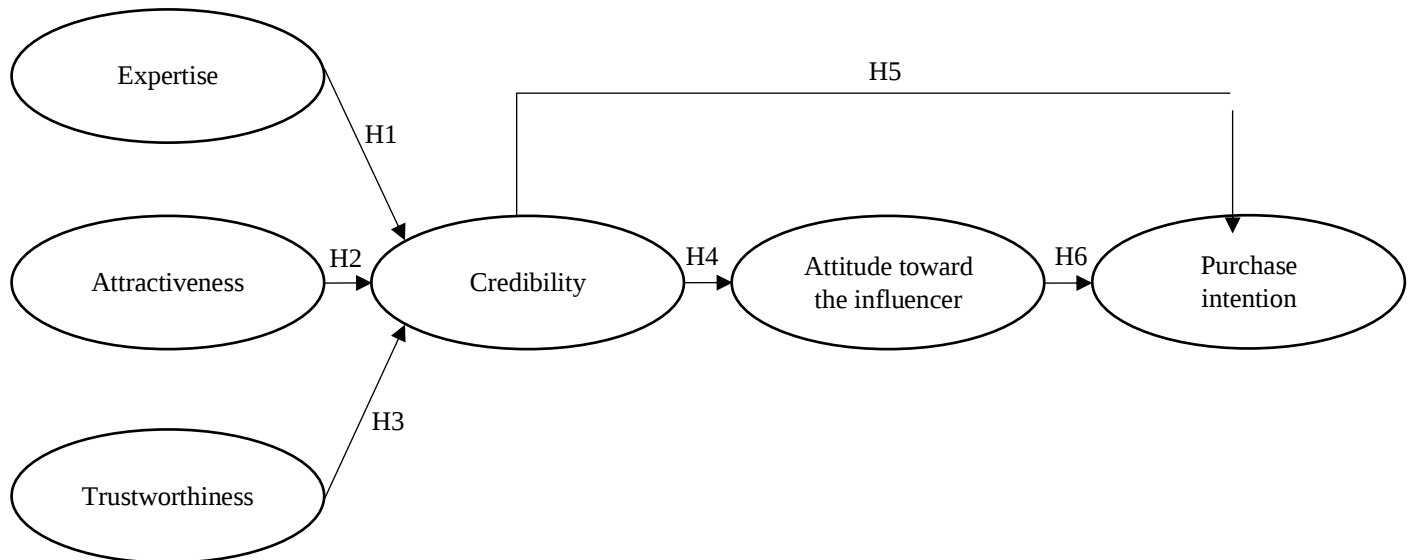
The framework is intentionally parsimonious. It does not seek to reproduce every determinant of online purchase intention; instead, it isolates a coherent chain of source evaluation, attitudinal response, and behavioral intention. This focus makes the model theoretically interpretable and permits researchers to examine the relative contribution of each credibility dimension. It also distinguishes the antecedents that form credibility from the consequences that follow once credibility has been established.

Figure 1 below represents the six hypothesized relationships. H1 links expertise to the formation of influencer credibility, H2 links attractiveness to influencer credibility, and H3 links trustworthiness to influencer credibility. H4 represents the effect of influencer credibility on attitude toward the influencer. H5 represents the direct effect of influencer credibility on purchase intention, whereas H6 links attitude toward the influencer to purchase intention. Together, H4 and H6 constitute the indirect credibility-attitude-purchase-intention pathway; mediation is examined as the combined consequence of these two relationships rather than as a separate hypothesis.

Future empirical validation should use variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for estimating a model that includes a reflective-formative higher-order construct and a mediation pathway. The measurement assessment should examine the reliability and convergent and discriminant validity of the reflective first-order dimensions, followed by collinearity, significance, and relevance of the formative weights defining overall

influencer credibility. The structural assessment should then evaluate the path coefficients corresponding to H1 through H6, their explanatory power and predictive relevance, and the indirect effect of credibility on purchase intention through attitude toward the influencer.

**Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model**



*Source: Authors' own elaboration.*

#### 4. Conceptual Contributions and Boundary Conditions

The first contribution of the model is to reconcile dimensional and global approaches to influencer credibility. Expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness are not treated as interchangeable predictors placed directly alongside purchase intention. They are positioned as distinct foundations of an overall credibility judgment. This hierarchical logic preserves the specific meaning of each dimension while explaining why consumers can still form a unified assessment of whether an influencer constitutes a credible source. It also provides a clearer theoretical basis for comparing the relative contribution of informational, relational, and visual cues.

The second contribution is the explicit separation of two consequences of credibility. A direct credibility-purchase path represents the informational value of the source, whereas the credibility-attitude-purchase path represents an evaluative mechanism. Prior models sometimes include credibility and attitude as parallel predictors without specifying their temporal or causal ordering. Positioning attitude as a mediator offers a more precise explanation of how a source judgment can become a behavioral intention and indicates why credibility may retain an effect even after attitude is considered.

The third contribution is the integration of two theoretical traditions at different analytical levels. Source Credibility Theory operates at the level of communicator evaluation, whereas the attitude-intention logic derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior operates at the level of behavioral decision formation. Their combination avoids theoretical redundancy because each explains a different stage of the process. The Elaboration Likelihood Model is not a third pillar of the proposed architecture; it is used only as a limited interpretive lens for understanding why source credibility may function as a heuristic cue in the direct pathway to purchase intention.

The proposed relationships are nevertheless subject to identifiable boundary conditions. Influencer-product congruence is especially relevant to the formative contribution of attractiveness and expertise because these cues should be more diagnostic when they match the

influencer's domain and the endorsed product. Product involvement primarily defines the informational setting of the credibility-purchase-intention path: highly involved consumers may supplement source cues with more extensive product information, whereas less involved consumers may rely more strongly on the influencer's credibility. Sponsorship disclosure, repeated commercial exposure, and platform norms principally delimit the formation and persuasive consequences of trustworthiness by shaping followers' inferences about commercial motives. These expectations specify where contextual variation is most likely to occur, but they are not formulated as moderation hypotheses and are not added to the six-path model.

Parasocial interaction constitutes a further boundary condition for the attitudinal pathway. When followers experience a strong sense of familiarity, intimacy, or imagined relational closeness with an influencer, a favorable attitude toward that influencer may be more readily activated and may carry greater relevance for purchase intention. When parasocial interaction is weak, the attitudinal route may be less salient and consumers may rely more heavily on the informational value of credibility. This interpretation is consistent with research linking influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and consumer responses (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Taillon et al., 2020; Yuan & Lou, 2020). Parasocial interaction is therefore used to delimit the likely strength of the credibility-attitude-purchase-intention sequence, without being incorporated as an additional construct or formal moderator in Figure 1.

Accordingly, the boundary conditions define the scope and potential generalizability of the parsimonious framework rather than extending its formal architecture. Future empirical research may test whether the six structural relationships vary across levels of congruence, product involvement, sponsorship transparency, platform norms, commercial exposure, and parasocial interaction. Such extensions should be examined separately so that the present article retains its focus on the core mechanism linking credibility, attitude toward the influencer, and purchase intention.

## **5. Research Agenda**

Future empirical research should operationalize the model constructs using established multi-item measures adapted to the social-media influencer context. Expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness may be measured as reflective first-order constructs using items adapted primarily from Munnukka et al. (2016), consistent with the source-credibility measurement tradition established by Ohanian (1990). Attitude toward the influencer may be assessed through global evaluative items adapted from Silvera and Austad (2004) and the validated attitude-measurement approach developed by Spears and Singh (2004). Purchase intention may similarly be measured using future-oriented purchase-intention items adapted from Spears and Singh (2004) and prior influencer-marketing research. All measures should be contextualized to the social-media platform examined and assessed using five-point response scales. The wording of the adapted items should be subjected to expert assessment, cognitive pretesting, and content-validity evaluation before data collection. The reflective measurement properties of expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, attitude toward the influencer, and purchase intention should be established before estimating influencer credibility as a reflective-formative higher-order construct.

The complete model should be estimated using variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), for example with SmartPLS. This approach is suitable for jointly assessing the reflectively measured first-order dimensions and the formative higher-order credibility construct, as well as the direct and indirect relationships represented in the model (Becker et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2022). The analysis should proceed by evaluating indicator reliability, internal-consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for the reflective constructs. For the formative higher-order construct, researchers should assess collinearity among the dimensions and the significance and relevance of their outer weights. The structural

model should subsequently be examined through the path coefficients corresponding to H1 through H6, explanatory power, predictive relevance, and bootstrapped confidence intervals. The indirect credibility-attitude-purchase-intention effect should be tested through bootstrapping, while retaining the direct credibility-purchase-intention path to determine the nature of the mediation.

Future empirical validation should rely on a sufficiently large sample to support the estimation of the higher-order model. An overall sample of at least 300 respondents may be adopted as a practical recruitment target. However, the minimum required sample size should be determined through an a priori power analysis based on the model complexity, the smallest structural effect of theoretical interest, the selected significance level, and a statistical power of at least 0.80 (Cohen, 1992; Hair et al., 2022; Kock & Hadaya, 2018). Future research may also compare the proposed relationships across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Such comparisons would require adequately sized and reasonably balanced platform-specific subsamples, with statistical power assessed separately for each group.

For multi-group comparisons across platforms, generations, cultures, product categories, or other theoretically justified groups, the power requirement should be satisfied separately for each group rather than only for the pooled sample. Each subgroup must therefore contain enough observations to detect the smallest effect of substantive interest with the chosen power level. Before comparing structural coefficients, researchers should also establish measurement invariance, for example through the measurement invariance of composite models procedure, and then apply an appropriate PLS multi-group test (Henseler et al., 2016; Hair et al., 2022). These requirements should guide both sampling quotas and the number of groups retained for analysis.

Longitudinal and experimental designs could complement cross-sectional survey models. Longitudinal research would help determine how credibility develops through repeated exposure and deteriorates after inconsistent endorsements or perceived violations of trust. Experiments could manipulate expertise cues, disclosure practices, or influencer-product congruence. Comparative studies may subsequently examine the boundary conditions identified in the article as extensions of the core model, without altering the six hypotheses or the parsimonious structure of Figure 1.

## 6. Conclusion

### *Synthesis of the proposed framework*

This article develops a parsimonious conceptual explanation of how influencer credibility may shape consumers' purchase intention. Expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness are specified as reflectively measured first-order dimensions that jointly form influencer credibility as a formative higher-order construct. Credibility is then linked to purchase intention through two complementary routes: a direct informational route and an indirect evaluative route passing through attitude toward the influencer. The six hypotheses therefore connect the formation of credibility to its attitudinal and behavioral consequences within a single coherent framework.

### *Theoretical and managerial contributions*

The theoretical contribution lies in articulating Source Credibility Theory with the attitude-intention logic derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior. This articulation distinguishes the assessment of the communicator from the subsequent formation of behavioral intention and clarifies the role of attitude toward the influencer as the psychological mechanism connecting these stages. It also reconciles dimensional and global approaches to credibility without

assuming that expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness necessarily carry equal weights across contexts.

From a managerial perspective, the framework suggests that brands and agencies should evaluate prospective influencers on the relevance of their expertise, the credibility of their commercial conduct, and the congruence of their public image with the endorsed offer rather than relying primarily on visibility or follower counts. Campaign assessment should distinguish between source credibility, audience attitude toward the influencer, and purchase intention because these indicators represent different stages of persuasion. Agencies should also monitor excessive promotional frequency and inconsistent partnerships that may weaken trustworthiness. Platforms can support credible influence practices by facilitating transparent sponsorship disclosure and providing brands with indicators that complement reach and engagement metrics.

### **Limitations**

The proposed framework has several limitations. First, it remains theoretical and has not yet been subjected to empirical validation; consequently, the direction and relative magnitude of the six relationships cannot be inferred from the present article alone. Second, the meanings and relative importance of expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and attitude may vary across cultural, platform, and product settings, which limits the assumption of universal applicability. Third, reducing influencer credibility to three established dimensions provides conceptual clarity but may omit context-specific cues such as perceived authenticity, sponsorship transparency, influencer-product congruence, or parasocial interaction. Finally, purchase intention is not equivalent to actual purchasing behavior and may be affected by situational constraints not represented in the model. These limitations reflect the deliberately focused scope of the framework and should be considered when interpreting and testing it.

### **Concluding perspective**

The principal next step is a rigorous empirical assessment of the proposed measurement and structural architecture. Such validation should determine whether the reflective-formative specification of influencer credibility is empirically supported and whether the direct and attitude-mediated routes to purchase intention coexist. Overall, the central contribution of this article lies in explaining how expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness jointly form influencer credibility and how this evaluation may be transformed into purchase intention through attitude toward the influencer.

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