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Integrating Trust and Source Credibility in Social Media Influencer Marketing: An Integrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Influencer research explains purchase intention through either source credibility or consumer trust but rarely connects the two. This integrative review examines how expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness interact with consumer trust to shape purchase intention. Fifty-five peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2023 were screened against seven criteria, and 25 studies were synthesized thematically. Trustworthiness and parasocial relationships drove purchase intention most consistently, attractiveness worked mainly through parasocial relationships, and expertise often lost significance in multivariate models. Consumer trust repeatedly mediated credibility effects, with perceived authenticity as its strongest antecedent. Sponsorship disclosure lowered purchase intention directly but raised trustworthiness through transparency. The review contributes a process framework placing consumer trust between credibility and purchase intention, with five testable propositions.

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INTRODUCTION

The migration of consumer attention from broadcast media to algorithmically curated social platforms has restructured marketing communication. Social media influencers, individuals who build sizeable and engaged audiences through the sustained production of personal content, now act as consumer catalysts whose recommendations are received closer to peer advice than to corporate advertising. In Indonesia alone, 139.0 million active social media user identities were recorded in January 2024, about half of the population (Kemp, 2024), which makes the question of how influencers persuade relevant well beyond the Western markets that dominate the evidence. Campaign effectiveness depends systematically on the characteristics of the influencer, the content, and the follower base (Leung et al., 2022), yet the theory used to explain why influencers persuade remains fragmented, with no framework that links antecedents, processes, and outcomes (Vrontis et al., 2021). The most consequential gap lies between two literatures. Communication scholarship, anchored in source credibility theory, explains persuasion through attributes of the sender, namely expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). Consumer psychology explains persuasion through trust, a readiness to accept vulnerability toward another party that rests on beliefs about that party's ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995). Because the two traditions are usually treated as parallel, existing work cannot explain how specific source attributes are converted into consumer trust, when that conversion succeeds or fails, and why the same endorser persuades in one setting and backfires in another.

This review addresses the gap through one research question: how do the dimensions of influencer source credibility interact with consumer trust mechanisms to shape purchase intention in social media contexts? Previous reviews have mapped the field bibliometrically or organized it into broad antecedent-outcome frameworks (Joshi et al., 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021), but none has synthesized the primary evidence on these links. The contribution of this review is a process account that treats consumer trust as the mechanism through which credibility dimensions affect purchase intention, rather than as one more antecedent beside them. The review therefore aims to identify the functional role of each credibility dimension, to establish whether consumer trust carries their effect to purchase intention, and to explain when sponsorship disclosure strengthens or weakens persuasion, through an integrative review of peer-reviewed evidence published between 2015 and 2023.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Source Credibility Theory

Source-centric research explains persuasion through perceivable attributes of the sender, operationalized as expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness in the scale validated for celebrity endorsers (Ohanian, 1990). The model was later applied to online celebrities, whom young female Instagram users find more believable and easier to identify with than traditional stars (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), and a meta-analysis shows that the characteristics of a source

affect whether consumers accept and act on information they encounter online (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

In this model, expertise refers to how far an audience regards a communicator as knowledgeable enough to make sound claims, trustworthiness to the audience's confidence that those claims are stated honestly, and attractiveness to physical appeal, familiarity, and likeability (Ohanian, 1990). Because the model was built for distant and episodic contact with celebrities in mass media, its transfer to social media is incomplete.

Consumer Trust

Consumer-centric research shifts the explanation from the sender to the receiver. Here trust is a psychological state of the consumer rather than an attribute of the influencer, formed through repeated exposure and reduced uncertainty about the endorser's motives (Mayer et al., 1995). In influencer settings, followers place more trust in branded posts when the content is informative and the influencer appears credible, and that trust then raises brand awareness and purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In this review, consumer trust covers trust in the influencer, in branded content, and in the endorsed brand, which the primary studies measure separately.

Set side by side, the two traditions leave an under-theorized interface. Source-centric studies rarely specify how credibility judgments become trust, consumer-centric studies often collapse credibility into a single antecedent of trust, and neither explains why attractiveness can capture attention without producing trust or why disclosing sponsorship sometimes strengthens persuasion.

Parasocial Interaction and Credibility in Digital Contexts

Social platforms change credibility judgments in two ways. Algorithmic curation amplifies engaging content, which favors visually appealing material, and follower counts act as heuristic cues: a large following makes an influencer seem more popular and, through that impression, more likeable (De Veirman et al., 2017). Parasocial interaction, the sense of intimacy that audience members develop toward a media figure who does not know them personally (Horton & Wohl, 1956), makes credibility relational: followers judge not only whether the influencer knows and tells the truth, but also whether the influencer resembles and cares about them. Among followers of Instagram and YouTube bloggers, perceived credibility and parasocial interaction each contribute to purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), and consumers identify more closely with influencers than with celebrities, which helps influencer endorsements perform better (Schouten et al., 2020). Source credibility in digital contexts is therefore best read as an expansion of the classical dimensions toward similarity, parasocial closeness, and perceived authenticity.

Perceived Authenticity and Persuasion Knowledge

Perceived authenticity is the audience's judgment that an influencer's endorsements stem from genuine conviction, fit the influencer's established

identity, and are offered truthfully rather than mainly for commercial gain; the validated scale captures this judgment through five facets: sincerity, truthful endorsement, visibility, expertise, and uniqueness (J. A. Lee & Eastin, 2021). It differs from trustworthiness, a dispositional attribution about the honesty of a source, because it concerns the motive behind a specific endorsement.

Authenticity also governs the activation of persuasion knowledge, what consumers have learned over time about how marketers try to influence them (Friestad & Wright, 1994). When authenticity is high, commercial intent is read as compatible with the relationship and skepticism is neutralized; when it is low, the same cues amplify skepticism and weaken the link between credibility and trust.

Guiding Expectations

Drawing on these theories, the review was guided by four initial expectations, which were tested against the primary evidence and revised where it contradicted them: physical attractiveness secures attention but adds little to purchase intention; expertise anchors long-term purchase intention; consumer trust carries the effect of source credibility to purchase intention; and sponsorship disclosure enhances perceived authenticity when the endorser is highly credible.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses an integrative review design because the research question requires combining heterogeneous evidence, including structural models, experiments, and a meta-analysis, interpreted alongside conceptual work, from two disciplines with different constructs; integrative reviews suit this task because they can merge findings obtained with different methods into a new conceptual framework (Torraco, 2016; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The review moved through the five stages proposed by Whittemore and Knafl (2005), from problem identification and literature search to data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation, and its search and screening are reported following PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021).

Problem identification. The review problem, the unexplained interface between source credibility and consumer trust in the formation of purchase intention, was broken into three questions: which dimensions relate to which outcomes, how credibility becomes trust, and when that conversion strengthens or weakens.

Information sources and timeframe. The protocol was designed for Scopus and Google Scholar, and the publication window was January 2015 to December 2023. The lower bound precedes the first empirical studies of social media influencers identified in the candidate pool, the earliest of which appeared in 2016 (J. E. Lee & Watkins, 2016), so the window does not truncate the evidence at its start. The upper bound was set for two reasons. First, in June 2023 the U.S. Federal Trade Commission adopted revised Endorsement Guides that tightened the disclosure expectations for social media endorsements (Federal Trade Commission, 2023); because disclosure is one of the focal constructs of this review, ending the window in 2023 keeps the corpus within one comparable disclosure regime. Second, a closed window allows the most recent studies to be fully indexed and

corrected, so that the corpus can be audited against stable bibliographic records. Studies published after 2023 are treated as material for an updated review.

Search strategy. Search terms combined three conceptual blocks, namely the endorser, the credibility construct, and the consumer outcome, with OR within blocks and AND between them: ("social media influencer*" OR "influencer marketing" OR "digital endorser*" OR "content creator*" OR blogger* OR vlogger* OR "key opinion leader*") AND ("source credibility" OR trustworthiness OR expertise OR attractiveness OR authenticity) AND ("consumer trust" OR "brand trust" OR "purchase intention*" OR "buying intention*"). Candidate records were identified through targeted searches of Google Scholar and publisher databases guided by this string, assisted by the Research and Cite features of Paperpal (Cactus Communications, 2026), and through backward and forward citation chasing of earlier reviews and key studies; the last search was conducted on 8 November 2026. A complete execution of the string in Scopus is reported as a limitation.

Eligibility criteria. Seven criteria were applied identically to every record:

1. *Publication type:* peer-reviewed journal articles; conference papers, book chapters, theses, editorials, and preprints were excluded.
2. *Period:* published between 2015 and 2023.
3. *Language:* English.
4. *Context:* influencers or digital endorsers on social media rather than celebrities in offline or broadcast media only.
5. *Constructs:* at least one source credibility dimension, and consumer trust or purchase intention measured as a variable.
6. *Design:* quantitative or mixed-method empirical studies, or meta-analyses, with explicit theoretical grounding; conceptual and qualitative work was used only to interpret findings.
7. *Quality:* clear construct definitions, a transparent method, and, for quantitative studies, reported reliability and validity.

Screening workflow. Fifty-five candidate records were identified, none duplicated, and all were screened on title and abstract and assessed for eligibility, 54 in full text and one, which was not included, from the abstract and publisher information. Nineteen records were excluded because they did not measure the required constructs, and eleven met the criteria only partially and were not retained (reasons in Figure 1), leaving 25 studies for synthesis. Records outside the corpus are cited only to interpret findings and are identified as such in the text. The flow of records is shown in Figure 1.

Use of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence was used strictly for literature discovery and citation retrieval during the search stage through the "Research and Cite" features of Paperpal (Cactus Communications, 2026). No artificial intelligence tool was used for record screening, eligibility assessment, data extraction, or thematic synthesis, all of which were conducted manually by the authors. Every retrieved record, screening decision, extracted value, and citation was independently verified by the authors against the original primary sources, and the full screening record is available from the corresponding author upon request.

Quality appraisal. Quantitative studies were appraised for the reporting of reliability and validity, the testing of common method bias, sampling, and the measurement of outcomes. Fifteen of the 24 primary studies reported both composite reliability and average variance extracted, but only five tested for common method bias. Eight studies relied on online panel samples from Amazon Mechanical Turk, two used student samples, and three measured a key outcome with a single item. Within the 25 included studies, these design weaknesses were used to weigh conflicting findings rather than to exclude studies further. All 25 included studies were assessed in full text.

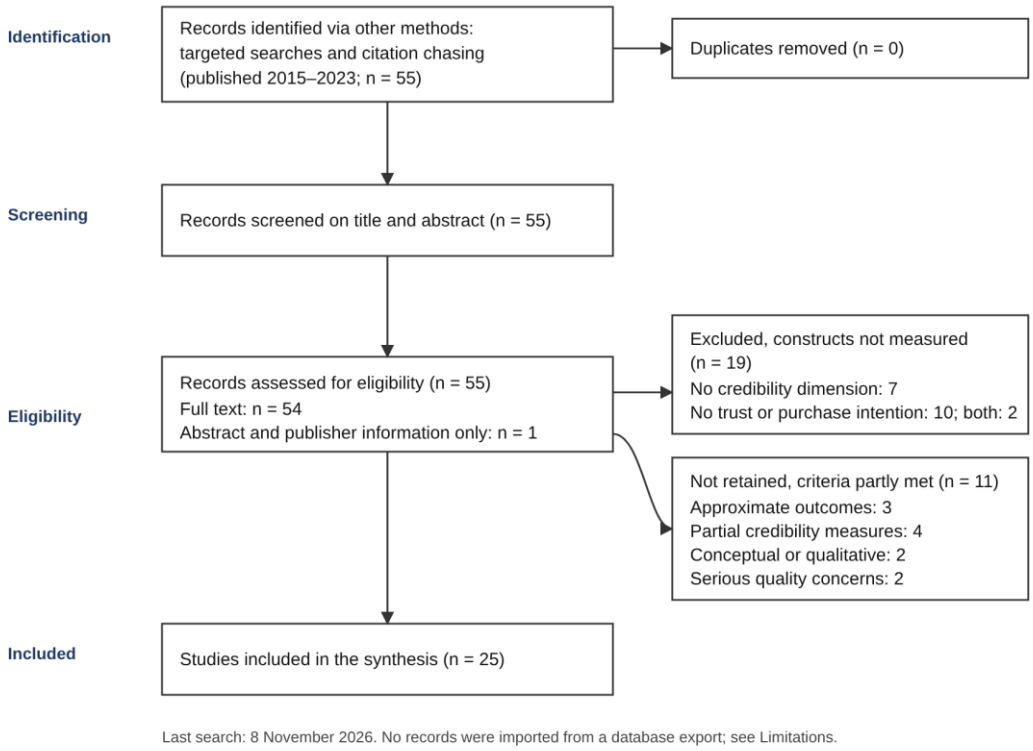

Figure 1. Flow of Records Through the Review, Following the PRISMA 2020 Statement

Data extraction and synthesis. A structured form recorded each study's context, design, sample, theoretical lens, constructs, measures, mediators and moderators, key coefficients, and contradictory findings. Findings were coded inductively, clustered into themes reflecting the functional role of each construct, and then integrated with source credibility, trust formation, parasocial interaction, and persuasion knowledge theory.

RESEARCH RESULT

The synthesis shows that source credibility dimensions are not interchangeable predictors of purchase intention. Table 1 lists the characteristics of the 25 included studies and Table 2 consolidates the themes; the Discussion integrates them into a revised framework (Figure 2).

Descriptive Profile of the Included Studies

The 25 studies were published between 2016 and 2023, most of them in 2020 (eight) and 2022 (seven). Nine studies used samples from the United States and

three from Portugal, while only six came from non-Western countries (Table 1). Instagram was the setting of 13 studies and YouTube of four; 15 studies were cross-sectional surveys, eight used experiments alone or with surveys, one combined interview with a survey, and one was a meta-analysis. Source credibility theory was the dominant lens, combined with parasocial interaction or relationship theory in nine studies, and fashion and beauty were the most frequent product contexts.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Included Studies

Study	**Country**	**Platform**	**Design (n)**	**Credibility dimensions measured**	**Key finding**
J. E. Lee & Watkins (2016)	USA	YouTube	Survey + 2 experiments (396)	Physical and social attractiveness, homophily	Homophily/social attractiveness drove PSI (β = 0.84); physical attractiveness weak (β = 0.08)
Breves et al. (2019)	Germany	Instagram	Experiment (687) + survey (197)	Trustworthiness, expertise, physical attractiveness	Fit raised trustworthiness and expertise, not attractiveness; effects weaker at high PSR
Ki & Kim (2019)	USA	Instagram	Survey (395)	Attractive and expert content	Desire to mimic predicted purchase intention (β = 0.61)
Pöyry et al. (2019)	Finland	Instagram	Survey (592)	Attractiveness, authenticity	Authenticity predicted PI (β = 0.162); attractiveness and disclosure n.s.
Torres et al. (2019)	Portugal	Multiple	Survey (307)	Attractiveness (likeability, familiarity)	Attractiveness (β = 0.177) and congruence (β = 0.203) predicted PI
Chetioui et al. (2020)	Morocco	Multiple	Survey (610)	Credibility, expertise	Credibility, expertise, and trust shaped attitude, which predicted PI
Jin & Ryu	USA	Instagram	3	Source	Content type

Study	Country	Platform	Design (n)	Credibility dimensions measured	Key finding
(2020)			experiments (121; 106; 377)	trustworthiness	interacted with envy and PSI in shaping buying intention
Ladhari et al. (2020)	USA	YouTube	Survey (501)	Expertise, homophily	Expertise and homophily raised vlogger popularity, which drove purchases
S. Lee & Kim (2020)	USA	Instagram	Experiment (358)	Influencer credibility (high vs low)	Influencer credibility had no effect on PI; brand credibility mattered
Reinikainen et al. (2020)	Finland	YouTube	Experiment (302)	Influencer credibility	Credibility fully mediated PSR → brand trust
Trivedi & Sama (2020)	India	Multiple	Survey (421)	Expertise, attractiveness	No direct effects on PI; indirect via brand attitude and admiration
Weismueller et al. (2020)	Australia	Instagram	Survey with disclosure stimuli (306)	Attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise	Trustworthiness strongest (β = 0.22); hashtag disclosure reduced PI via attractiveness
Yuan & Lou (2020)	USA	Multiple	Survey (355)	Expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, similarity	Attractiveness and similarity, not expertise or trustworthiness, built PSR
AlFarraj et al. (2021)	Jordan	Instagram	Survey (384)	Attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise	Attractiveness (γ = 0.470) and expertise (γ = 0.317) raised engagement, which drove PI (γ = 0.798); no direct credibility effect on PI; trustworthiness n.s.

Study	Country	Platform	Design (n)	Credibility dimensions measured	Key finding
Aw & Chuah (2021)	Malaysia	Multiple	Survey (361)	Attractiveness, prestige, expertise (content)	Attractiveness strongest driver of PSR (β = 0.228); PSR reduced self-serving motive (β = −0.630)
Kim & Kim (2021)	USA	Multiple	Survey (384)	Expertise, physical attractiveness, authenticity, homophily	Authenticity (β = 0.45) strongest antecedent of trust; attractiveness n.s.
S. S. Lee et al. (2021)	USA	Instagram	Experiment (287)	Trustworthiness, expertise	Non-sponsorship declarations raised credibility more than honesty claims
Balaban et al. (2022)	Romania	Instagram	Experiment (248)	Trustworthiness	Paid-partnership label reduced PI directly (b = −1.31) but raised it via trustworthiness
Gomes et al. (2022)	Portugal	Instagram	Interviews + survey (206)	Trustworthiness, expertise, similarity	Expertise n.s. (β = −0.082); PSI predicted PI (β = 0.370)
Janssen et al. (2022)	Netherlands	Instagram	Experiment (432)	Credibility (trustworthiness, expertise)	Fit and follower count worked through credibility and identification
Koay et al. (2022)	Malaysia	Instagram	Survey (191)	Trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise	Trustworthiness (β = 0.345) and expertise (β = 0.408) predicted PI; attractiveness n.s. (β = 0.003) but stronger at high materialism
Leite & Baptista (2022)	USA	Instagram, YouTube	Survey (433)	Source credibility	Credibility → PI n.s. (β = 0.00) but → brand trust;

Study	Country	Platform	Design (n)	Credibility dimensions measured	Key finding
					PSR → PI (β = 0.38)
Magano et al. (2022)	Portugal	Instagram	Survey (501)	Credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, similarity	Trustworthiness and expertise supported; attractiveness not supported
Masuda et al. (2022)	South Korea	YouTube	Survey (313)	Physical and social attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise	PSR (β = 0.391) > trustworthiness (β = 0.225) > expertise (β = 0.181)
Ao et al. (2023)	Multiple	Multiple	Meta-analysis (62 studies)	Credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, homophily	Pooled r with PI: credibility 0.57, trustworthiness 0.55, expertise 0.50, attractiveness 0.47

Note: Studies are ordered by year of publication. PI = purchase intention; PSI = parasocial interaction; PSR = parasocial relationship; β = standardized path coefficient; b = unstandardized coefficient; γ = standardized structural coefficient; r = pooled correlation; n.s. = not significant.

Thematic Synthesis

Thematic coding produced five themes, summarized in Table 2, and each is discussed in turn below.

Table 2. Thematic Synthesis of the Functional Roles of Source Credibility and Consumer Trust in Influencer Persuasion

Theme	Focal constructs	Mechanism	Supporting studies	Contrary or null evidence
T1. Attractiveness as a relational entry point	Physical and social attractiveness	Builds parasocial relationships; weak or no direct effect on trust and purchase intention	AlFarraj et al., 2021 (via engagement); Aw & Chuah, 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021; Koay et al., 2022 (moderated by materialism); J. E. Lee & Watkins, 2016; Magano et al., 2022; Pöyry et al., 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020	Torres et al., 2019
T2. The uneven role of expertise	Expertise	Strong bivariate association but small unique effect when trustworthiness and	AlFarraj et al., 2021; Gomes et al., 2022; S. Lee & Kim, 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2020; bivariate	Kim & Kim, 2021; Koay et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2022; Weismueller et

Theme	Focal constructs	Mechanism	Supporting studies	Contrary or null evidence
		parasocial closeness are modeled	association: Ao et al., 2023	al., 2020 (positive multivariate effects)
T3. Trustworthiness and parasocial closeness as anchors	Trustworthiness, parasocial relationships, fit	Relational route dominates the cognitive route; fit strengthens both	Breves et al., 2019; Gomes et al., 2022; Janssen et al., 2022; Jin & Ryu, 2020; Koay et al., 2022; Ladhari et al., 2020; Masuda et al., 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020	AlFarraj et al., 2021 (trustworthiness n.s.); Yuan & Lou, 2020 (trustworthiness unrelated to parasocial strength)
T4. Trust and authenticity as the conversion mechanism	Consumer trust, perceived authenticity	Trust mediates credibility to purchase intention; authenticity is the strongest antecedent of trust	Chetioui et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022; Pöyry et al., 2019; Reinikainen et al., 2020	None identified in the corpus
T5. Dual pathway of sponsorship disclosure	Disclosure, persuasion knowledge, transparency	Direct negative effect on purchase intention; indirect positive effect via transparency and trustworthiness	Balaban et al., 2022; S. S. Lee et al., 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020	S. Lee & Kim, 2020; Pöyry et al., 2019

Attractiveness as a Relational Entry Point

The initial expectation was that physical attractiveness secures visual engagement but adds little to purchase intention. The evidence supports the second half of this expectation. Physical attractiveness did not predict trust in the influencer ($\beta = 0.10$, n.s.) while authenticity, homophily, and expertise did (Kim & Kim, 2021). Attractiveness was not supported as a predictor of attitudes and purchase intention among 501 fashion followers (Magano et al., 2022), and its effect on purchase intention vanished once photo-level variables were controlled ($\beta = 0.012$, n.s.) (Pöyry et al., 2019). In a luxury context, physical attractiveness had only a weak effect on parasocial interaction ($\beta = 0.08$) compared with homophily and social attractiveness ($\beta = 0.84$) (J. E. Lee & Watkins, 2016).

The first half of the expectation needs revision. Attractiveness is not only a gate for attention; it also builds relationships. Attractiveness and similarity, but not expertise or trustworthiness, predicted the strength of parasocial relationships, which in turn raised interest in promoted products (Yuan & Lou, 2020). Attractive content was the strongest content-level driver of parasocial relationships in a Malaysian sample ($\beta = 0.228$) (Aw & Chuah, 2021). One study still reports a direct effect: attractiveness predicted purchase intention ($\beta = 0.177$) together with influencer-brand congruence (Torres et al., 2019). In an aesthetic dermatology context, attractiveness raised online engagement ($\gamma = 0.470$), which in turn drove purchase intention, but had no direct effect on it (AlFarraj et al.,

2021), and among Malaysian Instagram users' attractiveness did not predict purchase intention directly (β = 0.003) but gained influence as materialism increased (Koay et al., 2022). Taken together, attractiveness appears to work through relational closeness and to depend on consumer and product characteristics, rather than acting as a stable direct driver of purchase.

The Uneven Role of Expertise

The expectation that expertise anchors long-term purchase intention is the weakest part of the original argument. Expertise was not significant as a direct predictor of purchase intention in a Portuguese fashion sample (β = −0.082, n.s.) (Gomes et al., 2022), and neither expert nor attractive influencers affected online purchase intention directly in India, although both worked indirectly through brand attitude and brand admiration (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Expertise likewise had no direct effect on purchase intention among aesthetic dermatology followers in Jordan (γ = 0.077, n.s.) and worked only through online engagement (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Manipulated influencer credibility had no effect on purchase intention in an experiment (S. Lee & Kim, 2020). Other studies, however, report positive effects of expertise on trust (β = 0.20) (Kim & Kim, 2021), on purchase intention (β = 0.408, β = 0.181, and β = 0.16, respectively) (Koay et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020), and on attitudes (Chetioui et al., 2020).

The meta-analytic evidence sharpens the contrast. Across 62 studies, expertise correlated substantially with purchase intention (r = 0.50) (Ao et al., 2023). The gap between this bivariate association and the frequent non-significance in multivariate models suggests that expertise shares much of its variance with trustworthiness and parasocial closeness, so its unique contribution disappears when those constructs are modeled together. Product category may also matter: expertise may weigh more for search goods and high-risk purchases than for the fashion and lifestyle products that dominate the evidence.

Trustworthiness and Parasocial Closeness as Anchors

Trustworthiness is the most consistent credibility dimension in the corpus. It was the strongest predictor of purchase intention among the three classic dimensions (β = 0.22) (Weismueller et al., 2020), and it predicted purchase intention (β = 0.345) together with expertise while attractiveness did not (Koay et al., 2022). The pattern is not universal, however: trustworthiness affected neither engagement nor purchase intention among aesthetic dermatology followers in Jordan (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Parasocial relationships emerged as an even stronger driver. In a Korean sample, parasocial relationships predicted purchase intention (β = 0.391) more strongly than trustworthiness (β = 0.225) or expertise (β = 0.181) (Masuda et al., 2022); parasocial interaction predicted purchase intention (β = 0.370) in Portugal (Gomes et al., 2022); and parasocial relationships predicted purchase intention (β = 0.38) when source credibility did not (Leite & Baptista, 2022). The relational route therefore dominates the cognitive route. Fit between the influencer and the endorsed product strengthens both routes: fit increased trustworthiness and expertise but not physical attractiveness (Breves

et al., 2019), and fit together with follower count worked through credibility and identification (Janssen et al., 2022).

Consumer Trust and Authenticity as the Conversion Mechanism

The strongest support in the corpus concerns the central claim of this review: credibility affects purchase intention mainly through consumer trust. Source credibility had no direct effect on purchase intention (β = 0.00, n.s.) but significantly increased brand trust, which carried the effect forward (Leite & Baptista, 2022). When influencer credibility entered the model, the direct effect of parasocial relationships on brand trust became non-significant (β = −0.01), which indicates that credibility mediates the link between relationship and trust (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Trust in the influencer mediated the effects of expertise, authenticity, and homophily on loyalty, product attitude, and purchase intention (Kim & Kim, 2021), and trust and credibility jointly shaped attitudes and purchase intention in Morocco (Chetioui et al., 2020).

The same studies assign perceived authenticity a larger role than the original framework did. Authenticity was the strongest antecedent of trust in the influencer (β = 0.45), stronger than homophily (β = 0.29) or expertise (β = 0.20), and its indirect effect on purchase intention through trust was 0.33 (Kim & Kim, 2021). Authenticity also predicted purchase intention directly (β = 0.162) while attractiveness did not (Pöyry et al., 2019). Strong parasocial relationships reduced the perception that an influencer acts from self-serving motives (β = −0.630) (Aw & Chuah, 2021), which shows how relational closeness protects authenticity. Authenticity therefore acts both as a direct source of trust and as the filter that determines whether commercial cues trigger skepticism.

The Dual Pathway of Sponsorship Disclosure

The original framework proposed a disclosure paradox in which transparency enhances authenticity when the endorser is highly credible. The evidence supports a more precise account in which disclosure acts through two opposing pathways. Four studies cited in this subsection did not meet all eligibility criteria and are used to interpret rather than count the evidence (Belanche et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2017; Karagür et al., 2022; Stubb et al., 2019). The direct pathway is negative. A paid-partnership label reduced purchase intention substantially (b = −1.31) (Balaban et al., 2022), the perception that an influencer was paid for a post reduced credibility sharply (β = −0.587) (Belanche et al., 2021), and explicit disclosure language raised advertising recognition, which lowered brand attitude among consumers who remembered the disclosure (Evans et al., 2017).

The indirect pathway is positive. The same paid-partnership label that reduced purchase intention also increased persuasion knowledge, which raised perceived trustworthiness (b = 0.34) and, through it, purchase intention (indirect b = 0.03) (Balaban et al., 2022). Disclosure increased perceived advertising transparency, which produced a transparency bonus that raised trustworthiness, and the positive and negative paths were of similar size (Karagür et al., 2022). A disclosure that justified the compensation increased acceptance of sponsorship

and source credibility (Stubb et al., 2019), and declarations of non-sponsorship had stronger effects on credibility than general honesty claims (S. S. Lee et al., 2021). The form of disclosure also matters: a disclosure statement increased purchase intention through attractiveness, whereas a disclosure hashtag decreased it, and disclosure did not raise trustworthiness or expertise (Weismueller et al., 2020). Two studies found no effect at all: disclosure was unrelated to purchase intention (β = 0.015) (Pöyry et al., 2019), and disclosure did not activate persuasion knowledge differently across conditions (S. Lee & Kim, 2020).

DISCUSSION

A Revised Integrated Framework

Figure 2 presents the framework derived from the synthesis. It differs from the additive models common in the literature in three ways. Attractiveness enters mainly through parasocial relationships rather than as a direct driver of purchase intention. Consumer trust sits at the center of the model as the mechanism that converts trustworthiness, expertise, authenticity, and parasocial closeness into purchase intention. Sponsorship disclosure is odelled with two paths: a direct negative path to purchase intention and an indirect positive path that runs through perceived transparency and trustworthiness.

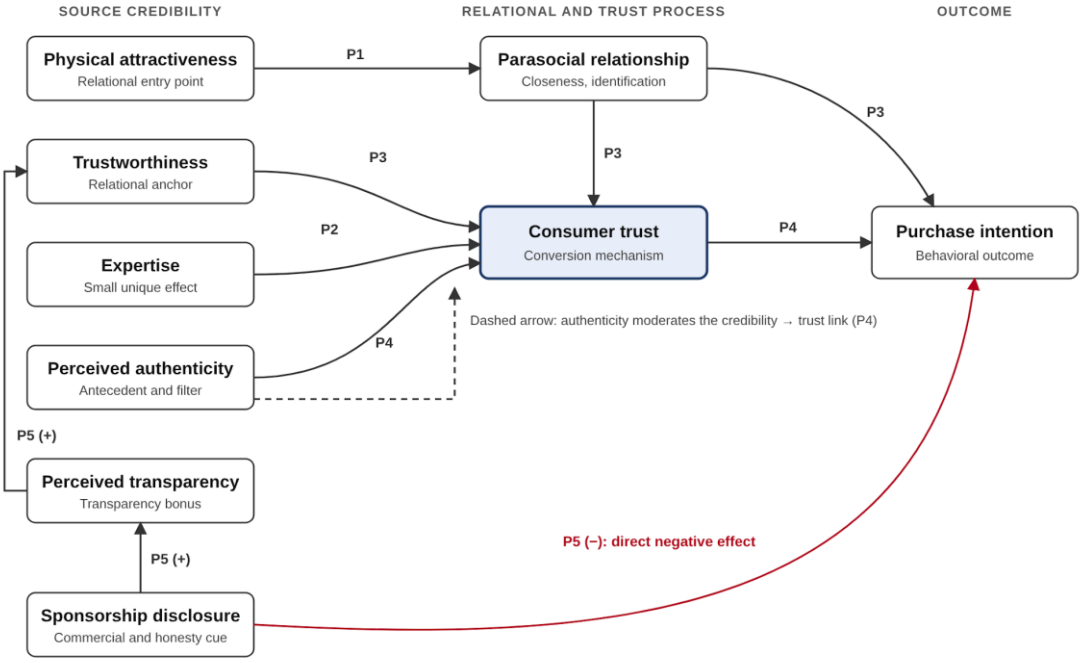

Figure 2. Revised Integrated Framework Linking Source Credibility Dimensions, Perceived Authenticity, Parasocial Relationships, Consumer Trust, and Purchase Intention

The framework also explains why the net effect of disclosure varies across studies. Strong parasocial relationships and high authenticity reduce the attribution of self-serving motives (Aw & Chuah, 2021), which should strengthen the transparency pathway relative to the skepticism pathway. This interpretation

keeps the core of the original disclosure argument but makes it conditional and testable.

Propositions

Five propositions summarize the revised framework. Each is followed by the supporting and contrary evidence and a suggestion for testing.

Proposition 1: Physical attractiveness has at most a weak direct effect on consumer trust and purchase intention; its influence runs mainly through parasocial relationships and is moderated by consumer materialism and product type. It rests on the evidence summarized under T1 in Table 2 and is contradicted by one study that reports a direct effect (Torres et al., 2019). It can be tested with a model in which physical attractiveness predicts parasocial relationships and purchase intention simultaneously, with materialism as a moderator.

Proposition 2: The unique effect of expertise on purchase intention is small once trustworthiness and parasocial closeness are controlled, and it is stronger for search goods and high-risk purchases than for experience goods. Supporting and contrary evidence is summarized under T2 in Table 2. A multi-category experiment that crosses expertise with product type while measuring trustworthiness and parasocial relationships would test it.

Proposition 3: Trustworthiness and parasocial relationships are the strongest credibility-related drivers of purchase intention, and influencer-product fit strengthens both. It rests on the evidence under T3 in Table 2 and can be tested with structural models that compare the relational and cognitive routes in the same sample.

Proposition 4: Consumer trust mediates the effect of source credibility on purchase intention, and perceived authenticity is both a direct antecedent of trust and a moderator of the credibility-trust link. It is supported by the mediation evidence under T4 in Table 2 and can be tested with moderated mediation, measuring authenticity on an established scale (J. A. Lee & Eastin, 2021).

Proposition 5: Sponsorship disclosure reduces purchase intention directly but increases perceived trustworthiness through transparency, and the positive pathway is stronger for influencers with high authenticity and strong parasocial relationships. It rests on the corpus evidence under T5 in Table 2 and on two studies outside the corpus (Karagür et al., 2022; Stubb et al., 2019), while other studies outside the corpus report only negative effects (Belanche et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2017). Experiments that cross-disclosure format with prior authenticity and parasocial strength, and model both pathways, would test it.

Theoretical Implications

The review makes three contributions. First, it connects source credibility theory and trust formation by showing that trust is the main route through which credibility affects purchase intention. Second, it differentiates the functions of credibility dimensions: trustworthiness and parasocial closeness anchor persuasion, attractiveness operates relationally, and expertise often loses its unique effect in multivariate models. Third, it refines the application of persuasion knowledge theory (Friestad & Wright, 1994) to influencer marketing.

Disclosure activates persuasion knowledge, but activated knowledge does not always produce resistance; when it is read as transparency, it can raise trustworthiness. This supports arguments that influencer-follower relationships are reciprocal and co-created rather than one-sided (Lou, 2022).

Comparison with Prior Reviews

The findings extend earlier reviews in two respects. Systematic and bibliometric reviews organized influencer research into antecedents and outcomes or mapped its intellectual structure (Joshi et al., 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021), but they did not synthesize the primary evidence on whether consumer trust transmits the effect of credibility to purchase intention; the studies reviewed here that modeled trust as a mediator indicate that it does (Kim & Kim, 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022). Meta-analytic evidence reports substantial bivariate correlations between each credibility dimension and purchase intention (Ao et al., 2023); the multivariate studies reviewed here show that these correlations overlap, so expertise and attractiveness lose much of their unique effect once trustworthiness, parasocial closeness, and trust are modeled.

Boundary Conditions

Three boundary conditions limit how far the framework can be generalized. The evidence comes almost entirely from Instagram and YouTube, and no study in the corpus focused on TikTok, where algorithmic short-video feeds may change how parasocial bonds with individual creator's form. Eighteen of the 24 single-country studies used samples from Western countries, and only six came from Morocco, India, Jordan, Malaysia (two studies), and South Korea, so the relative weight of trust and credibility in markets such as Indonesia remains largely untested. Fashion and beauty dominate the product contexts, which may understate the role of expertise for search goods and high-risk purchases.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This integrative review shows that source credibility and consumer trust are sequential parts of one persuasion process. Its main theoretical contribution is a revised framework in which trustworthiness, authenticity, and parasocial closeness build consumer trust, trust carries credibility into purchase intention, and attractiveness acts mainly through relationships rather than directly. Sponsorship disclosure has a direct cost to persuasion but can raise trustworthiness when it is read as transparency.

For marketers, the findings point to four practices. First, select influencers for perceived honesty, authenticity, and closeness to the target audience rather than for appearance or follower count alone. Second, prioritize influencer-product fit, which raises trustworthiness and expertise without depending on attractiveness. Third, treat disclosure as a credibility decision rather than only a legal obligation: clear disclosures with a credible justification of the partnership limit the direct loss and strengthen the transparency pathway. Fourth, invest in long-term partnerships that allow parasocial relationships to develop, because strong relationships reduce the attribution of self-serving motives. These practices are relevant for brands in Indonesia, where social media reaches about

half of the population (Kemp, 2024), although evidence from that market is still thin, so their effectiveness there should be tested rather than assumed.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

The review has six limitations. The candidate pool was assembled from targeted searches and citation chasing rather than a full Scopus execution, so relevant studies may be missing. Only English-language journal articles were considered. The window ends in 2023, so studies conducted under the revised disclosure guidance and studies of generative or virtual influencers published since then are not covered. One screened record, which was not included in the synthesis, was assessed only from its abstract and publisher information because its full text was not available. Although screening and data extraction were performed manually by the authors and every decision was verified against the original sources, literature retrieval was assisted by the Research and Cite features of Paperpal and the exact number of records returned at each search step was not systematically logged, which limits search replicability. Finally, the evidence is dominated by cross-sectional surveys, online panel samples, and fashion and beauty contests, which limits causal claims and generalization.

Future studies should test the five propositions with designs that separate the cognitive and relational routes, measure trust explicitly, and compare product categories. Three settings deserve priority: live-streaming commerce, where real-time interaction may accelerate parasocial bonds and trust; virtual and artificial-intelligence influencers, whose authenticity must be judged without a human source; and Indonesia and other Southeast Asian markets, which are under-represented in the corpus despite high social commerce adoption. Longitudinal designs would also show whether the effects of disclosure change as consumers grow used to platform labels.

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