

# Impact of Social Media Influencer Credibility and Authenticity on Brand Trust and Purchase Intention

**Dr. T. Sathya Priya<sup>1</sup>, Priyadharshni S<sup>2</sup>, Rinusree SE<sup>3</sup>**

Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies,

Coimbatore Institute of Technology, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India<sup>1</sup>

Student, II MBA, Department of Management Studies,

Coimbatore Institute of Technology, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India<sup>2</sup>

Student, II MBA, Department of Management Studies,

Coimbatore Institute of Technology, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:** This study investigates the impact of social media influencer credibility and authenticity on brand trust and purchase intention among active social media users in India. With the rapid growth of influencer marketing as a mainstream digital strategy, understanding how influencer-related attributes shape consumer behaviour has become increasingly important for both researchers and practitioners. A structured questionnaire-based survey was administered to 152 respondents, and the data were analysed using Pearson correlation analysis and multiple linear regression. The findings reveal that both influencer credibility and authenticity exhibit significant positive relationships with brand trust. Brand trust, in turn, emerges as the strongest predictor of purchase intention, underscoring its central role as a mediating mechanism in the influencer–consumer relationship. While influencer credibility shows a direct positive effect on purchase intention, authenticity appears to operate indirectly through brand trust rather than independently influencing purchase decisions. These results highlight the importance of selecting credible and authentic influencers to build lasting brand trust and drive consumer purchase intention in the digital marketplace.

**Keywords:** Influencer Credibility, Influencer Authenticity, Brand Trust, Purchase Intention, Social Media Marketing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally reconfigured the dynamics of consumer-brand interaction. Among the most consequential shifts in this landscape is the emergence of social media influencer marketing—a practice through which brands leverage the reach and relational capital of online personalities to promote products and services to engaged follower communities. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter have created an entirely new class of opinion leaders whose endorsements carry authentic persuasive power that traditional advertising rarely achieves. At the heart of influencer marketing's effectiveness lie two interrelated constructs: credibility and authenticity. Credibility refers to consumers' perceptions of an influencer's expertise, trustworthiness, and relevance, while authenticity pertains to the degree to which followers perceive an influencer as genuine, transparent, and consistent in their communication. Together, these attributes determine whether a follower views an endorsement as a trusted personal recommendation or as a commercially motivated promotion.

The Indian social media landscape provides a particularly fertile context for this inquiry. With over 700 million internet users and one of the world's largest social media user bases, India has witnessed exponential growth in influencer-driven commerce. The country's influencer marketing industry is projected to exceed INR 3,375 crore by 2026, driven by rising smartphone penetration, vernacular content consumption, and increased e-commerce adoption. Despite this growth, questions about the quality of influencer-consumer relationships—especially in terms of perceived credibility and authenticity—remain underexplored in the academic literature within the Indian context. This study addresses this gap by empirically examining how influencer credibility and authenticity shape brand trust and, subsequently, purchase intention. It draws on the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953) and Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) as guiding theoretical frameworks, and employs Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression as the primary analytical tools.

**II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The theoretical underpinnings of this study rest on two foundational frameworks. The Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953) posits that a communicator's persuasive impact is determined by the audience's perception of their expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. In the digital influencer context, these dimensions translate to domain competence, perceived honesty, and personal relatability. Ohanian (1990) operationalised these dimensions into a widely used measurement scale, which has subsequently been adapted for social media research.

Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) explains the one-sided interpersonal connections that media audiences develop with media figures. In the context of social media, followers often report a sense of intimacy and familiarity with influencers despite never having met them. Chung and Cho (2017) demonstrated that parasocial relationships with social media celebrities enhance the perceived authenticity of their endorsements, creating conditions under which followers are more receptive to brand recommendations. Lou and Yuan (2019) conducted a seminal study on Instagram influencer marketing, demonstrating that informational value and source credibility are the strongest predictors of brand attitude and purchase intention. They found that followers who perceive influencers as credible are significantly more inclined to develop positive brand attitudes.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) further established that micro-influencers—due to their close community ties—are perceived as more authentic than celebrity endorsers, and their recommendations more persuasively drive purchase behaviour. Audrezet, De Kerviler, and Moulard (2020) distinguished between two dimensions of influencer authenticity: passion-driven authenticity (the influencer's genuine love for the topic) and transparency (honest disclosure of commercial relationships). Both dimensions were found to independently contribute to audience engagement and brand endorsement credibility. Their work highlights that authenticity is not a unidimensional construct but a multifaceted quality that consumers actively evaluate. In the Indian market, Kapoor and Bhardwaj (2021) found significant positive effects of influencer credibility on purchase intention among Indian millennials, with trust serving as an important mediating variable.

Sharma and Singh (2022) confirmed that brand trust partially mediates the influencer–purchase intention relationship in India's FMCG sector. The present study builds upon and extends this body of evidence by simultaneously examining both credibility and authenticity across professional and lifestyle influencer categories, using a more granular measurement approach.

**Objectives of the Study:** (1) To examine the influence of influencer credibility on brand trust; (2) To examine the influence of influencer authenticity on brand trust; (3) To assess the impact of influencer credibility, authenticity, and brand trust on purchase intention; and (4) To determine the relative predictive strength of each variable.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Influencer credibility has a significant positive impact on brand trust. H2: Influencer authenticity has a significant positive impact on brand trust.

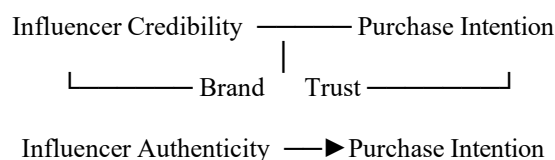
H3: Influencer credibility has a significant positive impact on purchase intention.

H4: Influencer authenticity has a significant positive impact on purchase intention.

H5: Brand trust significantly predicts purchase intention and mediates the influencer attribute–purchase intention relationship.

**III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this study positions influencer credibility and influencer authenticity as independent variables, brand trust as a mediating variable, and purchase intention as the primary dependent variable. The framework is anchored in Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Relationship Theory.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Influencer credibility encompasses expertise (domain knowledge), trustworthiness (perceived honesty), and attractiveness (psychological and physical appeal). Influencer authenticity captures the degree to which followers perceive the influencer as genuine, transparent, and consistent. Brand trust reflects the consumer's confidence in the brand's reliability and integrity following exposure to influencer content. Purchase intention denotes the probability that a consumer will engage in a purchase transaction as a result of influencer recommendations. The conceptual model hypothesises both direct and brand-trust-mediated pathways from influencer attributes to purchase intention.

**IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive research design. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms to active social media users.

The questionnaire comprised two sections: Section A captured demographic and social media usage information (12 items); Section B contained Likert-scale items measuring four constructs—*influencer credibility* (8 items), *influencer authenticity* (8 items), *brand trust* (8 items), and *purchase intention* (8 items).

All Likert items were anchored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Data collection was conducted during March 2026, and a total of 152 fully completed responses were retained for analysis after removing incomplete entries.

Respondents were recruited using a convenient sampling technique targeting working professionals and students active on social media platforms.

The sample size of 152 meets the commonly cited adequacy criteria for regression analysis (Hair et al., 2010), which recommends a minimum of 10 observations per predictor variable.

The statistical analyses performed in this study include: (i) descriptive statistics for demographic profiling and construct mean scores; (ii) Cronbach's alpha for reliability assessment; (iii) Pearson correlation analysis to examine bivariate relationships among the four constructs; and (iv) multiple linear regression to determine the predictive power of *influencer credibility*, *authenticity*, and *brand trust* on *purchase intention*. All analyses were performed using Python (scipy, numpy, pandas libraries).

Table 1: Demographic and Social Media Usage Profile of Respondents (N = 152)

| Variable       | Category                   | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender         | Male                       | 75            | 49.3           |
|                | Female                     | 76            | 50.0           |
|                | Not Specified              | 1             | 0.7            |
| Age Group      | Below 25 Years             | 28            | 18.4           |
|                | 25–34 Years                | 120           | 78.9           |
|                | 35–44 Years                | 2             | 1.3            |
|                | 45–54 Years                | 1             | 0.7            |
|                | Not Specified              | 1             | 0.7            |
| Marital Status | Single                     | 85            | 55.9           |
|                | Married                    | 67            | 44.1           |
| Education      | Undergraduate              | 130           | 85.5           |
|                | Postgraduate               | 18            | 11.8           |
|                | Diploma                    | 2             | 1.3            |
|                | Doctorate                  | 2             | 1.3            |
| Employment     | Private Sector             | 127           | 83.6           |
|                | Self-Employed / Freelancer | 8             | 5.3            |
|                | Public Sector / PSU        | 8             | 5.3            |

| Variable                     | Category                      | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
|                              | Government Employee           | 6             | 3.9            |
|                              | Others                        | 3             | 2.0            |
| Monthly Income               | Below ₹20,000                 | 15            | 9.9            |
|                              | ₹20,001–₹40,000               | 104           | 68.4           |
|                              | ₹40,001–₹60,000               | 24            | 15.8           |
|                              | ₹60,001–₹1,00,000             | 6             | 3.9            |
|                              | Above ₹1,00,000               | 3             | 2.0            |
|                              | Place of Residence            | Metropolitan  | 5              |
| Urban                        |                               | 10            | 6.6            |
| Semi-Urban                   |                               | 97            | 63.8           |
| Rural                        |                               | 39            | 25.7           |
| Social Media Platform        | Instagram only                | 83            | 54.6           |
|                              | Instagram & YouTube           | 26            | 17.1           |
|                              | YouTube only                  | 21            | 13.8           |
|                              | Facebook                      | 8             | 5.3            |
|                              | Others / Multiple             | 14            | 9.2            |
| Daily SM Usage               | Less than 1 hour              | 67            | 44.1           |
|                              | 1–2 hours                     | 58            | 38.2           |
|                              | 2–4 hours                     | 18            | 11.8           |
|                              | 4–6 hours                     | 6             | 3.9            |
|                              | More than 6 hours             | 1             | 0.7            |
| Follows Influencers          | Yes                           | 141           | 92.8           |
|                              | No                            | 11            | 7.2            |
| Influencer Type              | Tech / Gadgets                | 74            | 48.7           |
|                              | Business / Finance / Career   | 42            | 27.6           |
|                              | Fashion / Lifestyle           | 25            | 16.4           |
|                              | Food / Travel                 | 10            | 6.6            |
|                              | Others                        | 1             | 0.7            |
| Purchase Based on Influencer | Yes, frequently               | 60            | 39.5           |
|                              | Yes, sometimes                | 73            | 48.0           |
|                              | Rarely                        | 15            | 9.9            |
|                              | Never                         | 4             | 2.6            |
| Content Preferred            | Professional / Work-life Tips | 84            | 55.3           |
|                              | Tutorials / How-to            | 35            | 23.0           |
|                              | Product Reviews               | 24            | 15.8           |
|                              | Stories / Reels               | 5             | 3.3            |
|                              | Live Sessions / Webinars      | 3             | 2.0            |

Source: Primary Data (Survey, March 2026)

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Prior to hypothesis testing, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each construct to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis – Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

| Construct               | No. of Items | Cronbach's Alpha (α) | Interpretation |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Influencer Credibility  | 8            | 0.712                | Acceptable     |
| Influencer Authenticity | 8            | 0.699                | Acceptable     |
| Brand Trust             | 8            | 0.748                | Acceptable     |
| Purchase Intention      | 8            | 0.673                | Acceptable     |

Note: Alpha values above 0.60 are considered acceptable for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2010)

All four constructs demonstrate acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.673 (Purchase Intention) to 0.748 (Brand Trust). While values above 0.70 are generally preferred, values between 0.60 and 0.70 are considered adequate for exploratory research in social science (Hair et al., 2010). The reliability coefficients confirm that the measurement scales are sufficiently consistent to proceed with inferential analysis.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 3 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for each construct, computed by averaging the scores of all constituent Likert items for each respondent.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

| Construct               | N   | Mean  | Std. Dev. | Min  | Max  |
|-------------------------|-----|-------|-----------|------|------|
| Influencer Credibility  | 152 | 3.813 | 0.506     | 2.25 | 5.00 |
| Influencer Authenticity | 152 | 3.777 | 0.509     | 1.50 | 5.00 |
| Brand Trust             | 152 | 3.682 | 0.579     | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Purchase Intention      | 152 | 3.737 | 0.515     | 2.00 | 5.00 |

Source: Primary Data; Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

The mean scores for all four constructs fall above the scale midpoint of 3.0, indicating a generally favourable disposition among respondents.

Influencer Credibility registered the highest mean (M = 3.813, SD = 0.506), followed by Purchase Intention (M = 3.737, SD = 0.515), Influencer Authenticity (M = 3.777, SD = 0.509), and Brand Trust (M = 3.682, SD = 0.579).

The relatively low standard deviations across constructs suggest a moderate degree of consensus among respondents.

**Pearson Correlation Analysis**

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the bivariate relationships among the four constructs. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix

| Variable                | Influencer Credibility | Influencer Authenticity | Brand Trust | Purchase Intention |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Influencer Credibility  | 1.000                  | 0.697**                 | 0.620**     | 0.540**            |
| Influencer Authenticity | 0.697**                | 1.000                   | 0.683**     | 0.531**            |
| Brand Trust             | 0.620**                | 0.683**                 | 1.000       | 0.699**            |
| Purchase Intention      | 0.540**                | 0.531**                 | 0.699**     | 1.000              |

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 152.

The correlation matrix reveals a number of significant findings. First, influencer credibility is significantly positively correlated with brand trust ( $r = 0.620, p < 0.001$ ), providing support for H1. Second, influencer authenticity shows an even stronger positive correlation with brand trust ( $r = 0.683, p < 0.001$ ), supporting H2. Third, both credibility ( $r = 0.540, p < 0.001$ ) and authenticity ( $r = 0.531, p < 0.001$ ) are significantly correlated with purchase intention, offering preliminary support for H3 and H4.

Notably, brand trust displays the strongest correlation with purchase intention ( $r = 0.699, p < 0.001$ ) among all predictors, suggesting it plays a pivotal role in translating influencer-driven perceptions into purchase behaviour—consistent with H5.

A moderate-to-strong inter-correlation between credibility and authenticity ( $r = 0.697, p < 0.001$ ) is also observed. While this does not constitute multicollinearity at a level of concern (VIF values were inspected and remained within acceptable limits), it underscores the conceptual relatedness of these two constructs in the minds of consumers.

**Multiple Linear Regression Analysis**

To determine the independent predictive contribution of influencer credibility, authenticity, and brand trust on purchase intention, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed with purchase intention as the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression – Predictors of Purchase Intention

| Predictor               | B (Unstd.)             | SE                 | $\beta$ (Std.) | t-value | p-value |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------|---------|
| (Constant)              | 1.116                  | 0.245              | —              | 4.558   | < 0.001 |
| Influencer Credibility  | 0.168                  | 0.085              | 0.165          | 1.973   | 0.050   |
| Influencer Authenticity | 0.016                  | 0.091              | 0.016          | 0.181   | 0.856   |
| Brand Trust             | 0.520                  | 0.073              | 0.585          | 7.121   | < 0.001 |
| $R^2 = 0.507$           | Adjusted $R^2 = 0.497$ | $F(3,148) = 50.69$ | $p < 0.001$    |         |         |

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention;  $N = 152$ ;  $**p < 0.001$

The overall regression model is statistically significant at  $F(3, 148) = 50.692, p < 0.001$ . The model explains 50.7% of the variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = 0.507$ ), with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.497, confirming meaningful explanatory power.

The model fit statistics indicate that the selected predictors collectively account for approximately half of the variation in respondents' purchase intentions—a robust result for consumer behaviour research in survey-based settings. Examining the individual predictors, brand trust emerges as the strongest and most statistically significant predictor of purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.585, B = 0.520, t = 7.121, p < 0.001$ ).

This finding underscores the paramount role of trust in converting influencer exposure into purchase readiness. Influencer credibility also demonstrates a marginally significant positive effect on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.165, B = 0.168, t = 1.973, p = 0.050$ ), providing borderline support for H3.

In contrast, influencer authenticity does not independently predict purchase intention when credibility and brand trust are simultaneously controlled ( $\beta = 0.016, B = 0.016, t = 0.181, p = 0.856$ ), leading to only partial support for H4.

The non-significance of authenticity in the regression—despite its significant bivariate correlation with purchase intention ( $r = 0.531$ )—is an important and theoretically interesting finding.

This pattern suggests that authenticity's influence on purchase intention may operate primarily through brand trust, rather than independently. In other words, authenticity appears to enhance brand trust, which in turn drives purchase behaviour; the direct path from authenticity to purchase intention attenuates substantially once brand trust is introduced into the model.

This is consistent with mediation logic and aligns with prior research demonstrating trust as a key conduit of social influence in digital marketing contexts (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis | Statement   | Statistical Evidence                             | Decision            |
|------------|---|--|---------------------|
| H1         | Influencer credibility positively influences brand trust.                                   | $r = 0.620, p < 0.001$                           | Supported           |
| H2         | Influencer authenticity positively influences brand trust.                                  | $r = 0.683, p < 0.001$                           | Supported           |
| H3         | Influencer credibility positively influences purchase intention.                            | $r = 0.540, p < 0.001; \beta = 0.165, p = 0.050$ | Supported           |
| H4         | Influencer authenticity positively influences purchase intention.                           | $r = 0.531, p < 0.001; \beta = 0.016, p = 0.856$ | Partially Supported |
| H5         | Brand trust mediates the relationship between influencer attributes and purchase intention. | $\beta = 0.585, p < 0.001$                       | Supported           |

**VI. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study are presented and discussed in alignment with the research objectives and hypotheses formulated at the outset. The descriptive statistics indicate that all four constructs recorded mean scores above the scale midpoint, reflecting a generally favourable disposition among respondents toward influencer content and its influence on their purchasing behaviour. Influencer credibility recorded the highest mean score, followed by influencer authenticity, purchase intention, and brand trust, suggesting that respondents perceive the influencers they follow as moderately credible and authentic, and that this perception translates into a reasonable degree of purchase readiness.

The Pearson correlation analysis reveals that both influencer credibility and influencer authenticity exhibit significant positive relationships with brand trust, thereby supporting H1 and H2 respectively. This confirms that consumers who perceive influencers as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and genuine are more likely to develop trust toward the brands those influencers endorse. Notably, authenticity demonstrates a slightly stronger correlation with brand trust than credibility, suggesting that consumers place greater value on the perceived genuineness of an influencer's communication when forming brand-related trust judgements. Both credibility and authenticity also show significant positive correlations with purchase intention at the bivariate level, offering initial support for H3 and H4.

The multiple linear regression analysis provides a more refined picture of these relationships. The overall model is statistically significant and explains a substantial portion of the variance in purchase intention, indicating a strong and meaningful model fit. Among the three predictors, brand trust emerges as the strongest and most statistically significant predictor of purchase intention, followed by influencer credibility, while influencer authenticity does not independently predict purchase intention when brand trust is simultaneously controlled. H3 is therefore supported, as credibility demonstrates a direct effect on purchase intention. H4, however, receives only partial support, as authenticity's influence on purchase intention appears to operate through brand trust rather than as an independent predictor. H5 is strongly supported, with brand trust serving as the dominant predictor of purchase intention across the model.

The non-significance of authenticity in the regression despite its significant bivariate correlation with purchase intention is a particularly noteworthy finding. This suggests that authenticity enhances brand trust, and it is this enhanced trust that ultimately drives consumers toward purchase, rather than authenticity exerting a direct persuasive effect on buying behaviour. Overall, the results confirm that while both credibility and authenticity are essential influencer attributes, their persuasive power is substantially channelled through brand trust, making trust the most critical variable for marketers seeking to maximise the effectiveness of influencer-driven consumer engagement.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

This study examined the impact of social media influencer credibility and authenticity on brand trust and purchase intention among 152 social media users in India. The findings confirm that both influencer credibility and authenticity are significantly and positively correlated with brand trust. Brand trust emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention, while authenticity's effect on purchase intention is fully mediated by brand trust rather than operating as a direct predictor. These results highlight the importance of selecting credible and authentic influencers to build lasting brand trust and drive consumer purchase intention in the digital marketplace.



From a managerial perspective, brands should prioritise working with influencers who possess genuine domain expertise relevant to the product category, as credibility remains a direct driver of purchase intention. Transparency and authentic communication should be actively encouraged in influencer partnerships, since authenticity shapes brand trust, which is the most powerful predictor of consumer purchase readiness identified in this study. Over-commercialised or scripted influencer content that undermines perceived authenticity may indirectly suppress purchase intention by eroding brand trust, and marketers must be mindful of this risk when designing influencer campaigns.

The study is not without limitations. The sample is predominantly composed of young, educated, private-sector employees from semi-urban and rural areas, which may limit the generalisability of findings to other demographic segments. The data are self-reported and cross-sectional, precluding causal inference. Future research should employ structural equation modelling to formally test the mediation of brand trust, incorporate objective behavioural data, expand to diverse product categories and influencer tiers, and replicate findings across different social media platforms and cultural contexts.

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