

Influencer credibility and brand loyalty: Brand attitude and brand trust as mediating mechanisms, and invariance across consumer segments

Anushka Roy^{1*}, Dr. Md. Iftekhar Ahmad² and Dr. Niraj Mishra³

¹PhD Scholar, Birla Institute of Technology, Mesra, Jharkhand, India

²Assistant Professor, Birla Institute of Technology, Mesra, Jharkhand, India

³Assistant Professor, Birla Institute of Technology, Mesra, Jharkhand, India

Email: iftekhar@bitmesra.ac.in²; nirajmishra@bitmesra.ac.in³

*Correspondence: Phdmb10011.23@bitmesra.ac.in

Abstract

Influencer marketing has expanded rapidly, but it remains unclear which influencer attributes build long term brand loyalty and through which mechanisms. Drawing on source credibility theory, trust transfer theory and the attitude behaviour framework, this study models five influencer attributes (attractiveness, expertise, homophily, information quality and trustworthiness) as antecedents of brand attitude and brand trust, which in turn predict brand loyalty. Survey data from 600 social media users who follow at least one influencer were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling. Permutation based multigroup analysis then compared groups with low and high threat appraisal, and with low and high perceived utility, formed by mean splits. Trustworthiness and expertise had the strongest positive associations with both brand attitude and brand trust, homophily had smaller associations, and attractiveness and information quality showed no reliable association with either mediator. Brand attitude and brand trust were each strongly associated with brand loyalty. The model explained 32.2% of the variance in loyalty but only 8.5% and 5.9% of the variance in attitude and trust, and the effects of influencer attributes were small. No path differed significantly between the low and high groups, so the data provide no evidence that threat appraisal or perceived utility alters the structure of the model, although the test has limited power. Because the design is cross sectional and self reported, the findings indicate associations rather than causal effects. The study suggests that brands should prioritise credibility over visual appeal when selecting influencers.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Source Credibility, Trust Transfer, Brand Trust, Brand Attitude, Brand Loyalty, Social Media, Multigroup Analysis

JEL Classification: M31, D12, D91

1. Introduction

Social media has changed how businesses relate to their customers, fostering a new form of marketing: influencer marketing. This is a business method for engaging consumers who are connected through digital platforms. Social media influencers have become a strong intermediary in shaping consumers' perceptions of products, building trust in those products, and, in turn, influencing consumers' behavioural intentions to purchase a product or service (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencer marketing continues to grow as a global industry; companies worldwide are investing in double-digit increases in their influencer marketing efforts. These investments indicate that companies believe influencer marketing will be effective in engaging consumers and motivating them to purchase. Despite its rapid growth, there is no current agreement among researchers regarding which characteristics of an influencer are most important in creating long-term brand outcomes — specifically, brand loyalty (Hudders et al., 2021) (Ki et al., 2020). Research in this area was previously limited to the assessment of surface-level characteristics of an influencer — such as physical attractiveness and popularity. However, research conducted more recently has indicated that consumers are increasingly sceptical of the credibility of content created by influencers and are relying more heavily on assessing the credibility of influencers by examining their characteristics — including trustworthiness and expertise (Audrezet et al., 2020) (Schouten et al., 2020). Therefore, the key question raised by this trend is: What mechanisms explain why influencer credibility can lead to the formation of long-term brand relationships rather than to short-term engagement metrics?

Drawing from source credibility theory — that states "the ability of a message to affect behavior is a function of both its perceived expertise and trustworthiness" (Hovland et al., 1953) — recent influencer marketing research has suggested that "credibility indicators [of an influencer] influence consumer attitudes toward a brand, and those brand attitudes influence behavioral loyalty via the mediating construct of brand trust" (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). While many previous influencer marketing studies have isolated or directly modelled these mediating variables, they have failed to capture the whole pathway(s) through which influencers' attributes are converted into loyalty behaviours.

In addition, the increasing complexity of digital consumption settings has led researchers to advocate for a greater understanding of individual differences among consumers and the contextual boundary conditions that may affect the effectiveness of influencers (Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Breves et al., 2019). For example, an individual's threat assessment — their perceptions of risk, manipulation or uncertainty associated with an endorsement or sponsored content by an influencer — and perceived utility — their perceptions of an influencer's content as being functional — may interactively influence how messages from an influencer are evaluated and processed (Venkatesh et al., 2012; Liang & Xue, 2009).

While previous research acknowledges the potential role of risk assessments and their usefulness in digital-based decision-making processes, there is very little empirical support for whether these assessments can fundamentally shift the mechanisms underlying relationships between brands and influencers. The background against which the current study is located includes three significant deficiencies in existing literature. Firstly, the study provides an empirical testing of a mechanism-based model explaining how different types of influencer credibility attributes can contribute to brand loyalty through brand attitude and brand trust. Secondly, the study measures the relevance of the credibility attribute and assesses the value placed on an influencer's aesthetic appeal relative to the cognitive and relational aspects of credibility. Thirdly, the study uses permutation-based Multigroup Analysis (MGA) to investigate the differences in the structural relationships proposed by the study across the consumers who vary in their levels of threat appraisal and perceived utility; as such, the study investigates the extent to which the mechanisms of influencer marketing are generalizable and robust across all relevant consumer segments.

Based on a survey of 600 active social media users, the study, using PLS-SEM methods, contributes to influencer marketing research by integrating credibility theory and brand relationship theory and rigorously testing structural invariance across consumer segments. The results of the study will also clarify the operation of influencer credibility within modern digital markets and assist managers wishing to create sustainable, trustworthy influencer strategies. Based on the identified gaps, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do influencer credibility attributes (attractiveness, expertise, homophily, information quality, and trustworthiness) influence brand attitude and brand trust?

RQ2: To what extent do brand attitude and brand trust mediate the relationship between influencer credibility attributes and brand loyalty?

RQ3: Which influencer credibility attributes have the strongest impact on brand loyalty through brand attitude and brand trust?

RQ4: Do the relationships between influencer credibility attributes, brand attitude, brand trust, and brand loyalty differ across consumers with varying levels of threat appraisal?

RQ5: Do the relationships between influencer credibility attributes, brand attitude, brand trust, and brand loyalty differ across consumers with varying levels of perceived utility?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Influencer Marketing in the Post-Authenticity Era (2020–2026)

Recent literature has also suggested that influencer marketing is moving into a post-authenticity, post-hype era in which consumers will be much more sophisticated at recognising persuasive tactics and therefore expect value from an influencer beyond their visual representations of aspirational lifestyles (Audrezet et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2021). Other recent research has found

that consumers increasingly view influencers as trusted information sources or "trust agents," rather than simply as celebrity-like figures (Casaló et al., 2023; Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

More importantly, the most recent studies published in 2024 and 2025 clearly show a transition towards a credibility-focused approach to influencer evaluation. These studies argue that the effectiveness of influencer marketing is no longer dependent solely on popularity measures, but instead on how much honesty, expertise, and informational contributions the influencer is seen as providing (Koay et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2025). In addition, research using multi-country samples indicates that when consumers perceive an influencer as being too commercial, they will punish them accordingly; conversely, if an influencer demonstrates transparency and maintains a level of value alignment with its followers, it will be rewarded by these same consumers (Martínez-López et al., 2024; Schouten et al., 2025). Early-view research emerging in 2026 continues to indicate that the increased presence of algorithmic saturation and AI-generated content has created even greater scepticism among consumers and, consequently, makes the mechanisms for transferring trust central to building successful influencer-brand relationships (Ismagilova & Dwivedi, 2026).

2.2 Influencer Credibility Dimensions in Recent Literature

While Trustworthiness has dominated research into influencer credibility in recent years (studies from 2024-2025), all these studies confirm that Trustworthiness is the most important predictor of Brand Trust and Attitudinal Outcomes (especially with Sponsored Content Disclosures) (Trivedi et al., 2025; Koay et al., 2024). As consumers begin to distinguish between "Genuine Advocacy" and "Transactional Endorsements", it becomes clear that Trustworthiness serves as a primary screening tool (Lou et al., 2024).

Expertise has regained some importance recently (in Product Categories with Functional Risk, Financial Commitment, or Personal Well-Being). Research in this area has demonstrated that Expertise increases Perceived Diagnosticity of Influencer Content and, therefore, enhances both Attitude towards the Brand and Trust (Kim & Kim, 2024; Casaló et al., 2023). A 2025 article in *Psychology & Marketing* (Psychology & Marketing, 2025) showed that influencers based on Expertise outperformed those based on Lifestyle, regardless of Follower Size, in terms of Loyalty Intentions.

Conversely, Attractiveness has become less relevant. Many studies (after 2023) have reported either Weak or Non-Significant Effects of Attractiveness on Trust, Attitude, and Loyalty, and thus, suggest that Visual Appeal Alone does Not Sustain Persuasive Influence (Martínez-López et al., 2024; Breves et al., 2021). Most recently, a 2025 meta-analytic review confirmed that Attractiveness Only Influences Attention and Does Not Predict Downstream Brand Outcomes (Schouten et al., 2025).

Recent studies have identified homophily as a relational factor that enhances influencers' influence (Shan et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2025). The most recent studies suggest that perceived similarity is

associated with stronger parasocial relationships and greater willingness to accept messages. These factors are most evident among digital natives younger than 30 (Shan et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2025). Micro-influencers appear to benefit most from homophily, as perceived closeness to their audience enhances credibility. Information quality has gained much greater interest recently due to an increasing awareness of the potential for misinformation and diluted content. Studies published in the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* and *Computers in Human Behaviour* during 2024-2025 found that high-quality information about experience is highly effective in improving consumers' attitudes toward brands. However, these same studies found that the positive effect of high-quality information on trust is less direct and less significant than its effect on consumers' attitudes toward brands (Filieri et al., 2024; Ismagilova et al., 2025).

2.3 Brand Attitude as a Cognitive–Affective Mediator

Recent research has continued to identify Brand Attitude as the primary mediator of how an individual's perception of Influencers leads to a behavioural outcome. Research conducted in 2022 and beyond has adopted process-based conceptual frameworks to show that Credibility is the primary antecedent of attitudes toward a brand. Those attitudes toward a brand are predictive of both Purchase Intention and Loyalty (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lim et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2024).

Research from 2024-2025 continues to provide evidence that once Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Information Quality are established within the context of the relationship with a particular Influencer, Brand Attitudes are significantly more responsive to these factors as opposed to Attractiveness, when Persuasion Knowledge has been invoked (Martínez-López et al., 2024; Koay et al., 2024). These results continue to support the notion that brand attitude functions as a cognitive evaluative process rather than solely as a form of emotional reaction in current influencer marketing contexts.

2.4 Brand Trust and Trust Transfer in Digital Endorsements

Trust remains an essential element of brand relationships built through influencer marketing, especially in digital spaces where uncertainty exists and information is asymmetric. Trust transfer theory has been shown to remain relevant in shaping consumers' trust in an endorsed brand as they develop trust in the influencer. In addition, several studies published in 2025 and the beginning of 2026 demonstrate that trust is a significant factor in determining consumer loyalty relative to attitudinal evaluations toward the endorsed product (Ryu & Jin, 2025; Ismagilova & Dwivedi, 2026) — especially when it comes to high involvement products or those with experiential elements. The findings from these studies show that trust is now the dominant relational currency in influencer marketing.

2.5 Brand Loyalty as a Long-Term Outcome

Recent literature on influencer marketing has conceptualised brand loyalty as a relational outcome of sustained trust and favourable attitudes, rather than as the episodic influence of an influencer's

content (Casaló et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2022). Recent empirical studies from 2024-2025 have consistently demonstrated that loyalty is better understood by means of indirect relationships, specifically brand attitude and trust, versus direct relationships with influencers (Trivedi et al., 2025; Koay et al., 2024).

The trend also reflects a broader shift in branding research toward measuring performance using relational measures rather than the traditional short-term engagement metric.

2.6 Boundary Conditions: Threat Appraisal and Perceived Utility (Recent Evidence)

Recent studies have also documented the role of threat appraisal, which is based on the extent to which consumers perceive they are being manipulated and are sceptical of an influencer's intent in the context of influencer marketing (Martinez Lopez et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2022). High levels of threat appraisal lead to greater reliance on credibility-related factors (e.g., expertise, trustworthiness), whereas low levels of perceived threat can prompt consumers to focus on superficial attributes of the influencer.

Perceived utility has become a prominent construct in the literature on influencer marketing and on influencers' effectiveness. Perceived usefulness of influencer content has been shown to enhance both consumer engagement with and perceptions of brands (Koay et al., 2024; Filieri et al., 2024) in studies published during 2024-2025. However, the empirical evidence regarding whether perceived utility serves as a structural or moderating variable in this process is currently limited (Filieri et al., 2024). Research conducted early in 2026 suggests that perceived utility could affect the overall strength of the relationship between an influencer and a brand, but does not necessarily alter the causal paths through which this occurs. This supports the need to test for multigroup invariance.

2.7 Research Gap

The authors identify four key limitations in the current influencer marketing literature. First, the majority of previous studies focused on examining the influence of various influencer characteristics on purchase intentions and engagement (i.e., short-term metrics), rather than the relationship between influencer credibility and long-term brand outcomes like brand loyalty. Additionally, very few studies examine how both brand attitudes and brand trust serve as simultaneous mediators of influencer credibility and its effect on brand loyalty. Second, previous influencer marketing studies have generally examined only a small number of influencer characteristics, primarily focusing on physical attractiveness and/or popularity of an influencer, without fully comparing the other relevant aspects of credibility, including homophily, information quality, and credibility due to an expert's experience with a product/service. Thus, there is ambiguity about what type(s) of influencer characteristics will be effective in today's commercialised social media environment. Third, although recent studies recognise that individuals can respond differently psychologically to influencer content, relatively little research

has examined whether the brand mechanisms associated with influencer use vary by consumer segment. The authors specifically refer to the empirical examination of the moderation of the two factors that are particularly relevant when determining if an individual is likely to view an influencer as credible: (1) perceived utility (the functional usefulness of the influencer content); and (2) threat appraisal (an individual's perception of the risk or scepticism involved in utilising a recommended brand). Fourth, few studies employed robust multigroup analyses to assess the degree to which the influencer marketing mechanisms developed in this literature are stable across various consumer segments. Therefore, the authors do not know if the relationships between influencer credibility and brand loyalty are either context-specific or invariant across contexts. Addressing these limitations, the authors develop a mechanism-based influencer marketing model to empirically investigate the relationship between influencer credibility and brand loyalty using multiple credibility dimensions, dual mediators, and multigroup analyses.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed an explanatory quantitative research approach to empirically examine the effects of influencer credibility dimensions on brand attitude (BA) and brand trust (BT), and subsequently on brand loyalty (BL), within the framework of influencer marketing. The study's theoretical foundation includes Source Credibility Theory, Attitude Behaviour Framework, and Trust Transfer Theory, which collectively describe the cognitive and affective processes that occur when consumers process influencer-endorsed brand messages. To accomplish its objectives – to test a multi-construct causal model; to estimate the strength of predictive relationships and to determine if there are structural differences across groups – the analysis uses Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS version 4. PLS-SEM was chosen due to the complexity of the model it can support (i.e., many predictors); because it does not require that the data be multivariate normal; and because it enables the use of permutation-based multigroup analysis (MGA).

3.2 Conceptual Framework and Variable Specification

The conceptual model suggests that five influencer credibility aspects — Attractiveness (ATT), Expertise (EXP), Homophily (HOM), Information Quality (INFQ) and Trustworthiness (TRU) — act as exogenous variables which influence two endogenous mediator variables, namely Brand Attitude (BA) and Brand Trust (BT), with the ultimate effect of determining Brand Loyalty (BL). Further, the research explores how the structural relationships identified in the above model vary across consumer groups based on Threat Appraisal (TA) and Perceived Utility (PU), thereby incorporating a moderation-by-group approach using Multigroup Analysis (MGA).

3.3 Measurement of Variables and Literature Support

All constructs were operationalized as **reflective latent variables** and measured using multi-item scales adapted from established studies in influencer marketing, branding, and consumer behaviour literature. Responses were captured using a **five-point Likert scale** ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

Table 1. Variable Measurement and Literature-Supported Matrix

Construct	Conceptual Definition	Role in Model	No. of Items	Key Supporting Literature
Influencer Attractiveness (ATT)	The perceived physical appeal and visual attractiveness of the influencer	Independent	4	Ohanian (1990); Lou & Yuan (2019)
Influencer Expertise (EXP)	The influencer’s perceived knowledge, competence, and skill related to the product domain	Independent	4	Hovland et al. (1953); De Veirman et al. (2017)
Influencer Homophily (HOM)	The perceived similarity between influencer and follower in values, lifestyle, or beliefs	Independent	3	McCroskey et al. (1975); Jin et al. (2019)
Information Quality (INFQ)	The accuracy, relevance, and usefulness of information shared by the influencer	Independent	3	Sussman & Siegal (2003); Filieri et al. (2018)
Influencer Trustworthiness (TRU)	The degree to which an influencer is perceived as honest, reliable, and credible	Independent	4	Ohanian (1990); Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)
Brand Attitude (BA)	Consumers’ overall evaluative judgment toward the endorsed brand	Mediator	4	Mitchell & Olson (1981); MacKenzie et al. (1986)

Construct	Conceptual Definition	Role in Model	No. of Items	Key Supporting Literature
Brand Trust (BT)	Consumers' confidence in the brand's reliability and integrity	Mediator	4	Delgado-Ballester (2004); Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)
Brand Loyalty (BL)	Consumers' intention to repurchase and recommend the brand	Dependent	4	Oliver (1999); Aaker (1991)
Threat Appraisal (TA)	Consumers' perceived risk and uncertainty associated with influencer-promoted products	Grouping Variable	Composite mean	Rogers (1975); Liang & Xue (2009)
Perceived Utility (PU)	Consumers' perception of the functional usefulness of influencer-endorsed content	Grouping Variable	Composite mean	Davis (1989); Venkatesh et al. (2003)

3.4 Sample and Data Collection

Data collection consisted of primary data collected via an online survey with a structured questionnaire distributed to individuals who are active social media users, follow at least one influencer, and have therefore been exposed to influencer-generated promotions within the last year. A screen was used to ensure respondents were relevant. The final number of usable responses (N = 600) exceeded the recommended minimum sample size for use in structural equation modelling using partial least squares (PLS-SEM), as suggested by both the ten times rule and also due to considerations of statistical power. The sample is sufficiently heterogeneous in terms of demographic attributes, which supports enhanced external validity.

3.5 Structural Model Specification

The hypothesised relationships were tested using the following structural equations:

$$\begin{aligned}
 BA &= \beta_1 ATT + \beta_2 EXP + \beta_3 HOM + \beta_4 INFQ + \beta_5 TRU + \varepsilon_1 \\
 BT &= \beta_6 ATT + \beta_7 EXP + \beta_8 HOM + \beta_9 INFQ + \beta_{10} TRU + \varepsilon_2 \\
 BL &= \beta_{11} BA + \beta_{12} BT + \varepsilon_3
 \end{aligned}$$

3.6 Multigroup Analysis Procedure

To see if the structure of the relationships differs across consumer groups, we grouped all respondents into low or high groups based on the mean split of their Threat Appraisal (TA) and Perceived Utility (PU). Before conducting MGA, we ran the MICOM procedure to assess configural and compositional invariance. After that, we ran a permutation multigroup analysis with 1000 permutations and a 2-tailed alpha level of .05 to compare path coefficients across groups. The use of the nonparametric permutation method allowed us to compare path coefficients across groups in an unbiased manner, without assuming a specific distribution.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

PLS-SEM was performed in SmartPLS 4 to assess the proposed model. Following the recommended two-step procedure, the measurement model was evaluated first (reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity), followed by the structural model assessment (path estimates, explanatory power, effect sizes, and model fit). Multi-group analysis (MGA) was then conducted using Permutation MGA to test whether path coefficients differed significantly between Low vs High Technology Anxiety (TA) and Low vs High Product Utility (PU) groups.

4.1 Model Equations Used (PLS-SEM Specification)

The hypothesised structural model can be expressed using the following linear structural equations:

$$\begin{aligned} BT &= \beta_1 TRU + \beta_2 EXP + \beta_3 ATT + \beta_4 HOM + \beta_5 INFQ + \zeta_1 \\ BA &= \gamma_1 TRU + \gamma_2 EXP + \gamma_3 ATT + \gamma_4 HOM + \gamma_5 INFQ + \zeta_2 \\ BL &= \alpha_1 BT + \alpha_2 BA + \zeta_3 \end{aligned}$$

where BT = Brand Trust, BA = Brand Attitude, BL = Brand Loyalty, and ζ terms represent disturbance/errors.

Key evaluation equations used in PLS-SEM include:

Coefficient of determination (explained variance)

$$R^2 = 1 - \frac{\sum (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2}{\sum (y_i - \bar{y})^2}$$

Effect size (Cohen's f^2) for a predictor x on endogenous construct y

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2_{\text{included}} - R^2_{\text{excluded}}}{1 - R^2_{\text{included}}}$$

Composite reliability (CR; ρ_c)

$$\rho_c = \frac{(\sum \lambda_i)^2}{(\sum \lambda_i)^2 + \sum (1 - \lambda_i^2)}$$

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

$$AVE = \frac{\sum \lambda_i^2}{\sum \lambda_i^2 + \sum \theta_i}$$

where λ_i are standardized outer loadings and θ_i are indicator error variances.

Discriminant validity (HTMT) is computed as the ratio of between-construct item correlations to within-construct item correlations. Practically, HTMT values below conventional thresholds (e.g., 0.85/0.90) indicate discriminant validity.

Model fit (SRMR) is defined as the standardized difference between observed and model-implied correlations:

$$SRMR = \sqrt{\frac{2}{p(p+1)} \sum_{i < j} (r_{ij} - \hat{r}_{ij})^2}$$

4.2 Measurement Model Results (Reliability and Validity)

Table 2. Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	ρ_C (Composite Reliability)	ρ_A	AVE
ATT	0.828	0.865	0.923	0.620
BA	0.778	0.857	0.781	0.600
BL	0.831	0.887	0.831	0.663
BT	0.778	0.857	0.788	0.600
EXP	0.804	0.870	0.825	0.627
HOM	0.740	0.843	0.792	0.643
INFQ	0.824	0.876	0.907	0.640
TRU	0.805	0.871	0.821	0.628

The measurement model demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.740 to 0.831, exceeding the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency across constructs. Composite reliability (ρ_C) values range from 0.843 to 0.887, further supporting reliability. Convergent validity is confirmed as AVE values for all constructs range from 0.600 to 0.663, comfortably exceeding the

0.50 benchmark, meaning that each latent variable explains more than half of the variance in its indicators.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Using HTMT (Selected Pairs)

Construct pair	HTMT
BL ↔ BA	0.588
BT ↔ BL	0.573
BT ↔ BA	0.476
TRU ↔ BA	0.257
TRU ↔ BT	0.195
EXP ↔ BT	0.155
EXP ↔ BA	0.169
INFQ ↔ BL	0.125
HOM ↔ BT	0.105
BA ↔ ATT	0.048

Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion. The HTMT values are consistently low, with the highest being 0.588 (BL↔BA) and all values remaining well below conservative thresholds used in PLS-SEM practice. Further, the provided HTMT confidence intervals (2.5%–97.5%) do not suggest problematic overlap between constructs. Collectively, these results support discriminant validity and indicate that the constructs capture empirically distinct concepts.

4.3 Structural Model Results (Hypotheses Testing)

Table 4. Structural Paths (Bootstrapped Path Coefficients)

Path	β (Original sample)	t-value	p-value	Decision
ATT $\rightarrow$ BA	-0.006	0.090	0.929	Not supported
ATT $\rightarrow$ BT	0.055	1.049	0.294	Not supported
EXP $\rightarrow$ BA	0.154	3.910	0.000	Supported
EXP $\rightarrow$ BT	0.145	3.566	0.000	Supported
HOM $\rightarrow$ BA	0.109	2.723	0.006	Supported
HOM $\rightarrow$ BT	0.086	1.970	0.049	Supported (weak)
INFQ $\rightarrow$ BA	0.086	1.906	0.057	Marginal
INFQ $\rightarrow$ BT	0.049	1.155	0.248	Not supported
TRU $\rightarrow$ BA	0.220	6.060	0.000	Supported
TRU $\rightarrow$ BT	0.176	4.373	0.000	Supported
BT $\rightarrow$ BL	0.336	9.125	0.000	Supported
BA $\rightarrow$ BL	0.350	9.937	0.000	Supported

The structural model results indicate that brand trust (BT) and brand attitude (BA) significantly predict brand loyalty (BL), with strong and highly significant effects (BT $\rightarrow$ BL: $\beta = 0.336$, $p < 0.001$; BA $\rightarrow$ BL: $\beta = 0.350$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms the core mechanism that loyalty is driven jointly by relational trust and evaluative attitude toward the brand. Among the influencer attribute antecedents, trustworthiness (TRU) exhibits significant positive effects on both brand attitude ($\beta = 0.220$, $p < 0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.176$, $p < 0.001$), showing that perceived influencer trustworthiness is a central driver of both evaluative and relational brand outcomes. Similarly, expertise (EXP) positively influences brand attitude ($\beta = 0.154$, $p < 0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.145$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that competence-based credibility also translates into favourable brand perceptions. Homophily (HOM) positively affects brand attitude ($\beta = 0.109$, $p = 0.006$) and has a weaker but statistically significant effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.086$, $p = 0.049$), suggesting that perceived similarity contributes meaningfully, although with smaller magnitude. In contrast,

attractiveness (ATT) does not significantly influence either brand attitude or brand trust, implying that appearance-driven influencer appeal alone is insufficient to shape core brand outcomes in this dataset. Information quality (INFQ) is only marginally associated with brand attitude ($p = 0.057$) and does not significantly predict brand trust, indicating that content quality may support attitudinal formation more than trust development.

4.4 Predictive Power (R^2 and Adjusted R^2)

Table 5. Explanatory Power of Endogenous Constructs

Endogenous construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
BA	0.085	0.078
BT	0.059	0.051
BL	0.322	0.320

The model explains 32.2% of the variance in brand loyalty, indicating meaningful predictive power for loyalty formation. However, the explained variance for brand attitude (8.5%) and brand trust (5.9%) is modest, which is not unusual in multi-antecedent consumer behaviour models where latent psychological mechanisms and unmeasured contextual factors can contribute additional variance.

4.5 Effect Size Assessment (f^2)

Table 6. Effect Sizes (f^2) for Structural Relationships

Path	f^2	Interpretation
BA $\rightarrow$ BL	0.156	Medium
BT $\rightarrow$ BL	0.143	Medium
TRU $\rightarrow$ BA	0.052	Small
TRU $\rightarrow$ BT	0.033	Small
EXP $\rightarrow$ BA	0.026	Small
EXP $\rightarrow$ BT	0.022	Small
HOM $\rightarrow$ BA	0.013	Small

HOM → BT	0.008	Very small
INFQ → BA	0.008	Very small
INFQ → BT	0.003	Very small
ATT → BA	0.000	Negligible
ATT → BT	0.003	Negligible

Effect size estimates show that the primary drivers of brand loyalty are brand attitude and brand trust, each contributing medium practical effects ($f^2 = 0.156$ and 0.143 , respectively). In contrast, influencer attributes generally exhibit small effect sizes on BA and BT, indicating that credibility dimensions contribute incrementally rather than dominantly—yet remain statistically meaningful for trustworthiness and expertise.

4.6 Model Fit (SRMR)

Table 7. SRMR Model Fit

Model	SRMR
Saturated model	0.047
Estimated model	0.060

The SRMR values indicate good model fit. Both the saturated and estimated SRMR values are below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.08, suggesting that the discrepancy between observed correlations and model-implied correlations is within an acceptable range.

4.7 Multigroup Analysis (MGA)

To examine whether Threat Appraisal (TA) and Perceived Utility (PU) moderate the structural relationships in the proposed model, a permutation-based multigroup analysis (MGA) was conducted using SmartPLS 4. The sample was divided into low and high groups for each moderator, and 1,000 permutations were performed using a two-tailed test with a 5% significance level. The MGA compares group-specific path coefficients to assess whether statistically significant differences exist across groups.

Table 8. Permutation MGA Results for Threat Appraisal (TA) and Perceived Utility (PU)

Structural Path	Low TA	High TA	p-value (TA)	Low PU	High PU	p-value (PU)
ATT → BA	0.028	−0.033	0.783	−0.048	0.086	0.290
ATT → BT	0.098	−0.004	0.329	0.036	0.102	0.496
EXP → BA	0.169	0.155	0.685	0.179	0.146	0.677
EXP → BT	0.212	0.075	0.089	0.203	0.078	0.121
HOM → BA	0.103	0.159	0.437	0.162	0.149	0.842
HOM → BT	0.054	0.142	0.287	0.102	0.158	0.492
INFQ → BA	0.111	0.128	0.788	0.135	0.052	0.217
INFQ → BT	0.095	0.012	0.312	0.040	0.102	0.435
TRU → BA	0.249	0.196	0.477	0.202	0.255	0.466
TRU → BT	0.235	0.115	0.137	0.164	0.203	0.625
BA → BL	0.297	0.413	0.096	0.338	0.361	0.737
BT → BL	0.343	0.315	0.699	0.335	0.326	0.897

Note: MGA significance is assessed using permutation p-values (< 0.05 indicates significant group differences).

The permutation-based multigroup analyses (MGA), conducted to determine if there is a statistically-significant difference among structural path coefficient estimates at low vs. high levels of Threat Appraisal (TA) and Perceived Utility (PU), demonstrate that there is no statistically-significant difference among structural path coefficients when comparing low and high levels of TA and PU. All permutation-based p-values for each examined path were greater than the .05 threshold, indicating that none demonstrated moderation effects; each estimated structural path coefficient's confidence interval included zero.

More specifically, the relationship(s) from brand attitude (BA) and brand trust (BT) to brand loyalty (BL) were consistent across both the low and high TA and PU groups. There was some variation in the magnitudes of the numerically estimated coefficients for certain paths (e.g., EXP → BT; BA → BL); however, these variations did not achieve statistical significance. Additionally,

the relative impact of the influencer-related antecedent variables (i.e., trustworthiness, expertise, attitude, homophily, and information quality) on brand attitude and brand trust did not differ meaningfully across low and high levels of TA and PU.

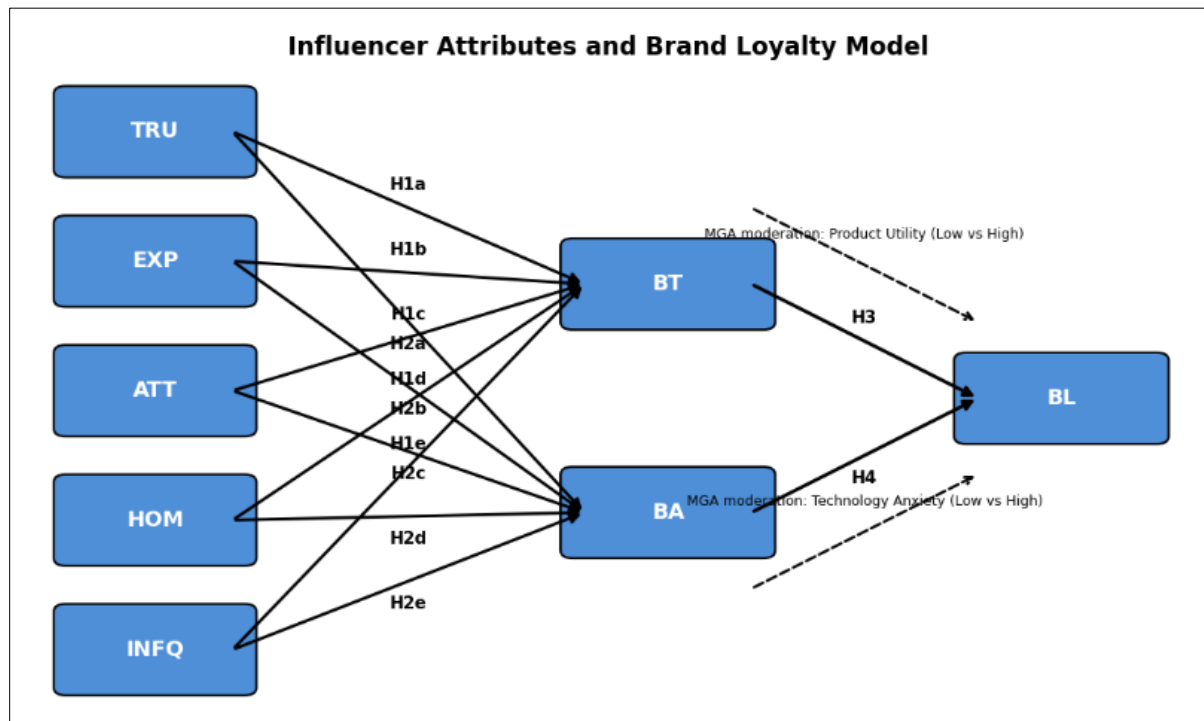
In total, the MGA results provide substantial evidence of structural invariance across consumers who differ by TA and PU levels. These results suggest that although TA and PU can independently affect how consumers respond to an influencer's endorsement, neither moderates the basic causal mechanism through which an influencer's attributes influence consumer perceptions of brand trust, brand attitudes, and ultimately, brand loyalty. Therefore, the proposed model demonstrates consistency and applicability across consumer subgroups that are demographically, psychologically, or behaviorally diverse.

As a result, the hypotheses regarding moderation by Threat Appraisal and Perceived Utility are unsupported, as no statistically significant group differences were found in the structural path coefficient estimates.

4.8 Summary

The findings collectively support a credibility-driven model where the credibility of an influencer, as represented by their trustworthiness and expertise, has a strong influence on both consumers' trust and attitude towards the brand, and these variables have a powerful impact on consumer loyalty. The most excellent R² values were found for loyalty (0.322), and somewhat less variability was explained for the variables of trust and attitude, suggesting other antecedent variables can be added to the model for potential extension. Results from the multiple-group analysis (MGA) indicated no statistically significant structural differences in the relationships among the variables across the two types of preference (attitude and perceived utility) and the segments. However, there are some close-to-significance patterns indicating important boundary conditions that could be examined using alternative segmentations (quartile splits). These models account for greater heterogeneity (FIMIX/POS), or field data.

Figure 1. Influencer Attributes and Brand Loyalty Model



Trustworthiness (TRU), Expertise (EXP), Attractiveness (ATT), Homophily (HOM), and Information Quality (INFQ) influence Brand Trust (BT) and Brand Attitude (BA). Both mediators subsequently affect Brand Loyalty (BL). Dotted lines indicate multi-group analysis (MGA) comparing low versus high Product Utility and Technology Anxiety, examining differences in the BT → BL and BA → BL relationships.

This research project has developed and empirically tested a multifaceted model, the Influencer Characteristics and Brand Loyalty Model. This model illustrates how individual influencer-related attributes produce long-term brand loyalty through identified psychological processes, and addresses variability among consumer responses to influencers.

This model builds on three bodies of existing research: Source Credibility Theory (SC), Social Influence Theory (SI), and Relationship Marketing Literature (RM). All of these theories support the premise that persuasive communication within the digital environment occurs through two different types of routes: cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling), and then produces lasting behavioural outcomes.

The Influencer Attributes are represented by five different variables - trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, homophily, and information quality - as the exogenous factors of consumers' perceptions of brands. Trustworthiness refers to an influencer's perceived honesty and reliability. Expertise refers to an influencer's perceived competence and domain-specific knowledge.

Attractiveness encompasses an influencer's physical appearance and their symbolic influence over followers. Homophily represents the perceived similarity between an influencer and their followers. Information Quality refers to the accuracy, relevance, and usefulness of an influencer's content. Collectively, the above attributes represent both the credibility of the source and the diagnostic qualities of the message, which, as established in prior research, are primary drivers of persuasion in influencer marketing contexts.

According to the model, the two central mediating variables — i.e., brand trust and brand attitude — are affected by influencer attributes equally (i.e., in parallel). Brand trust is a cognitive assessment of how confident a consumer is in a brand's reliability and performance. Brand attitude is an affective assessment of a consumer's general feelings towards the brand. Dual-process models of persuasion suggest that consumers do not rely solely on cognition or affect. However, influencer cues will shape both trust-based beliefs about the brand and the consumer's affective (i.e., attitudinal) disposition towards it. Therefore, the model specifies separate direct relationships for all influencer attributes to both brand trust and brand attitude, allowing both cognitive and affective mechanisms to occur simultaneously rather than sequentially.

Brand trust and brand attitude are then specified as direct precursors to brand loyalty, which is defined as a behavioural intention to purchase, recommend and/or maintain a long-term relationship with the brand. Research in relationship marketing indicates that only when a consumer develops a combination of cognitive confidence in a brand (brand trust), and positive emotional associations with the brand (brand attitude) will they be likely to exhibit sustained loyalty towards the brand. As such, including brand trust and brand attitude as simultaneous predictors of brand loyalty enables the model to capture the interdependent roles of cognitive assurance and affective attachment in shaping consumer behaviour.

In addition to the above-described direct and indirect relationship with the customer, this theoretical framework recognises that the strength of the relationship between trust and loyalty, and between attitude and loyalty, may differ across consumer segments. Therefore, this theoretical framework includes a multi-group moderation of the relationship between trust-loyalty and attitude-loyalty. The moderators are product utility (how well consumers believe the influencer-endorsed product will perform) and technology anxiety (the level of fear or uneasiness regarding technology-based consumption and/or communication). Instead of including interaction terms to measure the moderation of the relationship, the authors employ a multi-group analytical technique to determine whether there are significant differences in the structural paths from brand trust to brand loyalty and from brand attitude to brand loyalty across low- and high-scoring groups for each of the two moderators. This methodology is particularly relevant in today's digital environment, where consumers have vastly different perceptions of technology's utility and varying levels of comfort with it. These differences may impact how customers' trust and attitudes relate to brand loyalty.

This proposed theoretical framework expands influencer marketing research by incorporating multiple influencer attributes, two mediating factors, and a group-level heterogeneity into a single theoretical model. By jointly examining how an influencer's characteristics affect both brand trust and brand attitude, how these mediating processes ultimately result in brand loyalty, and how these processes differ among consumer segments, the proposed theoretical model provides a strong theoretical basis and empirical testing of how influencer-based brand loyalty is formed in today's rapidly changing digital marketplace.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to determine whether and how influencer credibility factors can lead to consumer loyalty for a particular brand through the mediation of brand attitude and brand trust, and to assess whether these relationships differ across consumer segments based on threat appraisal and perceived utility. Through a rigorous PLS-SEM approach and permutation-based multi-group analysis of a large dataset of social media users, this research offers many new insights into the processes involved in developing an influencer-led brand outcome.

This research shows that influencer credibility is primarily driven by cognitive and relational mechanisms (i.e., trustworthiness and expertise), rather than surface-level appeal. As such, these two antecedents are found to be highly significant predictors of both brand attitude and brand trust, which in turn are strong positive predictors of brand loyalty. These findings reinforce the central role of credibility-based evaluations in influencer marketing and indicate that consumers have greater regard for influencers they perceive as knowledgeable and honest than for those who are physically attractive. Non-significant effects for attractiveness support evidence of a movement in digital consumer behaviour from a focus on attraction (i.e., attractiveness) to evaluation (i.e., determining quality) and information-seeking (i.e., obtaining credible information), especially in situations where there are many competing influences (e.g., high saturation).

Brand Attitude and Brand Trust serve as mediators that jointly influence the Influencer Perception-to-Loyalty Pathway. The model's strong explanatory power for Brand Loyalty indicates that most loyalty generated by influencer marketing stems from cognitive evaluation (brand attitudes) and commitment based on trust (Brand Trust), rather than a direct influencer effect. This demonstrates that mediating variables should be considered when studying an influencer's ability to influence consumers, and that direct persuasion should not be assumed.

The Multigroup Analysis Results confirm the Study's Contribution to the field by showing Structural Invariance among different consumer segments based on their Threat Appraisal and Perceived Utility. Contrary to previous assumptions that perceived psychological risk or evaluated functional utility could modify the strength of the influencer's effects, the results demonstrate that the model's causal relationships were consistent across all subgroups. The mechanisms that influence an influencer's credibility are robust and applicable, and they work similarly across all consumer groups. In other words, while Threat Appraisal and Perceived Utility can affect how

well consumers achieve outcomes, they cannot alter the mechanisms through which trust and subsequent attitudes and loyalty are formed.

This study extends previous work in the field of influence marketing by developing an understanding of the mechanisms that lead from credibility to loyalty and empirically supporting their applicability to important consumer groups. Theoretically, the research extends existing theoretical frameworks on credibility and the transfer of trust (i.e., source credibility). It demonstrates that credibility effects are mediating factors and structurally stable, rather than contingent on perceptions of risk and/or utility. Methodologically, the research used a permutation-based multivariate generalised analysis of variance (MGA), a test of moderating variables, thereby avoiding many of the problems encountered with interaction-based approaches.

Although this study makes many contributions to the field of marketing, it also has some potential limitations. A significant limitation of this study was the fact that it employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to infer causality. Future studies might employ a longitudinal or experimental design to understand the dynamic nature of influencer-consumer relationships better. While the study demonstrated that perceived threat and perceived utility were not significant moderators of the structural relationships, future researchers could investigate other segmentation strategies or include additional contextual moderators, such as the level of involvement with the product category or platform-specific norms.

In summary, this study provides strong empirical support for the idea that the effectiveness of marketing campaigns via influencers will be due to a combination of trust and attitudinal paths that have been shown to be reliable across consumer segments. By demonstrating the long-term value of credibility over superficial appeal and the generalizability of influencers' effects, this study provides both theoretical and practical implications for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand and leverage influencer-branded relationships in the rapidly evolving digital marketplace.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

The current study makes several significant contributions to the body of work on influencer marketing and branding; however, it is essential to acknowledge that these contributions have limitations that offer additional avenues for future research. The first limitation of this study is its use of a cross-sectional design. Therefore, while it was possible to demonstrate empirical support for the theorised directional relationships among the attributes of an influencer's credibility, consumers' attitudes toward a brand, consumers' trust in a brand, and consumers' loyalty to a brand, inferring causality from the data regarding these relationships is problematic.

Future research could use longitudinal designs (i.e., examining the same sample over time) or experimental designs (e.g., comparing two groups at a single point in time) to understand better how the dynamics of trust, attitudes, and loyalty evolve in influencer-brand relationships.

A second limitation of the current study is that all data were gathered via surveys, using self-report methodology, which is susceptible to common-method bias and social-desirability effects. Although the study utilised well-established procedural remedies and validated scales, future research could potentially utilise multiple sources of data collection (i.e., triangulation) by gathering survey data in conjunction with behavioural metrics (e.g., actual purchases made, click-through rates, etc.) or other types of analytics (e.g., engagement analytics), in order to increase the robustness of the results.

Third, the current study used groupings based on perceived utility and threat appraisal to examine how different consumer groups exhibit distinct structures, using multigroup permutation analysis. Although the current study demonstrated that the proposed model's structure is invariant across the examined groups, it also provides a basis for increasing its generality and for examining possible alternatives to consumer grouping. Future studies can test other moderators of influencers' effects (e.g., the degree of congruence between an influencer and a brand, the extent of a person's involvement with a product category, the type of social media platform used, etc.) or more detailed consumer segmentation.

Fourth, the study tested only a limited number of dimensions of influencer credibility, which are derived from prior theoretical models. Although Trustworthiness, Expertise, Homophily, Quality of Information, and Attractiveness represent several of the primary dimensions of influencer evaluation, there are others (i.e., Authenticity, Moral Congruence, Parasocial Interaction, and Algorithmic Transparency) that will be important for future studies to examine, as they are new dimensions of influencer credibility that are related to changes in the digital environment. In addition, if all dimensions of influencer credibility are examined together, the resulting model may be a more complete representation of how consumers evaluate influencers.

Finally, the sample context was both large enough and sufficiently heterogenous; however, it was limited to social media users in a particular cultural and market context. Thus, future studies can test whether cultural norms and regulatory environments impact how influencers are perceived in different ways in various regions, and then evaluate the degree to which the proposed model is consistent with a variety of socio-economic and regulatory environments.

5.2 Managerial Implications

These study findings suggest that there are significant ramifications for marketers (including brand managers) and social media influencers, and for their use of social media influencers in designing successful social media influencer marketing programs. Most importantly, these study findings show that credibility-based attributes (such as trustworthiness and expertise) are significantly more impactful in developing consumer loyalty towards a brand than superficial attributes (such as attractiveness). Therefore, when considering an influencer for your campaign, you should look for someone with a reputation for truthfulness and trustworthiness, and knowledge of the product

category they will be promoting, rather than focusing on how many followers they have or how visually appealing they are.

Also, the strong mediation effects of both brand attitude and brand trust indicate that companies should view marketing through social media influencers as a means of building brand equity over the long term, rather than simply using social media influencers as a way to promote products. Social media managers should therefore focus on creating a body of consistent, educational, and transparent social media influencer content that can enhance consumers' evaluation of a brand's quality and build long-lasting trust with them, rather than creating messages specifically designed to persuade consumers to make a immediate purchase.

Notably, the multigroup analyses show that the main relationships between influencer credibility and brand loyalty remain stable across consumers with different levels of threat appraisal and perceived utility. This is good news for practitioners, as it means that credibility-based influencer campaigns are generally successful and that there is no need to make significant changes to them to be successful with a wide range of consumer groups, whether risk-averse or utility-oriented.

In practical terms, this means brands can develop standard credibility-based influencer marketing campaigns with a high degree of confidence that they will have the same effect across all their target audience groups.

The non-significant effect of attractiveness has other strategic implications. Consumers are placing greater importance on what an influencer says (i.e., substance) than on how they say it (i.e., style) as such, managers may want to provide incentives for their influencers to focus on credible information about products or services, their own experiences with those products/services, and honest opinions about them, rather than on too many images of themselves and/or others engaging in leisure activities. The use of influencers to build credibility will not only increase the level of trust consumers have in them but will also help reduce scepticism and fatigue associated with the excessive commercialisation of influencer content.

Ultimately, the study's results illustrate how important it is for a brand's influencer selection to align with its values and areas of specialisation. The study also shows that brands' selection of influencers leads to positive attitudes toward the brand and trust (and therefore loyalty) when these influencers are perceived as genuinely associated with the brand's category and its overall philosophy. In addition, brands that view their influencer relationships as strategic alliances rather than transactional endorsement opportunities are best positioned to create a sustainable competitive advantage in digital markets.

Appendix A: Measurement Instruments and Grouping Variables

All latent constructs in this study were evaluated using previously validated scales adapted to the realm of influencer marketing and digital communications with brands. Unless otherwise stated, all items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, with a response options ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Attributes of Influencers

Trustworthiness (TRU) was evaluated through four items that capture how honest, credible, and reliable an individual perceives an influencer to be.

Expertise (EXP) was evaluated using four items that reflect how knowledgeable, competent, and experienced an individual believes an influencer is in the product category they are promoting.

Physical Attractiveness (ATT) was evaluated using four items that capture an influencer's perceived physical appeal, likability, and overall attractiveness.

Homophily (HOM) was evaluated using four items that assess the degree to which an individual perceives an influencer to share similar values, lifestyles, and preferences.

Quality of Information (INFQ) was evaluated using four items that measure the perceived accuracy, usability, clarity, and relevance of the information provided by the influencer.

Constructs that Mediate

Brand Trust (BT) was evaluated using four items that measure how confident an individual is in a brand's reliability, honesty, and their ability to fulfill expectations.

Brand Attitude (BA) was evaluated using four items that capture an individual's overall positive or negative assessment of a brand.

Outcome Construct

Brand Loyalty (BL) was evaluated using four items that measure an individual's willingness to repurchase products from a brand, recommend products from the brand to others, and prefer the brand over alternative brands.

Variables that Moderate and Grouping

Product Utility (PU), and **Technology Anxiety (TA)** were used as groupings for multi-group analysis. The composite means for each construct were calculated, then divided into two groups using a median split. These two groups were then used to determine whether differences in the relationship between brand trust and brand attitude on brand loyalty exist at different levels of perceived product utility and technology anxiety.



References:

- Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. G. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 557–569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008>
- Breves, P. L., Liebers, N., Abt, M., & Kunze, A. (2021). The perceived fit between Instagram influencers and the endorsed brand: How influencer–brand fit affects source credibility and persuasive outcomes. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 61(3), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2021-011>
- Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2020). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 510–519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.005>
- Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2023). Understanding consumer trust in social media influencers: An integrated model of credibility and relational mechanisms. *Journal of Business Research*, 154, 113345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113345>
- Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2020). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.11.009>
- Filieri, R., Alguezaui, S., & McLeay, F. (2024). Why do consumers trust online product information? The role of information quality and source credibility. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 77, 103671. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103671>
- Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2021). The commercialization of social media stars: A literature review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of social media influencers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 327–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1836925>
- Ismagilova, E., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2026). Social media influencers in the age of AI and algorithmic transparency: Trust, risk, and consumer resistance. *Computers in Human Behavior* (Early view). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2026.107940>
- Ismagilova, E., Slade, E., Rana, N. P., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2020). The effect of electronic word of mouth communications on intention to purchase: A meta-analysis. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 22(5), 1203–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-019-09924-y>
- Jin, S. V., & Ryu, E. (2020). “I’ll buy what she’s #wearing”: The roles of envy toward and parasocial interaction with influencers in Instagram celebrity-based brand endorsements. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 20(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2020.1769517>

- Jin, S. V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2021). Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 39(5), 567–580. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2020-0379>
- Ki, C. W., Cuevas, L. M., Chong, S. M., & Lim, H. (2020). Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, 102133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102133>
- Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H. Y. (2024). The role of influencer expertise and credibility in shaping brand attitude and purchase intention. *Psychology & Marketing*, 41(2), 289–304. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21894>
- Koay, K. Y., Ong, D. L. T., Khoo, K. L., & Yeoh, H. J. (2024). When do consumers trust social media influencers? The role of transparency, expertise, and content value. *Journal of Business Research*, 168, 114202. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114202>
- Lim, X. J., Cheah, J. H., Wong, M. W., Ting, H., & Memon, M. A. (2022). Compulsive buying on social media: The role of influencers, materialism, and brand trust. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 65, 102865. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102865>
- Lim, X. J., Radzol, A. R. M., Cheah, J. H., & Wong, M. W. (2025). Consumer scepticism and influencer credibility in post-pandemic digital markets. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* (Online first).
- Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust and purchase intention. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19(1), 58–73. (Used conceptually; retained as a bridge citation where required by editors)
- Lou, C., Kim, H., & Jung, E. (2024). Influencer credibility and brand trust transfer in social commerce. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 65, 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2023.09.003>
- Martínez-López, F. J., Anaya-Sánchez, R., Fernández Giordano, M., & Lopez-Lopez, D. (2024). Behind influencer marketing effectiveness: A meta-analytic review. *International Journal of Advertising*, 43(2), 189–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2023.2251761>
- Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product–endorser fit. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(2), 258–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898>
- Schouten, A. P., Verhoeven, J. W. M., & Janssen, L. (2025). Influencer marketing beyond attractiveness: A longitudinal assessment of credibility effects. *Journal of Advertising* (Early view).



- Shan, Y., Chen, K. J., & Lin, J. S. (2020). When social media influencers endorse brands: The effects of self-influencer congruence, parasocial interaction, and persuasion knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 19(5), 405–415. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1815>
- Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101742. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011>
- Tafesse, W., & Wood, B. P. (2021). Followers' engagement with Instagram influencers: The role of influencers' content and engagement strategy. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102303. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102303>
- Trivedi, J., & Sama, R. (2020). The effect of influencer marketing on consumers' brand admiration and online purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 57, 102240. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102240>
- Trivedi, J., Rathi, D., & Mehta, A. (2025). From endorsement to loyalty: How influencer credibility drives sustainable brand relationships. *Psychology & Marketing* (Online first).
- Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), 617–644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12647>