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## Research Article

### The Effects of Influencer Follower Count on Consumer Perception and Purchase Behavior

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#### ABSTRACT

In this study, we analyze the influence of influencer follower count on purchase behavior and consumer perception in college students, and address an emerging gap in the social media-driven marketing research area. Influencers on the one hand have very different follower counts, credibility and knowledge on the other, and while little research has been done on how these factors affect consumers' responses. Based on digital consumer behavior and persuasion theory, we study three independent variables - follower count impact, consumer perception and purchase behavior - and how these predict consumer behavior. Using descriptive-correlational research design, we collected data from 394 college students through 5-point Likert scale surveys and the followers' characteristics ( $M = 3.49$ , Agree), consumer perception indicators ( $M = 3.09$ , Neutral) and purchase behavior ( $M = 3.40$ , Neutral). We found that the follower count impact is strongly correlated with consumer perception ( $R^2 = .43$ ,  $F = 117.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and purchase behavior ( $R^2 = .49$ ,  $F = 380.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, consumer perception influenced purchase behavior strongly ( $R^2 = .49$ ,  $F = 380.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, a study also demonstrated that influencer exposure and follower count shape purchase behavior directly and indirectly through consumer perception, which is the most important way to link influencer cues to buying behavior. The research shows that seeing influencers often and knowing their follower count influences students' trust in them and that this trust in them is what drives buying behavior, so we need to be honest on influencer approach and clear marketing and research into why people follow and buy from these influencers.

**Keywords:** *Consumer perception, Digital influence, Follower count, Influencer, Influencer exposure, Purchase behavior, Social-media marketing*

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## Background

Within the past decade, and along with the continuous advancement of technology and social media, influencer marketing has become increasingly popular throughout social media platforms (Kim, et al 2021). By utilizing social media, brands collaborate with social media influencers that have a significant influence on their audiences to promote their products or services. The influencer phenomenon has burgeoned into a standalone industry and career path, thanks to the exponential growth of social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest. A study by highlights that trust is a foundational aspect of influencer marketing as consumers perceive influencers as trustworthy sources of information due to their authenticity (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). In support of this argument, it was found that “Instagram users tend to trust influencers with more modest numbers of followers than those with larger follower bases.” (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Consumer perception in influencer marketing is based on trust, awareness, social proof, emotional connection, and engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Trust is the foundation of the marketing strategy because influencers are seen by consumers as trustworthy sources of information (Tafesse & Wood, 2021), and research also indicates that “Instagram users trust influencers with relatively small numbers of followers more than those with larger followers” (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Additionally, “customers tend to buy products seen used by an influencer during the purchase decision phase” (Gelati et al., 2022), revealing that influencers impact decision-making in everyday life and change consumer/brand engagement. And finally, more followers can increase trustworthiness and expertise and it will have an impact on the consumer’s attitude towards influencer products, and perception is regarded as a mediating factor in influencer marketing (Abraham et al., 2022).

Influencers are renowned as reliable and trustworthy sources of information and are regarded as knowledgeable people offering recommendations that are then believed by their audiences. When influencers endorse products, their followers are more likely to purchase

them, resulting in brand awareness, credibility, social validation, emotional engagement, and ultimately higher sales (Adebayo et al., 2023). Influencer marketing is a business-to-consumer (B2C) approach that leverages the influence, trust, and social reach of people with strong online followings to promote products or services and influence consumer behavior. With this marketing approach having become so significant in influencing the purchasing decisions of college students, influencers are becoming more personal and more in tune with the consumers in this market and have a direct impact on the way brands are perceived (Gelati et al., 2022).

To fill the gap in understanding the impact of influencer popularity in consumer decisions, we study the impact of influencer follower count on consumer perceptions and purchase behavior among college students. In particular, we assess how students’ perception of credibility, trustworthiness and authenticity in social media influencers are influenced by the follower count and how these perceptions affect their purchasing behavior and actions. Bringing together theoretical knowledge on influencer marketing and consumer psychology with the behavior of young digital consumers through this research, we hope to gain a better understanding of how social proof methods affect consumers’ purchasing behaviour in a student-centered context. This research is informed by the following questions: (1) Do college students feel the credibility and the authenticity of the influencers based on the follower count? (2) How much does consumer perception influence the purchase behavior of college students in the presence of influencers with different follower counts? (3) Does influencer follower count influence consumer perception and purchase behavior of college students? To answer these questions, we employ the following null hypotheses: (1) College learners do not believe that influencer follower count impacts their perceived perception and consumer perception. (2) College learners do not believe consumer perception affects their purchase behavior. (3) College learners do not believe in follower count in influencer follower count but also their perception of them. (4) College learners think about the follower number

of influencers when buying more products and not less.

Figure 1 shows the design of the study and the main variables under study and their expected relationships. Specifically, it explains

how exposure to influencers and follower count are prior variables that influence consumer perceptions and then purchase behavior. The figure illustrates how the variables are assumed to flow in a given direction.

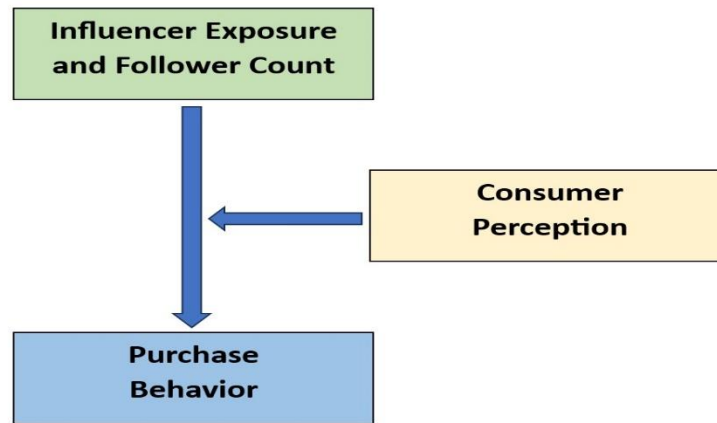


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Relationship Among Influencer Exposure, Follower Count, Consumer Perception, and Purchase Behavior

The figure shows that influencer exposure and follower count have a direct impact on consumers' purchase behaviour as well as how they will perceive products or brands. These perceptions affect purchasing behavior further. This relationship indicates that consumers don't just respond to the visible influencer characteristics (like popularity or reach), but also to the emotional and cognitive responses as well. Consequently, the influence of influencers and consumer perception are integrated in shopping behavior.

## Methods

### Research Design

In this study, we used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between influencer follower count, consumer perception, and purchase behavior among college students. The design was well placed, as it allowed the researchers to describe their perceptions and behaviors and also to discover statistical relations among the variables. In this study, we asked whether the number of followers an influencer has had a significant impact on consumer perception and purchase behavior without affecting any of the variables.

### Respondents

The target population of the study was college students from various universities in Cebu City, Philippines. They were selected because they are active users of social media platforms and are a key demographic in influencer marketing research. A total of 394 students were selected. They conducted voluntary response sampling and selected participants based on their willingness to participate in the survey. It was completely voluntary and in accordance with ethical research guidelines and to preserve confidentiality of responses.

### Instruments

The questionnaire in this study included several sections on influencer exposure, follower count perception, consumer perception, and purchase behavior and consisted of five item questions addressing all the dimensions of these variables. Our reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha demonstrated good internal consistency for influencer exposure and follower count ( $\alpha = 0.845$ ), acceptable reliability for follower consumer perception ( $\alpha = 0.896$ ), and high reliability for purchase behavior ( $\alpha = 0.907$ ). The data presented in this study were well-measured in each item scale and the data reported in this study was representative of

what is needed for the evaluation of the model to be a reliable multi-item scale in the context of influencer marketing research. Consistency in measurement also plays a key role in measuring credibility, exposure frequency, and behavioral responses (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Kim, 2019). Both consumer perception and purchase behavior are best measured in combination, and authenticity, trustworthiness, and intention were well-measured in the multi-item scale used in this study (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). These reliability results suggest that the assessed instrument used in this study is robust and fit for the study of influencer-related variables and consumer decision making.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected online via Google Forms for college students from different universities in Cebu City. Before answering, they were presented with a consent form that outlined the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses. The questionnaire had 3 parts for the study variables and was based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). All responses were automatically recorded on Google Forms and then organized for statistical analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the data collected by the respondents, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used in the study. Descriptive statistics (especially, the computation of means) were used to summarise the level of influencer exposure, follower count perception, consumer perception, and purchase behaviour. In order to investigate the relationship between the variables, regression analysis was used to assess the predictive impact of influencer exposure and follower count on consumer perception and consumer perception on purchase behaviour. This also allowed for the investigation of mediation effects and to assess if consumer perception is an intermediary between independent and dependent variables. The regression method was appropriate to test the study's hypotheses and to get evidence for how influencer-related cues influence

consumer purchasing behavior in the context of digital consumption.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All respondents were informed about the study objectives, scope and risks. Data collection was conducted anonymously and no personally identifiable information was recorded. Participation was voluntary and respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. The research protocol was based on the ethical principles of the APA Ethics Code (2017) and involved informed consent, confidentiality and responsible data collection.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Influencer Exposure and Follower Count**

Research has shown that influencer exposure and follower count are influential visibility signals that influence people's perception of the influencers and how they respond to their content. Frequent exposure promotes familiarity, trust and message recall, which supports the idea that repeated exposure engenders trustworthiness and credibility (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017). Conversely, follower count is social proof: higher numbers are indicative of popularity and legitimacy and thus increase trustworthiness and influence (Jin & Phua, 2020; Sundar, 2020). But follower count alone is not enough, since quality of engagement and authenticity can reduce the impact (Audrezet et al., 2020). Influencer exposure and follower count are related to consumer perception and persuasive efficacy and affect brand engagement, preference and purchase intention (Lou et al., 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Table 1 shows the mean scores and corresponding levels of agreement for the five criteria for influencer exposure and follower count. These scores are measured on a five-point Likert scale, from strong disagreement to strong agreement, and the results show how strongly each of the criteria impacts the way people view social media influencers. Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived influence, which tells us what factors are driving influencer credibility and appeal.

Table 1. Means and Levels of Agreements of Influencer Exposure and Follower Count Criteria

Influencer Exposure and Follower Count Criteria	Means	Interpretation
1. An influencer's follower count affects how I view their posts.	3.51	Agree
2. I pay attention to the follower count when evaluating an influencer's recommendation.	3.47	Agree
3. I consider accounts/influencers with many followers as more established.	3.70	Agree
4. I find endorsements from small accounts to be as reliable as those from larger accounts.	3.39	Neutral
5. I find endorsements from large accounts to be trustworthy even if they are commercial.	3.38	Neutral
Average	3.49	Agree

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree.

Overall, the results indicate that follower metrics are important to evaluate influencers. The greatest endorsement came with perceived credibility by size ( $M = 3.70$ ), suggesting that a bigger follower base is still a way of establishing trustworthiness and expertise, which is consistent with findings that the audience often uses numerical popularity as a cue (Lim & Kim, 2023; Sundar et al., 2022). Influencer Follower Impact ( $M = 3.51$ ) and Follower Count Evaluation ( $M = 3.47$ ) were also rated as "Agree" on the scale of 1-10 and the followers are the key to how the audience sees and judges an influencer's authority and ability to persuade (Varma & Singh, 2024).

Follower count was generally accepted as an important evaluation cue ( $M = 3.49$ , Agree), but its influence seems to be conditional rather than absolute. This is supported by the average ratings of Small Account Reliability ( $M = 3.39$ ) and Large Account Trustworthiness ( $M = 3.38$ ) which indicates that college students in Cebu City do not instantly trust big influencers or see smaller influencers as more genuine. This neutrality could be affected by the local socio-cultural and socio-economic context in which students are highly exposed to influencer content and are more aware of its commercial aspect.

In the local context, especially among urban college students, the purchase decision is usually influenced by price, value for money and previous experience with sponsored content. Hence, follower size may not be a decisive credibility signal anymore. Students appear to be more concerned with the authenticity, relevance, and transparency of influencer

endorsements. The fact that people don't care if an account is small or large suggests a savvy audience that knows influencers of all sizes are doing paid partnerships, which demolishes the trust signal that is normally tied to popularity metrics.

These findings suggest that in this sample, the number of followers is more of an initial heuristic than a determinant of trust. This contextualized interpretation is in line with the study's mediation results, supporting the idea that the central process through which influencer exposure affects purchase behavior is consumer perception, not the size of followers.

Small-Account Reliability ( $M = 3.39$ ) and Large-Account Trustworthiness ( $M = 3.38$ ) were viewed as "Neutral" - the follower size is important, but the qualitative ones like authenticity, content relevance, or transparency are what really matter. This is consistent with recent surveys that suggest consumers are becoming more discerning about follower numbers and artificially high engagement (Varma & Singh, 2024). The overall average score of 3.49 in the "Agree" group is evidence of followers being important but not the only factors that determine the credibility of an influencer (Lim & Kim, 2023; Sundar et al., 2022).

### Consumer Perception

Consumer perception plays a crucial role in influencing the way consumers view and respond to influencer content because it is the perception of whether an influencer is credible, authentic, and trustworthy. Research shows that positive consumer perception increases

engagement, attitudes toward endorsed brands, and purchase intention (Lou & Kim, 2019). In general, audiences tend to trust the authenticity and transparency of influencers who are perceived as genuine and consistent, which makes them susceptible to their content (Audrezet et al., 2020). Parasocial relationships (feeling close to or related to influencers) also raise consumer perception and make their followers open to persuasive messages (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Overall, the literature shows that consumer perception is a powerful psychological mechanism for influencer behavior and is associated with what is perceived by the consumer.

Table 2 shows mean scores and agreement levels for the five criteria that impact consumers' perceptions of influencers. The values are based on a five-point Likert scale, which represent everyone's general opinion of the influencers and the reliability, authenticity, credibility, and informational value they provide to the audience. In this way, we can explore the trustworthiness and utility of influencer-generated content to the consumers in terms of how trustworthy and informative influencer-generated content is perceived in terms of consumer attitudes and decisions.

*Table 2. Means and Levels of Agreements of Consumer Perception*

Consumer Perception Criteria	Means	Interpretation
1. I can rely on influencer recommendations.	3.24	Neutral
2. Influencers provide helpful and accurate information.	3.28	Neutral
3. Influencers feel genuine and not overly scripted.	2.93	Neutral
4. Influencer content seems aligned with their real preferences.	3.20	Neutral
5. Higher follower counts make influencers seem more credible.	2.81	Neutral
Average	3.09	Neutral

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree.

All the indicators fit within the neutral category, indicating a very moderate opinion among respondents about the perceptual quality of influencers. Recommendation reliability ( $M = 3.24$ ) and information accuracy ( $M = 3.28$ ) received the highest level of neutrality, suggesting that people do not trust or distrust influencers' recommendations too much, which is in line with recent research that indicates while audience members appreciate influencers as a source of information, they are still cautious about sponsorship bias and commercial persuasion (Hwang & Zhang, 2020). Content Authenticity ( $M = 2.93$ ) and Genuine Preference Alignment ( $M = 3.20$ ) are also within the neutral range, which suggests that there is still doubt as to whether or not the influencer endorsement is genuine. Prior research shows that consumers are increasingly suspicious of influencer motivations as audiences become more aware of brand partnerships and curated online profiles (Lee & Eastin, 2021).

The lowest rated criterion (Credibility by Follower Count)  $M = 2.81$  also indicates that respondents do not associate numerical popularity with credibility. This is consistent with a broader shift in digital consumer behavior in which knowledge, transparency and authenticity are more important than superficial popularity cues (Lou, Tan, & Chen, 2019). The overall mean score of 3.09 ("Neutral") indicates that consumers are not blind to influencer content but are more cautious and judgmental and not to have their opinion. This is consistent with recent research that has shown that credibility is still based on much more than just follower numbers (Jin et al., 2019) and that people are looking at what you have said or done but not what you've written, so credibility is subjective and it takes much more than a follower number (Jin et al., 2019). This suggests that influencers and marketers need to be transparent and have the confidence of the public for longer-term engagement.

### Purchase Behavior

Purchase behavior is highly influenced by the consumers' perceptions of influencers and the persuasive cues in social media content. Research shows that credibility, authenticity, and emotional connection are among the factors driving consumers to consider or purchase endorsed products (Jin & Phua, 2020). Positive purchase behavior is also linked to influencers' trustworthy recommendations and relatable content, which are more likely to boost consumers' confidence in the product or brand (Chetioui et al., 2020). Exposure to influencer content was also found to affect purchase intentions through social proof and parasocial interactions by making followers feel that they are connected to influencers who endorse them and therefore more likely to respond to their

endorsement (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In general, the literature shows that purchase behavior is influenced by the product appeal and psychological and relational cues embedded in influencer–audience interactions.

Table 3 indicates the mean scores and agreement levels for the five criteria used to assess the purchase behavior of the participants. Based on a five-point Likert scale, the results provide a glimpse of the participants' tendencies, intentions, and decision-making processes with regard to purchasing. In particular, the findings show how social media influences consumer awareness, preference formation, and buying behavior to an extent that online content, peer opinions, and digital exposure influence the purchasing behavior of respondents.

Table 3. Means and Levels of Agreements of Purchase Behavior

Purchase Behavior Criteria	Means	Interpretation
1. I would consider purchasing products recommended by influencers.	3.41	Agree
2. I intend to try or buy products recommended by influencers if budget allows.	3.55	Agree
3. I would recommend products to a friend after seeing them endorsed by influencers.	3.24	Neutral
4. The higher an influencer's follower count, the more likely I am to purchase their recommended products.	3.29	Neutral
5. I have previously bought a product because of an influencer's recommendation.	3.49	Agree
Average	3.40	Neutral

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree.

Three indicators are considered by the "Agree" group—Purchase Consideration ( $M = 3.41$ ), Intent to Try or Buy ( $M = 3.55$ ), and Past Influencer-Driven Purchase ( $M = 3.49$ )—indicating that influencers have a role in influencing consumer intention and past purchasing experiences. These findings are in line with the evidence that influencer marketing increases consumer willingness to try product trials and purchase intention through the development of persuasive messaging and reduced product uncertainty (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). The role of influencers in influencing purchase action is also reinforced in studies that show that exposure to influencer recommendations can activate aspirational motivation and social

proof, which are linked to higher levels of behavior (Chetioui et al., 2020).

Two indicators—peer Recommendation Influence ( $M = 3.24$ ) and Purchase Likelihood by Follower Count ( $M = 3.29$ )—were considered neutral, which means that social and numerical signals do not drive purchasing behavior. This follows the results of finding that peer influence and follower metrics have a certain level of influence but are moderated by perceived authenticity, consumer skepticism, and prior experience with influencer-promoted products (Jin & Phua, 2020). The overall average of 3.40 means that influencers can influence purchase intentions but consumers are still cautious and will take other factors (like personal relevance, brand familiarity, and content credibility) into

account in making a decision. Such findings indicate that influencer marketing can drive consumer interest but it is only effective when trust, transparency, and genuine value communication are built into the buying strategies (Al-Farraj et al., 2021).

### ***Influencer Exposure and Follower Count***

**Model Summary.** Table 4 summarizes the regression model for the predictive relationship between influencer exposure, follower count, and purchase behavior in this study. The

key model fit parameters are the correlation coefficient, coefficient of determination, adjusted  $R^2$ , standard error, and total number of observations. These figures provide a complete picture of the influence of the independent variables (and specifically influencer exposure) on the consumers' purchase behavior. This information helps to understand the model's strength and explanatory power in predicting the purchasing behavior of consumers in the context of social media.

*Table 4. Model Summary for Influencer Exposure and Follower Count Outcomes*

Statistic	Value
Multiple R	0.70
R Square	0.49
Adjusted R Square	0.49
Standard Error	0.66
Observations	394

Our model achieves a Multiple R of .70 that is very positive for influencer exposure and follower count, causing consumers to buy products. The  $R^2$  of .49 confirms that nearly half of the variance in purchase behavior is explained by these predictors and the model is reliable. The  $R^2$  of .38 and the adjusted  $R^2$  of .48 is also good because in this case our model is reliable because of the sample size ( $N = 394$ ). The standard error (.66) indicates that the predicted values are slightly variable, but the influencer exposure and follower count are important factors and other factors could affect purchase behavior. In general, this means that our model is a good model to understand how

influencer-related cues can influence consumer decision making and decision making.

**ANOVA.** Table 5 summarizes the ANOVA results that characterize the statistical significance of the regression model that was used to predict the outcome variable from influencers' exposure and follower count. The table includes the degrees of freedom, sum of squares, mean squares, F-value, and significance level. These are used to assess the model's goodness of fit and to show that independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable in the best way, thus confirming the model's overall explanatory power.

*Table 5. ANOVA Summary for Influencer Exposure and Follower Count Outcomes*

Source	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	167.43	167.43	380.25	< .001
Residual	392	172.61	0.44		
Total	393	340.04			

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant ( $F = 380.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and influencer exposure and follower count account for a large share of the variance in purchase behavior. The significance level of these results shows that the likelihood of these results occurring by chance is very low,

and that the independent variables are predictive. This means that more influencer exposure and more follower-related cues have a direct impact on consumers' decisions to make purchases. The strong F-value also confirms that influencer-related factors are involved in influencing purchase behavior in digital markets

and that they are a significant factor for strategic marketing and engagement strategies.

**Coefficients.** Table 6 shows the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), SE, t-values, significance levels (p), and 95% confidence intervals for the predictor (influencer exposure)

and intercept. These statistical values illustrate both the magnitude and direction of the relationship between influencer exposure and purchase behavior. The model can now understand how changes in influencer exposure influence consumers' purchasing behavior, and the strength of this relationship.

Table 6. Regression Coefficients for Influencer Exposure and Follower Count Outcomes

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Intercept	0.75	0.14	5.41	< .001	[0.48, 1.03]
Influencer Exposure	0.76	0.04	19.50	< .001	[0.68, 0.83]

The regression coefficient for influencer exposure (B = 0.76, p < 0.001) shows that for every one-unit increase in influencer exposure the predicted purchase behavior score goes up 0.76 units and all other variables remain the same. The small confidence interval [0.68, 0.83] indicates that this is a relatively consistent and accurate estimate and that the effect is stable and positive. The intercept (B = 0.75) is the expected baseline level of purchase behavior when influencer exposure is zero and can be used to understand the model's predictions. Taken together, the results show that influencer exposure is a significant and statistically significant predictor of purchase behavior and therefore is important in influencing consumer decision making in digital marketing. Samanta et al. (2025) demonstrated a strong effect of influencer exposure on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.83$ , p < 0.001) indicating that influencer marketing is a very good predictor of consumer behavior. Mohammed and Sundararajan (2025)

also found that trust in influencers is very significant in purchasing intentions (p < 0.01), further supporting the reliability and importance of influencer exposure to consumers in influencing the purchase intention and purchase decision making process.

### Consumer Perception

**Model Summary.** Table 7 summarizes the model summary for the regression analysis of how influencer exposure and follower count predict consumer perception, which is the mediating variable in our study. The table details key indicators of model fit including the correlation coefficient, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), adjusted  $R^2$ , standard error, and total sample size. Together, these indicators illustrate how effectively the independent variables explain the variance in the mediating variable, and indicate the strength of their combination in consumer perception.

Table 7. Model Summary for Consumer Perception Outcomes

Statistic	Value
Multiple R	0.66
R Square	0.43
Adjusted R Square	0.43
Standard Error	0.63
Observation	394

The Multiple R of the model is 0.66 indicating a moderately positive association between influencer exposure, follower count, and consumer perception. The  $R^2 = 0.43$  indicates that 43% of the variance in consumer perception is accounted for by the predictors, and the same

adjusted  $R^2 = 0.43$  is indicative of the model being stable and reliable given sample size (N = 394). The standard error of 0.63 indicates that the predicted values vary from point A to point B and there are other factors contributing to the perception of influencers which affect how

consumers perceive influencers in the context of consumer perception. In conclusion, we are able to show that influencer exposure and follower count have a significant impact on consumer perception and thus are influential antecedents in the mediation.

**ANOVA.** Table 8 presents ANOVA results illustrating the overall significance of the regression model predicting consumer perception

based on influencer exposure and follower count. The degrees of freedom, sum of squares, mean square values, F-statistic, and significance level all measure how well the model explains variance in the mediating variable. These are important indicators to identify the extent to which the different independent variables contribute meaningfully to differences observed in consumer perception.

Table 8. ANOVA Summary for Consumer Perception Outcomes

Source	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	117.59	117.59	295.94	< .001
Residual	392	155.76	0.40		
Total	393	273.35			

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant,  $F(1, 392) = 295.94, p < .001$ , which shows that influencer exposure and number of followers, as well as impact on perception of consumers, together make up a large part of the variance in perception. The large F-value indicates predictors are more likely to explain consumer perception than chance. Our results show that visibility-related signals such as influencer exposure and perceived follower metrics are important in consumer perception of influencers for credibility, authenticity, and informational value. The strong ANOVA results further indicate that the model is effective and that these variables

play a role in predicting consumer perception as a mediating factor.

**Coefficients.** Table 9 presents the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standard errors (SE), t-values, significance levels (p), and 95% confidence intervals for the predictor variable (influencer exposure) along with the intercept in predicting consumer perception. These coefficients reflect both the magnitude and direction of the relationship between influencer exposure and the mediating variable, offering insight into how changes in exposure contribute to shifts in consumers' evaluations and perceptions of influencers.

Table 9. Regression Coefficients for Influencer Exposure and Follower Count Outcomes

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Intercept	0.88	0.13	6.62	< .001	[0.62, 1.14]
Influencer Exposure	0.63	0.04	17.20	< .001	[0.56, 0.71]

The regression coefficient for influencer exposure is  $B = 0.63$  and  $p < 0.001$ , so that for every one unit increase in influencer exposure, consumer perception increases by 0.63 units, if we keep all other factors constant. The confidence interval [0.56, 0.71] confirms this effect is accurate and consistent, and that the effect is indeed positive. The intercept ( $B = 0.88$ ) is the expected level of consumer perception if influencer exposure is zero, which can be used to understand the model results. Overall, the findings show that influencer exposure is a strong

and statistically significant predictor of consumer perception, reinforcing its role as a key antecedent in the mediation process and highlighting how increased visibility and engagement with influencers meaningfully shape consumers' evaluative judgments (Pan et al., 2025; Kedia et al., 2025).

**Purchase Behavior**

**Model Summary.** Table 10 presents the model summary for the regression analysis predicting purchase behavior, which involves

influencer exposure, number of followers, and consumer perception in the mediation framework. The table displays key indicators of the model performance, including the correlation coefficient (Multiple R), coefficient of

determination ( $R^2$ ) of the regression, adjusted  $R^2$ , standard error of the estimate, and sample size. This means that both predictors (direct vs indirect) account for variance in consumers' purchase behavior.

Table 10. Model Summary for Purchase Behavior Outcomes

Statistic	Value
Multiple R	0.76
R <sup>2</sup>	0.57
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.57
Standard Error	0.61
Observations	394

The Multiple R is 0.76, indicating a strong positive relationship between the combined predictors and purchase behaviour. The  $R^2$  is 0.57, which means 57% of the variance in purchase behavior is explained by the integrated model, indicating the predictive power of influencer exposure, follower count, and consumer perception. The same adjusted  $R^2$  value further confirms the model's reliability given the sample size ( $N = 394$ ). This standard error of 0.61 indicates some variability around predictions and suggests that although the model captures most of the variance, there are other contextual or personal factors that impact purchase decision making. Thus, we believe that consumers' perception is significant as a mediator of influencer-related signals regarding purchase be-

havior and the influence of exposure, perception, and consumer action in digital marketing is very much interrelated.

**ANOVA.** Table presents ANOVA results for the regression model predicting purchase behavior with exposure to influencers, follower count, and the variable consumer perception. The degrees of freedom, sum of squares, mean squares, F-statistic, and significance measure all indicate that the combined predictors are able to explain a significant share of the variance in the dependent variable. These measures indicate how well the model is fit and successful in the influence-perception pathway in which we have considered to describe consumers' purchase behavior.

Table 11. ANOVA Summary for Purchase Behavior Outcomes

Source	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	2	195.03	97.52	262.96	< .001
Residual	391	145.00	0.37		
Total	393	340.04			

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant,  $F(2, 391) = 262.96, p < .001$ , indicating that influencer exposure, follower number, and consumer perception together account for a significant amount of variance in purchase behavior. The large F-value indicates that the predictive model is much better than expected by chance and that the independent variables and mediator are highly intertwined. In this study, exposure-based and follower-related cues, along with consumers' perception of influencers, play

a key role in influencing purchase behavior. These ANOVA findings are encouraging to support the mediation model and demonstrate how influencer attributes and consumer perception are all involved in the purchasing behavior.

**Coefficients.** Table 12 shows the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standard errors (SE), t-values, significance levels (p), and 95% confidence intervals for the predictors in the model explaining purchase behavior. In this

mediation framework, influencer exposure and consumer perception are key predictors of the dependent variable. These coefficients can be seen in terms of both the magnitude and direc-

tion of their impact on purchase behavior, revealing how each variable contributes to changes in consumers' purchase-related decisions.

Table 12. Regression Coefficients for Purchase Behavior Outcomes

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Intercept	0.39	0.14	2.85	.005	[0.12, 0.65]
Influencer Exposure	0.49	0.05	10.38	< .001	[0.40, 0.58]
Consumer Perception	0.42	0.05	8.63	< .001	[0.33, 0.52]

Our results show that exposure to influencer marketing ( $B = 0.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is important to influence purchase behavior. It is found that one unit increase in exposure to influencers leads to a 0.49 unit increase in purchase behavior when other things are held constant. The confidence interval [0.40, 0.58] is also in agreement with this estimate. Similarly, consumer perception (which we use in our study through a parasocial relationship measure ( $B = 0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ )) is a very important predictor: a 1 unit increase in perceived connection or evaluation judgment increases the purchase behavior by 0.42 units. The confidence interval [0.33, 0.52] is also in agreement with this estimate. The intercept ( $B = 0.39$ ) is the level of purchase behavior when all predictors are zero. These findings suggest that influencer exposure and consumer perception have a strong and statistically significant impact on purchase behavior, illustrating the integration of external signals as well as internal signals that influence consumer buying decisions in digital marketing. These findings strengthen the existing trends that influencer exposure is a significant predictor of purchase behavior (Migkos & Giannakopoulos, 2025) and parasocial relationship, which is used here to measure consumer perception, is an important factor in purchasing intention (Sharkasi & Rezakhah, 2023).

### Summary of Findings

Influencer exposure and follower count are positively correlated with respondents' perception and thus, the perception of the influencer is very strong for buying behavior. Overall, respondents acknowledged that visibility cues (influencer exposure and follower count) impact the way they perceive the credibility

and authenticity of the influencer and the perceived credibility of the influencer. We found that influencer exposure and follower count explained variance of consumers' perception across the data and consumer perception itself was a major predictor of purchase behavior, viewing the product, buying decisions, and past behavior. Mediation results also showed that perception of the influencer is the primary mechanism through which consumers respond to influencer influence and therefore influences buying decisions through the influencer's visibility and popularity.

### Implications of the Study

The findings are consistent with the main theories of digital persuasion and source credibility by indicating that exposure cues and follower metrics influence perceptions of influencer trustworthiness and authenticity (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Teng et al., 2022). Consumer perception is strong in this area and corroborates the Elaboration Likelihood Model in which peripheral cues such as popularity influence attitudes and intentions (Petty & Briñol, 2021). Mediation results also support parasocial and relational influence theories in relation to perceived connection and authenticity driving purchase behavior (Pham & Gammoh, 2023; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In general, consumer perception is the key factor connecting influencer visibility with purchasing outcomes.

From a managerial perspective, the results can be useful for brands and marketers in practical ways. Exposure has been shown to have a strong impact on consumer response and thus needs to be consistent and algorithm-based to promote consumer responsiveness (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Although follower count is important, it is very much about authentic

engagement and trust, and the influencers with a good track record and credible relationships so that brands should not build a huge but superficial follower base (Casaló et al., 2020). As consumer perception is the most important factor in purchase behavior, relationship-building strategies—such as storytelling and community interaction—are a very important element to build trust and purchase intent.

The findings also hold policy implications for transparency and ethical advertising. The transparent disclosure of sponsored content is crucial to protect consumers and promote informed decision-making (Evans et al., 2021). The results also support authenticity metrics and engagement-quality indicators to minimize the risks related to inflated follower counts and ensure fair influencer selection (De Veirman et al., 2022). Digital marketing Key Performance Indicators can also be used for the assessment of influencer campaigns and for the evaluation of perception-based indicators in performance systems.

Future research should study more mediators such as trust, expertise, and emotional engagement to better understand how influencer cues shape behavior (Hudders et al., 2021). Personality traits, involvement, or product type of influencer could help us determine when influencer exposure is most effective. Longitudinal or experimental research may show how exposure over time informs perception and purchase behavior, while cross-platform comparisons may reveal differences in persuasive mechanisms. Moderated mediation models would further deepen our understanding of the complex processes driving digital consumer decision-making.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

A limitations of the study is the use of voluntary response sampling. The fact that these respondents volunteered, they may have strong opinions about online influencers and naturally had to be active online users. This situation may create an unintended bias on the part of the respondents. Moreover, future research might also use comparative designs across platforms and mixed-method approaches to better understand how consumers

see and feel about influencer content in various digital spaces.

### **Conclusion**

Researchers examined the influence of influencer exposure and follower count on purchase behavior and consumer perception as a mediator. The research shows that influencer exposure and follower count are positive signals that influence consumer perception ( $R^2 = .43$ ) and consumer perception is strongly associated with purchase behavior ( $R^2 = .57$ ). In other words, visibility cues influence how consumers judge authenticity and credibility and this influences decision-making. In general, the research shows that consumer perception is the most important component that can link influencer personality traits with purchasing behavior.

Additional mediators such as trust, perceived credibility, and influencer expertise might help to explain the impact influencer marketing has on consumer attitudes and behavior. Similarly, a deeper examination of moderators such as platform type, content format, or individual consumer characteristics (e.g., personality traits, involvement level) could also provide important boundary conditions.

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