

Digital Influencer Marketing and Consumer Behavior: A Systematic Review of Literature

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Abstract

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This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to analyze the role of digital influencer marketing (DIM) in shaping consumer behavior between 2020 and 2022. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsement, influencers create authenticity and parasocial relationships that enhance credibility and influence consumer trust, purchase intention, and electronic word of mouth. The review synthesizes findings from peer reviewed journals, focusing on three central themes: influencer attributes and message features, sponsorship disclosure and persuasion knowledge, and influencer brand congruence with platform specific characteristics. Results indicate that authenticity, expertise, and credibility are primary drivers of positive consumer outcomes, while disclosure practices and perceptions of commercial intent may undermine persuasion by raising skepticism. Furthermore, platform affordances such as Instagram's visual orientation and TikTok's short form video formats significantly shape consumer engagement and message effectiveness. The review concludes that DIM is most effective when authenticity is emphasized, sponsorship disclosure is carefully managed, and brand congruence is maintained. However, inconsistencies across contexts highlight the need for further cross-cultural and longitudinal research.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, digital influencer marketing (DIM) has become a core mechanism through which brands shape consumer attitudes and behaviors across social platforms. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsement, influencers cultivate perceived authenticity and parasocial closeness with followers, which can heighten source credibility and, in turn, drive brand evaluations, purchase intentions, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (De Veirman et al., 2017; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As social media ecosystems mature, platform affordances such as visual storytelling on Instagram, short-form video, and creator–audience interaction intensify message relevance and personalization, situating influencers as “human brands” whose endorsements often outperform conventional ads in engagement efficiency (Appel et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2020).

Yet, the psychological levers that translate influencer content into consumer response remain contested. Prior work points to credibility, expertise, attractiveness, and perceived authenticity as primary antecedents of trust and persuasion, while sponsorship disclosures, material connections, and overt commercial cues can mitigate these effects by triggering ad recognition or skepticism (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Evans et al., 2017; Audrezet et al., 2020). Moreover, influencer product fit and platform format fit appear pivotal boundary conditions that shape attention, processing depth, and downstream behavior (Schouten et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2021). Despite a fast growing corpus, findings are dispersed across platforms, product categories, and methodological designs, challenging cumulative theory

building about when and how DIM shifts consumer cognition, affect, and behavior (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Hudders et al., 2021).

This systematic review synthesizes DIM research to map theoretical drivers, boundary conditions, and outcome patterns in consumer behavior. Specifically, it aggregates evidence on (1) influencer attributes and message features that shape credibility and authenticity, (2) the roles of disclosure and persuasion knowledge in moderating effects, and (3) cross-platform and product category contingencies governing attitudes, intentions, and choice. By integrating findings from 2020 - 2022, the review clarifies consistencies and contradictions in the literature and outlines a future agenda for rigorous, platform aware research on influence effectiveness.

2. Literatur Review

Digital influencer marketing (DIM) has emerged as an essential approach for brands to engage consumers in online platforms. Influencers act as “human brands” whose authenticity and relatability strengthen consumer trust and purchase intentions (Jin et al., 2022). On Instagram, influencer credibility and opinion leadership have been shown to significantly affect consumer attitudes and brand loyalty (Casaló et al., 2020). Similarly, the rise of TikTok has highlighted the persuasive power of short-form video content in shaping consumer perceptions and encouraging electronic word-of-mouth (Lee & Kim, 2020).

Psychological drivers such as credibility, attractiveness, and expertise remain central in explaining consumer responses to influencer content (Martensen et al., 2021). However, overt sponsorship disclosure can weaken persuasion by raising

consumer skepticism and activating advertising literacy (De Jans et al., 2020). Source credibility and authenticity also play a key role in differentiating influencer-promoted ads from brand-promoted content, where influencer ads often generate stronger engagement (Lou et al., 2022).

Another important factor is the congruence between influencer and brand, as well as the alignment of message formats with platform characteristics. Studies show that when there is a strong fit, consumers process information more deeply and demonstrate higher intention to share content or make purchases (Ki et al., 2020). Despite these insights, findings across studies remain fragmented, reflecting differences in platforms, influencer types, and product categories. This inconsistency suggests the need for systematic reviews to consolidate knowledge and build stronger theoretical foundations for understanding DIM's influence on consumer behavior.

3. Methods

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to synthesize research findings on digital influencer marketing (DIM) and its impact on consumer behavior. The review focuses on peer reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2022, as this period represents the most recent and rapid development of research in this field. The inclusion criteria were defined to ensure relevance: (1) articles must explicitly examine influencer marketing in digital or social media contexts, (2) studies must analyze consumer-related outcomes such as trust, purchase intention, engagement, or electronic word-of-mouth, and (3) the articles

must be published in reputable, peer-reviewed journals indexed in databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, or Web of Science.

The search process was conducted using keywords including “digital influencer marketing,” “social media influencers,” “consumer behavior,” and “engagement”. To refine the selection, Boolean operators (AND/OR) were applied in combination with publication years. After removing duplicates and irrelevant studies, the final sample of articles was selected through a multi stage screening process involving title and abstract review, followed by full text assessment.

The data analysis was carried out by categorizing studies into three main themes: (1) influencer attributes and message characteristics that affect credibility and authenticity, (2) the moderating role of sponsorship disclosure, authenticity perception, and advertising literacy, and (3) the influence of influencer brand congruence and platform-specific formats on consumer engagement and purchase intentions. A qualitative synthesis was then conducted to identify theoretical drivers, boundary conditions, and inconsistencies across studies. This structured method provides a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which DIM influences consumer cognition, attitudes, and behavior

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that digital influencer marketing (DIM) has become a powerful driver of consumer engagement and brand related outcomes between 2020 and 2022. Studies consistently emphasize that authenticity, expertise, and credibility are crucial attributes that enhance consumer

trust and strengthen purchase intentions. For example, research shows that influencers perceived as authentic opinion leaders can significantly improve brand loyalty and encourage electronic word-of-mouth, highlighting the central role of credibility in persuasion (Casaló et al., 2020). Similarly, the persuasiveness of citizen influencers lies in their ability to leverage attractiveness and trustworthiness, which fosters deeper consumer relationships (Martensen et al., 2021).

Another important theme concerns sponsorship disclosure and consumer persuasion knowledge. While disclosures are critical for transparency, they may reduce the effectiveness of influencer content by activating skepticism and raising advertising awareness. For instance, evidence suggests that adolescents and young consumers become more critical when sponsorship is explicitly revealed, thereby weakening persuasion (De Jans et al., 2020). At the same time, brand promoted ads often fail to achieve the same level of engagement as influencer promoted content, since consumers perceive influencers as more authentic and relatable (Lou et al., 2022).

The review also underlines the significance of influencer brand congruence and platform-specific characteristics. When influencer identity aligns with brand personality, consumers process content more deeply and display higher intentions to engage or purchase. Conversely, a lack of congruence can undermine credibility and limit campaign effectiveness (Ki et al., 2020). In addition, platform affordances such as the visual orientation of Instagram or the short-form video nature of TikTok shape how consumers interpret and respond to influencer messages, suggesting that

effectiveness is not only determined by influencer attributes but also by the communication environment (Jin et al., 2022).

Taken together, these results indicate that DIM is most effective when influencers are perceived as authentic, sponsorship disclosures are carefully managed, and campaigns are tailored to the specific platform context. Nevertheless, inconsistencies remain regarding the relative effectiveness of micro versus macroinfluencers, as the former tend to foster higher engagement due to perceived closeness, while the latter ensure broader reach at the expense of authenticity (Casaló et al., 2020). These findings highlight the need for further cross contextual and cross cultural research to understand how consumers from different backgrounds interpret influencer credibility, authenticity, and disclosure. Overall, the evidence consolidates DIM as a strategic tool for shaping consumer cognition, attitudes, and behavior, while also revealing gaps that future research should address.

5. Conclusion

This review concludes that digital influencer marketing (DIM) has emerged as an increasingly effective strategy in shaping consumer behavior, particularly between 2020 and 2022. The findings highlight that authenticity, credibility, and expertise are fundamental attributes driving consumer trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions. At the same time, sponsorship disclosure and perceptions of commercial intent present challenges, as they may reduce persuasion by activating consumer skepticism. Moreover, the effectiveness of influencer campaigns is strongly influenced by brand congruence and the unique affordances of each platform, such

as Instagram's visual appeal or TikTok's short-form video engagement. While micro influencers are more effective in building trust and closeness, macro influencers remain valuable for extending reach, suggesting that brands must strategically balance both approaches. Overall, DIM should be understood as a context-dependent strategy that requires careful management of authenticity, disclosure, and platform fit. Future research is encouraged to explore cross cultural differences and long term consumer outcomes to build a more integrated theoretical foundation for influencer marketing and consumer behavior.

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