

Consumer Responses to AI-generated Influencer Content: The Role of Trust and Scepticism

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally reshaped social media marketing by enabling personalized interactions, intelligent content delivery and data-driven consumer engagement. Despite the expanding use of artificial intelligence in marketing, relatively few studies have examined how AI-driven social media marketing and influencer authenticity jointly influence consumer purchase behaviour intentions through psychological mechanisms. This research investigates the effects of AI-Driven Social Media Marketing (AISMM) and Influencer Authenticity (IA) on Consumer Purchase Intention (PI), while examining the mediating role of Trust (TR) and the moderating role of Consumer Scepticism (CS). A quantitative research design was employed using survey data collected from 490 active social media users. The proposed conceptual model was evaluated by applying PLS-SEM with Smart PLS 4.0. The findings demonstrate that AI-Driven Social Media Marketing and Influencer Authenticity exert significant positive effects on both Trust and Consumer Purchase Intention. Trust significantly mediates these relationships, highlighting its pivotal role in translating AI-enabled marketing practices and authentic influencer communication into favorable purchasing intentions. However, Consumer Scepticism does not serve as a moderator in the relationship between Trust and Purchase Intention. The model exhibits satisfactory explanatory and predictive capability. This research extends the emerging literature on AI-driven consumer behavior through the integration of technological, relational and behavioral perspectives into a unified framework. The findings offer practical insights for marketers, digital platforms and influencers seeking to design trustworthy, AI-driven social media strategies that foster consumer engagement and purchase intentions in increasingly competitive digital marketplaces.

Keywords: AI-driven Social Media Marketing, Consumer Purchase Intention, Consumer Scepticism, Influencer Authenticity, PLS-SEM, Trust.

Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technologies has transformed marketing, placing social media at the core of consumer-brand interactions, evolving into a marketplace where consumers discover, evaluate and purchase products, while smartphones, algorithms and user-generated content increasingly shape decision-making and engagement (1). Social media influencers shape consumer attitudes through credibility, relatability and authenticity, making their recommendations more trusted and influential than traditional advertising in purchase decisions. (2). Social media platforms enable influencers to create interactive and engaging content that significantly affects consumer views and behavioral intentions, strengthening the effectiveness of digital

marketing strategies (3). Data-driven approaches, predictive analytics and algorithm-based content delivery systems allow firms to analyze consumer behavior, personalize marketing messages and optimize influencer selection (4). The increasing commercialization of influencer content has created scepticism among consumers regarding the genuineness of endorsements. Issues such as fake followers, manipulated engagement metrics and undisclosed sponsorships have raised concerns regarding the reliability of influencer-driven promotions (5). These challenges highlight the importance of authenticity as a major strong factor which shape consumers' trust and purchasing decisions. Authentic influencers are more likely to establish emotional connections

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with their viewer, enhancing credibility and fostering positive consumer responses (6). Trust plays a critical role in digital marketing environments characterized by their uncertainty and information asymmetry. Consumers demonstrate a greater propensity to engage with brands and make purchase decisions when they perceive the information source as credible and reliable (7). Research indicates that social media content characterized by informativeness, entertainment and relevance significantly enhance consumer trust, which subsequently influences purchase intention (8). Studies indicate that trust-related factors, including perceived credibility and social proof, significantly influence consumer preferences and purchase behavior in digital marketplaces (9). Consumer scepticism is the tendency to question marketing motives and credibility, often weakening the impact of marketing efforts by reducing perceived trustworthiness (10). Virtual influencers and digital avatars offer consistency and control, but are often perceived as less trustworthy than human influencers due to artificiality (11). Existing literature has examined the individual roles of social media marketing, influencer authenticity, trust and scepticism in shaping consumer behaviour (12). Previous researches have examined the role of content characteristics in shaping consumer trust, purchase decisions and emotional engagement in consumer responses and the influence of authenticity on credibility and persuasion (8, 13). Other studies have emphasized the role of data-driven marketing strategies and predictive analytics in improving marketing effectiveness (14). Notwithstanding these contributions, limited research has examined the combined influence of these variables within a unified framework (15).

Artificial Intelligence in Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention

Modern social media platforms use algorithms, predictive analytics and user behavior tracking to enhance engagement and influence consumer decision-making (16). This study explains how AI-driven marketing influences consumer behavior through authentic influencer interactions, offering theoretical and practical insights.

Null Hypothesis (H₀₁)

AI-driven social media marketing does not exert an empirically significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁₁)

AI-driven social media marketing has a significant influence on consumers' purchase intentions.

Influencer Authenticity and Purchase Intention

Authentic influencers are more likely to establish emotional connections with consumers, enhancing persuasive power and increasing favourable behavioral responses (17). Consumers tend to rely more on influencers who appear honest and relatable because they are perceived as reliable information sources (18). Hidden sponsorships and manipulated engagement metrics, however, may negatively affect consumer perceptions and reduce marketing effectiveness (19).

Null Hypothesis (H₀₂)

Influencer authenticity does not affect an empirically significant influence on consumers' purchase intentions.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁₂)

Influencer authenticity affects an empirically significant influence on consumers' purchase intentions.

Trust as a Mediating Variable

Informative and engaging social media content significantly enhances consumer trust, which subsequently influences purchase behavior (20). Trust is reinforced through transparency, consistent communication and alignment between influencer behavior and consumer expectations (21).

Null Hypothesis (H₀₃)

Trust does not mediate the association between AI-enabled social media marketing and consumer purchase intention.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁₃)

Trust mediates the association between AI-enabled social media marketing and consumer purchase intention.

Null Hypothesis (H₀₄)

Trust does not serve as a mediator between influencer authenticity and consumer purchase intention.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁₄)

Trust mediates the association between social media influencer authenticity and consumer purchase intention.

Consumer Scepticism as a Moderating Variable

Sceptical consumers are less likely to trust promotional content and may critically evaluate influencer endorsements (22). High levels of scepticism can reduce the effectiveness of marketing efforts by weakening the relationship between trust and purchase intention (23).

Null Hypothesis (H_{05})

Consumer scepticism does not significantly moderate the relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_{15})

Consumer scepticism moderates the link between trust and consumers' purchase intentions.

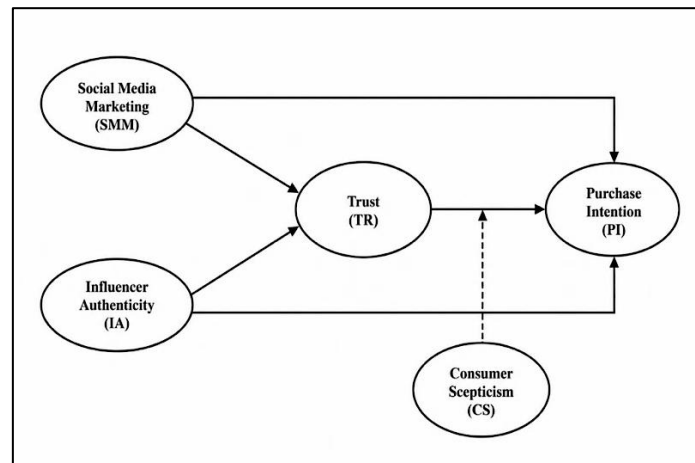


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The present research develops a conceptual framework in Figure 1 to examine the effect of AI-Driven Social Media Marketing (AISMM) and Influencer Authenticity (IA) on Consumer Purchase Intention (PI). The framework identifies Trust (TR) as a mediating construct and Consumer Scepticism (CS) as a moderating variable. AISMM and IA are expected to enhance consumer trust through personalized, credible and engaging communication, which subsequently influences purchase intention (24). The study integrates SOR and TAM to explain how AI-driven marketing influences consumer evaluations, where perceived usefulness, ease of use, authenticity and trust influence consumers' purchase intentions. Source Credibility and Signalling Theory explain that authentic influencers build trust and reduce uncertainty. ELM highlights authenticity as a persuasive cue, while Trust Transfer Theory shows trust shifts to brands, collectively explaining links among AI marketing, authenticity, trust and purchase intention.

Methodology

This research employs a quantitative approach to investigate the associations among AI-Driven Social Media Marketing (AISMM), Influencer Authenticity (IA), Trust (TR), Consumer Scepticism

(CS) and Consumer Purchase Intention (PI). The research follows a structured empirical approach consistent with prior studies within social media marketing and consumer behaviour (25). A deductive research approach has been employed; wherein proposed hypotheses are grounded in established theoretical frameworks and empirical literature are tested using primary data. The study utilizes a cross-sectional study design, as the data were collected at a single point in time from respondents exposed to social media marketing content, which is widely adopted in digital marketing research to assess the hypothesized structural relationships among latent constructs (26). Given the presence of both mediating (Trust) and moderating (Consumer Scepticism) variables, the research employs PLS-SEM as the primary statistical analytical technique. Given its ability to accommodate multiple constructs and interconnected paths, PLS-SEM is appropriate for analysing complex conceptual models and is widely used in marketing and behavioural research due to its predictive orientation and flexibility (27).

The define population of the research consists of participants who frequently use social media platforms and are regularly exposed to influencer-based marketing content. Respondents include

users across social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, where influencer marketing is prevalent. A non-probability convenience sampling approach has been used to collect data, given the accessibility of respondents and the exploratory nature of the research. This sampling method has been widely used in previous studies examining social media influence on consumer purchase decisions (28). A total of 490 valid responses were obtained through a structured online questionnaire. The sample size provides adequate statistical power and strengthens the robustness of the findings, while also satisfying the recommended sample-size criteria for PLS-SEM. According to established guidelines, PLS-SEM requires a minimum sample size determined based on the complexity of the proposed framework; therefore, a sample of 490 is considered adequate and robust for the present research (29).

The data collection tools consist of a structured questionnaire divided into two sections.

- a) The first section captures demographic characteristics, including age, gender, educational attainment and frequency of social media use, while
- b) the second section measures the constructs incorporated into the proposed conceptual framework.

All constructs were assessed using multi-item scales adapted from established studies to ensure measurement accuracy and reliability. AI-Driven Social Media Marketing (AISMM) is measured using items related to personalization, data-driven targeting and content optimization (25). Influencer Authenticity (IA) is measured through indicators such as credibility, transparency and genuineness (30). Trust (TR) is measured using reliability, integrity and benevolence dimensions (31). Consumer Scepticism (CS) is measured through doubtfulness, suspicion and critical evaluation (32), while Purchase Intention (PI) is measured through intention to buy, likelihood of purchase and recommendation behaviour (33). All measurement items are measured using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) in line with previous research on consumer behaviour.

Participants were recruited through an online survey using convenience sampling. The questionnaire was administered electronically to

the selected respondents via Google Forms through different social networking platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, to reach active social media users across different regions of India. To be eligible for participation, actively use social networking platforms and be familiar with AI-driven social networking marketing and influencer-generated content. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate after providing informed consent from all respondents before completing the questionnaire. Prior to analysis, the responses obtained were screened for completeness and validity. Incomplete questionnaires, duplicate submissions and responses exhibiting inconsistent or invalid response patterns were removed from the final sample data. After data screening, all retained responses were complete, with no missing data, resulting in a final sample of 490 valid responses for statistical analysis. The study is based on primary data collected through a structured online questionnaire administered to active social media users.

The collected research data are analyzed applying PLS-SEM with Smart PLS 4.0 software and the analysis followed a two-stage procedure. Initially, the measurement model was evaluated to establish construct reliability and validity by applying criteria including factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). Factor loadings are expected to exceed 0.70, whereas Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values should be greater than 0.70 and AVE values should exceed 0.50. Discriminant validity is assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio, ensuring that the constructs are empirically distinct (34). The second stage involved evaluating the structural model to assess the proposed interrelationships among the constructs. This includes the assessment of path coefficients, t-values and p-values through bootstrapping, along with the coefficient of determination (R^2) to examine explanatory power, effect size (f^2) to determine the impact of exogenous variables and predictive relevance (Q^2) to assess the predictive capability of the model. The mediating effect of Trust (TR) is examined using indirect effect analysis, while the moderating effect of Consumer Scepticism (CS) is tested through interaction terms within the PLS-SEM framework (35).

Results

The empirical analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4.0 and the resulting findings are reported in this section. A two-stage analytical procedure was followed, including evaluation of the measurement model and structural model. The measurement model analysis assesses construct reliability, convergent validity and discriminant

validity, whereas the structural model assessment examines the relationships among AI-Driven Social Media Marketing (AISMM), Influencer Authenticity (IA), Trust (TR), Consumer Scepticism (CS) and Consumer Purchase Intention (PI). The findings are presented through descriptive statistics, validity and reliability measures, model fit indices, path coefficients, effect sizes, predictive relevance and hypothesis testing results.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	248	50.61
	Female	232	47.35
	Prefer not to say	10	2.04
	Total	490	100
Age	Below 18	23	4.69
	18–25	209	42.65
	26–35	149	30.41
	36–45	64	13.06
	Above 45	45	9.18
	Total	490	100
Education	Undergraduate	148	30.20
	Graduate	144	29.39
	Postgraduate	143	29.18
	Other	55	11.22
	Total	490	100
Social Media Usage	<1 hour	52	10.61
	1–3 hours	164	33.47
	3–5 hours	156	31.84
	>5 hours	118	24.08
	Total	490	100

The demographic profile in Table 1 of the respondents reveals that a slightly higher proportion of participants are male (50.61%) compared to female respondents (47.35%), with a small percentage preferring not to disclose their gender (2.04%). The majority of respondents belong to the 18–25 age group (42.65%), followed by the 26–35 category (30.41%), indicating that the sample primarily consists of young and active social media users. In terms of educational

background, respondents are fairly evenly distributed among undergraduate (30.20%), graduate (29.39%) and postgraduate (29.18%) levels. Regarding social media usage, most respondents spend between 1–3 hours (33.47%) and 3–5 hours (31.84%) daily on social media platforms, suggesting a high level of engagement with digital content and influencer-based marketing.

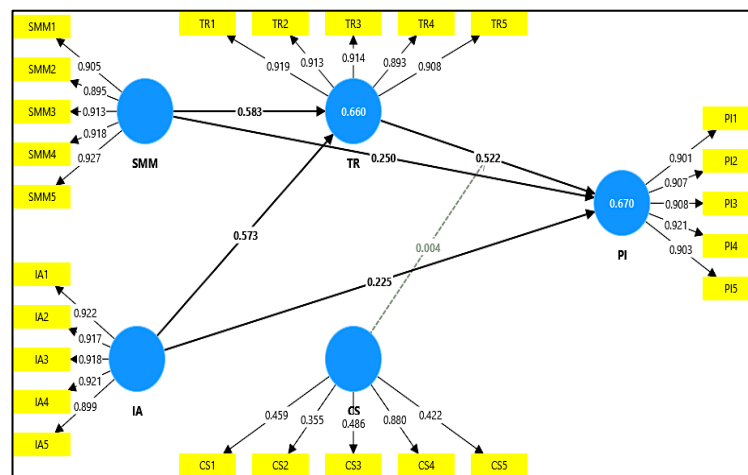


Figure 2: Conformity Factor Analysis (CFA) of the Proposed Measurement and Structural Model Using PLS-SEM

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust.

Figure 2 presents the CFA results of the proposed measurement and structural model using PLS-SEM. The Figure shows the relationships among the latent constructs, including Social Media Marketing (SMM), Influencer Authenticity (IA), Trust (TR), Consumer Scepticism (CS) and Purchase Intention (PI). The outer statistical loadings result of most indicators exceeds the minimum recommended criterion of 0.70, demonstrating adequate reliability at the indicator level and construct representation. The path coefficients reveal significant positive relationships between SMM and Trust, IA and

Trust, Trust and Purchase Intention, as well as direct effects of SMM and IA on Purchase Intention. The R^2 values indicate that the research model explains 66.0% of the variance in Trust and 67.0% of the variance in Purchase Intention, indicating substantial explanatory power of the structural model. The moderating effect of Consumer Scepticism in linking Trust with Purchase Intention appears weak and statistically insignificant. The CFA results demonstrate the adequacy, reliability and validity of the proposed conceptual framework.

Table 2: Outer Loading of the Measurement Items

Construct	CS	IA	PI	SMM	TR	CS x TR
CS1	0.459					
CS2	0.355					
CS3	0.486					
CS4	0.880					
CS5	0.422					
IA1		0.922				
IA2		0.917				
IA3		0.918				
IA4		0.921				
IA5		0.899				
PI1			0.901			
PI2			0.907			
PI3			0.908			
PI4			0.921			
PI5			0.903			
SMM1				0.905		
SMM2				0.895		
SMM3				0.913		
SMM4				0.918		
SMM5				0.927		
TR1					0.919	

TR2	0.913	
TR3	0.914	
TR4	0.893	
TR5	0.908	
CS x TR		1.000

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust, CS × TR = Interaction effect between Consumer Scepticism and Trust. Values represent outer loadings of indicators on their respective latent constructs. Recommended threshold for acceptable outer loading is 0.70.

Table 2 presents the outer loadings of the measurement items associated with their respective constructs. Factor loadings above 0.70 indicate satisfactory indicator reliability (34, 36). The findings show that most indicators of Influencer Authenticity (IA), Purchase Intention (PI), Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Trust (TR) demonstrate strong with loadings ranging between 0.893 to 0.927. These values confirm that the indicators adequately represent their respective constructs. Several indicators of

Consumer Scepticism (CS), including CS1, CS2, CS3 and CS5, show lower loading values. These indicators were retained because Consumer Scepticism represents an important theoretical construct within the moderating framework of the research (35). The interaction construct (CS × TR) records a loading value of 1.000, which is expected in interaction-term modelling within PLS-SEM (37). The results confirm acceptable indicator reliability and confirm the adequacy of the measurement model.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix Among the Research Constructs

Construct	CS	IA	PI	SMM	TR	CS x TR
CS	1.000	-0.031	-0.072	-0.046	-0.081	-0.031
IA	-0.031	1.000	0.518	-0.012	0.566	-0.009
PI	-0.072	0.518	1.000	0.549	0.795	0.055
SMM	-0.046	-0.012	0.549	1.000	0.576	0.062
TR	-0.081	0.566	0.795	0.576	1.000	0.072
CS x TR	-0.031	-0.009	0.055	0.062	0.072	1.000

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust, CS × TR = Interaction effect between Consumer Scepticism and Trust. Values represent Pearson correlation coefficients among the research constructs.

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix among the research constructs. Purchase Intention (PI) shows positive correlations with Influencer Authenticity (IA), Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Trust (TR). The strongest relationship appears between Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.795$), indicating that trust strongly influences consumer purchase behaviour in social media environments. Influencer Authenticity also demonstrates a positive relationship with Trust ($r = 0.566$), suggesting that authentic influencer behavior contributes to higher levels of consumer

trust. Social Media Marketing exhibits positive relationships with both Trust and Purchase Intention, indicating that targeted and personalized marketing strategies positively influence consumer responses. Consumer Scepticism (CS) shows weak negative relationships with the remaining constructs, suggesting that sceptical consumers tend to demonstrate lower trust and lower purchase intention. These the findings are consistent with past research focusing on the importance of trust and authenticity in digital consumer behavior (30, 31).

Table 4: Composite Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability(rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CS	0.942	-7.674	0.661	0.305
IA	0.952	0.952	0.963	0.838
PI	0.947	0.947	0.959	0.824
SMM	0.949	0.949	0.961	0.832
TR	0.948	0.948	0.960	0.828

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust, Cronbach's Alpha = Internal consistency reliability, Composite Reliability (rho_a and rho_c) = Construct reliability measures, AVE = Average Variance Extracted. AVE values above 0.50 and reliability values above 0.70 indicate satisfactory convergent validity and reliability.

Table 4 shows the assessment of internal consistency construct reliability and convergent validity were assessed, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients examined across all constructs exceed the suggested threshold limit of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability (36). Composite reliability (ρ_c) values for Influencer Authenticity (IA), Purchase Intention (PI), Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Trust (TR) exceed 0.90, shows strong construct reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for these

constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, thereby confirming convergent validity (38). Consumer Scepticism (CS) records a lower AVE value of 0.305 and lower composite reliability due to weaker outer loadings of several indicators. The construct was retained because of its theoretical relevance in the moderating framework of the research. The assessment indicates that the measurement model meets the established criteria for reliability and validity.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity Using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	CS	IA	PI	SMM	TR
CS					
IA	0.027				
PI	0.026	0.546			
SMM	0.019	0.021	0.578		
TR	0.053	0.596	0.839	0.607	
CS x TR	0.028	0.011	0.057	0.063	0.074

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust, HTMT = Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio. HTMT values below 0.90 indicate satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 5 presents the discriminant validity assessment using the HTMT criterion. HTMT values below 0.90 indicate satisfactory discriminant validity among constructs (38). All HTMT values remain below the threshold value, confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another. The highest HTMT value

is observed within Trust (TR) and Purchase Intention (PI) at 0.839, which remains within the prescribed acceptable range. The findings demonstrate that the constructs measure separate conceptual dimensions and satisfy discriminant validity requirements.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity Using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	CS	IA	PI	SMM	TR
CS	0.552				
IA	-0.031	0.915			
PI	-0.072	0.518	0.908		
SMM	-0.046	-0.012	0.549	0.912	
TR	-0.081	0.566	0.795	0.576	0.910

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust. Diagonal values represent the square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct. Off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations. Values on the diagonal should exceed inter-construct correlations to establish discriminant validity.

Table 6 presents the Fornell–Larcker criterion for assessing evaluate discriminant validity. As per this criterion, the square root of AVE for each construct should exceed its correlations with other constructs (38). The findings show that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its corresponding correlations among the constructs.

For instance, the square root of the AVE for Trust (0.910) exceeds its correlations with Influencer Authenticity, Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention. Comparable results were obtained across the other constructs, providing evidence of adequate discriminant validity.

Table 7: Model Fit Indices for the Saturated and Estimated Models

Construct	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.094	0.094
d_ULS	2.858	2.855
d_G	0.760	0.760
Chi-square	1592.371	1593.522
NFI	0.876	0.876

Note: SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, d_ULS = Squared Euclidean Distance, d_G = Geodesic Distance, NFI = Normed Fit Index. SRMR values below 0.10 and higher NFI values indicate acceptable model fit.

Table 7 reports the model fit indices for both the saturated and estimated research model. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value is 0.094 for both models, which indicates acceptable model fit (39). The Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.876 indicates satisfactory model

adequacy, as values closer to 1 indicate stronger model fit. The d_ULS and d_G values likewise support the adequacy of the proposed model. The findings indicate that the PLS-SEM assessment indicates that the proposed model achieves satisfactory fit (36).

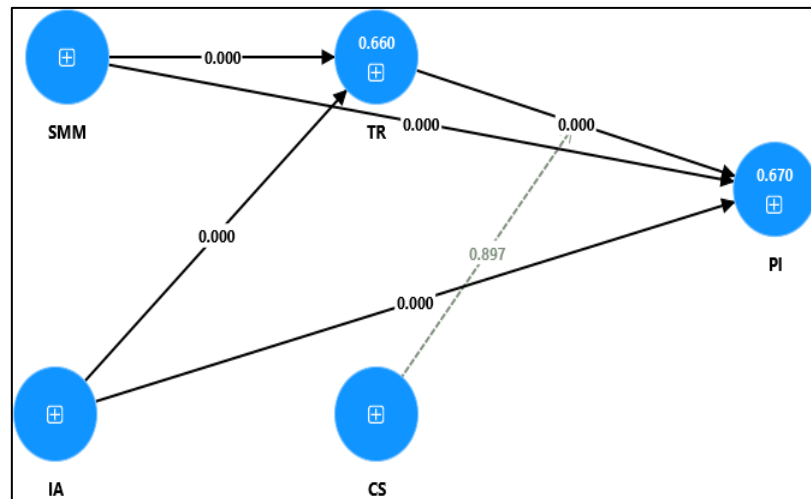


Figure 3: Structural Equation Model (SEM) Results of the Proposed Framework using PLS-SEM

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust.

Figure 3 reports the Structural Equation Model (SEM) results of the proposed framework through PLS-SEM. The figure illustrates the significance levels of the relationships among Social Media Marketing (SMM), Influencer Authenticity (IA), Trust (TR), Consumer Scepticism (CS) and Consumer Purchase Intention (PI). The results indicate that SMM significantly influences Trust and Purchase Intention, while Influencer Authenticity also demonstrates significant positive effects on both Trust and Consumer Purchase Intention, as demonstrated by the P-values (0.000). Trust significantly influences Purchase

Intention, confirming its mediating role within the model. The r^2 values show that the model explains 66.0% of the variance in Trust and 67.0% of the variation in Purchase Intention, indicating substantial explanatory power. The moderating role of Consumer Scepticism on the association between Trust and Purchase Intention is statistically insignificant ($P = 0.897$), indicating that consumer scepticism does not significantly change the effect of trust on purchase intention in the present research. The SEM results support the overall adequacy and predictive capability of the proposed structural framework.

Table 8: Path Coefficient of the Structural Model

Construct	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
CS -> PI	-0.011	0.016	0.037	0.298	0.765
IA -> PI	0.225	0.227	0.033	6.760	0.000
IA -> TR	0.573	0.574	0.025	23.047	0.000
SMM -> PI	0.250	0.252	0.035	7.131	0.000
SMM -> TR	0.583	0.583	0.023	25.110	0.000
TR -> PI	0.522	0.519	0.040	13.176	0.000
CS x TR -> PI	0.004	0.032	0.034	0.129	0.897

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust, CS x TR = Interaction effect between Consumer Scepticism and Trust, O = Original Sample, M = Sample Mean, STDEV = Standard Deviation, T Statistics = Ratio of original sample estimate to standard deviation, p-values indicate statistical significance of the relationships. Values significant at $P < 0.05$ are considered statistically significant.

Table 8 presents the structural model findings and hypothesis testing outcomes obtained through bootstrapping analysis. Influencer Authenticity significantly influences Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.225$, $P < 0.001$) and Trust ($\beta = 0.573$, $P < 0.001$). These findings indicate that authentic influencer behavior strengthens consumer trust and positively influences purchase-related decisions. Social Media Marketing significantly affects Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.250$, $P < 0.001$) and Trust ($\beta = 0.583$, $P < 0.001$), indicating that personalized and targeted social media strategies positively shape consumer behavior. Trust significantly

enhances consumers' Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.522$, $P < 0.001$), confirming its mediating role within the conceptual framework. Consumer Scepticism does not significantly influence Purchase Intention directly ($\beta = -0.011$, $P = 0.765$). The moderating effect of the interaction term ($CS \times TR \rightarrow PI$) is also statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.004$, $P = 0.897$). The findings indicate that trust, influencer authenticity and social media marketing significantly influence purchase intention, whereas consumer scepticism does not significantly moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intention in this study (39, 40).

Table 9: Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Values

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
PI	0.670	0.667
TR	0.660	0.659

Note: PI = Purchase Intention, TR = Trust, R^2 = Coefficient of Determination, Adjusted R^2 = Adjusted explanatory power of the endogenous constructs. Higher R^2 values indicate stronger explanatory capability of the structural model.

Table 9 shows the coefficient of determination (R^2) values for the endogenous constructs the model accounts for 67.0% of the variation in Purchase Intention ($R^2 = 0.670$), suggesting that the predictors collectively provide substantial explanatory power for consumers' purchase intentions through Social Media Marketing,

Influencer Authenticity, Trust, Consumer Scepticism and the interaction term. The R^2 value for Trust is 0.660, showing that Influencer Authenticity and Social Media Marketing explain 66.0% of the variance in trust. These findings demonstrate that the structural model has considerable explanatory capability (41).

Table 10: Effect size (f^2) Value

Construct	PI	TR
CS	0.000	-
IA	0.078	0.968
PI	-	-
SMM	0.095	0.999
TR	0.279	-
$CS \times TR$	0.000	-

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust, $CS \times TR$ = Interaction effect between Consumer Scepticism and Trust, f^2 = Effect Size. Values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 indicate small, medium and large effect sizes respectively. Higher values indicate stronger contribution of exogenous constructs toward endogenous variables.

Table 10 presents the effect size (f^2) values of the exogenous constructs. Trust demonstrates a moderate effect size on Consumer Purchase Intention ($f^2 = 0.279$), indicating a substantial contribution to explaining consumer purchase behavior. Influencer Authenticity and Social Media Marketing demonstrate small-to-moderate effects on Purchase Intention. Influencer Authenticity ($f^2 = 0.968$) and Social Media Marketing ($f^2 = 0.999$)

show very strong effects on Trust, indicating that both constructs substantially contribute to explaining consumer trust. Consumer Scepticism and the interaction construct ($CS \times TR$) demonstrate negligible effect sizes, this finding is consistent with the absence of a statistically significant moderating effect in the structural model (39).

Table 11: Cross-validated redundancy (Q^2) of the constructs

Construct	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
CS	2450.000	2450.000	0.000
IA	2450.000	2450.000	0.000

PI	2450.000	1118.610	0.543
SMM	2450.000	2450.000	0.000
TR	2450.000	1124.150	0.541

Note: CS = Consumer Scepticism, IA = Influencer Authenticity, PI = Purchase Intention, SMM = Social Media Marketing, TR = Trust, SSO = Sum of Squares Observation, SSE = Sum of Squares Error, Q^2 = Predictive Relevance obtained through blindfolding procedure. Q^2 values greater than zero indicate predictive relevance of the structural model for endogenous constructs.

Table 11 reports the predictive relevance (Q^2) results derived from the blindfolding procedure. Q^2 values above zero suggest that the model possesses predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs (40). Purchase Intention records a Q^2 value of 0.543, while Trust records a Q^2 value of 0.541. These findings indicate strong predictive capability of the structural model for both endogenous constructs. The exogenous constructs show Q^2 values of zero, which is expected because predictive relevance is assessed only for endogenous variables in PLS-SEM analysis. The findings confirm satisfactory predictive capability of the proposed model (39, 40).

Discussion

The present research examined the influence of AI-Driven Social Media Marketing (AISMM) and Influencer Authenticity (IA) on Consumer Purchase Intention (PI), while also investigating the mediating role of Trust (TR) and the moderating role of Consumer Scepticism (CS). The findings offer valuable insights into how social media marketing strategies shape consumer behaviour within digital environments.

The empirical results indicate that AI-driven social media marketing has a significant effect on both Trust and Consumer Purchase Intention. The positive relationship between AISMM and Purchase Intention indicates that personalized content delivery, data-driven targeting and optimized social media communication positively shape consumer purchasing behavior. Consumers tend to respond favourably to marketing content that aligns with their preferences and online behavior patterns. The findings corroborate evidence reported in prior research emphasizing that technology-enabled social media marketing enhances consumer engagement and improves the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies (25, 26). The strong positive relationship between AISMM and Trust further suggests that consumers perceive personalized and relevant content as more credible and reliable. This finding supports earlier research highlighting the importance of tailored marketing communication in developing

consumer trust within online environments (27). The findings also indicate that Influencer Authenticity exerts a significant positive influence on both Trust and Purchase Intention. Influencer credibility, transparency and perceived genuineness can strengthen consumers' trust in influencer communications. Authentic influencer behavior strengthens emotional connection and increases confidence in product recommendations, which ultimately influences purchase intention. These findings support prior studies demonstrating that authenticity serves as a key determinant of influencer effectiveness and consumer engagement (30). The results further confirm that consumers rely more heavily on influencers who present consistent and trustworthy content, reinforcing the importance of transparency and credibility in influencer marketing strategies.

Trust emerged as one of the most influential predictors of Purchase Intention within the structural model. The significant relationship between Trust and consumer Purchase Intention indicates that consumers tend to be more likely to purchase products recommended through social media when they perceive the source of information as reliable and trustworthy. Trust reduces perceived uncertainty and strengthens consumer confidence in digital purchasing environments. These findings are aligned with previous research emphasizing that trust functions as a central mechanism linking social media marketing activities with consumer behavioral outcomes (31, 39). The mediation results further demonstrate that Trust partially transmits the effects of AISMM and Influencer Authenticity on Purchase Intention. This indicates that both technology-driven marketing strategies and authentic influencer behavior influence consumer decisions largely through the development of trust. Consumer Scepticism, on the other hand, did not demonstrate a significant direct effect on consumer Purchase Intention. The moderating role of Consumer Scepticism on the relationship between Trust and Purchase Intention was examined for its moderating effect was also statistically insignificant. These findings suggest

that although consumers may critically evaluate influencer content and promotional communication, scepticism does not necessarily weaken the influence of trust on purchasing decisions in the present context. One possible explanation is that consumers who actively engage with influencer content may already possess a certain level of familiarity and acceptance toward social media marketing practices. As a result, trust may continue to dominate consumer decision-making even in the presence of sceptical attitudes. Similar findings have been observed in previous digital marketing studies where trust remained a stronger predictor of purchase intention than scepticism (32).

The measurement model assessment confirms satisfactory the reliability and validity of the constructs employed in the study. Most constructs demonstrated strong factor loadings, high composite reliability and adequate convergent validity. The HTMT and Fornell–Larcker analyses further confirmed discriminant validity among the constructs (34, 38). The model's explanatory capacity was supported by the observed R^2 values, demonstrating its ability to account for variation in the proposed framework effectively explains variations in Trust and Purchase Intention. The Q^2 values further confirmed strong predictive relevance of the model, indicating that the framework possesses satisfactory predictive capability within the PLS-SEM environment (39, 40). The study provides further empirical evidence to advance understanding in this area of digital consumer behavior by integrating technological, psychological and behavioral perspectives within a single framework. The research demonstrates that AI-driven marketing practices and influencer authenticity are important factors influencing consumers' purchase intentions in social media environments. The results also reinforce the central role of trust as a mechanism through which digital marketing strategies shape consumer behavior. The insignificant moderating role of Consumer Scepticism suggests that trust-based relationships may remain dominant even when consumers critically evaluate marketing communication. From a managerial standpoint, the results indicate that marketers should focus on developing personalized and trustworthy marketing strategies that strengthen consumer confidence and engagement. Brands should

collaborate with influencers who demonstrate authenticity, transparency and credibility, as these characteristics significantly influence consumer trust and purchase intentions. Social media marketing strategies should prioritize relevant and consumer-oriented content to enhance trust formation and strengthen long-term consumer relationships. The findings also suggest that firms should invest in ethical and transparent digital communication practices to maintain consumer confidence in increasingly competitive online environments.

The research also provides implications for future research. Future studies may examine additional moderating variables such as consumer involvement, perceived risk, or digital literacy to gain deeper insights into online purchasing behavior. Comparative studies across different demographic groups or cultural contexts may further enhance understanding of consumer responses to influencer marketing and AI-driven communication strategies. Longitudinal research designs may also offer greater insights into how trust and consumer attitudes evolve over time in digital environments. The present research considers AI as an enabling technology that promote the effectiveness of social media marketing rather. AI-driven social media marketing enhanced content personalization, audience engagement and communication efficiency of consumer; and its positive effect on consumer behaviour depends largely on the perceived authenticity of influencers. When AI-supported content is shared by influencers who are viewed as genuine, transparent and credible, it strengthens consumer trust and ultimately increases purchase intention of consumer. Therefore, AI is conceptualized as an antecedent that enhances influencer authenticity, which subsequently influences consumer trust and purchase intention.

Conclusion

The present research examined the influence of AI-Driven Social Media Marketing and Influencer Authenticity on Purchase Intention by investigating the mediating role of Trust and the moderating role of Consumer Scepticism. The findings demonstrate that both AI-driven marketing practices and influencer authenticity significantly influence consumer purchase

intention in digital environments. Personalized social media content, data-driven communication strategies and authentic influencer behavior positively shape consumer attitudes and strengthen purchasing decisions.

The research identified Trust as a critical mechanism linking social media marketing activities with consumer purchase intention. Consumers demonstrate a greater propensity to engage with products and services promoted through social media when they perceive the information source as credible, transparent and reliable. Trust significantly mediates the relationships between AI-Driven Social Media Marketing, Influencer Authenticity and Purchase Intention, indicating that the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies largely depends on the ability to establish consumer confidence and credibility.

The results further reveal that Consumer Scepticism does not significantly moderate the relationship between Trust and Purchase Intention in the present research. Although consumers may critically evaluate influencer promotions and marketing communication, trust remains the dominant factor influencing purchasing behavior. This finding suggests that consumers who actively engage with influencer content may continue to rely on trusted digital sources despite possessing sceptical attitudes toward online promotions.

The evaluation of the measurement and structural model confirm the reliability, validity and predictive relevance of the proposed framework. The research demonstrates substantial explanatory power in understanding consumer behavior within social media environments. The findings contribute to the growing literature on digital marketing by integrating technological, psychological and behavioral dimensions within a unified analytical framework. The research also extends existing knowledge regarding the role of influencer authenticity and trust in shaping online consumer decision-making.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should focus on developing transparent, personalized and consumer-oriented marketing strategies to strengthen trust and engagement. Firms should collaborate with influencers who demonstrate credibility, consistency and authenticity, as these

characteristics significantly influence consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior. Ethical communication and trustworthy content creation may further enhance long-term consumer relationships and improve marketing effectiveness in competitive digital environments.

The research provides several directions for future research. Future studies may incorporate additional psychological and behavioral variables such as perceived risk, consumer involvement, digital literacy, or emotional attachment to gain deeper insights into online consumer behavior. Comparative studies across different cultural and demographic contexts may further enrich understanding of consumer responses to AI-driven marketing and influencer communication strategies. Longitudinal research designs may also provide greater insight into the evolving nature of trust and consumer attitudes within rapidly changing digital ecosystems. Future research may employ longitudinal or experimental research designs, include respondents from different countries or cultural settings and examine additional variables such as consumer engagement, perceived AI transparency, or brand loyalty to further extend the proposed framework and provide deeper insights into AI-driven social media marketing.

Practical Implications

The findings of the present research offer meaningful practical implications for marketers, businesses, social media managers and influencer marketing agencies operating in digital environments. The significant effect of AI-enabled social media marketing on consumer purchase intention indicates that firms should increasingly utilize data-driven technologies and personalized communication strategies to improve consumer engagement. Personalized advertisements, recommendation systems and algorithm-based content delivery enable firms to provide relevant information that aligns with consumer interests and preferences, thereby enhancing marketing effectiveness and purchase-related outcomes.

The research also highlights the importance of Influencer Authenticity in shaping consumer trust and purchase intentions. Organizations should carefully select influencers who demonstrate credibility, transparency and consistency in their communication. Consumers are more likely to trust influencers who appear genuine and

relatable rather than highly commercialized promotional figures. Therefore, brands should prioritize long-term collaborations with authentic influencers whose values and personalities align with the promoted products and services. Trust emerged as a major determinant of consumer purchase intention, indicating that firms should focus on building trustworthy relationships with consumers through transparent and ethical communication practices. Accurate product information, honest endorsements and reliable customer interaction may strengthen consumer confidence and reduce uncertainty associated with online purchasing decisions. Businesses should also encourage authentic customer reviews and interactive engagement to enhance credibility within social media platforms.

The findings related to Consumer Scepticism suggest that consumers are increasingly aware of persuasive marketing strategies and influencer promotions. Firms should therefore avoid misleading advertisements, exaggerated claims and hidden sponsorship practices, as such strategies may negatively affect consumer perceptions over time. Transparent disclosure of paid promotions and ethical influencer practices may help sustain consumer confidence and strengthen brand reputation in digital markets.

The research also provides implications for social media platform managers and digital marketing agencies. The integration of AI-driven tools for audience analysis, engagement prediction and content optimization may improve campaign performance and marketing efficiency. Marketing agencies should invest in analytical tools capable of identifying suitable influencers and monitoring authenticity-related indicators to improve consumer trust and campaign credibility.

For policymakers and regulatory authorities, the findings emphasize the need for stronger transparency standards and ethical guidelines within influencer marketing practices. Regulatory frameworks ensuring proper disclosure of sponsored content and protection against misleading promotional activities may contribute to healthier and more trustworthy digital marketing ecosystems.

The practical implications of the research demonstrate that successful digital marketing strategies depend not only on technological advancement but also on authenticity, ethical

communication and consumer trust. Organizations capable of balancing personalized marketing with transparency and credibility are more likely to achieve sustainable consumer engagement and stronger purchase intentions in highly competitive social media environments.

Abbreviations

AISMM: AI-Driven Social Media Marketing, AVE: Average Variance Extracted, CR: Composite Reliability, CS: Consumer Scepticism, HTMT: Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio, IA: Influencer Authenticity, TR: Trust, PI: Purchase Intention, PLS-SEM: Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling, SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

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Author Contributions

Anas Ahmad: Literature Review, Questionnaire Development, Data Collection, Preliminary Data Screening, Writing -Original Draft, Coordination of Survey Responses, Sultan Ahmad: Conceptualization, Research Design, Theoretical Framework Development, Supervision, Methodology Design, Statistical Analysis using PLS-SEM and SmartPLS, Interpretation of Results, Critical Revision, Final Editing, Ankita: Review of Literature, Academic Guidance, Interpretation of Findings, Validation of Theoretical Constructs, Critical Review, Intellectual Inputs for Improving the Quality of the

Research, Inderjit Kaur: Data Compilation, Data Coding, Questionnaire Administration Support, Formatting, Referencing, Assistance in Empirical Analysis, Documentation, Mohd Zulkarnain Sikandar: Writing - Review and Editing, Academic Inputs, Validation of Research Findings, Manuscript Evaluation, Improving the Overall Quality, Presentation of the Research, Mohammed Mustehsan: Writing - Review and Editing, Academic Inputs, Validation of Research Findings, Manuscript Evaluation, Improving the Overall Quality, Presentation of the Research, Ariba Naz: Writing - Review and Editing, Academic Inputs, Validation of Research Findings, Manuscript Evaluation, Improving the Overall Quality, Presentation of the Research. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Data Availability

The data used in this research are primary in nature and were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to social media users. The dataset supporting the findings of this research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The authors acknowledge the use of generative AI to assist in the paraphrasing of certain parts of the manuscript. All content generated through AI was critically reviewed, edited and verified by the authors to ensure accuracy, originality and compliance with academic standards. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and validity of the manuscript.

Ethics Approval

The research was conducted using primary data collected through an online questionnaire from voluntary participants. Respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the research and confidentiality and anonymity of responses were maintained throughout the research process. No personal or sensitive information was collected from participants.

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