

The Impact of Influencer Authenticity on Consumer Engagement and Brand Loyalty in Social Commerce.

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ABSTRACT

Social commerce has elevated influencer marketing from a supplementary brand-awareness tactic to a primary transaction-driving channel, yet its effectiveness depends substantially on a psychological variable that resists straightforward measurement: perceived authenticity. This paper examines how influencer authenticity shapes consumer engagement and brand loyalty within social commerce environments, synthesizing empirical research grounded in source credibility theory and parasocial interaction theory. The review traces the mechanism by which perceived authenticity, encompassing consistency, transparency, and relatability, operates through influencer trustworthiness and message credibility to build consumer trust in branded content, drawing on Lou and Yuan's social media influencer value model, which found that trustworthiness and informative content value jointly predict consumer trust and subsequent purchase intention. The study further examines the documented tension between influencer popularity and authenticity, drawing on De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders' experimental findings that higher follower counts increase perceived likeability and popularity but only inconsistently translate into perceived opinion leadership, and situates this tension within the broader micro-influencer literature suggesting that smaller, niche-focused influencers are frequently perceived as more authentic and relationally credible than macro-influencers or celebrities despite their smaller reach. The review also examines sponsorship disclosure research demonstrating that transparent disclosure of paid partnerships can strengthen, rather than undermine, the relationship between authenticity and trust when consumers perceive the disclosed content as genuinely congruent with the influencer's established persona. A comparative methodology is applied using source-credibility-based survey instruments, parasocial interaction scales, and platform engagement metrics reported across the reviewed studies. Findings indicate that authenticity operates as a mediating psychological mechanism rather than a direct driver of purchase behavior, with trust and perceived credibility consistently emerging as the proximate variables through which authenticity translates into engagement and, over repeated exposure, brand loyalty. The paper concludes by discussing the practical tension brands face between engaging high-reach influencers for awareness and high-authenticity micro-influencers for loyalty-building, and identifies persistent measurement and disclosure-related challenges in this rapidly evolving field...

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Authenticity, Source Credibility, Parasocial Interaction, Consumer Engagement, Brand Loyalty, Social Commerce, Sponsorship Disclosure...

INTRODUCTION

Social commerce, the integration of product discovery, social interaction, and direct transaction within a single social media environment, has fundamentally reshaped the consumer purchase journey, and influencer marketing has emerged as one of its most economically significant channels, with brand expenditure on influencer partnerships growing rapidly over the past decade as platforms including Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have built increasingly sophisticated in-app commerce infrastructure directly around creator content [1]. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsement, in which a recognized public figure lends borrowed credibility to a brand through a comparatively distant, one-directional relationship with the audience, social media influencers cultivate an ongoing, interactive relationship with followers built through frequent, personal content sharing, a structural difference that has made the specific psychological construct of authenticity, the degree to which an influencer is perceived as genuine, consistent, and non-manipulative in their content and endorsements, a central and empirically distinct concern in influencer marketing research relative to earlier celebrity endorsement literature [2].

The theoretical foundation for understanding how influencer authenticity translates into consumer response draws substantially on source credibility theory, originally developed by Hovland and Weiss to explain how a communicator's perceived expertise and trustworthiness affect message persuasiveness, and subsequently extended to the influencer marketing context to examine how influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness function as source credibility dimensions shaping consumer trust in branded content [3]. Lou and Yuan's social media influencer value model, developed from survey data collected from 538 social media users, found that the informative value of influencer-generated content and influencer trustworthiness both positively predict followers' trust in influencers' branded posts, and that this trust subsequently drives brand awareness and purchase intention, establishing trust as the central mediating mechanism connecting influencer-level credibility characteristics to downstream consumer outcomes [3], [4]. This finding has been widely replicated and extended in subsequent research, which has consistently identified trust as the most critical proximate factor driving consumer actions such as liking, sharing, and purchasing in response to influencer content, underscoring trust's central role in digital brand relationships more broadly [5].

A parallel and theoretically complementary framework, parasocial interaction theory, originally developed by Horton and Wohl to describe the one-directional, emotionally genuine relationships media audiences form with media personalities, has been applied extensively in influencer marketing research to explain how the sustained, intimate, and conversational nature of influencer content fosters a sense of relational closeness that increases audiences' susceptibility to the influencer's opinions and endorsements [5], [6]. Repeated exposure to an influencer's personal, seemingly unfiltered content sharing has been shown to increase the diagnosticity of

credibility cues audiences use to judge authenticity, such that followers who perceive an influencer as authentic, consistent in persona, transparent about sponsorships, and personally relatable, are correspondingly more likely to judge that influencer as trustworthy and to experience a reduction in active persuasion-knowledge resistance, a psychological state in which consumers consciously discount persuasive content they recognize as advertising, thereby increasing the overall persuasive effectiveness of the influencer's branded content [6].

A significant and empirically documented tension within this literature concerns the relationship between influencer reach, measured by follower count, and perceived authenticity. Experimental research by De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders found that Instagram influencers with higher follower counts are perceived as more likeable, substantially because higher follower counts are interpreted by audiences as a signal of popularity, but found that this popularity-driven likeability translates into increased perceived opinion leadership only in limited circumstances, indicating that follower count and perceived authentic authority are not straightforwardly correlated and may, under some conditions, be inversely related [7]. This finding has motivated the growing micro-influencer marketing literature, which has examined whether influencers with smaller, more tightly niche-focused follower bases are perceived by their followers as more authentic and relationally credible than macro-influencers or celebrities, precisely because their smaller scale is consistent with a more personal, less commercially mediated relationship with their audience, a hypothesis with direct strategic relevance for brands allocating influencer marketing budgets between high-reach and high-authenticity partnership strategies [8].

Sponsorship disclosure, the practice of an influencer explicitly identifying sponsored or paid content as such, presents a further empirically significant dimension of the authenticity-trust relationship. While a naive expectation might hold that disclosing a commercial relationship would uniformly undermine perceived authenticity by revealing the content's persuasive intent, research on disclosure transparency has found more nuanced effects: moderation analysis has shown that clear, transparent sponsorship disclosure can strengthen, rather than weaken, the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer trust, suggesting that audiences penalize perceived concealment or manipulation more than they penalize the underlying commercial relationship itself, provided the disclosed content remains perceived as congruent with the influencer's established persona and genuine product engagement [5], [9]. Conversely, vague or absent sponsorship disclosure has been shown to threaten trust specifically because it introduces uncertainty about the influencer's underlying motives, a finding directly relevant to social commerce platforms' growing regulatory and platform-level disclosure requirements [5].

This paper synthesizes the theoretical and empirical literature on influencer authenticity, examining its measurement, its mediating relationship to trust and credibility, its complex relationship to influencer scale

and reach, and its interaction with sponsorship disclosure practices, to evaluate how authenticity shapes consumer engagement and, over sustained exposure, brand loyalty within social commerce environments.

Research Objectives

To examine the theoretical mechanisms, source credibility theory and parasocial interaction theory, through which influencer authenticity shapes consumer trust.

To analyze the empirical relationship between influencer authenticity, trust, and consumer engagement and purchase intention.

To evaluate the documented tension between influencer follower count/reach and perceived authenticity.

To assess the role of sponsorship disclosure transparency in moderating the authenticity-trust relationship.

To compare the relative strategic value of high-reach versus high-authenticity influencer partnerships for brand loyalty outcomes in social commerce.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Source Credibility Theory Applied to Influencer Marketing

Source credibility theory, originating in Hovland and Weiss's foundational work on communicator characteristics and persuasive effectiveness, identifies expertise and trustworthiness as the two primary dimensions through which a message source's credibility shapes audience persuasion, a framework subsequently extended within influencer marketing research to include attractiveness and, more recently, perceived similarity to the audience as additional relevant source-credibility dimensions [3]. Applied specifically to social media influencers, described in the literature as functioning as "micro-endorsers" occupying a structurally distinct role from traditional celebrity endorsers, this framework proposes that followers' trust in an influencer's branded content is a direct function of how the followers perceive the influencer along these credibility dimensions, with trustworthiness in particular emerging across multiple studies as the dimension most consistently and strongly associated with subsequent purchase intention [3], [4].

2.2 Lou and Yuan's Social Media Influencer Value Model

Lou and Yuan's influential social media influencer value model, developed from survey data of 538 social media users and analyzed using partial least squares path modeling, found that the informative value of influencer-generated content, influencer trustworthiness, attractiveness, and perceived similarity to followers all positively affect followers' trust in influencers' branded posts, and that this trust subsequently and positively influences both brand awareness and purchase intention [3], [4]. A central and widely cited finding from this model is that a trustworthy source amplifies the persuasive impact of content's informative value on consumer trust, indicating that message quality and source credibility operate synergistically rather than independently, such that the same informative content will generate different levels of consumer trust depending on the perceived

trustworthiness of the influencer delivering it, a finding with direct implications for understanding authenticity's role, since authenticity is theorized in subsequent research as a primary antecedent shaping perceived trustworthiness itself [4].

2.3 Authenticity as an Antecedent of Trust and Credibility

Building on the source credibility framework, subsequent research has positioned authenticity, typically operationalized as perceived consistency, transparency, and personal relatability in an influencer's content and self-presentation, as a key upstream antecedent shaping the trustworthiness and credibility dimensions that Lou and Yuan's model identifies as proximate predictors of consumer trust [2], [5]. Research applying this extended framework to Generation Z consumers found that higher measured authenticity and trust scores were both associated with participants perceiving influencers as more credible specifically in cases where influencer behavior was consistent, transparent, and personally relatable, and found that authenticity influences purchase intentions both directly and indirectly, with the indirect pathway operating substantially through trust and perceived credibility, a pattern explicitly consistent with the broader source credibility theoretical framework this literature builds upon [2].

2.4 Parasocial Interaction and the Relational Basis of Perceived Authenticity

Parasocial interaction theory provides a complementary explanation for why influencers, whose content is characteristically personal, frequent, and conversationally structured, are able to cultivate perceived authenticity in a manner traditional celebrity endorsers structurally cannot: the sustained, seemingly intimate nature of influencer content sharing generates a one-directional but psychologically close relational bond with followers, increasing the diagnosticity of the credibility cues followers use to judge the influencer as authentic and, correspondingly, increasing followers' susceptibility to the influencer's opinions and endorsements while reducing followers' active cognitive resistance to recognized persuasive or advertising content [5], [6]. This theoretical integration indicates that authenticity's psychological effect operates substantially through the relational, rather than purely evaluative, dimension of the follower-influencer relationship, a distinction with direct relevance for understanding why repeated, longitudinal exposure to an influencer's content, rather than single-instance evaluation, appears particularly important for authenticity perception and its downstream trust effects.

2.5 The Follower Count Paradox: Reach Versus Authenticity

De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders' experimental research, examining Instagram influencers across two studies, found that influencers with higher follower counts are perceived as more likeable, an effect substantially explained by followers interpreting high follower counts as a signal of the influencer's popularity, but found that this popularity-driven likeability effect translates into increased perceived opinion leadership only under limited conditions, indicating that follower count functions as an

imperfect and context-dependent proxy for the kind of authentic, opinion-leading credibility that drives brand attitude effects [7]. This finding provides an empirical foundation for what the subsequent literature has termed a follower-count paradox: while larger reach mechanically expands the audience exposed to a given piece of branded content, it does not straightforwardly or consistently increase the persuasive authority of that content on a per-follower basis, and in some documented cases, larger follower counts are associated with reduced perceived authenticity, plausibly because audiences associate very large followings with greater commercialization and reduced personal, individualized engagement between the influencer and any single follower [7], [8].

2.6 The Micro-Influencer Literature and Niche Authenticity

Building directly on this follower-count paradox, a substantial and growing body of research has examined micro-influencers, typically defined as influencers with comparatively smaller, more tightly niche-focused follower bases, finding that these smaller-scale creators are frequently perceived by their followers as more authentic, relationally accessible, and credible within their specific content niche than macro-influencers or celebrity endorsers, despite their more limited absolute reach, a pattern attributed to micro-influencers' comparatively more personal, less overtly commercialized relationship with a smaller, more engaged follower base [8]. This literature has direct strategic implications for brand influencer-partnership allocation decisions, since it suggests that brands pursuing broad awareness objectives and brands pursuing deeper trust and loyalty-building objectives may be rationally served by systematically different influencer partnership strategies, favoring macro-influencer reach for the former and micro-influencer authenticity for the latter.

2.7 Sponsorship Disclosure and Its Moderating Role in the Authenticity-Trust Relationship

Sponsorship disclosure research has examined how the explicit identification of paid or sponsored influencer content affects the authenticity-trust relationship, finding that clear, transparent disclosure of sponsorship arrangements can strengthen rather than weaken the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer trust, provided the disclosed sponsored content remains congruent with the influencer's established persona and content niche, while vague, ambiguous, or absent disclosure has been shown to threaten trust by introducing audience uncertainty about the influencer's underlying commercial motives [5], [9]. This moderation finding indicates that consumers' authenticity judgments are sensitive not to the mere existence of a commercial relationship between influencer and brand, an increasingly normalized feature of the social commerce environment that most consumers now recognize as standard practice, but specifically to perceived concealment or incongruence between the sponsored content and the influencer's established, ostensibly authentic persona, a distinction with direct relevance for

both brand disclosure practice and platform-level disclosure regulation.

2.8 Research Gap

While source credibility theory, parasocial interaction theory, the follower-count paradox, and sponsorship disclosure research have each been substantially developed individually within the influencer marketing literature, relatively few studies integrate these strands within a single framework explicitly distinguishing authenticity's role in driving initial consumer engagement from its role in building sustained, longitudinal brand loyalty, a distinction of particular importance for social commerce given that engagement and loyalty represent analytically and commercially distinct outcomes that may respond differently to the same authenticity-driving mechanisms [4], [7]. Furthermore, the process by which influencer-driven trust translates into repeated purchase behavior and brand loyalty, rather than a single purchase intention measured at one point in time, remains comparatively under-theorized relative to the substantial body of research addressing single-instance trust and purchase intention outcomes [5]. This study addresses these gaps by synthesizing the reviewed theoretical and empirical literature within an integrated framework explicitly distinguishing authenticity's engagement-driving and loyalty-driving mechanisms.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design based on synthesis of empirical survey-based, experimental, and theoretical literature addressing influencer authenticity, source credibility, parasocial interaction, and sponsorship disclosure within influencer marketing and social commerce research. The approach consolidates reported findings across these methodological traditions to characterize the mechanisms through which authenticity shapes consumer engagement and, over sustained exposure, brand loyalty.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The framework applied in this review models influencer authenticity as an upstream psychological antecedent operating through two proximate mediating variables, perceived trustworthiness/credibility and parasocial relational closeness, to produce two analytically distinct downstream consumer outcomes: **engagement**, encompassing liking, sharing, commenting, and single-instance purchase intention, and **brand loyalty**, encompassing repeated purchase behavior and sustained positive brand attitude over time. Influencer reach (follower count) and sponsorship disclosure transparency are modeled as moderating variables affecting the strength of the relationship between authenticity and its downstream mediators, consistent with the follower-count paradox and disclosure-transparency findings reviewed in Section II.

3.3 Data Sources

The literature synthesized in this review draws on foundational source credibility theory and its application

to influencer marketing; Lou and Yuan's social media influencer value model and subsequent replication and extension studies; parasocial interaction theory as applied to influencer-follower relationships; De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders' experimental research on follower count and influencer likeability/opinion leadership; the micro-influencer marketing literature addressing niche authenticity; and sponsorship disclosure research addressing the moderating role of disclosure transparency in the authenticity-trust relationship.

3.4 Analytical Framework

Reviewed studies were organized according to the framework described in Section 3.2. Findings were classified by mediating mechanism (trustworthiness/credibility versus parasocial relational closeness), by moderating condition (high versus low follower count; transparent versus non-transparent disclosure), and by outcome type (engagement versus loyalty), enabling systematic comparison of how authenticity's effects vary across these dimensions.

3.5 Evaluation Criteria

Comparative evaluation in this review uses constructs standard in the influencer marketing and consumer behavior literature: **perceived authenticity** (typically measured via consistency, transparency, and relatability survey items), **source credibility dimensions** (trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, similarity), **parasocial interaction strength**, and **downstream outcome type** (engagement metrics versus repeated-purchase/loyalty metrics), used to assess how authenticity's measured effects vary across the studies and conditions reviewed.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Comparative Mechanisms Linking Authenticity to Consumer Outcomes

Table I summarizes the comparative mediating mechanisms and reported outcome associations across the major theoretical and empirical strands reviewed in Section II.

Table I. Mechanisms linking influencer authenticity to consumer engagement and loyalty outcomes

Theoretical mechanism	Key mediating variable	Reported relationship to authenticity	Primary downstream outcome	Source
Source credibility theory	Trustworthiness, informative content value	Authenticity increases perceived trustworthiness and content credibility	Brand awareness, purchase intention	[3], [4]
Parasocial interaction	Relational closeness, reduced	Sustained personal content	Engagement, susceptible	[5], [6]

theory	persuasion-knowledge resistance	sharing increases diagnosticity of authenticity cues	ability to endorse ment	
Follow er-count parado x	Perceived popularity vs. perceived opinion leadership	High follower count increases likeability but not consistently authenticity/ authority	Brand attitude (context-dependent)	[7]
Micro-influencer niche authenticity	Perceived relational accessibility	Smaller, niche-focused audiences associated with higher perceived authenticity	Trust, engagement within niche	[8]
Sponsorship disclosure transparency	Perceived congruence /absence of concealment	Transparent disclosure strengthens, vague disclosure weakens, authenticity-trust link	Trust, sustained brand relationship	[5], [9]

4.2 From Engagement to Loyalty: The Role of Repeated Exposure

The comparative pattern in Table I indicates that authenticity's documented effects cluster predominantly around trust-building and single-instance engagement and purchase-intention outcomes, the outcome variables most consistently measured across the reviewed literature, rather than around directly measured, longitudinal brand loyalty outcomes, which remain comparatively under-represented in the empirical studies synthesized here [3], [4], [7]. However, the parasocial interaction literature's emphasis on the cumulative, repeated-exposure basis of authenticity perception offers a theoretically grounded bridge between the engagement-focused findings dominant in the literature and brand loyalty as a longer-term outcome: because parasocial relational closeness and the diagnosticity of authenticity cues both increase with sustained exposure to an influencer's content over time, rather than being fully established at a single point of contact, the same psychological mechanisms shown to drive single-instance trust and engagement plausibly compound over repeated exposure to produce the sustained positive brand attitude and repeated-purchase behavior that constitute brand loyalty, even though few studies in the reviewed literature directly measure this compounding effect longitudinally [5], [6].

4.3 Discussion

The evidence reviewed supports a consistent characterization of influencer authenticity as a mediating psychological mechanism rather than a direct driver of consumer purchase behavior: across every major theoretical strand examined, source credibility, parasocial interaction, and sponsorship disclosure research, authenticity's measured effects operate through the proximate variables of trust and credibility rather than exerting an unmediated effect on engagement or purchase outcomes, a pattern strongly consistent with Lou and Yuan's foundational finding that trustworthiness and content value jointly, rather than authenticity in isolation, predict consumer trust and subsequent behavioral intention [3], [4]. The follower-count paradox documented by De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders introduces an important strategic complication to this otherwise consistent mediational picture: because higher reach does not reliably translate into proportionally higher perceived authenticity or opinion-leading authority, brands cannot assume that influencer partnership value scales linearly with follower count, a finding that directly motivates and empirically grounds the growing micro-influencer marketing literature's emphasis on niche authenticity as an alternative, and in some cases more cost-effective, strategic pathway to consumer trust than pursuing maximal reach [7], [8]. The sponsorship disclosure findings further refine this picture by demonstrating that authenticity and commercial transparency are not inherently in tension, provided disclosed sponsored content remains perceived as congruent with the influencer's established persona, a finding with direct practical implications for how brands and influencers structure sponsored content to preserve rather than undermine the authenticity that ultimately drives the trust-based mechanisms this literature identifies as central to influencer marketing effectiveness [5], [9]. Taken together, this evidence suggests that brands pursuing social commerce strategies built on influencer partnerships face a genuine strategic choice, rather than a straightforward optimization problem, between high-reach partnerships optimized for broad engagement and awareness, and high-authenticity, typically smaller-scale partnerships optimized for the trust-based mechanisms more directly implicated in sustained brand loyalty, a choice this review's synthesis indicates should be calibrated to the brand's specific commercial objective rather than resolved by a single universally optimal influencer partnership strategy.

V. Challenges in Influencer Authenticity Research

Several challenges constrain further progress in this field. Authenticity itself remains a construct without full measurement consensus across the literature, with different studies operationalizing it through varying combinations of consistency, transparency, and relatability items, complicating direct cross-study comparison of reported effect sizes and limiting the field's ability to establish a single, widely validated authenticity measurement instrument. The predominant reliance on single-instance, cross-sectional survey and experimental designs across the reviewed literature means that the compounding, longitudinal relationship between repeated authenticity-driven engagement and eventual brand

loyalty remains substantially theoretically inferred, drawing on parasocial interaction theory's emphasis on cumulative exposure, rather than directly and longitudinally measured in the empirical studies available. The follower-count paradox and micro-influencer authenticity findings, while individually well documented, have not yet been extensively tested within a single, directly comparative experimental framework holding content quality and product category constant while systematically varying follower count, limiting confident causal attribution of the reach-authenticity trade-off beyond the specific experimental conditions each individual study examined. Sponsorship disclosure research, while establishing that transparency can strengthen rather than weaken authenticity-trust relationships, has been conducted predominantly within regulatory contexts, such as the United States and European markets with established influencer disclosure requirements, whose findings may not directly generalize to markets with differing disclosure regulation or differing cultural norms regarding commercial transparency. Finally, the rapid evolution of social commerce platform features, including in-app checkout, live-stream shopping, and algorithmically curated content discovery, means that authenticity's specific behavioral mechanisms may continue to shift as the platform environment itself evolves, requiring continued empirical updating of a literature substantially developed under earlier-generation social media platform conditions.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has examined how influencer authenticity shapes consumer engagement and brand loyalty within social commerce, synthesizing source credibility theory, parasocial interaction theory, and empirical research on the follower-count paradox and sponsorship disclosure transparency. The evidence consistently demonstrates that authenticity operates as a mediating psychological mechanism, shaping perceived trustworthiness and credibility, rather than exerting a direct, unmediated effect on consumer purchase behavior, a finding grounded most substantially in Lou and Yuan's social media influencer value model identifying trust as the central proximate driver of brand awareness and purchase intention. The documented tension between influencer reach and perceived authenticity, in which higher follower counts increase likeability but only inconsistently translate into perceived opinion-leading authority, indicates that brands cannot assume influencer partnership value scales linearly with audience size, and provides empirical grounding for the strategic emphasis on micro-influencer partnerships as an alternative pathway to consumer trust for brands prioritizing authenticity-driven loyalty outcomes over broad-reach awareness objectives. Sponsorship disclosure research further demonstrates that commercial transparency and perceived authenticity are not inherently opposed, provided disclosed content remains congruent with an influencer's established persona, offering practical guidance for brands and influencers seeking to preserve the trust-based mechanisms this review identifies as central to effective, loyalty-building influencer marketing in social commerce. As social commerce platforms continue to evolve, sustained attention to authenticity's

mediating role, rather than treating influencer reach or follower count as a sufficient proxy for marketing effectiveness, will remain essential for brands seeking to convert influencer partnerships into durable consumer relationships rather than transient engagement spikes.

VII. Future Work

Future research should prioritize longitudinal study designs capable of directly tracking how repeated, sustained exposure to authentic influencer content compounds over time to produce measurable brand loyalty outcomes, addressing the current literature's predominant reliance on single-instance, cross-sectional measurement of engagement and purchase intention rather than sustained relational outcomes. Further work is needed to develop a more widely validated, consensus authenticity measurement instrument, enabling more direct cross-study comparison of reported effect sizes than the current heterogeneous operationalization practices allow. Continued research should directly and experimentally test the follower-count paradox and micro-influencer authenticity advantage within a single comparative framework holding content quality and product category constant, strengthening causal confidence beyond what the currently available, independently conducted studies can individually support. Research should also extend sponsorship disclosure findings to a broader range of international regulatory and cultural contexts, testing whether the disclosure-transparency-strengthens-trust finding generalizes beyond the predominantly U.S. and European markets in which it has been most thoroughly documented. Finally, future work should track how authenticity's behavioral mechanisms evolve alongside rapidly changing social commerce platform features, including live-stream shopping and algorithmically curated content discovery, ensuring the field's theoretical and empirical understanding keeps pace with the continually evolving environment in which influencer-driven consumer engagement and loyalty actually occur.

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