



Authenticity and Parasocial Interaction in Influencer Marketing: An Integrated Systematic Literature Review of Consumer Outcomes and Theoretical Perspectives

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Abstract: Influencer marketing has become an increasingly important strategy in digital marketing, with authenticity and parasocial interaction emerging as key factors influencing consumer responses. Despite the growing body of literature, existing studies remain fragmented across different contexts and outcomes, making it difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their roles in influencer marketing effectiveness. Therefore, this study aims to synthesize the existing literature on authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA 2020 framework. A systematic search was conducted across relevant academic databases, resulting in 45 identified articles. Following the screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion procedures, 20 articles were selected for final qualitative synthesis. The reviewed studies were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify major research trends, key themes, and research gaps. The findings reveal that authenticity and parasocial interaction play significant roles in shaping consumer behavior. Authentic influencers are generally perceived as more credible, trustworthy, and relatable, while parasocial interaction strengthens emotional connections between influencers and followers. These factors positively influence trust, engagement, purchase intention, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and brand loyalty. Furthermore, the review highlights several gaps in the literature, including limited theoretical diversity, the dominance of cross-sectional survey designs, and the lack of studies examining virtual influencers and AI-generated influencers. This study contributes to the influencer marketing literature by providing an integrated theoretical perspective that connects authenticity, parasocial interaction, and consumer outcomes, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of influencer marketing effectiveness. The findings also provide practical implications for marketers by emphasizing the importance of selecting authentic influencers, fostering stronger influencer–consumer relationships, and developing engagement strategies that enhance trust, consumer loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth in digital environments.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Authenticity, Parasocial Interaction, Consumer Behavior, Purchase Intention.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media and digital technologies has transformed marketing communication practices and consumer behavior, making influencer marketing one of the most widely used strategies for engaging consumers (Basri & Fahmid, 2026; Sudirjo et al., 2023). Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, influencers can shape consumer perceptions, build trust, and influence purchasing decisions. As a result, businesses increasingly



rely on influencers to strengthen brand awareness and customer engagement in digital environments (Ki et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Zhao et al., 2022).

Recent studies suggest that the effectiveness of influencer marketing is strongly influenced by authenticity and parasocial interaction. Authenticity refers to the extent to which influencers are perceived as genuine, honest, and trustworthy, while parasocial interaction describes the emotional bond that followers develop with influencers despite having no direct personal relationship. Both factors have been identified as important determinants of consumer trust, engagement, and purchase intention (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lee & Eastin, 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022).

Although research on influencer marketing has grown significantly, existing studies remain fragmented across different contexts and industries. Previous research has primarily focused on influencer credibility, endorsement effectiveness, and consumer purchase behavior, while limited attention has been given to synthesizing the role of authenticity and parasocial interaction within a comprehensive framework. Furthermore, findings regarding their influence on consumer outcomes remain inconsistent across studies (Liu et al., 2024; Reinikainen et al., 2020).

This gap highlights the need for a systematic review to consolidate existing knowledge and provide a clearer understanding of how authenticity and parasocial interaction contribute to influencer marketing effectiveness. A comprehensive synthesis is important to identify dominant research themes, theoretical perspectives, methodological trends, and unresolved issues in the literature (Duffek et al., 2025; Ying et al., 2026).

The need for an updated synthesis is further reinforced by the relatively limited number of review studies addressing the interplay between authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing. Existing review literature has primarily examined parasocial relationships or broader aspects of influencer marketing. Recent evidence has provided important insights into the development of consumer–influencer relationships and parasocial interactions (Aw et al., 2026). Nevertheless, the interconnected roles of authenticity and parasocial interaction and their implications for consumer outcomes have received comparatively limited attention. In addition, the increasing prominence of virtual influencers and AI-driven digital environments underscores the need for a more comprehensive and up-to-date synthesis. Accordingly, this study extends



previous literature by offering an integrated perspective on authenticity and parasocial interaction and examining their influence on consumer outcomes and future research directions.

Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA 2020 framework to examine authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of marketing literature by providing an integrated overview of current research, identifying research gaps, and proposing future research directions for academics and practitioners in digital marketing. Accordingly, this review seeks to answer three research questions: (RQ1) How are authenticity and parasocial interaction conceptualized in influencer marketing research? (RQ2) How do authenticity and parasocial interaction influence consumer behavior outcomes? and (RQ3) What research gaps and future directions emerge from the existing literature?

METHOD

Review Protocol

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize existing knowledge regarding authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing. The review process was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, which provides a structured procedure for identifying, screening, evaluating, and reporting relevant studies. The use of PRISMA enhances the transparency, rigor, and reproducibility of the review process (Page et al., 2021)

The literature search was conducted between March and May 2026 across major academic databases and scholarly search platforms, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. Database-specific searches were performed using combinations of keywords related to influencer marketing, authenticity, and parasocial interaction. The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2026 to capture recent developments in influencer marketing research. Only English-language articles with accessible full-text versions were considered for analysis.

The search process employed the following Boolean search string: ("influencer marketing" OR "social media influencer") AND (authenticity OR "influencer authenticity") AND ("parasocial interaction" OR "parasocial relationship")



To enhance methodological rigor, the quality of the included studies was assessed based on their relevance to the research objectives, clarity of methodology, adequacy of empirical evidence, and consistency of reported findings. Only peer-reviewed journal articles with accessible full texts and sufficient methodological information were retained for analysis. The thematic analysis process involved four stages: familiarization with the selected articles, coding of key concepts, identification of recurring themes, and synthesis of broader patterns across studies. Through this process, four major themes were identified, namely influencer authenticity, parasocial interaction, consumer outcomes, and future research directions. This procedure improved the transparency and reproducibility of the review process (Page et al., 2021).

Research Dimensions

To facilitate the review process, the selected studies were analyzed based on four dimensions: influencer authenticity, parasocial interaction, consumer outcomes, and emerging research trends. These dimensions were used to examine how authenticity and parasocial interaction influence consumer behavior and to identify future research opportunities in influencer marketing (Duffek et al., 2025).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they were published in peer-reviewed journals between 2020 and 2026, written in English, and focused on influencer marketing, authenticity, or parasocial interaction. Only studies with accessible full-text versions and relevance to consumer behavior outcomes were considered. Conference papers, book chapters, dissertations, duplicate records, and studies unrelated to the objectives of this review were excluded from the analysis.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, dissertations
Publication Year	2020–2026	Before 2020
Language	English	Non-English
Topic	Influencer marketing, authenticity, parasocial interaction	Unrelated topics
Accessibility	Full-text available	Full-text unavailable

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria



Quality Assessment

The quality assessment of the selected studies was conducted using four criteria: relevance to the objectives of the review, methodological clarity, adequacy of empirical evidence, and consistency of reported findings. Studies that did not provide sufficient methodological information or lacked empirical support were excluded during the eligibility stage. These criteria were adapted from commonly used procedures in systematic literature reviews to ensure the rigor and reliability of the synthesis (Page et al., 2021).

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Initially, 45 articles were identified through database searches using predefined keywords related to authenticity, parasocial interaction, and influencer marketing. After removing six duplicate records, 39 articles remained for the screening stage. The titles and abstracts of these articles were reviewed to assess their relevance to the research objectives, resulting in the exclusion of 12 studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria.

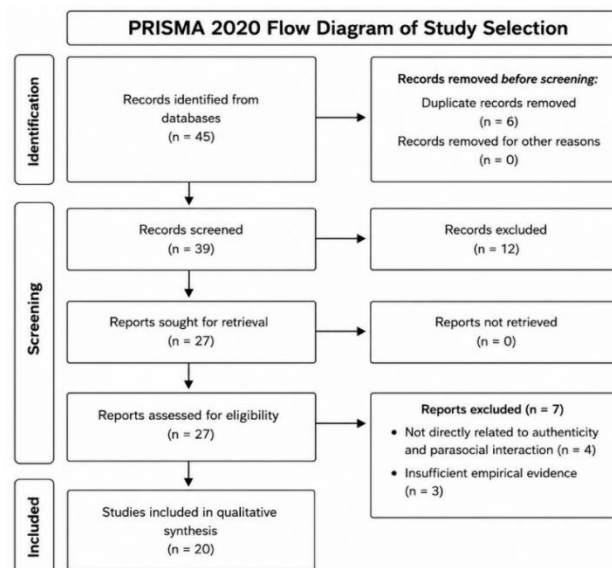


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of study selection

The increasing number of publications, particularly in 2024, indicates growing scholarly interest in understanding how authenticity and parasocial interaction shape consumer responses in digital environments. The trend also reflects the emergence of new research topics, including



virtual influencers and AI-driven marketing, suggesting that influencer marketing remains a rapidly evolving field.

Subsequently, 27 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. During this stage, seven articles were excluded because they were not directly related to authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing or did not provide sufficient empirical evidence regarding consumer behavior outcomes. As a result, 20 articles were retained and included in the final qualitative synthesis. The relatively small number of selected studies reflects the specificity of the review topic and the strict application of the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring that only studies with high relevance to the research objectives were incorporated into the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Trends

The growing importance of influencer marketing has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past few years (Zhao et al., 2022). Based on the 20 articles included in this review, research on authenticity and parasocial interaction has shown a noticeable increase between 2020 and 2026. The highest concentration of publications was observed in 2024, indicating growing academic interest in understanding how influencer characteristics shape consumer behavior in digital environments. This trend reflects the increasing academic interest in understanding how influencer characteristics affect consumer behavior and marketing effectiveness.

Geographically, the reviewed studies were conducted across various countries, including France, Spain, South Korea, China, India, Malaysia, Portugal, and Lithuania. This distribution suggests that authenticity and parasocial interaction have become global research topics. However, most studies were concentrated in Asian and European contexts, while limited evidence was found from African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American markets (Casalo et al., 2024; Ying et al., 2026).

In terms of research focus, the reviewed literature conceptualized authenticity as a perception of genuineness, transparency, credibility, and consistency, while parasocial interaction was commonly viewed as an emotional bond between influencers and followers. These concepts were primarily examined in relation to consumer trust, purchase intention, engagement, and brand-related outcomes. Furthermore, recent studies have begun to explore emerging topics such as



virtual influencers, AI-generated influencers, and short-form video platforms, reflecting the evolving nature of influencer marketing in the digital era (Duffek et al., 2025; Ying et al., 2026).

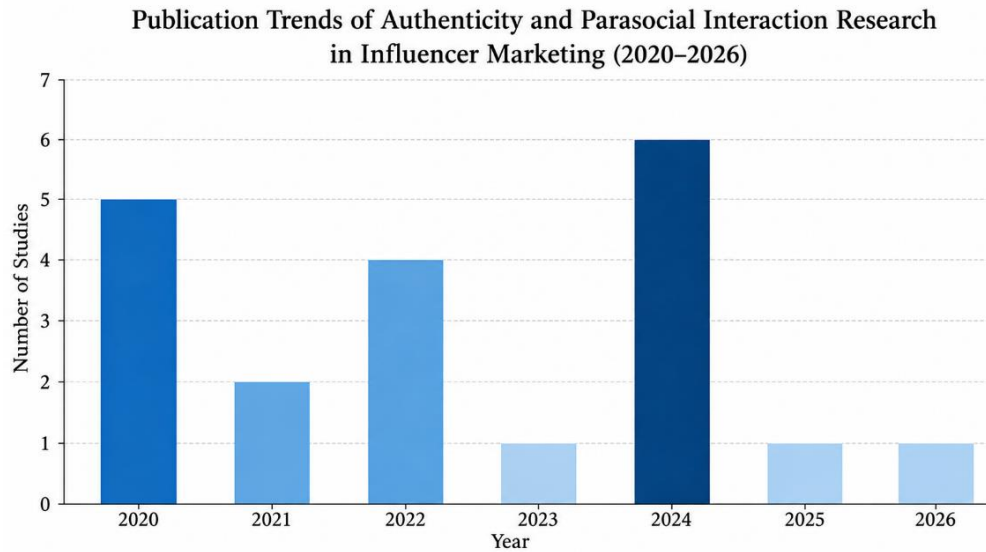


Figure 2. *Publication Trends of Authenticity and Parasocial Interaction Research in Influencer Marketing (2020–2026).*

Figure 2 presents the publication trends of studies examining authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing between 2020 and 2026. The number of publications varied across years, with the highest concentration observed in 2024 (six studies). Overall, the trend suggests growing academic interest in understanding how influencer authenticity and parasocial relationships influence consumer behavior and marketing effectiveness in digital environments.

No.	Author(s)	Year	Methodological Approach	Theoretical Framework	Key Findings
1	Audrezet et al.	2020	Qualitative	Authenticity Theory	Authenticity strengthens trust and credibility in commercial partnerships.
2	Ki et al.	2020	Survey, SEM	Human Brand Theory	Parasocial relationships enhance consumer engagement.
3	Reinikainen et al.	2020	Survey	Parasocial Relationship Theory	Parasocial relationships and credibility improve influencer effectiveness.
4	Sokolova & Kefi	2020	Survey	Source Credibility Theory	Credibility and parasocial interaction positively influence purchase intention.
5	Jin & Ryu	2020	Survey	Parasocial Relationship Theory	Parasocial interaction strengthens social commerce intentions.



6	Lee & Eastin	2021	Scale Development and Survey	Authenticity Theory	Authenticity consists of sincerity, transparency, and consistency.
7	Lou & Kim	2021	Survey	Persuasion Knowledge Theory	Authenticity mitigates the negative effects of advertising disclosure.
8	Leite & Baptista	2022	Survey	Source Credibility Theory	Self-disclosure enhances parasocial relationships and brand trust.
9	Zhao et al.	2022	Survey, SEM	Source Credibility Theory	Trust mediates the effect of influencer attributes on purchase intention.
10	Kim & Kim	2022	Survey	Parasocial Relationship Theory	Parasocial relationships increase persuasive power and eWOM intention.
11	Kim, Y., & Kim, S.	2023	Survey	Social Capital Theory	Motivations for following influencers encourage eWOM behavior.
12	Ren et al.	2023	Experiment	Regulatory Focus Theory	Authenticity and influencer type affect purchase intention.
13	Wang & Weng	2024	Survey	Source Credibility Theory	Authenticity improves credibility and positive word-of-mouth.
14	Casaló et al.	2024	Experiment	Authenticity Theory	Genuine influencers positively affect well-being and purchase intention.
15	Wies et al.	2024	Experiment	Authenticity Theory	Authenticity management strategies increase digital engagement.
16	Zhou et al.	2024	Quantitative Analysis	Parasocial Relationship Theory	Authentic communication strengthens parasocial relationships.
17	Liu & Zheng	2024	Survey	Source Credibility Theory	Brand credibility mediates the relationship between influencers and purchase intention.
18	Liu et al.	2024	Survey	Parasocial Relationship Theory	Parasocial relationships may also involve negative perceptions and threats.
19	Duffek et al.	2025	Conceptual Review	Authenticity Theory	Managing authenticity is essential for sustaining influencer effectiveness.
20	Ying et al.	2026	Survey	Source Credibility Theory	Consumers perceive human influencers as more authentic than virtual influencers.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Included Studies

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the studies included in this review. The selected articles were published between 2020 and 2026 and originated from various countries, including France, Spain, South Korea, China, Malaysia, India, Portugal, and Lithuania. The reviewed studies employed diverse methodological approaches, such as surveys, experiments, qualitative methods, mixed methods, SEM, and PLS-SEM. In terms of theoretical foundations, Authenticity Theory, Parasocial Relationship Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and Trust Theory emerged as the most frequently used frameworks in explaining consumer responses to influencer marketing.



Influencer Authenticity in Influencer Marketing

Influencer authenticity is widely recognized as a key factor influencing the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Authenticity refers to the extent to which influencers are perceived as genuine, honest, transparent, and consistent in their communication. Several studies indicate that consumers tend to trust influencers who share authentic experiences and demonstrate alignment between their personal values and endorsed products (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lee & Eastin, 2021).

The reviewed literature identifies authenticity as a multidimensional construct comprising sincerity, transparency, self-disclosure, consistency, and expertise. Previous studies suggest that authentic influencers are perceived as more credible and trustworthy, which positively affects consumer attitudes toward both influencers and brands. Furthermore, authenticity contributes to higher engagement, positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and stronger purchase intentions (Ren et al., 2023; Wang & Weng, 2024).

Overall, the findings highlight that authenticity serves as a fundamental driver of successful influencer marketing. By enhancing credibility and fostering trust, authenticity strengthens influencer–consumer relationships and improves various consumer outcomes (Casalo et al., 2024; Duffek et al., 2025).

These findings suggest that authenticity functions not merely as an individual characteristic of influencers but also as a relational mechanism that enhances consumers' perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness. By reducing skepticism and increasing perceived genuineness, authenticity strengthens the persuasive capacity of influencers and fosters more favorable attitudes toward endorsed brands. Therefore, authenticity may be regarded as a fundamental mechanism through which influencer marketing generates positive consumer responses.

Parasocial Interaction and Consumer Relationships

Parasocial interaction is defined as the perceived emotional connection that followers develop with influencers through continuous exposure to their content on social media platforms. Although this relationship is not reciprocal, followers often feel a sense of intimacy, familiarity, and personal attachment toward influencers. As a result, parasocial interaction has become an important concept for understanding consumer behavior in influencer marketing (Ki et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).



The reviewed studies indicate that parasocial interaction is strengthened when influencers share personal experiences, engage actively with followers, and communicate in an authentic manner. Such interactions increase followers' perceptions of closeness and trust, making influencers appear more relatable and credible. Several studies also suggest that authenticity serves as an important antecedent of parasocial interaction, highlighting the close relationship between the two constructs (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024).

Furthermore, parasocial interaction positively influences various consumer outcomes, including trust, engagement, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. Consumers who develop stronger parasocial relationships with influencers are generally more receptive to product recommendations and marketing messages. Therefore, parasocial interaction can be viewed as a key psychological mechanism through which influencer marketing affects consumer decision-making and relationship-building (Jin & Ryu, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2022).

The findings further indicate that authenticity serves as an important antecedent of parasocial interaction. Authentic self-presentation, transparency, and self-disclosure enable followers to perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy, thereby facilitating stronger emotional attachment and perceived intimacy. In turn, these parasocial relationships enhance trust, engagement, and purchase intention. This mechanism highlights the mediating role of parasocial interaction in translating perceptions of authenticity into favorable consumer outcomes.

Consumer Outcomes of Authenticity and Parasocial Interaction

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that authenticity and parasocial interaction contribute to several positive consumer outcomes. Trust emerged as one of the most frequently reported outcomes, with consumers showing greater confidence in influencers who are perceived as authentic and capable of establishing strong emotional connections with their followers. These perceptions enhance the credibility of influencer recommendations and strengthen brand evaluations (X. Liu & Zheng, 2024; Zhao et al., 2022).

In addition to trust, authenticity and parasocial interaction were found to positively influence consumer engagement and purchase intention. Authentic influencers tend to generate higher levels of interaction, while stronger parasocial relationships increase followers' willingness to consider and purchase recommended products. Several studies also reported that these factors encourage



positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), further extending the marketing impact of influencer activities (Kim & Kim, 2022; Lou & Kim, 2021).

Furthermore, emerging evidence suggests that authenticity and parasocial interaction contribute to long-term outcomes such as brand loyalty and advocacy behavior. Consumers who trust influencers and feel emotionally connected to them are more likely to maintain favorable attitudes toward endorsed brands and recommend them to others. These findings highlight the strategic importance of authenticity and parasocial interaction in building sustainable consumer relationships within digital marketing environments (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Wies et al., 2024).

Although most studies consistently reported positive relationships between authenticity, parasocial interaction, and consumer outcomes, variations in research contexts, influencer types, and consumer characteristics suggest that the strength of these relationships may differ across settings. These findings indicate that consumer responses are likely to be context-dependent and may vary according to cultural environments, platform characteristics, and emerging forms of influencer marketing.

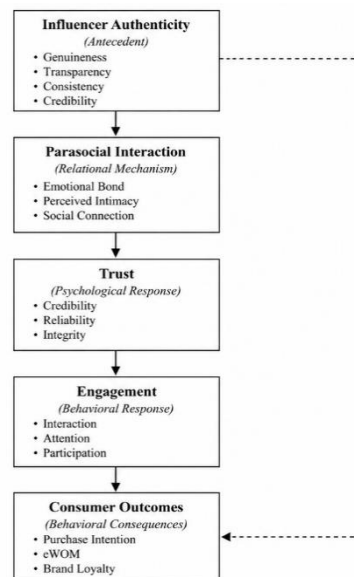


Figure 3. Proposed Conceptual Framework of Authenticity, Parasocial Interaction, and Consumer Outcomes in Influencer Marketing

Figure 3 presents the proposed conceptual framework derived from the reviewed studies. The framework suggests that influencer authenticity acts as an important antecedent of parasocial interaction and directly contributes to favorable consumer outcomes. Parasocial interaction further



strengthens trust and engagement, which subsequently influence outcomes such as purchase intention, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty. The framework highlights the interconnected nature of these constructs and provides an integrated perspective on consumer responses in influencer marketing. From a theoretical perspective, the framework integrates insights from Authenticity Theory, Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Relationship Theory, and Trust Theory, demonstrating how these complementary perspectives collectively explain influencer marketing effectiveness. Accordingly, the proposed framework offers a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which authenticity and parasocial interaction shape consumer behavior in digital environments.

Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

From a theoretical perspective, the findings indicate that Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Relationship Theory, Authenticity Theory, and Trust Theory should not be viewed as independent explanations of influencer marketing effectiveness. Rather, these perspectives complement one another in explaining how consumers develop favorable responses toward influencers. Authenticity Theory emphasizes perceptions of genuineness and consistency, whereas Source Credibility Theory explains how these perceptions enhance credibility. Parasocial Relationship Theory further clarifies how credibility and authentic self-presentation foster emotional bonds between influencers and followers, while Trust Theory explains how these relational mechanisms translate into favorable consumer outcomes. Collectively, these theories provide an integrated explanation of influencer marketing effectiveness and highlight the interconnected roles of authenticity, parasocial interaction, trust, engagement, and consumer behavior outcomes.

The review identified four major gaps in the existing literature on authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing. First, most studies relied on Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Relationship Theory, and Trust Theory, indicating limited theoretical diversity. Future research could integrate alternative perspectives, such as Social Identity Theory, Attachment Theory, or Self-Determination Theory, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer–influencer relationships (S. Liu et al., 2024).

Second, the majority of studies employed cross-sectional survey designs, limiting the ability



to examine changes in consumer perceptions over time. Longitudinal studies, experiments, and mixed-method approaches could provide deeper insights into the dynamic nature of authenticity and parasocial interaction in digital environments.

Third, most empirical evidence was generated in Asian and European contexts, while research in developing markets remains relatively limited. Future studies should explore cross-cultural differences and investigate whether the effects of authenticity and parasocial interaction vary across countries, cultures, and demographic groups.

Finally, emerging phenomena such as virtual influencers, AI-generated influencers, and live commerce remain underexplored. As digital technologies continue to evolve, future research should examine how consumers perceive authenticity and develop parasocial relationships with non-human influencers. Understanding these developments will be essential for advancing influencer marketing theory and practice in the digital era (Ying et al., 2026).

Gap Category	Current Situation	Future Research Opportunity
Theoretical Gap	Dominated by Source Credibility and Parasocial Relationship theories	Apply Social Identity Theory, Attachment Theory, and Self-Determination Theory
Methodological Gap	Mostly cross-sectional surveys	Use longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method designs
Contextual Gap	Focused on Asian and European countries	Expand studies to developing and cross-cultural contexts
Technological Gap	Limited studies on AI and virtual influencers	Investigate authenticity and parasocial interaction in AI-driven environments

Table 3. Research Gap Analysis

CONCLUSION

This study conducted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA 2020 framework to examine authenticity and parasocial interaction in influencer marketing. The findings indicate that both constructs play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior. Authenticity enhances credibility and trust, while parasocial interaction strengthens emotional connections between influencers and followers. Together, they positively influence trust, engagement, purchase intention, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and brand loyalty.

Despite the growing interest in this topic, several research gaps remain. Existing studies are largely dominated by cross-sectional survey designs and concentrated in Asian and European contexts. In addition, emerging phenomena such as virtual influencers and AI-generated



influencers remain underexplored. From a theoretical perspective, this review demonstrates that Authenticity Theory, Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Relationship Theory, and Trust Theory provide complementary explanations of influencer marketing effectiveness. By integrating these perspectives, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which authenticity and parasocial interaction shape consumer responses. Future research should employ more diverse methodological approaches, including longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method designs, and explore cross-cultural contexts, developing markets, and emerging digital environments to further advance influencer marketing research.

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