Research Article

A Systematic Review of Theoretical Perspectives and Emerging Trends in Influencer Marketing

Mythreayi Venkatesh[1,2*] & Ramya Raman[2]

[1] *Research Scholar, M.O.P. Vaishnav College for Women*

[2] *Assistant Professor and Head, Guru Nanak College, Chennai*

[3] *Assistant Professor and Head, M.O.P. Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai*

[*]*Correspondence: mythreayiphd23@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth and expansion of social media have shifted consumer expectations in marketing, which has moved spending from traditional advertising towards influencer marketing. Despite the high growth in this sector, many studies have focused on factors such as credibility, congruence, and parasocial responses, but very few studies have systematically analysed important theories and their implications. Hence, a comprehensive review of key theories and their association with influencer marketing is essential to provide authentic and structured research in the future. The literature review maps the theoretical perspectives applied in influencer marketing research and evaluates whether they are merely applied or authentically developed. A Systematic Literature review was conducted using PRISMA 2020. The search used appropriate keywords on the application Lens, covering Titles and Abstracts from English-language journal articles published between 2015 and 2026. The search returned 1063 records, of which 981 were screened, and 184 met the eligibility criteria. Each article was thoroughly studied for its theoretical perspective, Contextual characteristics, and profundity of theoretical application. The 184 studies utilised 63 different theories, but 145 of them, which is 79% of selected studies, did not modify their theoretical framework. Even though source credibility theory was repeatedly validated, it exhibited only a 10%, the lowest rate of theoretical development. Whereas the parasocial standpoint is widely and actively developed in many studies. Persuasion knowledge and the Stimulus-Organism-Response model showed no theoretical development, at 21%. Emerging trends include rapid growth towards virtual and AI-driven influencers, which is leading to the integration of human-computer interaction theories into the research area. The review differentiates between theoretical prevalence and theoretical productivity, uncovering that the most–cited perspective in the research is also one of the least developed. This also emphasises the proliferation of overlapping constructs that have to be consolidated. Marketers must treat influencer impacts as conditional rather than definite-specific to virtual influencers-and should prioritise expertise and trustworthiness over attractiveness when choosing endorsers.

Keywords: *Influencer Marketing, Systematic Literature Review, Source Credibility Theories, Theoretical Framework, virtual influencers.*

INTRODUCTION

The marketing environment has been drastically transformed through the rapid growth of social media in the past decades. Influencer marketing has adopted cognitive strategies such as trust, authenticity, and the reach of social media creators to engage customers, resulting in

higher and faster adoption of social media platforms than traditional advertisements. This positioning allows them to shape consumer behaviour, perception, attitude, and purchase decisions, which traditional advertising struggles to achieve. This influencer marketing is not inadvertent; rather, it is heavily discussed and established through theories based on psychology and communication. The theories focus on why and how followers develop the emotional connection that results in consumer buying behaviour. Despite the exponential growth of this area, the theoretical applications are examined selectively rather than systematically. Substantial empirical studies exist, but efforts to synthesize the core theoretical foundation are notably absent. Further limited attention has been given to boundary conditions and interrelationships among theories such as Source Credibility, Parasocial Relationship, and Congruence. In previous studies, several reviews have started to address this: (Vrontis, D.,2021) mapped the field's early development; (Joshi, Y., 2025), (Pradhan, B.,2023) traced its research trajectory; and (Aw, E. C. X., 2026) Synthesised parasocial literature. The above research established which theories appear in which field of marketing and not from the perspective of what happens to those theories once the researcher adopts them. This distinction is important, which indicate that a theory that is frequently cited but not altered suggests something different about the field than one that is actively debated or challenged. Hence, the current study is conducted to address this critical gap by conducting a systematic literature review by focussing on mapping, analysing and synthesising major theories adopted for influencer marketing studies by assessing the depth at which each is engaged.

Research Objectives

Firstly, the study aims to identify the theoretical and framework models often applied to elucidate the influencer marketing implications on consumer attitude and behaviour. Secondly, to assess the depth at which these theories are engaged, whether they are applied without alteration or truly advanced. Thirdly, to evaluate and present the emerging trends that are shaping the current research. Finally, to ascertain the research gaps that remain in the theoretical and empirical studies conducted on influencer marketing.

METHODS

Review protocol

The study follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) as suggested by Page, M. J., 2021, which establishes a selection method that is open, reproducible, and reduces potential bias. The review protocol specifying the research questions, search strategy, eligibility criteria, quality appraisal procedure ad data extraction fields was prepared before searching commenced. Searches covered the Title and Abstract fields, and full-text searching was not used.

The final search was executed on 26th August 2026 using the keywords, and the complete Boolean string is shared below:
(title:(“influencer marketing” OR “social media influencer” OR “ digital influencer” or online influencer” OR “virtual influencer” OR “ micro-influencer” OR “ “macro influencer” OR “ “nano influencer” OR “influencer endorsement”

OR "influencer advertising" OR "Instagram influencer" OR "TikTok influencer" OR "content creator")) AND (title: "source creditably "or "parasocial" OR "elaboration likelihood" OR "persuasion knowledge" OR "social comparison" OR "stimulus-organism-response" OR "social exchange" OR "used and gratification" OR "self-congruence" OR "match-up hypothesis" OR "signalling theory" OR "social identity" OR "attribution theory" OR "social learning" OR "theory of planned behaviour" OR "technology acceptance" OR "theoretical framework" OR "conceptual framework")OR abstract: (:("influencer marketing" OR "social media influencer" OR " digital influencer" or online influencer" OR "virtual influencer" OR " micro-influencer" OR " "macro influencer" OR " "nano influencer" OR "influencer endorsement" OR "influencer advertising" OR "Instagram influencer" OR "TikTok influencer" OR "content creator")) AND (title: "source creditably "or "parasocial" OR "elaboration likelihood" OR "persuasion knowledge" OR "social comparison" OR "stimulus-organism-response" OR "social exchange" OR "used and gratification" OR "self-congruence" OR "match-up hypothesis" OR "signalling theory" OR "social identity" OR "attribution theory" OR "social learning" OR "theory of planned behaviour" OR "technology acceptance" OR "theoretical framework" OR "conceptual framework")

The theory block consists of generic framework terms and named theories identified in a pilot search. The generic terms made the search open to perspectives, while named terms increase the recall of those already known to be prevalent.

Filtration of data was applied for scholarly publications from 2015 to 2026. The term "influencer marketing dates from the mid 2010's (Vrontis, D.,2021); thus, the current study encompasses the emergence and growth of its occurrence.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

The article was chosen within this time frame to cover the emergence and growth of influencer marketing. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria adopted are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Dimensions	Included	Excluded
Topic	Focal point as "Social media influencer" or "Influencer marketing"	Studies where influencer marketing is secondary
Theory	Explicitly named and used at least one theory in the study	Theories not identified or used
Article Type	Empirical and Conceptual review; peer–reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, preprints, repository deposits
Language	English	Other than English
Time Period	2015-2026	Pre 2015
Geography	Not Restricted	-

Journal Quality	As per ABDC list 2025: A* and A, and communication and media studies journals outside ABDC's disciplinary coverage	Journals that met neither condition

Source: *Created by Researcher*

Using ABDC alone would have excluded Human Communication Research, New Media & Society, and Media Psychology, while keeping lower-ranked business outlets. Journals in the adjacent communication, media, and behavioral psychology literatures were thus retained as a stated exception. A recurring problem was studies that incorporated theories in the introduction section but did not carried to hypothesis, design, or discussion. Such studies met the criteria but engaged the theory nominally for the study; rather than excluding them, the study was coded as applied and retained. Out of 184 included studies,136 appeared in ABDC-rated journals consisting of A* 6 and A 130, and 48 studies were from 15 outside ABDC journals listed in Appendix A, and in report analysis section the study was shown to establish whether the inclusion affected the findings.

Study Selection Process

After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria as mentioned above, the records were screened at the primary level with Title and Abstract, and then at full text. The search yielded 1063 records. Before screening,62 repository or preprint deposits and 20 duplicate records were eliminated, leaving 981 records. The next step of screening by title and abstract that has excluded 797 records and identified 184 studies. Full text of the articles was obtained for 184 records; all those records that discuss influencer marketing fell under the eligibility criteria. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

Quality Appraisal and Depth of Theoretical Engagement

For each included study, methodological features that are important for the quality of the investigations were retrieved, including the research design, sample and sample size, dependent variables, and key findings. These fields enable the assessment of the evidential weight of individual studies. These are presented for all studies provided in supplementary file S1.

Depth of the theoretical engagement was then coded under two levels as Applied and Extended. The explanation for those two levels is provided below:

Applied: If the study theory frame constructs, justifies hypotheses, or organises findings and does not produce any changes and persists as before. Testing the study in a new country, on a new platform, in a new product category, or with additional mediators or moderators.

Extended: The occurrence when theory itself changes. The study introduces a new construct, brings together two theories, develops a new measure of the core construct, or specifies conditions under which the theory does not hold. Coding has followed the authors' own explicit claims about their theoretical contribution rather than coders' inferences.

Data Extraction

Authors, year of publication, journal name, ABDC rating, DOI, primary and secondary theories, platform, country of data collection, product category, method,

sample, dependent variables, key findings, engagement level, quality tags, and notes recording null results, contradictions with named studies, and boundary conditions.

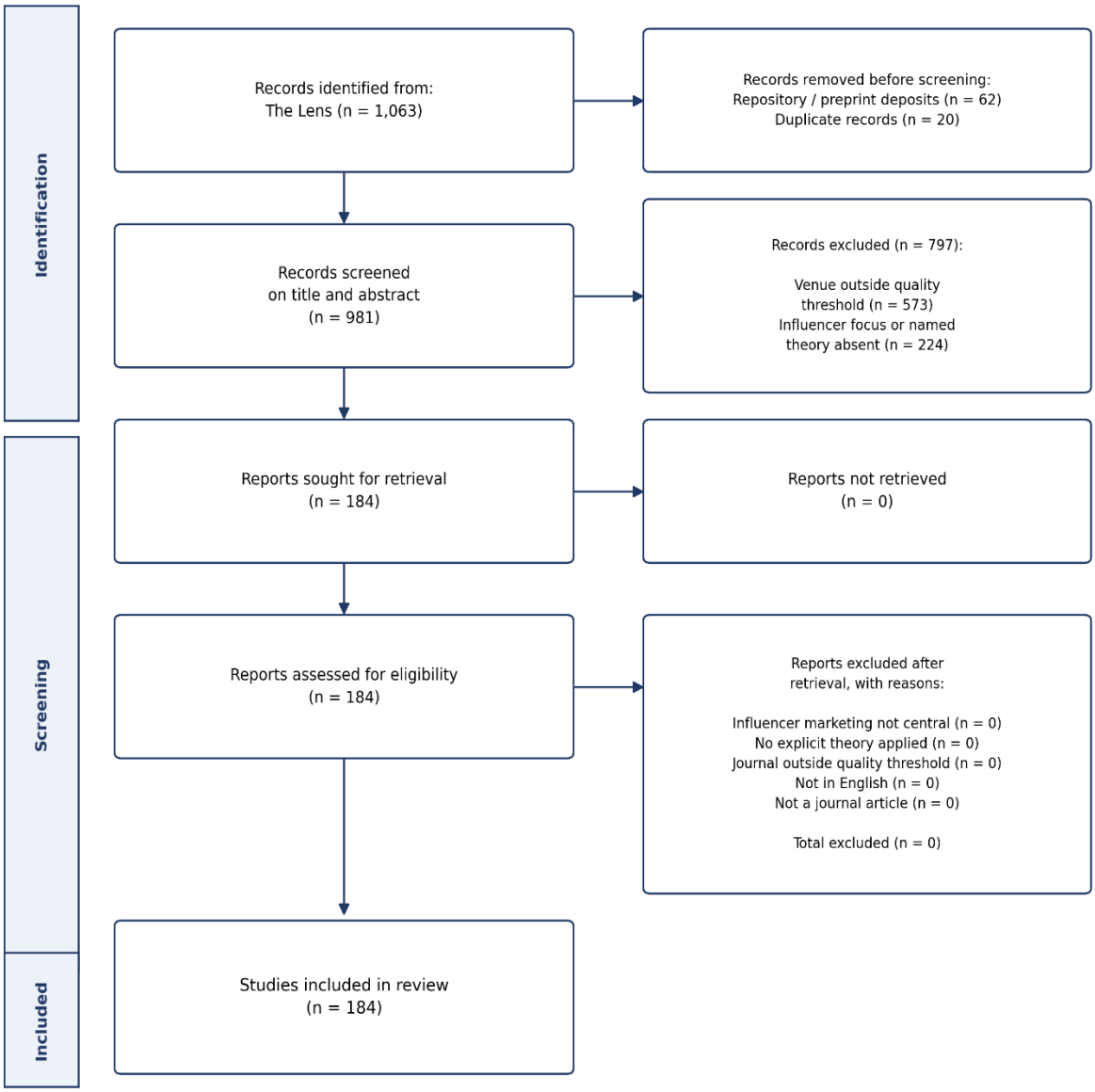


Figure 1: *PRISMA Flow Diagram*

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the theoretical frameworks identified across the reviewed literature. Out of 184 studies published in 60 journals, 63 different primary theories. Publications have accelerated sharply from 2022, as shown in Table 2. None of the studies from the first three years met the eligibility criteria of a central focus on influencers and an explicitly named theory. From the year 2023 onwards, there are 149 studies that contribute to 81% of the total number of studies analysed. It is evident that a theoretically explicit literature review on influencer marketing

has been conducted extensively over the past four years.

Table 2: *Distribution of studies included by year of publication (n=184)*

Year of publication	Studies	%
2015	0	0
2016	0	0
2017	0	0
2018	1	.5
2019	1	.5
2020	5	3
2021	8	4
2022	20	11
2023	32	17
2024	39	21
2025	38	21
2026	40	22
Total	184	100

Source: *Created by Researcher*

The total number of studies is 184, with 63 distinct theories as presented in Table 3; those 63 theories with closely related theories were grouped and formed into 13 families. For example, studies that pointed to parasocial interaction and parasocial theory are reported together. Here, studies mean the number of studies that cite the point of view as their main theoretical framework." "Extended" refers to studies where theory was changed rather than applied; it means studies in which theories are altered rather than simply applied. As already presented, the great amount of theory applied to influencer marketing is dominated by source credibility theory, explaining how influencer attributes and characteristics influence consumers' purchase behavior, and parasocial interaction, which in most studies functions as a mediating variable explaining how an individual's personality shapes audience behavior.

Table 3: *Theories and Their Application in Influencer Marketing Research (N=184)*

Theory or Model	Core Construct	Studies(n)	Extended	Representation
Parasocial interaction/relationship	One-sided emotional bonds between audience and influencers	39	8 of 39(21%)	Lou et al. (2026); Hu et al. (2023)
Source Credibility Model	Expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the endorser	29	3 of 29(10%)	Ashraf et al. (2023); Kim & Wang (2024)

Uses and gratification	Audience motivation for core construct seeking influencer content	12	4 of 12 (33%)	Fu et al. (2026)
Social comparison theory	Aspirational comparison driving imitation of influencer lifestyle	11	3 of 11(27%)	Rüther et al. (2023)
Persuasion Knowledge Model	Audience coping mechanisms in response to persuasion attempts	8	0 of 8 (0%)	Borchers et al. (2022); Willemsen et al. (2024)
Human – Computer interaction imports	Social response to non-human agents	8	2 of 8(25%)	Jin (2023)
Congruence/match-up	Fit between endorser, product and consumer	7	2 of 7 (29%)	Yuan et al. (2025); Liu & Lee (2024)
Stimulus-Organism-Response Model	External stimuli shaping behavioural outcomes	7	1 of 7 (14%)	Gamage & Ashill (2022); Zhang et al. (2025)
Opinion leadership/social influence	Influence transmitted through opinion leaders	5	1 of 5 (20%)	Ozuem et al. (2023); Mulcahy et al. (2024)
Social Exchange Theory	Reciprocal exchange between influencer and follower	4	1 of 4(25%)	Pandit et al. (2024)
Social Identity Theory	Identification with the influencer's group or values	4	0 of 4 (0%)	Trzebiński et al. (2025)
Signalling Theory	Cues signalling unobservable quality	3	2 of 3(67%	Shamim & Azam (2024)
Elaboration Likelihood Model	Central versus peripheral route processing of influencer content	3	2 of 3(67%)	Park et al. (2023)
Other Category of theories (38 further theories, <= 3 studies each)	-	44	10 of 44(23%)	-
Total		184	39 of 184(20%)	

Source: *Created by Researcher*

Theoretical foundation of influencer marketing

Influencer marketing has been founded on psychological and communication-based theories that have been tested by many researchers. Across the theory, Source credibility theory has been studied by researchers, with credibility, platform, and culture being researched frequently (Vrontis et al., 2021). The scale developed by Ohanian (1990) has been extensively used by researchers for its attributes in influencer content. Further, it has been developed into a higher-order construct by subsequent authors. Parasocial engagement improves networks among individuals for the collective good for a common goal, according to a recent systematic review by Aw et al. (2026). However, the present analysis reveals a lack of alignment between theoretical development and prevalence.

First, theories are much more often applied in studies rather than created in their respective disciplines. As listed in Table 3, among 184 studies, only 21%, which is 39 studies, have modified the theory they have used, whereas 145, which contributes to 79% of the total studies, have used an existing framework to apply for findings and support hypotheses without much modification. As the field of influencer marketing has grown in the past four years, the proportion of studies extending the theory has increased. From only 5 of 33 studies, which contributes to 15% from 2020 to 2022, to 34 of 149 (23%) published from 2023 onwards, and remained stable with (25%,26%, 21%, and 20% between 2023 and 2026. Thus, the findings indicate that theoretical development has remained at approximately one in five studies, despite the increasing publications in the past decade.

Second, even though the theories have the lowest rate of development of any major group, with 10% as listed above in Table 3 for 13 groups. Source credibility remains the most consistently validated theoretical perspective in the field of influencers. Whereas parasocial perspectives on both applications consist of 39 studies, and development with 8 research are considerably more. The dominance of source credibility is then a dominance of use, not a theoretical contribution.

Third, neither the Persuasion Knowledge Model nor the Stimulus-Organism-Response Model—two widely used frameworks—have led to further theoretical development.

The thirty-nine studies coded Extended can be grouped into four types. New construct development, such as the trans-parasocial relationship with a validated scale (Lou, 2021; Lou et al., 2026), digital congruence bridging congruence and parasocial theory (Yuan et al., 2025), visual congruence operationalized through image classification (Argyris et al., 2020), and the disaggregation of parasocial relationship into instrumental and expressive forms (Hu et al., 2023), forms the biggest proportion. Theory integration refers to the merging of previously separate frameworks, such as opinion leadership and parasocial relationship (Farivar et al., 2021). Boundary specification shows the conditions in which an established theory fails (Park et al., 2023; Koay et al., 2023). Construct extension moves a theory forward into new phenomena, such as negatively charged parasocial relationships (Mardon et al., 2023).

The 39 extended-coded studies from the coding scheme propose that theoretical development is concentrated in small numbers.

The results depict that research on source credibility remains grounded extensively in the field of Advertising and Mass communication. Prior reviews have established that literature in this field is concentrated more in North America, Europe, and China, with not much on South Asia as specified in (Vrontis et al., 2021; Kumar & Jibril, 2025). Extending source credibility to overlooked populations and cultural contexts and to different types of influencers would generate a more effective influencer-specific theory rather than contributing to retesting the established dimensions.

Emerging trends

Growth and broadening of research base: As social media usage and the surge in influencer marketing adoption by firms and brand managers have expanded. This resulted in a notable surge in academic research on influencer marketing. This is evident through the current study, where four out of five studies in the corpus were published from 2023 onwards.

Virtual and AI research was found to be one of the most pronounce trend in the corpus. Studies suggested that future research prospects are high with Virtual and AI influencers as compared to Human influencers, with stronger credibility perceptions. However, the present review finds that these studies apply the same theories as human-influencer research but with rather inconsistent results. discussed in section 5.3. Nine studies are based primarily on Computers Are Social Actors, anthropomorphism, mind perception, social presence, or the uncanny valley, and a further twelve studies invoke anthropomorphism as a secondary construct. These frameworks arose in the field because existing influencer theory could not account for non-human endorsers.

Terminology Proliferation

Among the 981 screened records, eleven different parasocial constructs are in use: parasocial relationship (178 records), parasocial interaction (161), bond (13), connection (5), engagement (5), identification (2), trans-parasocial relationship (2), ties (2), contact (1), breakup (1) and response (1). Twenty records use “parasocial interaction” and “parasocial relationship” interchangeably in the same article, although there is an established distinction between the episodic and the enduring form (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

On one side, there is extensive research on source credibility, testing the characteristics of influencers, trustworthiness of influencers, and the intention towards consumer purchase behaviours. This is further strengthened through the parasocial, persuasion knowledge, and opinion leadership mechanisms between influencers and potential buyers. This is due to buyers searching for and relying on authentic sources, not paid advertising, and content created by consumer creators build themselves as actual users, not paid promoters. In contrast, the real-world conditions of marketing communication are changing very quickly. All of this, plus AI-created influencers, technology that detects paid promotion and allows viewers to skip it, virtual shopping experiences that don’t require a visit to a shop, and

marketing based on geographic and cultural differences, needs to be tested against the older theories of influencer marketing. The results of this review indicate that this testing is not yet occurring in a manner that develops the theories concerned, and three issues arise.

Table 4: *Theoretical Status of Four Most Researched Perspectives*

Perspective	Status	Evidence inferred	Status
Parasocial Interaction/Relationship	39, of which 8 coded as primary and 12 studies had parasocial as mediation	Twelve studies across the corpus test parasocial mediation and reach opposing conclusions; four different boundary conditions have been proposed, none tested against the others	Contested and developing
Source credibility	29(3)	Consistently supported; 26 of 29 studies re-test Ohanian's (1990) three dimensions in a new context; no study revises the construct itself	Settled but static
Persuasion knowledge model	8(0)	Recognition of persuasive intent is reliably activated but unreliably converted into brand resistance.	Chain incomplete
Stimulus–Organism–Response	7(1)	Used to organise variables rather than to explain them; specifies sequence but not mechanism	Applied, not theorised

Source: *Created by Researcher*

Source credibility considered as field dominant perspective is least developed. The theory has been utilized by 29 studies more than any framework but is least developed in the review, altered only in three studies. Even though those three altered none of them changed any constructs. Farivar et al. (2021) developed it by combining it with opinion leaders; Liu (2025) developed it in a wider model, and Han and Balaban (2023) tested its explanatory power in a rival model. Ohanian's (1990 three dimensions have emerged in all three studies. The remaining 26 studies have retested the same dimensions in different regions, cultures, and platforms. When a theory becomes more convenient and widely used, the same scale is easy to administer. Whether the construct fits different endorsements and environment captures credibility in that setting is an open question that 29 studies have not asked.

The second most used theory was parasocial relationship, which shows an opposite pattern. Eight of 39 studies alter it, and studies build on it with the trans-parasocial construct proposed and validated (Lou et al., 2026), the parent construct divided into instrumental and expressive forms (Hu et al., 2023), and its extension to negative states (Mardon et al.,

2023). But its central claim is disputed. Twelve studies tested whether parasocial relationships carry influencer effects through to consumer outcomes, and they disagree. Most find the effect; several do not (Koay et al., 2023; Sheng et al., 2023; Balaban et al., 2022, the last explicitly contradicting Breves et al., 2021). The failures are not random: each occurs under a stated condition, and four studies have each proposed a different one — influencer–consumer congruence, product involvement, consumer Xeno centrism and inferences of manipulative intent — with none tested against the others. The effect therefore appears real but conditional. What the field has not done is treat this as a dispute: studies finding the effect rarely cite those that do not, and prior reviews report the construct's importance without noting that its causal claim is unsettled.

Virtual Influencers Theories Built for Human Endorser

Virtual and AI-driven influencers are the fastest-growing stream in the corpus, rising from no studies before 2022 to a substantial share of recent work. They apply the same theories as human-influencer research and produce conflicting answers. Park et al. (2023) found the elaboration likelihood model's central prediction violated, Wang et al. (2025) found virtual influencers less effective for green products, and Cheng et al. (2025) found flawless virtual influencers lowered brand attitudes by threatening human identity. Liu and Lee (2024) found them perceived as less authentic, while Kim and Wang (2024) found humanlike virtual influencers matched human ones in not-for-profit contexts. The field's response has been to import new frameworks — anthropomorphism, mind perception, the uncanny valley — rather than ask whether the existing ones still apply. Fu et al. (2026) warn against transferring assumptions about human influencers to virtual ones, but the literature continues to apply source credibility and parasocial interaction to endorsers who have no intentions.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretical appearance overstates the maturity of frameworks that are popular because they are easy to operationalise. Ohanian (1990) scale measures three dimensions of influencers such as expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Studies in this corpus have reported that these dimensions have been utilised, and results show that the dimensions behave differently, with expertise and trustworthiness predicting outcomes where attractiveness does not (Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021).

In parasocial needs consolidation, eleven different terms such as parasocial relationship, parasocial interaction, parasocial bond, parasocial connection, parasocial engagement, parasocial identification, trans parasocial relationship, parasocial ties, parasocial contact, parasocial breakup, and parasocial response were identified from 981 records using a text search of the title and abstract. Instead of using the same terms in circulation, comparative testing of the existing terms would help further the development of theory.

Practical Implications

The link between parasocial bonds and purchase behavior forms the basis for most selection advice, but is not consistent in all studies testing it, depending on product

involvement, cultural orientation, congruence, and audience skepticism.

The credibility dimensions are not interchangeable. Visual appeal is the least consistent predictor of outcomes, expertise is second, and trustworthiness is third.

Virtual influencers are not simple substitutes. They perform better or equally for digital native products, not-for-profit messaging, and utilitarian categories, and worse where authenticity is important. The fact that perfect virtual influencers can be detrimental to brand attitudes suggests that the pursuit of perfection is counterproductive.

Limitations of the study

The searches to retrieve the corpus for the study were conducted only in The Lens. Even though the study covered it aggregates Crossref, PubMed and other indexes with coverage comparable to Scopus. A second database would have allowed for duplicate detection across databases and enhanced recall.

Screening and coding of all 184 studies were done by the first author, with supervisory review by the second; hence inter rated reliability check could not be performed. The coding scheme lessened subjectivity by following authors' clearly stated contribution claims rather than coder inference, and by assigning vague studies to Applied by default. This convention makes the 21% extension rate a reserved estimate.'

In communication journals, parasocial perspectives were overrepresented since that is highly concentrated in these journals. When limiting the corpus to only ABDC-listed journals (n = 136), the extension rate is 24% compared to 21% for the full corpus, and the family sorting is unchanged, suggesting that the findings are not artifacts of that inclusion. Prevalence figures in section 4.3, however, are reported from the full screened corpus (n = 981). Similarly, excluding the 40 studies published in 2026, the extension rate is 22% with the same ordering of families.

Non-English language research papers and pre-2015 research fall outside the corpus.

Future Research Directions

First, the disagreement over parasocial mediation needs to be settled. Four studies each proposed a different condition under which parasocial relationships carry influencer effects, and each tested only its own. One study measuring all four in the same sample would show which condition matters.

Second, the persuasion knowledge model needs re-specification for influencer settings. Disclosure reliably makes consumers recognise commercial intent, but that recognition does not reliably change their brand attitudes. Why the chain breaks is worth studying, and it matters for disclosure regulation.

Third, researchers should check whether the same constructs apply to virtual influencers. Source credibility and parasocial interaction were built for human communicators. Until it is shown that they measure the same thing for virtual ones, studies comparing the two may be comparing different constructs.

Fourth, cultural and platform differences should be tested rather than assumed. The literature often explains conflicting findings by pointing to different countries or platforms, but few studies compare

across them in one design. Research from South Asia, Africa and Latin America is particularly needed, since the evidence base is concentrated in the United States, Europe and China.

CONCLUSION

This review analysed 184 studies on the theoretical positions applied in influencer marketing from 2015 to 2026, answering questions about the theories applied in the field and how much they are applied. The discipline integrates 63 different perspectives, including parasocial constructs (39 studies) and source trustworthiness (29), with a fast-expanding cluster of human–computer interaction borrowing in response to the rise of virtual influencers. From the study, it is understood that theories proposed by researchers often complement one another, contributing to the application and development of the model. However, only 20% of the researchers introduced new frameworks, while most of the studies continue to rely on establishing the model. The most consistently endorsed approach in this literature is source credibility. Parasocial perspectives have facilitated the field's only cumulative program of construct development. It has been observed that the lowest extension rate of any major family is 10%. Several research questions remain unanswered. First being, how persuasive knowledge translates into resistance? Second being, whether parasocial relationships. In each case, the corpus contains research showing both sides, suggesting conflicting boundary requirements, but none are decided. The problem with the discipline is not a lack of theory but the fact that the vocabulary of theory is outpacing the hard knowledge of theory. It is more likely to adjudicate what it already has than import more.

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During the preparation of this work, the authors used a generative artificial intelligence assistant (Claude, Anthropic) for three purposes: to generate provisional include/exclude recommendations during title and abstract screening; to assist in

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Appendix A.

Journals outside the ABDC Journal Quality List. The 48 studies (26%) published outside ABDC A/*A journals appeared in 15 Scopus-indexed outlets:* Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research* (8), *Frontiers in Psychology* (6), *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (5), *Frontiers in Communication* (4), *New Media & Society* (4), *Online Media and Global Communication* (3), *Mass Communication and Society* (3), *SAGE Open* (3), *Media Psychology* (2), *Human Communication Research* (2), *Asian Journal of Communication* (2), *Computers in Human Behavior: Artificial Humans* (2), *Computers in Human Behavior Reports* (2), *Journalism and Media* (1) and *Environmental Communication* (1)