

Driving Luxury through TikTok: A Systematic Review of Influencer Credibility, Interactivity, and Engagement as Determinants of Purchase Intention

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Abstract

The rapid growth of TikTok has transformed influencer marketing, particularly in shaping consumer decision-making in high-involvement and luxury markets. While prior studies have examined influencer effects on purchase intention, existing findings remain fragmented and limited attention has been given to how influencer credibility, interactivity and content engagement collectively influence consumer behaviour. This study aims to systematically review the literature on TikTok influencer marketing to synthesise current knowledge and identify research gaps related to purchase intention. Guided by the PRISMA framework, this systematic review analyses peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2019 and 2025, sourced from Scopus and Web of Science databases to focus on studies examining influencer credibility, interactivity and engagement within TikTok and related short-video platforms. The review reveals that influencer credibility, particularly trustworthiness and expertise plays a central role in shaping purchase intention. Interactivity enhances consumer–influencer relationships by fostering perceived social presence and parasocial interaction. Meanwhile content engagement especially emotional and behavioural engagement acts as a key mechanism driving consumer responses. However, the findings also highlight a strong concentration of studies in fashion and beauty industries, with limited research addressing luxury automotive contexts and emerging markets such as Malaysia. This study contributes by consolidating existing research on TikTok influencer marketing and proposing a structured agenda for future empirical studies. The findings provide a theoretical foundation for understanding digital influence in luxury consumption and support the development of future models examining purchase intention in the luxury automotive industry.

Keywords: Tiktok, Influencer Credibility, Content Engagement, Purchase Intention, Luxury Marketing; Systematic Literature Review

Introduction

The rapid rise of social media has significantly transformed how consumers interact with brands, particularly in the context of influencer marketing. Among emerging platforms, TikTok has gained exceptional global attention due to its short-form video format, algorithm-driven content distribution and high levels of user engagement. Unlike traditional social media platforms, TikTok encourages dynamic interaction, creative storytelling and emotional connection, making it a powerful tool for influencing consumer attitudes and purchase decisions (Wang, 2025). Research indicates that short-form video content and influencer interactions can shape consumer trust, engagement, and subsequent purchase decisions (Luo et al., 2025). These features differentiate TikTok from more established platforms and raise important questions about its implications for luxury consumption and high-involvement purchase behaviour.

Previous research has consistently shown that influencer marketing can positively influence purchase intention by enhancing brand awareness, trust and perceived value (Abou Ali et al., 2021; Fernando & Prabowo, 2024; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Key concepts such as influencer credibility, interactivity and content engagement are often identified as central drivers of consumer response (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencer credibility often defined in terms of trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity has shown to affect consumer perceptions and purchase intentions across different product categories (AlFarraj et al., 2021). For example, studies examining TikTok influencers report that perceived authenticity and credibility significantly influence brand recommendations and consumer willingness to buy (Selezneva, 2024). Short-video content characteristics such as entertainment value and perceived usefulness also play significant roles in shaping consumer trust and purchase intention (Luo et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of literature on influencer marketing, existing studies remain fragmented across platforms, industries, and theoretical perspectives. Much of the prior research has focused on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, while TikTok-related studies are still emerging and often lack theoretical integration. Furthermore, research has largely concentrated on low to medium involvement industries, particularly fashion, beauty and lifestyle products. Consistent with findings in the Malaysian context, prior research has shown that marketing technologies and interactive digital platforms significantly influence online purchasing behaviour by shaping consumer trust, engagement, and decision-making processes, particularly among fashion consumers (Lasi et al., 2021). Comparatively little attention has been given to luxury and high-involvement consumption contexts such as the luxury automotive industry, where purchasing decisions are complex, financially significant and strongly influenced by trust and perceived brand value.

The importance of this topic is amplified by three critical developments. First, TikTok's livestream commerce model integrates real-time interactivity, parasocial communication and algorithmic amplification. Unlike traditional advertising, livestream influencers engage audiences through immediate feedback loops, question-answer sessions, social proof cues and immersive storytelling. These characteristics may significantly alter how credibility is perceived and how trust is developed. However, the literature remains fragmented regarding which influencer attributes most strongly predict purchase intention in such dynamic digital settings.

Secondly, luxury consumption increasingly relies on digital touchpoints. Younger affluent consumers particularly Millennials and Generation Z are using TikTok not only for entertainment but also for product discovery, brand evaluation and peer validation. As luxury brands expand into digital-native platforms, understanding the determinants of purchase intention within these spaces becomes strategically essential. Without systematic synthesis, both scholars and practitioners lack clarity on how credibility, interactivity and engagement collectively influence behavioural outcomes.

Thirdly, trust has emerged as a central psychological mechanism in digital commerce. In online environments where physical product inspection is absent, trust functions as a risk-reduction tool. Yet prior research often examines trust either as a direct predictor of purchase intention or as a peripheral construct, without systematically integrating it as a mediating mechanism linking influencer attributes to behavioural intention. The absence of theoretical integration limits the explanatory power of current models.

Given these gaps, a systematic review is both timely and necessary. Rather than contributing another isolated empirical study, this research synthesises existing findings to identify dominant theoretical frameworks, methodological patterns, measurement approaches and empirical inconsistencies. By doing so, it provides conceptual clarity on how influencer credibility, interactivity, and engagement operate as determinants of purchase intention, particularly within luxury contexts and TikTok-based environments.

In addition, the majority of influencer marketing studies are conducted in Western or developed market contexts, resulting in limited understanding of consumer behaviour in emerging markets (Vrontis et al., 2021). Malaysia, as a growing luxury consumption market with high social media penetration and increasing TikTok usage, remains under-represented in the literature (Chopra et al., 2021). This lack of contextual diversity raises concerns about the generalisability of existing findings and highlights the need for a structured synthesis of current research to identify gaps and future research directions.

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become a new type of product endorser. They create their own content and are usually rewarded either with money or free products and services (Syrdal et al., 2023). SMIs as independent third-party endorsers who use social media platforms to influence the beliefs and attitudes of their followers (Nafees et al., 2021). In today's digital marketplace, consumers increasingly use social media platforms to search for information before making purchase decisions. Many follow SMIs to obtain product recommendations, reviews, and personal experiences that help them evaluate products and services (Ermeç, 2022; Nafees et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). On platforms such as TikTok, influencer content plays an important role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase intention, particularly in high-involvement and luxury consumption contexts. Compared to traditional advertising, influencer endorsements often face lower consumer resistance because they are perceived as more authentic, relatable and credible (Alves de Castro & Carthy, 2021). This perceived authenticity strengthens trust and engagement, which are key factors influencing purchase intention in influencer marketing research.

Given these limitations, a systematic review is necessary to consolidate existing knowledge and provide a comprehensive overview of how TikTok influencer credibility, interactivity, and

engagement have been conceptualised and empirically examined in relation to purchase intention. Unlike narrative reviews, a systematic literature review (SLR) offers a transparent and rigorous approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesising prior studies (Pati & Lorusso, 2018). Such an approach is particularly valuable for early-stage of research as it establishes a strong theoretical foundation and informs the development of future empirical models.

This study is significant because it provides critical theoretical, managerial and strategic insights into how influencer credibility, interactivity and engagement on TikTok shape purchase intention within high-involvement luxury markets. For researchers, the study advances influencer marketing and digital consumer behaviour literature by synthesising fragmented findings into a coherent framework that clarifies the mechanisms linking influencer attributes to behavioural outcomes. For luxury brand managers particularly in sectors such as automotive, fashion and premium lifestyle products. The findings offer evidence-based guidance on selecting influencers, designing livestream strategies and optimising engagement features to enhance consumer trust and conversion effectiveness. Digital marketers and platform strategists benefit from understanding how algorithm-driven interactivity and parasocial communication influence high-value purchase decisions. Additionally, policymakers and industry regulators may draw insights regarding transparency, credibility standards and ethical influencer practices in digital commerce. Ultimately, the study contributes practical value to businesses seeking competitive advantage in TikTok-driven luxury markets while offering a robust foundation for future empirical research in high-risk, high-investment consumer decision-making contexts.

Accordingly, this study systematically reviews existing literature to examine how TikTok influencer credibility, interactivity, and content engagement have been conceptualised and linked to purchase intention, particularly within luxury and high-involvement consumption contexts. By literature review (SLR) offers a transparent and rigorous approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesising, research methods, contextual trends, and key findings related to TikTok influencer marketing.

This systematic literature review pursues four main objectives: (1) to identifies the dominant theories underpinning research on TikTok influencer marketing and purchase intention. (2) To examines how influencer credibility, interactivity and content engagement are conceptualised and operationalised in existing studies. (3) To analyses research trends, contexts and methodological approaches within the TikTok influencer marketing literature. Finally, (4) to identifies key theoretical and contextual gaps and proposes a future research framework for luxury automotive marketing, particularly in emerging markets such as Malaysia.

Moreover, in order to achieve these objectives, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What theories underpin TikTok influencer marketing and purchase intention research?, (2) How are influencer credibility, interactivity, and engagement defined and measured in existing studies?, (3) What industries and cultural contexts dominate current TikTok influencer research? And (4) What gaps exist in relation to luxury automotive and emerging-market contexts, particularly Malaysia?

By addressing these questions, this review aims to contribute to the influencer marketing literature in three key ways. First, it offers a structured synthesis of theoretical and empirical insights related to TikTok influencer effects on purchase intention. Second, it highlights underexplored contexts and methodological limitations within existing research. Finally, it proposes a future research agenda that supports the development of empirical studies on luxury automotive marketing in emerging markets, thereby laying a solid foundation for subsequent research.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach, combining bibliometric analysis and content analysis. This is to examine existing research on TikTok influencer credibility, interactivity, engagement and their relationship with purchase intention. The integration of these two methods allows for both a quantitative overview of research trends and a qualitative synthesis of key concepts and findings. This mixed-review approach has been widely used in marketing and consumer behaviour research to ensure rigour, transparency, and comprehensive knowledge mapping (Donthu et al., 2021).

Sample Selection and Data Collection

The sample for this study consists of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2026. The review period was selected to reflect the emergence and rapid growth of TikTok as a marketing platform. Academic databases including Scopus and Web of Science were used due to their wide coverage and quality control standards. A systematic search strategy was developed using combinations of keywords such as 'TikTok', 'influencer credibility', 'interactivity', 'engagement' and 'purchase intention'.

Inclusion criteria were defined to ensure relevance and quality. Only journal articles written in English, focusing on influencer marketing, short-video platforms, or purchase intention were included. Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, and non-empirical articles were excluded. The screening process followed PRISMA guidelines, involving title screening, abstract review, and full-text assessment to ensure transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021). The final dataset represents studies across different industries, platforms and cultural contexts.

Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis was conducted to identify publication trends, influential authors, leading journals, dominant keywords, and thematic structures within the literature. This technique enables an objective and quantitative assessment of large volumes of academic publications (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Bibliometric indicators such as publication frequency, citation counts, and keyword co-occurrence were analysed to reveal the intellectual structure and evolution of TikTok influencer marketing research.

The analysis was performed using bibliometric software tools such as Bibliometrix and VOSviewer, which are widely used in social science and marketing research (Donthu et al., 2021). These tools support visual mapping and network analysis, allowing the identification of research clusters and emerging themes related to influencer credibility, interactivity, engagement and purchase intention.

Content Analysis

Following the bibliometric analysis, content analysis was employed to conduct an in-depth qualitative examination of the selected studies. This involved systematically coding and categorising key elements such as theoretical frameworks, variable definitions, measurement approaches, research contexts, and main findings. Content analysis enables researchers to move beyond descriptive patterns and interpret how constructs are conceptualised and operationalised across studies (Krippendorff, 2018).

By combining bibliometric and content analysis, this study provides a structured synthesis of existing knowledge and identifies theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps. This approach supports the development of a future research framework for examining purchase intention in the luxury automotive industry, particularly within emerging markets such as Malaysia.

Refining Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency and methodological rigour in identifying and screening relevant literature.

For the identification, an initial database search was conducted using Scopus and Web of Science, resulting in a total of 612 records (Scopus = 382; Web of Science = 230). The search utilised predefined keywords related to TikTok, influencer credibility, interactivity, engagement, and purchase intention. Then, after the removal of 164 duplicate records, a total of 448 unique articles remained for further screening. The reason for exclusion at this stage is to duplicate publications across databases.

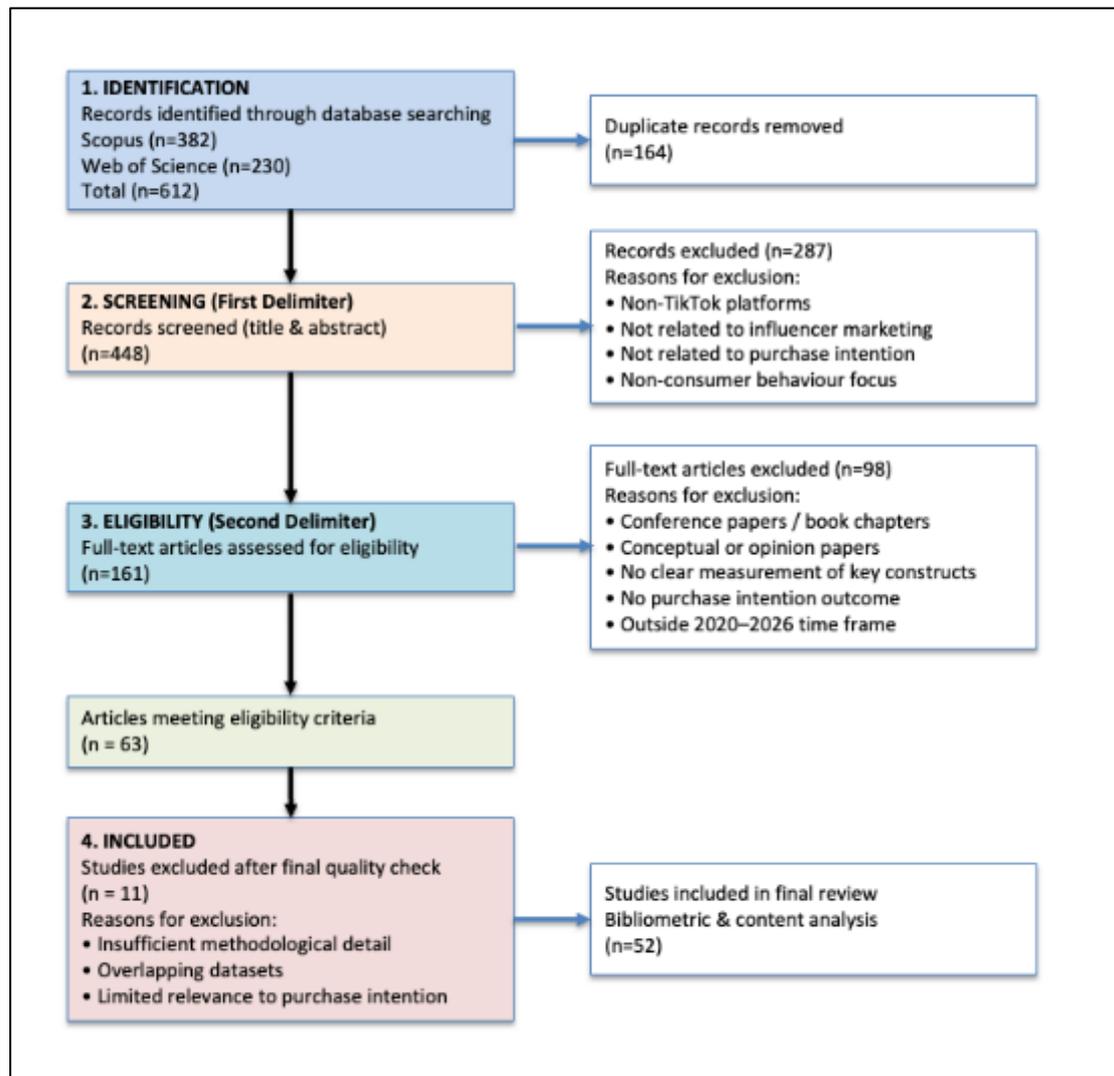


Figure 1.1 PRISMA Flow Diagram for Study Selection Process (Created by author).

Findings of the Bibliometric and Content Analysis

Following the systematic screening process illustrated in the PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process, a final dataset of 52 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2026 was included for bibliometric and content analysis. This dataset provides a structured representation of current scientific knowledge on TikTok influencer marketing, with particular emphasis on influencer credibility, interactivity, engagement, and purchase intention.

Bibliometric Analysis Findings

Bibliometric analysis was conducted to generate an overall picture of the intellectual structure and research trends within the selected literature. Knowledge mapping techniques, such as keyword co-occurrence and publication trend analysis, reveal a clear growth trajectory in TikTok-related influencer marketing research, particularly after 2021. This increase reflects the platform's rapid commercialisation and growing academic interest in short-video marketing environments.

Keyword co-occurrence mapping indicates that “purchase intention”, “influencer credibility”, “engagement”, “trust” and “parasocial interaction” are the most frequently connected concepts, suggesting a strong behavioural and psychological orientation in existing studies. However, the mapping also shows that research clusters are heavily concentrated around fashion, beauty, and lifestyle industries, with limited representation of high-involvement or luxury sectors. From a geographical perspective, the majority of publications originate from developed economies, while emerging markets particularly Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia remain under-represented.

From an outlet perspective, the literature is dispersed across marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital media journals, indicating the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Overall, bibliometric mapping proves valuable in identifying dominant themes, influential constructs, and structural gaps in the literature, offering researchers a comprehensive overview of how scientific knowledge in this area has evolved (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021).

Content Analysis Findings

To complement the quantitative insights from bibliometric mapping, content analysis was conducted to examine how key constructs are theoretically grounded and operationalised. The analysis reveals that most studies adopt theories such as Source Credibility Theory, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, and Parasocial Interaction Theory to explain the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase intention. Influencer credibility is commonly measured through trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity, while interactivity is operationalised through perceived responsiveness, two-way communication, and social presence.

Content engagement is predominantly conceptualised as a multidimensional construct, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement. However, variations in measurement scales and methodological approaches are evident, highlighting a lack of standardisation across studies. Methodologically, the majority of studies rely on cross-sectional survey designs, with limited use of experimental or longitudinal methods. Importantly, content analysis further confirms the scarcity of studies focusing on luxury automotive contexts and emerging markets, reinforcing the research gaps identified through bibliometric mapping.

Value of Knowledge Mapping for Future Research

Taken together, the bibliometric and content analysis findings demonstrate that knowledge mapping provides an effective overview of the scientific landscape, enabling researchers to identify dominant research streams, theoretical foundations, and underexplored areas. By linking these findings to the PRISMA-guided selection process, this study offers a transparent and structured synthesis of existing literature. The results support the need for future empirical research that extends influencer marketing theory into luxury automotive and emerging-market contexts, particularly within Malaysia.

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Key Themes Identified from Bibliometric and Content Analysis (n = 52)

Theme	Description	Frequency (No. of Studies)	Percentage (%)
Influencer Credibility	Trustworthiness, expertise, authenticity, and perceived honesty of influencers	41	78.8
Content Engagement	Emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement with influencer content	38	73.1
Interactivity	Two-way communication, responsiveness, social presence, and interaction features	34	65.4
Purchase Intention	Consumer willingness or intention to purchase products or services	46	88.5
Parasocial Interaction	One-sided emotional bonds between influencers and followers	29	55.8
Brand Attitude	Consumer evaluation and perception of the promoted brand	27	51.9
Platform Focus (TikTok)	Studies explicitly focusing on TikTok as the primary platform	32	61.5
Industry Context (Fashion/Beauty/Lifestyle)	Low- to medium-involvement consumer industries	39	75.0
Luxury / High-Involvement Products	Luxury, automotive, or high-risk purchase contexts	9	17.3
Emerging Market Contexts	Studies conducted in Southeast Asia, developing economies	11	21.2

Discussion

The keyword co-occurrence mapping reveals that “purchase intention,” “influencer credibility,” “engagement,” “trust,” and “parasocial interaction” form the most interconnected cluster within the dataset. This clustering pattern indicates that existing TikTok influencer marketing research is strongly oriented toward behavioural and psychological explanations of consumer decision-making rather than purely technological or platform-based analysis. The dominance of these constructs suggests that the literature views TikTok primarily as a persuasive communication environment that shapes internal consumer states and behavioural outcomes.

Emergent theme 1: Purchase Intention as the Central Behavioural Outcome

The mapping clearly positions purchase intention at the core of the network, confirming its role as the primary dependent variable across studies. This reflects a strong managerial orientation in influencer marketing research, where the ultimate objective is behavioural conversion. The prominence of purchase intention indicates that researchers are less focused on awareness or attitudes alone and more concerned with measurable behavioural outcomes. However, this centrality also suggests that other long-term relational outcomes such as brand loyalty or customer lifetime value remain relatively underexplored.

In the context of luxury consumption, this emphasis on purchase intention is particularly significant. Luxury purchases involve high financial risk, symbolic value and extended decision processes. Therefore, understanding how digital stimuli translate into purchase intention becomes theoretically and practically important.

Emergent theme 2: Influencer Credibility and Trust as Foundational Constructs

The close linkage between influencer credibility and trust highlights the foundational role of credibility perceptions in digital persuasion. Keyword clustering suggests that trust operates both as a component of credibility and as a mediating psychological state. This supports the extension of Source Credibility Theory into short-video environments, where authenticity and expertise are crucial in overcoming scepticism associated with sponsored content.

In luxury and high-involvement contexts, credibility becomes even more critical. Consumers may rely more heavily on credible influencers to reduce perceived financial and performance risk. The mapping suggests that trust is not merely an outcome but a structural pillar within the influencer–consumer relationship.

Emergent theme 3: Engagement as a Multi-Dimensional Psychological Mechanism

The strong association between engagement and purchase intention reflects the importance of emotional and behavioural immersion in short-video platforms. Unlike static social media formats, TikTok's algorithm promotes repeated exposure, interactive participation, and emotionally driven content consumption. The co-occurrence network suggests that engagement acts as a bridge between external stimuli (influencer content) and internal psychological responses.

However, the literature appears to emphasise emotional engagement more than cognitive evaluation. This imbalance suggests an opportunity for future research to examine how rational assessment and perceived informational value function in high-involvement purchases such as luxury automotive products.

Emergent theme 4: Parasocial Interaction as a Relational Driver

The clustering of parasocial interaction with trust and engagement reveals that influencer effectiveness is relational rather than purely informational. TikTok's interactive affordances such as comments, live sessions, short-form storytelling facilitate perceived closeness between influencers and followers. The mapping suggests that parasocial interaction functions as a mediating mechanism that strengthens the translation of credibility and engagement into behavioural intention.

This emerging relational perspective aligns with the understanding that digital consumers do not simply process persuasive messages; they form emotional attachments to media personalities. In luxury contexts, such attachments may amplify aspirational identification and symbolic consumption.

Emergent theme 5: Behavioural–Psychological Dominance and Theoretical Implications

Overall, the keyword network demonstrates a clear behavioural–psychological dominance in the literature. Technological features of TikTok such as algorithms, video format appear secondary to relational and cognitive constructs. This suggests that influencer marketing research remains rooted in classical persuasion and consumer psychology theories, even within rapidly evolving digital environments.

For future research, especially in Malaysia’s luxury automotive industry, this insight implies that empirical studies should prioritise psychological mediators such as trust, parasocial interaction, engagement when examining purchase intention. At the same time, integrating contextual moderators such as luxury value perception and consumer involvement may enhance explanatory power.

Conclusion

This study systematically reviewed existing literature on TikTok influencer marketing to synthesise how influencer credibility, interactivity, and content engagement influence purchase intention. Guided by a PRISMA-based selection process and supported by bibliometric and content analysis, the findings provide a structured overview of current theoretical and empirical developments between 2020 and 2026.

The review confirms that Source Credibility Theory remains highly relevant in explaining influencer effectiveness, particularly through dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity. Across studies, credibility consistently reduces perceived risk and strengthens persuasive impact, reinforcing its importance in digital environments characterised by high information exposure and algorithm-driven content distribution.

Furthermore, the findings support the continued applicability of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework in social media contexts. Influencer attributes and interactive features function as external stimuli that shape internal psychological states such as trust, emotional engagement, and perceived closeness which subsequently influence purchase intention. In this regard, TikTok’s short-video format enhances emotional and behavioural engagement, highlighting the platform’s distinct persuasive dynamics.

Importantly, the review underscores the theoretical relevance of Parasocial Interaction Theory. Interactivity and engagement consistently foster one-sided relational bonds between influencers and followers, which mediate the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase intention. This finding strengthens the understanding of digital influence as relational rather than purely informational.

Despite these theoretical advancements, the analysis reveals significant contextual limitations. Most existing studies focus on low- to medium-involvement product categories and Western markets, with limited research examining luxury or high-involvement purchases,

particularly in emerging economies such as Malaysia. This imbalance highlights the need to refine and extend influencer marketing theory into more complex consumption environments.

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