Exploring the Influence of Fashion Influencer Attributes on Perceived Authenticity and Attitude Toward the Influencer: Implications for Purchase Intention.

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Abstract
Social media influencer marketing has developed as a powerful marketing tool in the fashion industry, enabling brands to reach consumers through personalized endorsements. Despite the proliferation of research on influencer attributes, limited empirical evidence exists on how these attributes influence purchase intention via psychological mechanisms such as perceived authenticity and attitude toward the influencer. This study proposes a model incorporating seven influencer attributes—content usefulness, content accuracy, trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, image match-up, and relevance—and examines their effects on perceived authenticity and attitude towards the influencers. A survey of 516 Indian consumers was conducted, and the data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The result of this study shows that not all influencer attributes have significant impacts on perceived authenticity and attitude towards the influencers. The study shows that perceived authenticity and attitude towards the influencers have significant effect on consumer purchase intention. The study contributes to influencer marketing literature and offers a significant guidance to brands while selecting influencers.
Keywords: Social media influencer, perceived authenticity, attitude toward influencer, purchase intention, fashion marketing, PLS-SEM

1. Introduction
1.1 The Rise of Social Media and Influencer Culture
Over the past decade, the immense growth of social media tools has evolved the marketing scenario across the globe. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become powerful social media platform for brands to interact with consumers directly. In particular, Instagram has evolved from a simple photo-sharing application into a sophisticated ecosystem were visual storytelling drives consumer behaviour.

According to the Digital 2024 Global Overview Report (Datareportal, 2024), over 5.3 billion people worldwide use the internet, and 4.9 billion are active social media users. India alone accounts for over 750 million internet users, with more than 500 million social media accounts—a figure projected to cross 800 million by 2026. Among these users, Generation Z and Millennials represent the largest cohorts, spending an average of 2.5 hours daily on social networks.

This shift of consumers from traditional platform to social media platform has encouraged the marketer to make changes in their marketing strategies and traditional channel, and adapt influencer-driven campaigns. Influencers are those individuals who have cultivated substantial online followings and leverage their reach and perceived credibility to shape consumer opinions and purchasing decisions. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as social media influencer marketing (SMIM).

1.2 Social Media Influencer Marketing and Indian Fashion Industry
The fashion industry, characterized by rapid product cycles, aesthetic appeal, and trend-driven consumption, has embraced influencer marketing with

particular enthusiasm. Fashion influencers are individuals who curate their personal style, share outfit ideas, and review products, thereby creating aspirational narratives that resonate with their audiences.

The Indian fashion market, valued at approximately USD 75 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2023), is expected to continue growing due to increased internet penetration, rising disposable incomes, and the popularity of fast fashion brands. Around 68% of online shoppers in urban India follow fashion influencers for latest style and trends inspirations and product endorsements (IAMAI, 2024). Today fashion influencers not only act as content creators but also play a major role as trust advisors. Their posts often blend personal stories, product endorsements, and lifestyle imagery. As compared to traditional marketers, fashion influencers are considered more relatable, and their endorsements often come across as authentic rather than overtly commercial.

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Influencer Effectiveness

To understand why influencer marketing works, researchers have drawn upon several theories. The Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990) posits that an endorser's effectiveness depends on perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Similarly, the Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990) argues that the congruence between an endorser's image and the product significantly enhances persuasion.

1.4 Research Gap and Rationale

While several studies have examined the direct effects of influencer attributes on consumer attitudes and behaviors (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), fewer have explored mediated pathways, especially in the Indian context. For instance, perceived authenticity—defined as the consumer's belief that an influencer's recommendations are genuine—has emerged as a critical factor but remains underexplored in empirical research (Lee & Austin, 2021).

Moreover, although the role of attitude toward the influencer has been acknowledged (Spry et al., 2011), its simultaneous mediation alongside perceived authenticity has not been rigorously tested with fashion products. Given the cultural and economic significance of the Indian fashion market, this gap is particularly notable.

1.5 Research Objectives

Based on the above context, the objectives of this study are:

1.   To explore the effect of various SMIs attributes on consumer's attitude towards the influencers, and
2.   To explore the effect of various SMIs attributes on perceived authenticity of influencer.
3.   To study the impact of consumer's attitude towards the influencer on consumer purchase intention.
4.   To study the impact of perceived authenticity of influencers on consumer purchase intention

2. Literature Review
2.1. Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and their Role in Marketing

SMIs are defined as person who have acquired significant following on various social media platforms and leverage their influence to impact the decision of their audience (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In contrast to conventional celebrities who achieve recognition from mainstream media channels such as movie stars, singers and sports person etc. SMIs are those individuals who gain popularity through their online activities, such as blogging, vlogging, or creating lifestyle content on Instagram or YouTube (Khamis et al., 2016). SMIs are regarded as credible experts in specific niches and are considered as more relatable than movie celebrities due to their perceived similarity to their followers (Jin et al., 2019).

2.2. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of SMIs

To effectively use SMIs in influencer marketing, brands must consider several factors that influence the effectiveness of these endorsements. Three main attributes of SMIs are critical to understanding how they impact consumer behavior: Information values, source credibility, and product match-up.

- **Content Usefulness**: Content usefulness can be defined as the ability of a content creator's posts to help followers make decisions or achieve their goals. When followers perceive content as informative, entertaining, or inspirational, they tend to develop a favourable attitude toward the endorsed brand and develop purchase intentions (Müller & Christandl, 2019).

- **Content Accuracy**: Content Accuracy can be described as perceived correctness of the SMIs claims and recommendations. Influencers whose content is perceived as truthful and reliable can foster greater trust and influence consumer purchase decisions (Wixom & Todd, 2005).

- **Influencer Credibility**: According to Source credibility theory, Credibility of influencer consists of three main dimensions namely, attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990). Trustworthiness reflects how reliable and honest an influencer appears to be, while attractiveness refers to how followers perceived them likable and appealing. Expertise refers to how competent the influencers in particular area, which can significantly affect consumer trust and purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

- **Product Match-up**: Product match-up or Product celebrity congruence suggests that influencer's endorsement effectiveness is increases when followers found that there exists a strong relation between the influencer own characteristics and the product they are endorsing. Product match-up enhances the perceived credibility of the endorsement, fostering higher consumer purchase intentions (Kamins, 1990; Breves et al., 2019)

2.3. Factors Influencing Attitudes Toward Social Media Influencers

Consumers attitude toward SMIs are shaped by various attributes, with the credibility of the influencer being one of the most significant. According to Hovland et al., (1953) trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of an influencer contribute directly to their persuasive power. Trustworthiness of an influencer plays an important role in the context of influencer marketing because followers often base their purchasing decisions on the belief that the influencer genuinely supports the product (Ohanian, 1990).

Recently various previous studies have highlighted the significance of influencer credibility in shaping positive attitudes toward influencers. Liu et al. (2019) in their study suggests that influencers who are considered as credible and authentic, their endorsements are considered as more reliable, which results in higher engagement from customers and more positive attitudes. Similarly, De Veirman et al. (2017) explain that the influencer's expertise in a particular domain, such as beauty or fitness, enhances the influencer's credibility and significantly impacts consumer attitudes toward the endorsed brand. Another critical factor that shapes consumers attitude is similarity i.e., the resemblance between the influencers and audience, which enhances parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). De Veirman et al. (2017) emphasize that influencers who share relatable experiences or lifestyles with their followers ultimately leading to stronger emotional connections, which, in turn, lead to positive attitudes toward the influencer's recommendations.

2.4 SMIs attributes and Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity can be described as how real, and true to themselves consumers find influencer in their interactions. It is a crucial concept in influencer marketing, as consumers are more inclined to follow those influencers whom they presume as authentic in their promotion of products (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This perception of authenticity is often influenced by the influencer's consistency in sharing personal content, alongside their openness about partnerships, and their ability to maintain a strong relationship with their audience.

Studies by Ki et al. (2020) demonstrate that when influencers are viewed as authentic, consumers develop a strong connection to both influencer and the brand they endorse. Marwick (2015) suggests that for building long term relationship with the followers, authenticity of influencer marketing is important. Consumers are more persuaded to trust influencer recommendation and follow those influencers who consistently deliver content aligned with their personal values, rather than those who appear to endorse products for financial gain. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2019) argue that the authenticity of an influencer is closely linked to those influencer's who build a sense of community with their followers. Authentic influencers foster a trust-based relationship, which leads to a stronger emotional connection with the audience. As a result, perceived authenticity is seen as a vital component in driving consumer behavior and affecting attitudes toward products or services being endorsed.

2.5 Impact of Attitudes towards the influencer and Perceived Authenticity in Purchase Intention

Based on review of previous literature it is revealed that both consumers attitudes toward the influencer and perceived authenticity have been considered as major mediators between SMIs attributes and consumers' purchase intention. A positive attitude toward influencers significantly impacts consumers' intention to buy endorsed products, as positive attitudes often lead to greater trust and higher likelihood of buying (Breves et al., 2019). Additionally, influencers who are perceived as honest and reliable often generate stronger purchase intentions among consumers.

According to Ki et al. (2020), consumers attitudes toward the influencer positively affects and act as mediator between source credibility and their intention to purchase. Previous studies suggests that when consumers find an influencer trustworthy, attractive, and credible, they are more inclined to form favourable attitudes, which ultimately leads to an increased purchase intention. Similarly, Bakhshi et al. (2014) found that influencers who maintain an authentic online presence foster greater consumer trust, which positively impacts the likelihood of followers purchasing the products they promoted. In line with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001), perceived authenticity also plays a significant mediating role. Consumers who perceive an influencer as authentic are more inclined to believe and trust their product recommendations, resulting into heightened purchase intention. The trust in the influencer's authenticity acts as a bridge that translates positive attitudes into purchasing behavior (Chen et al., 2019).

The combined impact of attitudes toward the influencer and perceived authenticity on purchase intentions has been emphasised by Breves et al. (2019). Their research suggested that consumers' attitude towards influencers directly act as a determining factor of consumers purchase intentions, while the influencers' perceived authenticity amplifies this effect by making the endorsement appear more genuine and aligned with the consumer's values, thereby promoting purchase.

2.6 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

From the review of previous studies, it is figured out that SMIs attributes can positively influence perceived authenticity of influencers and customers attitude towards influencers. Further research conceives attitude toward the influencer as a direct predictor to purchase intention (Bergkvist et al., 2016). In the same line, the TPB considers purchase intention as a direct outcome of attitude (Ajzen, 2011). Influencer credibility plays a vital role in creation of consumers attitude towards the influencer (Lou & Yuan, 2019), while emotional attachment and perceived credibility enhance this effect (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Studies have shown that accuracy and usefulness of content shared by influencers enhance their perceived authenticity by ensuring that the influencer's message are reliable and relevant (Erkan & Evan, 2016). While other researchers also found that influencer's credibility (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness), also contributes to perceived authenticity. Influencers who are

perceived as knowledgeable and credible are seen as more authentic (McCracken, 1989; Ohanion, 1990). Additionally, the congruence between the influencer's persona and the endorsed product, reinforce perceived authenticity by indicating a sincere and well matched endorsement (Kamins. 1990; Till & Busler, 2000).

Therefore, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H1a–g: The influencers attributes- including (Information values): (a) Content Usefulness and (b) Accuracy; (Influencer credibility): (c) attractiveness, (d) trustworthiness, (e) expertise; (Product Celebrity Match-up): (f) Image Match-up and (g) Relevance, will positively influence consumers' attitude towards the influencer.

H2a–g: The influencers attributes- including (Information values): (a) Content Usefulness and (b) Accuracy; (Influencer credibility): (c) attractiveness, (d) trustworthiness, (e) expertise; (Product Celebrity Match-up: (f) Image Match-up and (g) Relevance, will positively influence perceived authenticity of influencer.

H3: Consumers' attitude toward the influencer is positively associated with the consumers' purchase intention

H4: Perceived Authenticity of Influencer positively associated with the consumers' purchase intention

Figure 1: Conceptual Model
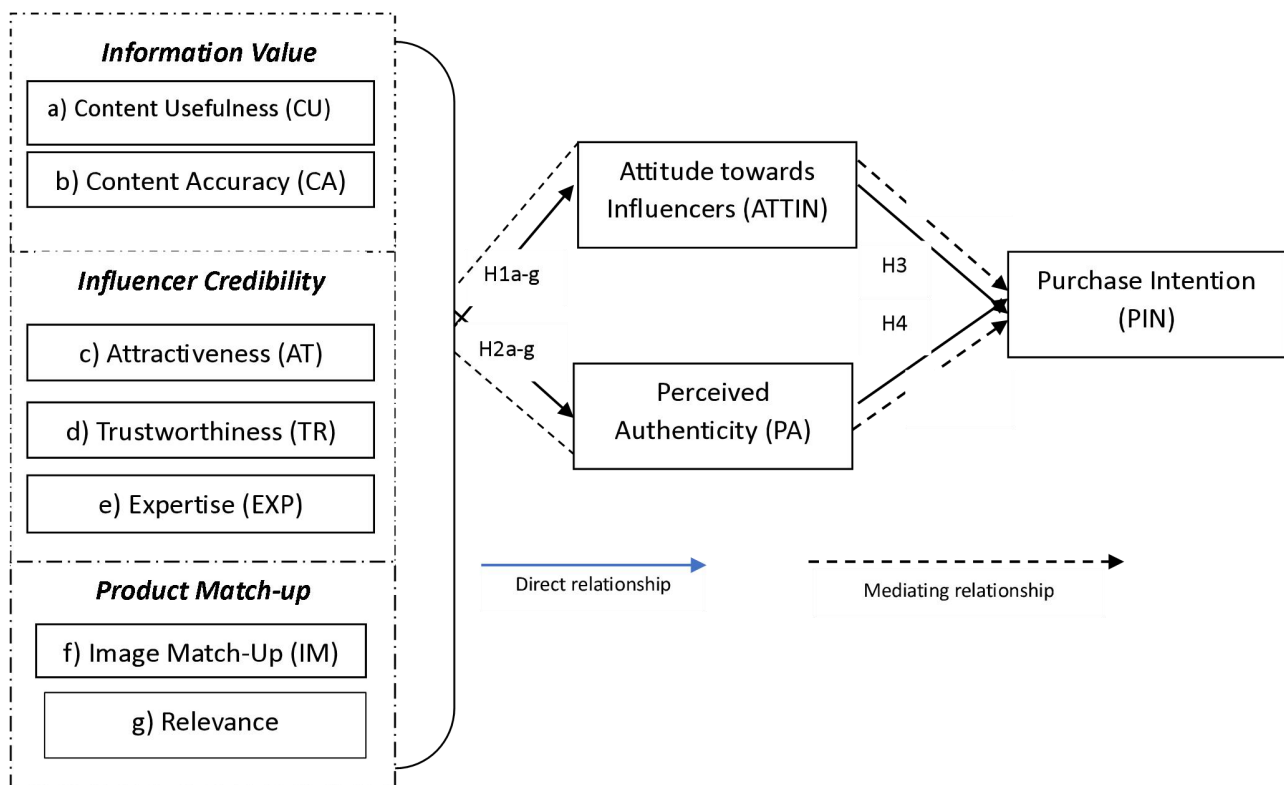
3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

For the purpose of this study a self-administered online questionnaire was designed and to ensure the proper measurement instruments fit, all the measurement items were adapted from previous studies and refined to make to achieve the aim of this study. Based on literature review a conceptual model was developed as shown in Fig. 1. A pilot study was conducted by a convenient sample in Delhi-NCR.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

In order to collect response from participants a convenience sampling method was used to collect data from social media users. As the population size is large and their behavioural pattern is unknown, this study estimated the sample size as suggested by Hair et al. (2021) that for PLS-SEM, the sample should be at least 10 times the maximum number of inner or outer model paths aimed at a particular construct. Given that purchase intention was predicted by 2 mediators and 7 direct paths (totalling 9 predictors), the minimum sample size was: $10 \times 9 = 90$. However, to increase statistical power and generalizability, data were collected from 516 respondents, exceeding recommended thresholds.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

In this study we have used exploratory factor analysis for which SPSS software was used. In order to test conceptual model and hypothesis testing PLS- SEM method was used for data analysis. In this research to test conceptual model Smart PLS v 4.0 was used.

This section presents the results of the descriptive analysis, measurement model assessment, structural model estimation and hypotheses testing.

4.1 Demographic Profile of the respondents

Demographic profile of 516 respondents used in this study are shown in Table 1. Out of total respondents' majority are male (62%) and 38% were female. The majority of participants were falling in younger age group of 15 to 25 years (69%), followed by 25 to 35 years age group (24.4%). Notably, 66.7% of respondents were students as majority of participants are from age group of 15-25 years; the next largest cohort were engaged in government job followed by private job. Majority of the participants (49.6%) were undergraduate and significant proportion of respondents (61%) had family monthly income of less than Rs. 25,000.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of demographic profile of respondents

Demographic criteria	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	320	62
	Female	196	38
	15-25 Years	356	69.0
	25-35 Years	126	24.4
	35-45 Years	28	5.4
	Above 45 Years	6	1.2
Age	Married	313	64.0
	High School	12	2.3
	Intermediate	61	11.8
Qualification	Graduate	256	49.6
	Post Graduate	153	29.7
Occupation	Government Job	78	15.1
	Private Job	71	13.8

4.2. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

To test the sample adequacy of each variable in the model Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was used. It is usually use to measure suitability of data for factor analysis. At the same time, Bartlett's test of sphericity was applied to check if the correlation matrix is indeed an identity (Hair et al., 2021). Table 2 shows the KMO value of 0.975 which is greater than acceptable value 0.70 in social science research and Bartlett's test of sphericity is also significant at $p < 0.05$. The result shows that data is suitable for factor analysis.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.978
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	20474.406
	Df	703
	Sig.	0.000

4.3. Reliability and validity

In order to test reliability and validity of measurement model, this study use Smart Pls 4 software for Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (PLS- SEM). To test the reliability Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR) was used. In this study Cronbach's α of all the ten construct is in range from 0.780 to 0.950 and CR of all constructs is greater than 0.70, as shown in table 3, which surpassed the threshold of 0.70, indicating construct satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2021).

The average variance extracted (AVE) used to test the convergent validity. Previous studies suggested that model can show excellent convergent validity if its AVE value is greater than 0.50 and items loading for each construct is greater than 0.70 (Chin, 2010). In this research the AVE of the constructs are within range of 0.758 to 0.889. Thus, shows convergent validity achieved.

The discriminant validity was tested using the square root of the AVE and Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 5, discriminant validity is achieved as the square root of AVE of each construct was higher than correlation with other constructs. Furthermore, HTMT ratio were below the threshold value of 0.85, taking (Henseler et al., 2015) into account, the factors verified the discriminant validity (see Table 4).

Table 3: Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	(AVE)
AT	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.799
ATTIN	0.914	0.915	0.94	0.796
CA	0.892	0.892	0.933	0.822
CU	0.877	0.882	0.924	0.802
EXP	0.942	0.942	0.956	0.811
IM	0.876	0.876	0.941	0.889
PA	0.938	0.938	0.953	0.801
PIN	0.918	0.919	0.948	0.86
R	0.78	0.781	0.901	0.82
TR	0.92	0.922	0.94	0.758

Table 4: HTMT

	AT	ATTIN	CA	CU	EXP	IM	PA	PIN	R	TR
AT										
ATTIN	0.83									
CA	0.822	0.79								
CU	0.841	0.783	0.841							
EXP	0.815	0.851	0.809	0.809						
IM	0.726	0.799	0.743	0.652	0.786					
PA	0.825	0.898	0.784	0.795	0.857	0.741				
PIN	0.798	0.835	0.807	0.768	0.783	0.722	0.818			
R	0.806	0.891	0.776	0.795	0.833	0.835	0.83	0.783		
TR	0.859	0.814	0.85	0.832	0.886	0.774	0.83	0.85	0.834	

Table 5: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	AT	ATTIN	CA	CU	EXP	IM	PA	PIN	R	TR
AT	0.894									
ATTIN	0.774	0.892								
CA	0.757	0.714	0.907							
CU	0.768	0.704	0.745	0.896						
EXP	0.771	0.79	0.742	0.737	0.901					
IM	0.662	0.715	0.657	0.572	0.714	0.943				
PA	0.778	0.831	0.718	0.723	0.807	0.672	0.895			
PIN	0.745	0.766	0.732	0.691	0.729	0.648	0.76	0.927		
R	0.694	0.753	0.648	0.658	0.714	0.691	0.71	0.663	0.905	
TR	0.802	0.748	0.77	0.748	0.826	0.694	0.772	0.781	0.705	0.871

4.4 Measurement Model Assessment
Conceptual model testing

To test the hypothesis and relationship between variables, t-statistics were employed. The T-statistics revealed the statistical significance of the estimated path coefficients (β) at a certain level (Hair et al., 2012). In this study, PLS SEM bootstrapping method was used and t value higher than 1.96 considered as significant at p<0.05. (Martinez and Aluja, 2009) The results of our analysis are presented in Table 6, it shows that out of seven SMIs attributes – attractiveness (AT), expertise (EXP), Image Match-up (IM) and Relevance (R) were found to have statistically significant influence on consumers' attitudes towards influencers and hence, thereby supporting hypotheses H1c, H1e, H1f and H1g. Moreover, regarding perceived authenticity, the influencers attributes such as, Content Usefulness (CU), attractiveness (AT), expertise (EXP), and Relevance (R) are statistically significant, thus supporting hypotheses H2a, H2c, H2e and H2g. Finally, the study examined the association between consumers' attitudes towards the influencer (ATTIN) and perceived authenticity (PA) on purchase intention, the result demonstrate the positive and significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions, which confirm hypotheses H3 and H4 as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Path Coefficient and Hypotheses testing result

Hypotheses	Path	B	T value	P value	Result	Hypotheses	Path	β	T value	P value	Result
H1 a	CU -> ATTIN	0.058	1.099	0.272	Not Supported	H2 a	CU -> PA	0.092	1.967	0.049	Supported
H1 b	CA -> ATTIN	0.065	1.300	0.194	Not Supported	H2 b	CA -> PA	0.0055	1.082	0.279	Not Supported
H1 c	AT -> ATTIN	0.227	2.977	0.003	Supported	H2 c	AT -> PA	0.2218	3.316	0.001	Supported

| H1 d | TR -> ATTIN | -0.013 | 0.231 | 0.817 | Not Supported | H2 d | TR -> PA | 0.086 | 1.491 | 0.136 | Not Supported |
H1 e	EXP -> ATTIN	0.260	4.405	0.000	Supported	H2 e	EXP -> PA	0.325	5.641	0.000	Supported
H1 f	IM -> ATTIN	0.149	3.410	0.001	Supported	H2 f	IM -> PA	0.057	1.534	0.125	Not Supported
H1 g	R -> ATTIN	0.235	4.660	0.000	Supported	H2 g	R -> PA	0.1311	2.720	0.007	Supported
H3	**ATTIN -> PIN**	0.433	6.288	0.000	Supported	H4	**PA -> PIN**	0.4000	6.032	0.000	Supported
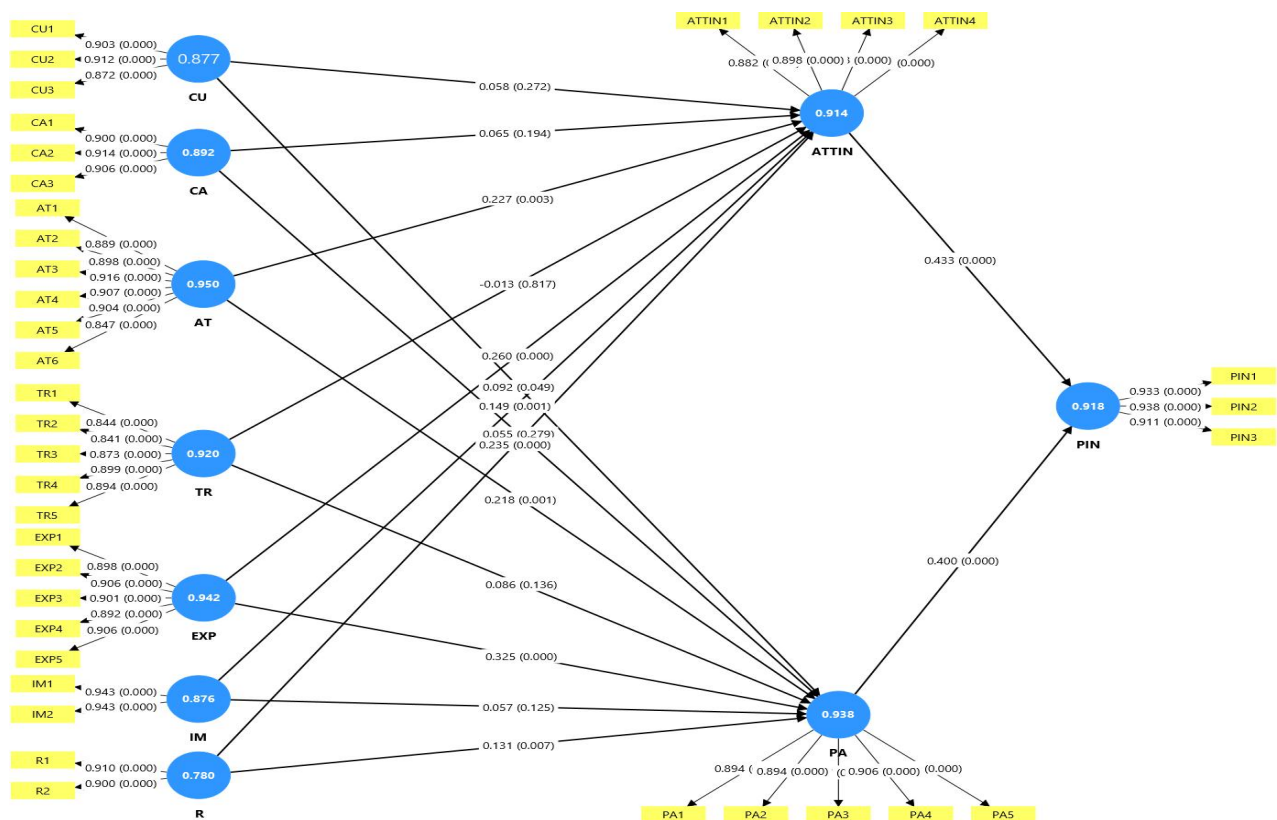
Figure 2: Path diagram

5. Discussion
5.1 Overview of Key Findings
The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of social media influencer (SMI) attributes on consumers attitude towards the influencers and their perceived authenticity in the context of Indian

fashion industry. This study explores the roles of perceived authenticity and attitude toward the influencer on consumers purchase intention. The results provide useful insights into how different characteristics drive or fail to drive consumer purchase intention.

First, **Expertise (EXP)** consistently emerged as the most significant predictor of perceived authenticity and consumers attitude toward the influencer. This underscores the critical role that perceived competence plays in influencing consumers' trust and decisions.

Second, **Attractiveness (ATT)** and **Relevance (R)** demonstrated significant direct and indirect effects, confirming that visual appeal and alignment with consumer interests strongly impact the perceived credibility of endorsements.

Third, **Content Usefulness (CU)** showed a modest but significant impact on perceived authenticity and indirect influence on purchase intention. This indicates that while content that is practically helpful contributes to positive perceptions, it is not the strongest driver in a fashion context, where aesthetic and lifestyle factors dominate.

Fourth, **Content Accuracy (CA)** and **Trustworthiness (TR)** did not significantly predict purchase intention or the mediators. These findings are consistent with Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), who argued that in visually-oriented platforms, consumers may deprioritize factual correctness in Favor of style and relatability.

5.2 Conclusion
This research demonstrates that influencer marketing's effectiveness hinges on a combination of factors, with perceived authenticity emerging as the most important mediator. Expertise, attractiveness, and relevance drive authenticity and attitudes, leading to higher purchase intention. Trustworthiness and content accuracy, while traditionally seen as central to credibility, are less important in this visual, aspirational context.

These findings underscore that successful influencer campaigns in fashion must go beyond follower counts and focus on credibility signals that resonate emotionally with consumers.

5.3 Limitations of the study and future research
This research contributed important and meaningful insights into the impact of SMIs attributes on consumer psychological behavior in the Indian fashion industry, but it also has some limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the research was limited to one industry i.e., fashion industry and only focused on Indian consumers. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalised in other industries such as beauty, technology, or lifestyle, or to consumers in different cultural or geographic settings. Future research could expand to these areas to compare results.

Another important limitation is that although this study explored how influencer attributes relate to perceived authenticity, attitude towards the influencer, and purchase intention, the mediation effects of consumers attitude towards the influencer and perceived authenticity were not formally tested using mediation analysis techniques. Future studies should conduct mediation analysis to statistically verify whether perceived authenticity and attitudes truly act as mediators between influencer attributes and purchase intention. This would strengthen the theoretical understanding of how and why these variables influence consumer decisions.

Finally, this research did not examine differences across social media platforms. Since user behavior and expectations vary between platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, future studies could compare these platforms to see if influencer attributes have different impacts depending on the platform.

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