

The Influence of Social Media Influencers on Students’ Purchase Intentions: Evidence from Instagram Marketing in University Communities

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received:20 Dec 2024 Revised:05 Sept 2025 Accepted: 01 Nov 2025	<p>This study investigates how social media influencers shape students’ purchase intentions within university communities through Instagram marketing. It examines the effects of influencer credibility, authenticity, parasocial interaction, peer and social influence, perceived behavioral control, and students’ attitudes toward a product. Guided by the Source Credibility Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, data were collected from 209 Jordanian university students through a structured questionnaire. The composite instrument demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.862). Correlation results showed that influencer credibility, authenticity, attitude, peer and social influence, and perceived behavioral control were positively associated with purchase intention. Multiple regression analysis revealed that influencer credibility, attitude, peer and social influence, and perceived behavioral control were significant positive predictors of purchase intention, whereas authenticity became non-significant in the full model. Mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 indicated that influencer credibility exerted a significant indirect effect on purchase intention through students’ attitudes but not through authenticity. Overall, the findings highlight attitude as a crucial pathway through which credibility translates into intention and offer practical insights for brands seeking to effectively engage university audiences through Instagram-based influencer marketing.</p> <p>Keywords: intention, revealed, perceived, Credibility</p>

1. Introduction

Instagram continues to serve as a major platform for socialization, discovery, and commerce among young adults. In Jordan, Instagram recorded approximately 4.05 million active users at the beginning of 2025, representing around 35% of the total population. This makes the platform an effective tool for conducting marketing campaigns targeting university students. Recent reports, including those from DataReportal (2025), indicate that brands increasingly rely on social media influencers to bridge the gap between commercial advertising and peer-based recommendations. Influencer characteristics such as expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, along with content quality, authenticity, and parasocial relationships, are identified in contemporary literature as key determinants of persuasion and purchasing intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In Jordan, research has begun to emerge, including studies focused on female university students that emphasize the role of influencer advertising in shaping purchasing behavior and highlight demographic and contextual influences (Makhadmeh & Rihani, 2023). However, several research gaps remain. First,

empirical evidence regarding the combined effects of influencer characteristics and relational dynamics within Jordanian university communities is still limited. Second, as brands increase investment in influencer partnerships, there is a need to identify which factors effectively drive purchase intention among students. Third, recent studies have highlighted conditional effects related to message value, sponsorship disclosure, influencer-brand fit, and perceived authenticity of self-presentation, suggesting that persuasion processes are context-dependent and require systematic modeling (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019; Audrezet et al., 2020). Drawing upon the Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this study examines the combined effects of influencer credibility, authenticity, parasocial interaction, peer and social influence, perceived behavioral control, and student attitudes on purchase intention through Instagram marketing. By doing so, it offers a theoretically grounded and context-specific contribution to understanding influencer persuasion mechanisms and their impact on consumer behavior within university settings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Instagram, students, and the Jordanian social media landscape

Jordan's social media landscape has expanded rapidly, with Instagram positioned at its center. According to DataReportal (2025), Instagram had approximately 4.05 million active users at the beginning of 2025, representing an advertising reach equivalent to about 35 percent of the total population. These figures highlight not only the platform's widespread diffusion but also its concentrated advertising potential, as they are derived from Meta's advertising tools that inform campaign planning and audience targeting strategies. Among university cohorts, Instagram serves as a fertile environment for exposure to influencer-generated content, where engagement metrics such as reach, frequency, and click rates provide measurable indicators of marketing effectiveness. This national trend mirrors global developments that position social media as a dominant channel for product discovery and digital commerce among young adults. Instagram's visually driven interface and integrated shopping features facilitate seamless transitions from inspiration to purchase intention. Within this context, the platform's significant presence among Jordanian youth underscores its relevance for examining how influencer marketing shapes students' purchase intentions in university communities.

2.2 Credibility of Sources and Influencers attributes

Source Credibility Theory posits that perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness determine persuasive effectiveness, offering a foundational framework for understanding why certain sources are more influential in shaping individual attitudes and behaviors (Ohanian, 1990). Within the context of social media influencers, contemporary evidence identifies credibility as a core antecedent of consumer response. Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that message value and source credibility jointly enhance trust in branded content, thereby fostering favorable attitudes and purchase intentions. Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that credibility and parasocial interaction are closely interrelated, suggesting that relational engagement reinforces persuasive impact. Importantly, credibility is not a fixed attribute but a dynamic construct influenced by factors such as disclosure practices, content frequency, and brand–influencer fit, all of which can strengthen or undermine follower confidence over time. Belanche, Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2021) showed that promotional behavior by influencers directly affects perceived credibility and, in turn, follower attitudes and behaviors. Complementary findings by Breves, Liebers, Abt, and Kunze (2019) indicated that congruence between an influencer's persona and the endorsed brand enhances perceived credibility and persuasive effectiveness, underscoring the instrumental importance of brand–influencer alignment.

Furthermore, Ryu and Han (2021) conceptualized “influencer reputation” as a broader construct encompassing authenticity, expertise, influence, and communicative competence. This expanded perspective highlights that credibility judgments often coincide with perceptions of genuineness and relational competence, particularly within parasocially rich platforms such as Instagram. Collectively, these studies suggest that credibility is both an attribute of the influencer and a product of ongoing, transparent, and well-matched collaborations that fulfill audience expectations.

2.3 Authenticity in dealing with commercial self-presentation

Authenticity has emerged as a central expectation within influencer culture. Audiences tend to reward creators who produce genuine and relatable content, while penalizing signals of over-commercialization, insincere endorsements, and self-promotional behavior. According to Audrezet et al. (2020), traditional self-presentation is no longer sufficient when authenticity is at risk, as influencers are now expected to align their values and actions in ways that can withstand sponsor and audience scrutiny. However, empirical findings on the effects of authenticity are often context-dependent. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found positive relationships between perceived authenticity, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention, although boundary conditions related to sponsorship disclosure and content style moderate these effects. More recent evidence from Lim, Rasul, and Cheah (2025) suggests that overt commercial content can weaken purchase intention, while sponsorship transparency and parasocial engagement shape how followers interpret such commercial cues. These findings indicate that authenticity functions less as a fixed personal attribute and more as a relational outcome negotiated through indicators such as narrative openness, product demonstration, and congruent brand partnerships. Among university students, who often operate within peer-influenced and budget-conscious environments, authenticity cues may serve as heuristics that reduce uncertainty about product claims. Nevertheless, the predictive strength of authenticity may diminish when credibility, attitudes, and social influence are simultaneously considered within the persuasion process.

2.4 Parasocial (Interpersonal) pathways to persuasion

Parasocial interaction (PSI) refers to the process through which followers develop one-sided yet psychologically meaningful relationships with media figures, a phenomenon that translates effectively into influencer–follower dynamics on Instagram. Lin, Crowe, Pierre, and Lee (2021) demonstrated that PSI with highly followed Instagram personalities leads to stronger brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions, identifying PSI as a relational channel for persuasion. Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) reported that credibility and PSI are interrelated, jointly influencing behavioral intentions across social platforms. Building on these foundations, more recent studies have examined the antecedents that intensify parasocial attachments. Liu, Ma, and Li (2024) found that perceived authenticity, homophily, and informational value of content strengthen parasocial relationships, thereby enhancing evaluations of brand credibility and increasing purchase intentions. Platform features such as short-form videos and ephemeral stories further heighten perceived intimacy and interaction frequency, deepening the influence of PSI. Among younger audiences, particularly university students, PSI can blur the boundary between peer advice and commercial endorsement, elevating the perceived relevance and trustworthiness of influencer recommendations. This evolving relational dynamic underscores that successful campaigns are not merely the result of reach or exposure, but of content strategies that cultivate enduring, reciprocal-seeming connections between influencers and their audiences.

2.5 Peer and social influence Perceived behavioral control Student attitudes

While influencers exert significant persuasive power, university environments introduce additional social dynamics that shape students’ behavioral intentions. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively

predict intention. Within student communities, subjective norms may be amplified by the rapid diffusion of opinions through friendship networks, student organizations, and classroom interactions. Peer discussions and campus microcultures often generate social proof either supporting or countering influencer messages. At the same time, perceived behavioral control is particularly relevant for students who must consider affordability, accessibility, and convenience when making purchase decisions. Empirical evidence from the region supports these mechanisms. Makhadmeh and Rihani (2023) found that Instagram influencer advertising significantly affected purchase behavior among female university students in Jordan, emphasizing the roles of information quality and message relevance in driving influence within campus populations. Broader reviews of influencer marketing similarly underscore attitudes as key mediators between exposure and intention, with subjective norms and perceived control contributing smaller yet meaningful effects, especially among younger and digitally immersed audiences. These insights offer practical implications for marketers. Effective strategies should combine credible, value-oriented content with campus-based social structures such as student ambassadors and peer advocacy programs, while minimizing barriers to purchase to enhance perceived behavioral control.

2.6 Conceptual model

Drawing from the above, our model proposes direct effects of influencer credibility, authenticity, peer and social influence, perceived behavioral control, and students' attitudes on purchase intention, with attitude and authenticity also tested as mediators of the effect of credibility on intention. The model is consistent with contemporary influencer literature that integrates credibility and authenticity with TPB mechanisms and parasocial dynamics (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lin et al., 2021; Belanche et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2025).

3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Anchored in the observed results from our dataset, we formulated the following hypotheses. Each hypothesis is motivated by the literature above, but stated in relation to the empirical patterns present in the analyzed sample.

H1. Influencer credibility positively predicts students' purchase intention on Instagram.

H2. Authenticity positively predicts students' purchase intention when modeled alone, but its unique effect becomes nonsignificant after controlling for credibility, attitude, peer and social influence, and perceived control.

H3. Students' attitudes toward the product positively predict purchase intention.

H4. Peer and social influence positively predict purchase intention.

H5. Perceived behavioral control positively predicts purchase intention.

H6. Influencer credibility has a positive indirect effect on purchase intention via students' attitudes.

H7. Influencer credibility has no reliable indirect effect on purchase intention via authenticity when covariates are controlled.

4. Method

4.1 Design and sample

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design targeting university student in Jordan. A total of 209 valid responses were obtained and retained for analysis, as reflected in the case-processing summary. Participants were recruited through university networks and student groups, with inclusion criteria requiring active Instagram use and current enrollment as university students. Ethical standards were observed throughout the study, including informed consent and assurances of confidentiality. The achieved sample size provided sufficient statistical power to support multiple regression and mediation analyses for detecting medium-sized effects.

4.2 Measures

All constructs were measured using Likert-type scales anchored from 1 to 5. Influencer credibility was operationalized via adapted items reflecting expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990), consistent with influencer research adopting or extending Ohanian's dimensions (e.g., Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019). Authenticity items captured perceived genuineness and real-life representation in influencer content based on recent authenticity scholarship (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Parasocial interaction was assessed through items reflecting the perceived relational bond and familiarity with the influencer, consistent with prior studies in Instagram contexts (Lin et al., 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Peer and social influence items tapped perceived normative pressures and social proof within university networks, aligning with the subjective norms component of TPB. Perceived behavioral control items reflected students' perceived ease or ability to purchase recommended products. Students' attitudes toward the product assessed evaluative responses toward products featured in influencer posts. Purchase intention items asked students about the likelihood and willingness to purchase products recommended by influencers.

4.3 Reliability and validity

Internal consistency for the 20-item instrument set was strong with Cronbach's alpha of 0.862, indicating reliable measurement across the study's constructs. Convergent and discriminant validity were supported by the observed pattern of correlations and by acceptable multicollinearity diagnostics in regression modeling. Contemporary measurement literature supports the credibility and authenticity dimensions we employed in this study's context.

4.4 Procedure and analysis

Data were analyzed in SPSS. The study computed descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among study variables, then estimated an Ordinary Least Squares regression predicting purchase intention from influencer credibility, authenticity, students' attitudes, peer and social influence, and perceived behavioral control. We inspected variance inflation factors and condition indices for multicollinearity and assessed residuals to evaluate model assumptions. We then estimated mediation using PROCESS v4.2, Model 4, with influencer credibility as X, students' attitudes and authenticity as parallel mediators, and purchase intention as Y, using 5,000 bootstrap samples to obtain bias-corrected confidence intervals. We relied on Hayes (2022) for the mediation framework and reporting conventions.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive statistics and reliability

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics. Means were above the midpoints for attitudes, perceived control, and purchase intention, with moderate dispersion. Authenticity and peer influence also showed mid-to-above-midpoint means.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (N = 209)

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Influencer Credibility	209	1.00	4.00	2.85	0.61
Authenticity / Real-life Image	209	1.00	4.50	2.91	0.82
Students' Attitude Toward Product	209	1.00	4.33	3.01	0.70
Peer and Social Influence	209	1.00	4.67	2.91	0.69
Perceived Control	209	1.00	5.00	3.07	0.78
Purchase Intention	209	1.00	5.00	3.08	0.73

Reliability for the full instrument was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .862$; 20 items), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

5.2 Correlations

Bivariate correlations revealed significant positive associations between purchase intention and each of the predictors: influencer credibility ($r = .462$, $p < .001$), authenticity ($r = .311$, $p < .001$), students' attitudes ($r = .435$, $p < .001$), peer and social influence ($r = .433$, $p < .001$), and perceived control ($r = .321$, $p < .001$). Influencer credibility was positively correlated with authenticity ($r = .576$, $p < .001$) and attitudes ($r = .522$, $p < .001$), consistent with theorized linkages among source attributes, appraisal, and intention.

Table 2. Pearson correlations (N = 209)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Influencer Credibility	—	.576**	.522**	.461**	.290**	.462**
2. Authenticity / Real-life Image		—	.434**	.408**	.366**	.311**
3. Students' Attitude Toward Product			—	.600**	.310**	.435**
4. Peer and Social Influence				—	.391**	.433**
5. Perceived Control					—	.321**
6. Purchase Intention						—

Note. $p < .01$ for all coefficients above.

5.3 Regression analysis predicting purchase intention

The overall regression model was significant, $F(5, 203) = 17.869$, $p < .001$, with $R = .553$ and $R^2 = .306$ (adjusted $R^2 = .289$). Influencer credibility ($B = .341$, $SE = .093$, $\beta = .285$, $p < .001$), students' attitudes ($B = .168$, $SE = .082$, $\beta = .161$, $p = .042$), peer and social influence ($B = .178$, $SE = .082$, $\beta =$

.168, $p = .031$), and perceived control ($B = .129$, $SE = .062$, $\beta = .138$, $p = .037$) were significant positive predictors. Authenticity was not significant when modeled with the other predictors ($B = -.037$, $SE = .067$, $\beta = -.042$, $p = .576$). Multicollinearity was acceptable with VIF values ranging from 1.259 to 1.801 and tolerances above .55. Condition indices suggested no severe multicollinearity concerns.

Table 3. Multiple regression predicting purchase intention (N = 209)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	.792	.249	—	3.186	.002	—
Influencer Credibility	.341	.093	.285	3.661	.000	1.769
Authenticity / Real-life Image	-.037	.067	-.042	-0.560	.576	1.644
Students' Attitude Toward Product	.168	.082	.161	2.045	.042	1.801
Peer and Social Influence	.178	.082	.168	2.175	.031	1.752
Perceived Control	.129	.062	.138	2.104	.037	1.259

Model fit: $R = .553$, $R^2 = .306$, Adjusted $R^2 = .289$, SE of estimate = .616. ANOVA: Regression SS = 33.941, Residual SS = 77.116, Total SS = 111.057.

5.4 Mediation analysis

Using PROCESS 4.2 (Model 4; 5,000 bootstraps), we tested parallel mediation of the effect of influencer credibility on purchase intention via students' attitudes and authenticity. Results showed a significant direct effect of credibility on purchase intention ($B = .3788$, $SE = .0944$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect via students' attitudes was significant ($B = .1648$, BootSE = .0661, 95% CI [.0448, .3014]). The indirect effect via authenticity was not significant ($B = .0099$, BootSE = .0726, 95% CI [-.1387, .1484]). The total indirect effect was positive but its CI included zero, attributable to the nonsignificant authenticity pathway. The model predicting attitudes from credibility was strong ($B = .5991$, $SE = .0680$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .273$), and credibility also positively predicted authenticity ($B = .7742$, $SE = .0764$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .331$). The outcome model including both mediators was significant, $R^2 = .265$.

Table 4. PROCESS mediation results (parallel mediators; N = 209)

Path	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI
Direct: Credibility → Purchase	.3788	.0944	4.0139	.0001	[.1927, .5648]
Indirect via Students' Attitudes	.1648	.0661	—	—	[.0448, .3014]
Indirect via Authenticity	.0099	.0726	—	—	[-.1387, .1484]
Total indirect	.1747	.1033	—	—	[-.0307, .3774]

Note. 95 percent bootstrapped CIs based on 5,000 samples.

5.5 Residual diagnostics

Predicted values ranged from 1.57 to 3.91 with mean 3.08, matching the observed mean of the dependent variable. Standardized residuals ranged from -2.824 to 4.255, suggesting several moderate outliers but no pervasive assumption violations. The distribution of standardized predicted values ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$) indicated appropriate scaling. Given acceptable VIFs, tolerance values, and condition indices, multicollinearity was not a threat to inference.

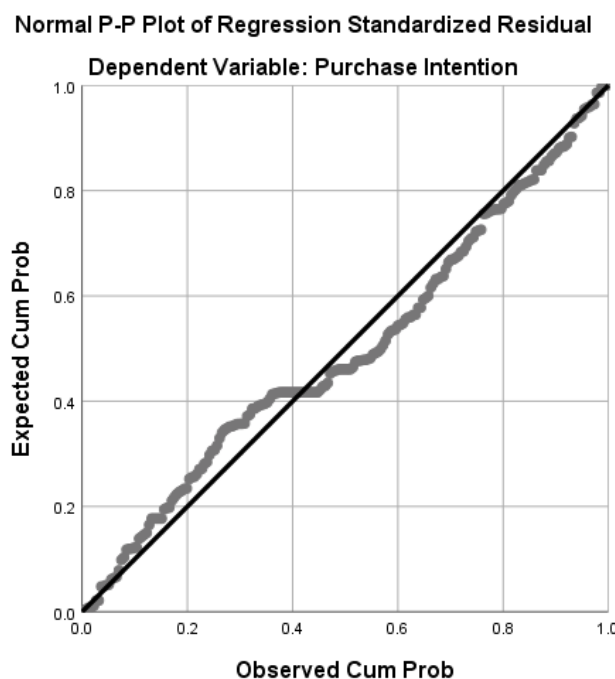


Figure 1: Regression Residuals

6. Discussion

6.1 Summary of findings

Findings support H1, H3, H4, H5, and H6 while aligning with H2 and H7's expectations about authenticity's limited unique role in the full multivariate context and its nonsignificant indirect path. Influencer credibility emerged as a robust predictor of purchase intention and as an antecedent to students' attitudes and authenticity perceptions. Attitude functioned as a key mediator explaining how credibility translates into purchase intention. Peer and social influence and perceived behavioral control added unique variance to purchase intention, reflecting the social and control components of the buying decision within university communities.

6.2 Theoretical implications

First, this study substantiates Source Credibility Theory in a non-Western, student-centered Instagram context by demonstrating that credibility directly predicts purchase intention and operates indirectly via attitudinal routes. This dovetails with contemporary influencer evidence that credibility and message value help build trust in branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019) and that relational dynamics amplify persuasion (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lin et al., 2021). Second, the limited unique contribution of authenticity in the full model suggests potential redundancy between perceived credibility and authenticity when both are entered with attitudes, peer influence, and control. This echoes nuanced findings that authenticity's effect can depend on sponsorship disclosure, self-disclosure, influencer-brand fit, and content-type contingencies (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019; Leite et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2025). Third, the significant role of peer and social influence resonates with the TPB's subjective norms element and the dense social fabric of university communities, where peer endorsement coexists with influencer messaging. Fourth, perceived behavioral control's significance

confirms that intention is not solely attitudinal; feasibility perceptions matter, especially in student markets with budgetary and logistical constraints.

6.3 Contextualizing with recent evidence

Recent, large-scale and mixed-method studies consistently document influencer impacts on growth and consumer outcomes, suggesting that influencer campaigns can effectively seed markets and catalyze engagement when credibility and relational signals are salient. Further, the Jordanian digital landscape data underscore why Instagram-based strategies are likely to reach student audiences at scale. The mediation results also align with new work showing that parasocial ties and authenticity can influence attitudes and intentions, albeit with boundary conditions tied to disclosures and content format.

6.4 Practical implications

For brand managers and university-facing campaigns in Jordan, three recommendations follow. First, prioritize credibility building. Vet influencers for domain expertise, reliable product knowledge, and trustworthy reputations. Provide substantive, informative content that signals competence; recent findings show that competence and transparent self-disclosure can enhance credibility perceptions and downstream persuasion. Second, design content to shape attitudes. Encourage narrative demonstrations, authentic testimonials anchored in real-life use, and value-focused explanations. Since attitude mediated the impact of credibility on intention, creative that moves evaluations is especially potent. Third, integrate peer dynamics. Encourage student ambassadors, campus micro-influencers, and UGC challenges that create visible social proof in university networks. Finally, reduce friction to enhance perceived control: facilitate easy purchase paths, student discounts, and localized availability, leveraging Instagram's native shopping features and clear call-to-action structures.

6.5 Why authenticity was not uniquely predictive in the full model

Although authenticity correlated with intention, it lost significance when entered with credibility, attitude, peer influence, and control. Several interpretations are plausible. Authenticity may be conceptually entangled with credibility for these respondents, yielding overlapping variance. It may also exert its influence primarily through building attitudes or parasocial bonds rather than directly prompting intention once other determinants are considered, which is compatible with studies showing authenticity's effects are mediated or moderated by disclosure and relational variables. Additionally, the operationalization of authenticity as "real-life image" may capture a narrower slice of authenticity relative to multi-dimensional models, potentially reducing unique variance when covariates are present.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that among Jordanian university students on Instagram, influencer credibility, students' attitudes, peer and social influence, and perceived behavioral control significantly predict purchase intention. Attitude mediates the effect of credibility, while authenticity does not provide a distinct pathway once other variables are controlled. The findings refine theoretical understanding of influencer persuasion by foregrounding attitude as a key conduit from credibility to intention and offer actionable guidance for designing campus-focused Instagram campaigns. As Instagram remains a high-reach channel in Jordan, aligning credible influencers with attitude-shaping content and social proof mechanisms is likely to yield the strongest intent outcomes.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This cross-sectional nature of the study is limited in its causal inference as causal inference may be strengthened by using a longitudinal approach or experimentally. The measurement of authenticity as "real-life image" may fail to capture the complex dimension of the construct, such moral, artisanal, and indexical dimensions as been proposed in the field of authenticity studies. Future research should make use of richer authenticity scales, and they should explicitly model disclosures of sponsorships on the part of ambassadors, as well as fit between influencers and brand values as moderators. Additionally, although our sample included a sample of universities, more widespread sampling, across regions and private/public institutions would allow for increased generalizability. Finally, behavioural outcomes such as click-through and actual purchase would allow the triangulation of self-reported intentions with behavioural outcomes enabling a extension of references by recent research to the efficacy of influencers in a real market context.

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Table A1. Model summary and ANOVA

Statistic	Value
R	.553
R ²	.306
Adjusted R ²	.289
SE of estimate	.616
ANOVA F(5, 203)	17.869
p	< .001

Table A2. Collinearity diagnostics

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Influencer Credibility	.565	1.769
Authenticity / Real-life Image	.608	1.644

Students' Attitude Toward Product	.555	1.801
Peer and Social Influence	.571	1.752
Perceived Control	.795	1.259

Table A3. Residual statistics

Metric	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Predicted value	1.571	3.908	3.078	0.404
Residual	-1.740	2.623	~0.000	0.609
Standardized residual	-2.824	4.255	0.000	0.988