

From Followers to Buyers: The Impact of Influencer Vs Brand Advertising on Consumer Decisions

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Abstract

Social media is a revolution in the digital advertising industry, this is where a few ideas just cannot go wrong influencer marketing and brand advertising are plays that must not be looked down upon to achieve positive sales conversions. The purpose of this study is to examine through the lens of consumer perception of the informative value, entertainment value, trustworthiness, attractiveness, parasocial relationship, brand admiration, and persuasion knowledge of an influencer, and influencer-related factors that affect consumers' intention to purchase. The study builds upon source credibility theory, parasocial relationship theory, and the persuasion knowledge model, creating and testing a holistic conceptual framework that will be able to explain the conversion of social media followers to real buyers. The research design used was a quantitative, cross-sectional design with a structured questionnaire used to collect the data from the social media users. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data. The results show that informative value ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.001$) and entertainment value ($\beta = 0.424$, $p < 0.001$) significantly affect parasocial relationships, and trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.029$) and attractiveness ($\beta = 0.703$, $p < 0.001$) significantly affect brand admiration. In addition, purchase intention ($\beta = 0.714$, $p < 0.001$) is significantly influenced by Brand Admiration, with no significant effect from parasocial relationship. Purchase intention is predicted by the model at 95.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.954$). The findings of the study will enrich theory and practice as it emphasizes the influential role of brand love in customer purchase decisions when dealing with influencers.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Brand Admiration, Parasocial Relationship, Purchase Intention, Persuasion Knowledge, Social Media Advertising, Consumer Behavior.

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized marketing communication by changing how organizations communicate in their marketing processes to consumers, and how the latter interact with their products and services. Social media offers unique opportunities because it is a platform that enables live interaction, personalization, and user-generated content, whereas conventional advertising methods involve one-way communication. There are several unique advantages that

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come from social media, as it gives users the chance to interact in real time, communicate in a dynamic way, and create content. Unlike traditional advertising channels, social media provides a platform for consumers to engage, interact, and create content. Social media marketing has transformed into a strategic business tool that has the potential to improve engagement and relationships with consumers, according to Li et al. (2021). With the rise in platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook, there are new avenues for companies to connect directly with consumers via unique promotional efforts. Migkos et al. (2025) highlighted that digital marketing environments provide the opportunity for companies to shape consumer perceptions through content that is both highly targeted and interactive. Additionally, with the rise in social media usage, the need for organizations to have effective advertising strategies to capture attention, build trust, and drive buying behavior has become more relevant in the ever-competitive social media marketplace.

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Social media platforms have seen a massive reach in recent years, meaning that various forms of social media marketing have become one of the quintessential marketing tactics in the digital sector, especially influencer marketing and brand marketing. While both options can be given a significant investment of resources, there is not a lot of empirical evidence on which advertising strategy is more effective in shaping a consumer's decision and actually securing a purchase. Studies in the area of influencer marketing and brand advertising have largely focused on either category individually, with limited knowledge of the relative effectiveness of these in combination. In addition, multiple sources of influencer endorsements and advertorials from brand actors have created an environment of consumer confusion over the distinctiveness of the effects of trust, credibility, admiration, and parasocial relationships on consumer purchase intent. Few recent studies have identified the increasing significance of influencer credibility and the trust that consumers hold in an influencer to influence their purchase of products or services (Zaki et al., 2025; Liu & Zheng, 2024), whereas other studies stress the persistence of brand credibility and the effectiveness of advertising in consumer decision-making (Migkos et al., 2025).

Literature Review

Influencers are among the most popular forms of social media and content creators, making influencer advertising one of the most persuasive digital marketing communications. Influencers serve as a bridge between brands and consumers, providing user experiences, suggestions, and endorsements to their audience. Influencer marketing is different from traditional ads because of its authenticity and natural tone, which helps it have more impact on consumers. Influencer content has a significant impact on consumer attitudes, engagement, and purchase intentions due to the consumers' belief that influencers are credible and authentic sources of information (Migkos et al., 2025). When the influencer appears knowledgeable and trustworthy in a particular niche area, their ability to drive business performance is even greater, as it establishes improved trust and brand evaluations from the consumers (Zaki et al., 2025). Moreover, influencer marketing is proving to be increasingly powerful when it comes to reaching younger audiences who often seek information on social media, delivered by the likes of influencers, as well as product direction (Adesokan et al., 2024). Previous studies have also shown that influence endorsement positively influences both education and consumers' response to the brand via the source credibility and emotional attachment mechanisms (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019). For this reason, influencer advertising has virtually become a staple of modern-day digital advertising and marketing efforts.

Theoretical Foundation

Source Credibility Theory

Considered one of the most popular theories in advertising and consumer behavior research, source credibility theory is used to describe how the attributes of the communication source affect the attitudes of the audience and their behavioral reactions to that communication. The theory suggests that people are more likely to “listen” to (accept and respond to) information presented by a source that they believe is credible, expert, and trustworthy. In the world of influencer marketing, source credibility becomes even more crucial since consumers are inclined to heed the advice of influencers, especially when assessing a product or deciding to buy or not. Some recent research has shown that trustworthiness and expertise of influencers play substantial roles in the consumer's trust and perceptions of brand and purchase decisions in digital spaces (Zaki et al. 2025). Similarly, when there is a credible influencer, the consumers are likely to be viewed as credible information providers and better persuasion can be achieved, leading to greater engagement (Liu & Zheng, 2024). The sources credibility plays a crucial role in the success of an advertisement and is a decisive factor in consumers' decisions (Migkos et al., 2025). Prior research also confirmed that the source credibility was found to affect the effectiveness of advertising as well as brand attitudes and consumer behavioral intentions (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019). Based on this, the integrated theoretical framework of source credibility theory is found to be suitable to support the study. Hence, source credibility theory is deemed to be appropriate in order to gain understanding of the influence of influencer advertising and brand advertising on the consumers' purchase intention.

Parasocial Relationship Theory

Parasocial Relationship Theory (PST) is a theoretical framework that describes the formation of emotionally unbalanced relationships between a viewer and a television presenter after prolonged exposure to the show and multiple interactions with the presenter. Its theory was initially devised to comprehend links between audiences and television personalities and has since become more applicable in social media. Its theory was created to comprehend the relationship between groups

and television personalities and became more applicable in social media, where customers interact with influencers in a lot of ways. These social media platforms allow the audience to interact with influencers, share content, and share a 'community', essentially making influencers seem like friends or trusted advisors to the audience, even when there is no interpersonal interaction. Recent studies indicate that positive parasocial relationships can foster trust, engagement, and consumer acceptance of influencers' recommendations (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Moreover, content made by influencers helps in building emotional connection and perceived intimacy, which further enhances the persuading power of followers (Migkos et al., 2025). With the surge in popularity of influencer marketing, scholarly inquiry regarding parasocial relationships and their effect on consumer behavior has gained new energy (Adesokan et al., 2024). A few earlier research studies also have shown that parasocial interactions have a positive impact on consumer attitudes, consumer intentions to buy, and consumer evaluation of the product or service (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019). Therefore, Parasocial Relationship Theory is undeniably applicable for making an understanding of the influencer's impact on consumers' buying behavior.

Persuasion Knowledge Model

Persuading consumers, the widely used Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) outlines the process by which consumers become aware, understand, and react to the persuasive messages sent by marketers and advertisers. The model proposes that persuasion knowledge is acquired through experience and that consumers are able to recognise the commercial motives and acquire a critical evaluation of the promoted messages. The concept of persuasion knowledge has gained relevance in digital contexts, where consumers constantly encounter sponsored content, social media influencers, and personalized ads. Recent research shows that if a consumer has high persuasion knowledge, they tend to be less accepting of marketing communications and less inclined to change their decisions based on persuasive measures "without reasoning" (Migkos et al., 2025: 158). Likewise, social media users who are aware of the business-related aspect of the influencer endorsement productively evaluate adverts differently from those who regard adverts as genuine recommendations (Liu & Zheng, 2024). With the rising transparency guidelines for sponsored content, consumers' understanding of persuasive tactics has also improved (Adesokan et al., 2024). Previous studies also showed that persuasion knowledge diminishes ad effectiveness as it robs them of the trust they have and raises doubts around promotional content (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). The Persuasion Knowledge Model, then, offers important understandings regarding consumer awareness and advertising impact.

Integration of Theories and Purpose of the Present Study

In the present study, the following theories were combined: source credibility theory, parasocial relationship theory, persuasion knowledge model, elaboration likelihood model, and uses and gratifications theory to enable consumers' reactions to influencer and brand advertising to be fully explained. Finally, due to the influence of influencer trustworthiness and expertise on consumers' perception, source credibility theory is applied, while for the emotional bonds that enhance the effect of persuasion, parasocial relationship theory has been used. The persuasion knowledge model is a model that adds understanding of people's awareness of an advertiser's intent in further understanding why people react to advertising. In addition, the Elaboration Likelihood model offers a cognitive perspective on how the messages in advertisements are processed by consumers, and the uses and gratifications theory identifies motives consumers feel when interacting with content on social media. In the digital context, recent research stresses the need to use several

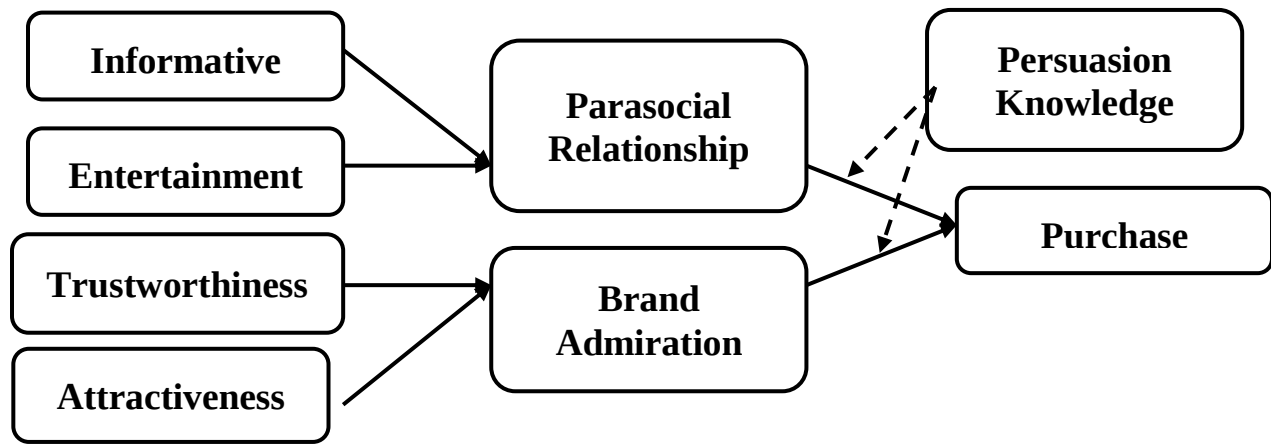
theoretical lenses to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex consumer behaviour (Zaki et al., 2025; Migkos et al., 2025). On a similar note, recent studies have described the interaction between trust, credibility, admiration, and persuasion in the factors influencing purchase intentions (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Thus, the basic aim of this study is to investigate the influence of influencer promotion and brand promotion on consumer purchase intention via parasocial relationship and brand admiration, moderated by persuasion knowledge (Adesokan et al., 2024; Reinikainen et al., 2020).

Supporting and Negating Views

Current existing digital marketing literature has drawn a clear conclusion that influencer marketing has a positive impact on consumer purchase intention, as the public views these influencers as trustworthy, authentic, and relatable information sources. Consumers often use influencers' recommendations when they are making their purchase decisions, which helps them lower the perceived risk and expand their confidence in the products they are considering. Studies find that the credibility of influencers can influence the engagement of consumers and their intentions in purchasing products, especially the younger generation who are active on social media platforms and follow influencers who provide information about the product and their lifestyle (Zaki et al., 2025). Likewise, endorsements were shown to have positively reinforced sentiments and improved consumers' purchase intentions for endorsed products on influencers (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Furthermore, the IGC often looks less wishy-washy and more relatable to the typical views of the audience, making them more persuasive than traditional advertising (Migkos et al., 2025).

Mediation and Moderation Perspective

The informative value is widely acknowledged to be an important factor for consumers to connect with and form a parasocial relationship with influencers, as the more informative, relevant, and reliable a social media influencer is, the more likely a consumer will be to engage with them. Informative content can fulfill informational needs and, at the same time, boost perceptions of expertise and credibility. People feel a great deal more connected with influencers, and see them as resources to educate themselves, recommend products to, and offer valuable feedback on products. More recent work has found that informational content had a significant positive effect on parasocial relationship conditions, enhancing involvement in the content and perceived intimacy (Migkos et al., 2025). The user also tends to be more engaged with the dialogue that conveys accurate and valuable information to help users make a decision (Liu & Zheng, 2024). For instance, previous studies showed that information had a positive impact on the belongingness of the audience and relationship building with the influencers in the long run (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Hypothesis Development

Informative Value and Parasocial Relationship

Informative value is the amount of useful, relevant, and meaningful information followers receive from influencers' shared content. People tend to follow influencers to get their insights, product-related knowledge, reviews, and recommendations that help them in making their purchasing decisions. If influencers consistently give accurate and valuable information, their followers trust them as a credible and knowledgeable source, leading to a stronger emotional connection and social bond. The findings show that content plays a crucial role in fostering parasocial relationships due to the growing reliance by followers on influencers for product and service information and advice (Migkos et al., 2025). Likewise, engaging social media content helps to build audience engagement and drive frequent interactions between influencers and the audience (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Additionally, if consumers find the content from influencers helpful, they are more likely to form positive attitudes and relational bonds with them (Adesokan et al., 2024). Previous research also showed that informational value has a positive effect on the formation of relationships and trust in social media communities (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

H1: The more informative the value, the more the parasocial relationship will be influenced.

Entertainment Value and Parasocial Relationship

Entertainability is the extent to which an influencer's content is enjoyable, pleasurable, exciting and emotionally satisfying to its audience. Social media users often interact with influencers because their content is entertaining, aesthetically pleasing and helps to alleviate boredom. If you have entertaining content, people will come back and engage with you, which will lead to a higher level of familiarity and feeling connected to influencers. In recent years, it has been found that entertaining content plays a significant role in parasocial relationship formation, as consumers tend to see entertaining influencers as relatable and pleasant to spend time with in the online world (Migkos et al., 2025). Likewise, content that is interesting and entertaining creates emotional engagement and empowers an audience to engage with an influencer in an ongoing manner (Zaki et al., 2025). In addition, enjoyable social media interactions enhance followers' satisfaction and boost loyalty towards influencers (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Some previous research also revealed that entertainment value is a significant antecedent to social media engagement and parasocial interaction (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

H2: Entertainment Value is positively related to parasocial relationship.

Trustworthiness and Brand Admiration

Trustworthiness is the degree of consumer confidence in the honesty, reliability, and sincerity of the consumers' communication with the influencers. Consumer evaluations tend to be more positive when they are made by influencers who they know and trust, as they are likely to view the recommendations as authentic experiences and not just a sales pitch. These attitudes can foster positive, transference attitudes toward endorsed brands which can lead to greater admiration and respect for endorsed brands. In recent years, research has shown that the trustworthiness of influencers is a variable that significantly contributes to the increase in brand admiration through increasing the belief in statements related to brands and decreasing the perceived risk (Zaki et al., 2025). Likewise, credible endorsements build positive brand connotations, which helps to foster consumer emotions and admiration (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Furthermore, the trustworthiness has positive influence on consumers willingness to support and promote the recommended brands (Migkos et al., 2025). Previous studies also showed that trust is a key factor in brand evaluation and consumer loyalty (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

H3: Trustworthiness positively influences brand admiration.

Attractiveness and Brand Admiration

Attractiveness is the physical attractiveness, charisma and overall appeal of an influencer that makes them attractive to followers. The halo effect occurs when consumers form positive impressions and emotional responses towards products and brands endorsed by attractive influencers, essentially because they are associated with desirable attributes. People often have a higher valuation of attractive influencers, and they are seen as more desirable and desirable to be associated with a brand, which further aids in positive brand perception and admiration. According to recent research, there is a positive relationship between the attractiveness of the influencers and the admiration of the brand, which is reflected in the consumer's perception of the brand's prestige and attractiveness (Zaki et al., 2025). Likewise, consumers will be more emotionally involved and have positive brand associations when the product is endorsed by an attractive person (Migkos et al., 2025). In addition, the appeal of the influencers is one of the factors that draws the attention of the audience and has a positive impact on the consumer's attitude (Adesokan et al., 2024). Previous studies also proved that attractiveness plays a significant role in endorsement effectiveness and brand perception (Schouten et al., 2019).

H4: The more attractive the brand, the higher the levels of brand admiration.

Informative Value, Parasocial Relationship and Purchase Intention

The concept of Parasocial Relationship has been attracting much attention in the study of influencer marketing because it has been identified as a mediator between the relationship of Informative Value and Purchase Intention. The informative content boosts the consumer's perception of the expertness and usefulness of the influencer, which leads to increased frequency of engagement with influencer-provided content. Repeatedly in consumption, followers increasingly become emotionally involved and feel closer to the individuals with whom they share the information, increasing their parasocial relationships. These relationships then lead to consumers' belief in recommendations and boost their commitment to buying recommended products. Recent studies suggest that the contribution of informative content to purchase intention is not so much a promotional one, but rather a relationship-building one (Migkos et al., 2025). Likewise, when consumers believe that the information provided by influencers is useful and reliable, they are more likely to form emotional ties that positively influence their buying decisions

(Liu & Zheng, 2024). Research also suggests that informational benefits enhance consumer engagement with and relational processes that lead to higher behavioral intentions (Zaki et al., 2025). Past studies also validated the mediation effect of parasocial interactions between influencer characteristics and consumer responses (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

H5: Parasocial Relationship has a mediating effect between informative value and purchase intention.

Entertainment Value, Parasocial Relationship and Purchase Intention

It is no secret that entertainment is a significant factor in consumer engagement and emotional connection in social media. The audience will enjoy the content, become satisfied and make them feel involved, so that they will spend more time interacting with the influencers. The more often users are exposed to pleasant material, the more familiar and affectionate the relationship will be, leading to more parasocial connections. These emotional connections then impact purchasing decisions because readers are more likely to follow suggestions from influencers they like and are interested in. In fact, according to recent studies, entertainment-oriented content plays an important part in Purchase Intentions, which enhances the relationship between the audience and the influencer as well as emotional engagement (Zaki et al., 2025). Similarly, watching influencer content has been shown to positively influence consumer attitudes toward endorsed brands, and boost purchasing motivation via parasocial interactions (Migkos et al., 2025). Another study has shown that emotional enjoyment increases trust and consumer responsiveness to marketing messages (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Previous research also revealed that entertainment value is an intermediary effect on consumer behaviour through relationship-building mechanisms (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

H6: Parasocial Relationship mediates the relationship between entertainment value and purchase intention.

Trustworthiness, Brand Admiration and Purchase Intention

Admiration of the brand has emerged as one of the key emotional ways in which influencer trustworthiness impacts consumer purchase intent. Consumers rely on the trustworthy influencers for their sense of trustworthiness, honesty, reliability, and sincerity and are likely to be more inclined to transfer positive perceptions from the influencer to the endorsed brand. The transfer process helps to build admiration, respect and affection for the brand which then enhances customer's motivation to buy the product. Research suggests that when consumers believe that a brand is from a trusted influencer, they are more likely to admire the brand, with trust helping to decrease uncertainty and enhance the positive brand evaluation (Zaki et al., 2025). Similarly, trustworthiness fosters positive emotional reactions, which helps to foster brand adoration and boost their readiness to buy endorsed products (Migkos et al., 2025). Emotional brand evaluations are also shown to be pivotal in bridging the gap between trust and actions (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Previous studies also showed that trust is a significant antecedent of positive brand attitudes and consumer loyalty (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

H7: Brand Admiration lies between the trustworthiness and purchase intention variables.

Attractiveness, Brand Admiration and Purchase Intention

It is not surprising that attractiveness has long been acknowledged as an effective variable that can impact endorsement effectiveness and consumer attitudes. Attractive influencers can make initial good impressions and elicit emotional responses that can be conveyed to endorsed brands. This

transfer makes consumers become more like the brands of attractive influencers and they start to admire and appreciate them. Recent research found that when the influencers are attractive, there is an increase in brand admiration as handsome influencers improve perceptions of prestige, desirability and social status (Migkos et al., 2025). Likewise, their visual appeal fosters more emotional connections and positive brand perceptions among their audience (Zaki et al., 2025). Furthermore, research has shown that attractiveness enhances consumers' psychological connection to brands in an affective way (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Previous studies also suggested that attractiveness positively affects endorsement effectiveness and consumer preferences (Schouten et al., 2019).

H8: Brand admiration mediates the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention.

Conceptualization

Previous studies have focused on the impact of individual factors such as influencer characteristics, advertising credibility, parasocial relationship, and consumer purchase intent in digital marketing settings. Earlier research has confirmed that informative and entertaining content positively affect audience engagement and building relationships, and trustworthiness and attractiveness lead to positive consumer perceptions of brands endorsed (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Migkos et al., 2025). Likewise, studies based on Source Credibility Theory and Parasocial Relationship Theory have shown that the emotional attachment and Source credibility have a significant influence on the attitude and behavioral intentions of consumers (Zaki et al., 2025). Previous studies also showed that parasocial interactions and brand-related feelings are significant mediators between the influencer and the consumer's reactions (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019). Most studies to date have focused on each of these relationships separately, however, and have not attempted to incorporate these relationships into a broader framework that would explain all these factors simultaneously.

Methodology

Research Design

Research design is the general plan for the gathering, analysing and interpreting data to meet research objectives effectively. It gives a systematic approach to the exploration of relationships between variables and helps ensure that they are valid, reliable and scientifically sound. Designing a study is of paramount significance in the field of marketing and consumer behavior as it helps scientists to assess the impact of various factors on consumer attitudes, perceptions and behavioral intentions. The use of quantitative designs is common in contemporary social media and digital marketing research where they enable the testing of the hypotheses tested and enable researchers to examine complex relationships between several variables simultaneously (Hair et al., 2022). Additionally, social science education research by the use of quantitative research designs can leave objective results that provide scientific data, which are also statistically reliable and can help build theory and for scientific decision (Sarstedt et al., 2023). In the previous research methods literature also structured research designs were identified as a necessary means of obtaining reliable and generalizable findings (Saunders et al., 2020).

The research design chosen is important as it guides the choice of appropriate research methods to effectively and scientifically achieve the research objective. In the present study, the effect of the above multiple independent variables is examined on purchase intention along with considering two mediators (parasocial relationship, brand admiration) and one moderator (persuasion knowledge). It is important to have a design that allows one to test complex theoretical

relationships and yield statistically sound data for such goals. Total descriptive research is useful for quantitative research since permits researchers to check hypothesized relationships with empirical proof gained from a lot of respondents (Hair, et al., 2022). Furthermore, in the last few years, methodological research has received significant attention for the validation of theoretical models in the field of marketing and consumer behavior through quantitative methods (See Sarstedt et al. 2023 for an overview of methodological studies on this topic).

The present study is of quantitative, explanatory and cross-sectional design aimed to explore the factors affecting the consumer's buying intention in the case of influencer marketing. The study is focused on the social media users who are active in consuming influencer generated content and have been exposed to influencers' endorsements and brand ads. The use of a quantitative approach is justified by its ability to measure consumer perceptions and intentions by using standardized tools for surveys which can be analysed statistically in an objective manner. Qualitative survey designs are well suited for analyzing consumer reactions to digital marketing measures and social media communication (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2023).

Sampling

Data collection is the systematic procedure of collecting data from respondents to answer the research questions and/or test hypotheses. The present study is based on primary data which will be collected by structured online questionnaire among social media users who follow the influencers and interact with the influencer's content. The use of online surveys in digital marketing is so common because it gives easy access to a huge population and it is time and cost saving. The use of Internet survey techniques to explore social media use, intentions to purchase, and digital engagement has been documented in recent studies (Hair et al., 2022). In addition, online questionnaires make data more accessible for researchers and increase the convenience for the respondents (Kock, 2023). Current methodological research also highlights the suitability of online data collection techniques for populations for whom technology is the primary lifestyle and those who are social media users (Sarstedt et al., 2023). Preliminary research also confirms that attitudinal measures and behavioral intentions measured by a survey are reliable measures (Saunders et al., 2020; Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

The target population for this study includes social media users who follow influencers regularly and are impacted by influencer advertising and brand advertising on digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and YouTube. These people are an appropriate population as they actively engage with content created by influencers and have experiences pertinent to the constructs being studied. Social media users are one of the main groups of study for consumer behavior researchers as they are directly impacted by the digital marketing activities of others and influencer endorsements. In recent studies, researchers have emphasized the importance of social media users as a source of insights into the effectiveness of influencers' marketing and digital advertising campaigns (Migkos et al., 2025). Moreover, the digital consumers are more involved in online information search and product evaluation processes, and are ideal respondents for studies of purchase intentions (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Social media users have also been deemed as a suitable target group in earlier studies to assess the credibility of the influencers, their engagement level and the outcome in terms of consumer behavior (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Thus, the population of social media users would be the most relevant population in the present study.

Sampling is the method of choosing a smaller group of people from a larger group called the target population to represent the target population well. The current study will use the non-probability

sampling method, convenience sampling because the social media users who meet the study criteria are easily accessible and available. In digital marketing research, convenience sampling is commonly used due to its ability to engage respondents who have the necessary experience using social media platforms and influencers. Convenience sampling has also been shown to be suitable for exploratory and theory-testing research on online consumer behaviour in recent methodological research (Hair et al., 2022). In addition, digital survey distribution allows researchers to obtain responses from a wide range of demographic groups without being unduly costly (Sarstedt et al., 2023). Convenience sampling has also proven useful in modern research on social media and consumer engagement and purchase intent (Kock, 2023). The underlying methodological literature corroborates the use of convenience sampling when it is impractical to access the whole population or it is costly to do so (Saunders et al. 2020; Sekaran & Bougie 2020).

The collected data will be analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and in this study will be analyzed using the software of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Preliminary analysis such as descriptive statistics, reliability test, demographic analysis, data screening procedures will be conducted using SPSS. Measurement model and structural model will be evaluated using SmartPLS, including reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, path coefficient, mediation effect and moderation effect. Recent methodological literature has pointed to PLS-SEM as the method of choice for research that involves complex models comprising multiple latent constructs and predictive goals (Hair et al., 2022). In addition, PLS-SEM is gaining traction in the field of marketing and consumer behavior research because of its flexibility and ability to deal with non-normal data (Sarstedt et al., 2023). Recent scholars have also highlighted the appropriateness of SmartPLS for the study of mediation and moderation effects in theory (Kock, 2023). Previous research also identified SEM techniques as a valid means of testing complex conceptual models (Hair et al., 2021; Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

Results and Discussion

The results of this study can help shed light on the factors affecting consumers' buying intentions in the context of influencer marketing. Based on the findings, the influencer characteristics (informativeness, entertainment value, trustworthiness, attractiveness) have been identified as influencing consumers' perception and behavioral intention. As with all modern marketing research, consumers seem to be responding well to content created by influencers with useful information and fun experiences. More recent research also underscored the impact of social media influencers on consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions, both via the trust-building and relationship development processes (Migkos et al., 2025). Additionally, the credibility of influencers has been found to be a significant factor in influencing consumer engagement and buying decisions in the digital context (Zaki et al., 2025). The results of the present research can thus be added to the growing research on the effectiveness of influencers in influencing consumer behavior in the realm of influencer marketing strategies.

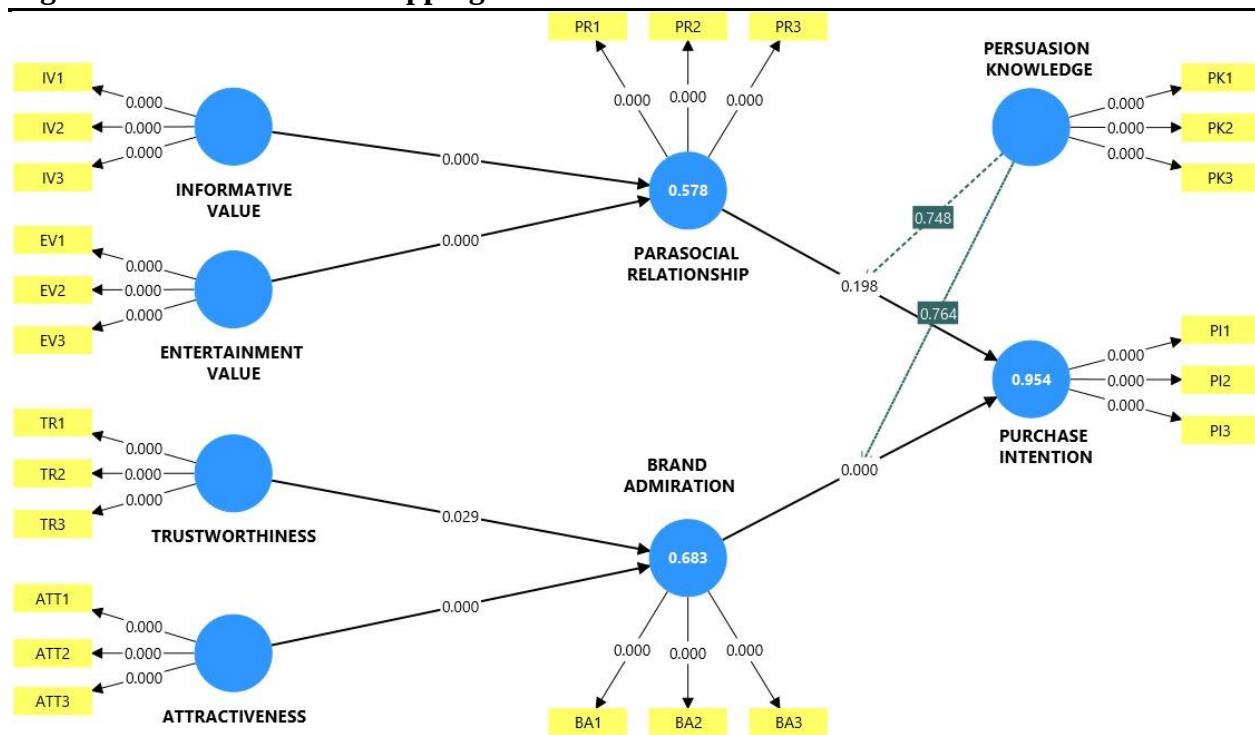
Table 1: Reliability and Validity Analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ATTRACTIVENESS	0.862	0.864	0.916	0.784
BRAND_ADMIRATION	0.853	0.855	0.911	0.773

ENTERTAINMENT_VALUE	0.832	0.837	0.899	0.748
INFORMATIVE_VALUE	0.887	0.887	0.930	0.815
PARASOCIAL _RELATIONSHIP	0.856	0.857	0.912	0.776
PERSUASION _KNOWLEDGE	0.918	0.921	0.948	0.858
PURCHASE_INTENTION	0.848	0.849	0.908	0.767
TRUSTWORTHINESS	0.908	0.909	0.942	0.844

Results for the construct reliability and convergent validity indicate that all measurement constructs meet the suggested standards for reliability and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values for all measurement items range from 0.832 to 0.918, which is above the acceptable level of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency of the items. Likewise, the Composite Reliability values (ρ_a and ρ_c) for all constructs exceed the .80 cut-off score suggesting that the indicators accurately measure the constructs which they represent, and that they have high levels of construct reliability. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of the constructs range from 0.748 to 0.858, which are significantly higher than the recommended value of 0.50, indicating good convergent validity and that all constructs account for over half of the variance in their indicators. The constructs with the highest reliability and convergent validity are persuasion knowledge ($\alpha = 0.918$, CR = 0.948, AVE = 0.858), and entertainment value has the lowest but acceptable values ($\alpha = 0.832$, CR = 0.899, AVE = 0.748). In general the results indicate that the measurement model has a good level of reliability and convergent validity, which makes the constructs suitable for further analysis of the structural model and testing the hypotheses.

Figure 2: PLS SEM Bootstrapping



The results of the structural model suggest that the proposed model has significant explanatory power for both endogenous constructs. For parasocial relationship, the value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.578, this means that informative value and entertainment value together account for 57.8% of the variance in parasocial relationship. In the same way, the attractiveness and the trustworthiness explain 68.3% of the variance of the brand admiration ($R^2 = 0.683$) and thus has a good predictive power. In addition, the R^2 value of the purchase intention is very high (0.954), suggesting that the variance in consumers' purchase intention was explained to be 95.4% by parasocial relationship, brand admiration and the moderating effect of parasocial knowledge. The significance values shown in the model represent the significance for informative value towards parasocial relationship, entertainment value towards parasocial relationship, and attractiveness towards brand admiration. Similarly, the hypothesized relationships are supported by the results of the influence of brand admiration on purchase intention ($p = 0.000$).

Hypothesis Testing

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing

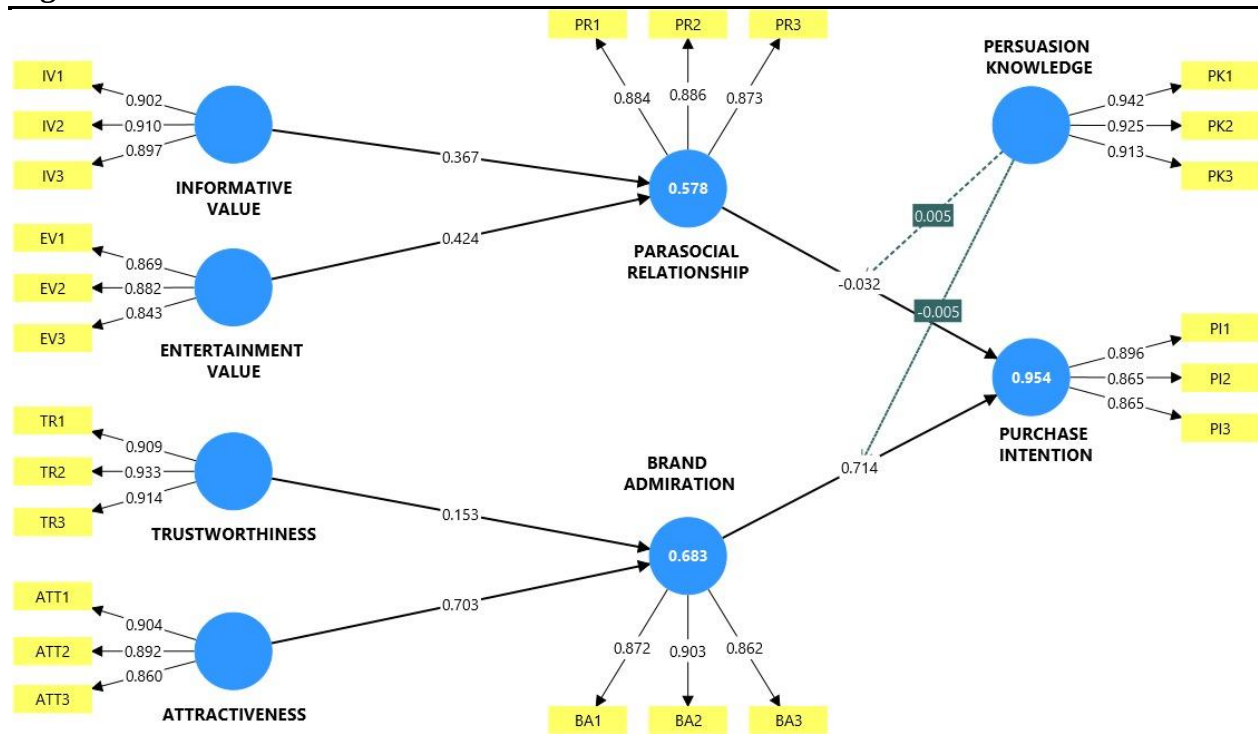
Path coefficients: Mean, STDEV, T values, p values

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
ATTRACTIVENESS -> BRAND _ADMIRATION	0.703	0.695	0.067	10.536	0.000
BRAND _ADMIRATION -> PURCHASE _INTENTION	0.714	0.715	0.028	25.814	0.000
ENTERTAINMENT _VALUE -> PARASOCIAL _RELATIONSHIP	0.424	0.426	0.077	5.522	0.000
INFORMATIVE _VALUE -> PARASOCIAL _RELATIONSHIP	0.367	0.367	0.068	5.382	0.000
PARASOCIAL _RELATIONSHIP -> PURCHASE _INTENTION	-0.032	-0.034	0.025	1.288	0.198
PERSUASION _KNOWLEDGE -> PURCHASE _INTENTION	0.339	0.339	0.024	14.319	0.000
PERSUASION _KNOWLEDGE x BRAND _ADMIRATION -> PURCHASE _INTENTION	-0.005	-0.004	0.017	0.300	0.764
PERSUASION _KNOWLEDGE x PARASOCIAL _RELATIONSHIP -> PURCHASE _INTENTION	0.005	0.004	0.017	0.321	0.748
TRUSTWORTHINESS -> BRAND _ADMIRATION	0.153	0.161	0.070	2.179	0.029

The path coefficient results show that most of the hypothesized relationships in the structural model are statistically significant and supported. The results indicated that Attractiveness significantly impacts on the consumers' Brand Admiration ($\beta = 0.703$, $t = 10.536$, $p < 0.001$), it can be seen that the positive relationship between the two is very strong and significant. Likewise, brand admiration has the highest direct effects on Purchase Intention $\beta = 0.714$, $t = 25.814$, $p < 0.001$, which shows that consumers who admire the brand are significantly more likely to buy products from that brand. The results show that both Entertainment Value ($\beta = 0.424$, $t = 5.522$, $p < 0.001$) and informative value ($\beta = 0.367$, $t = 5.382$, $p < 0.001$) positively affect parasocial

relationship, thus proving that informative and entertaining influencer content strengthen emotional connection with followers. Additionally, trustworthiness has positive relationships with brand admiration ($\beta = 0.153$, $t = 2.179$, $p = 0.029$), but its impact is also relatively low compared to the impact of attractiveness. Moreover, the results showed that persuasion knowledge has a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.339$, $t = 14.319$, $p < 0.001$). But parasocial relationship has no significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = -0.032$, $t = 1.288$, $p = 0.198$) and thus this hypothesis was rejected. Likewise, the moderating effects of persuasion knowledge on the relationships between parasocial relationship and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.005$, $p = 0.748$) and between brand admiration and purchase intention ($\beta = -0.005$, $p = 0.764$) are statistically insignificant, indicating that persuasion knowledge does not moderate these relationships within the present study. Overall, six hypotheses are supported and two of the direct effects of parasocial relationship are not.

Figure 3: PLS SEM



The final PLS-SEM model exhibits good measurement and structural model performance, suggesting the proposed model has a good explanatory power. All construct indicator loadings are greater than the recommended value of 0.70 and range from 0.843 to 0.942, indicating good indicator reliability and convergent validity. The range of the informative value items is 0.897 to 0.910, the range of the entertainment value items is 0.843 to 0.882, the range of the trustworthiness indicators is 0.909 to 0.933, and the range of the attractiveness indicators is 0.860 to 0.904. Likewise, the factor loadings for parasocial relationship, brand admiration, persuasion knowledge, and purchase intention are relatively high, indicating that the items measuring these constructs are well representative of the constructs. Moreover, the model shows good to moderate explanatory power, accounting for 57.8% of the variance of Parasocial Relationship ($R^2 = 0.578$) and 68.3% of the variance of brand admiration ($R^2 = 0.683$). These results validate that the proposed

conceptual framework includes important predictors such as informative value, entertainment value, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Table 3: Model Fitness

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.061	0.088
d_ ULS	1.099	2.347
d_ G	n/a	n/a
Chi-square	infinite	infinite
NFI	n/a	n/a

The model fit is evaluated by the model fit assessment, which shows that the proposed PLS-SEM is well fitted with the observed data. In PLS-SEM, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), one of the most popular model fit indices, is used and has a value of 0.061 for the saturated model and 0.088 for the estimated model. The values of SRMR were below the cut-off value of 0.08 for a good model fit, and below the value of 0.10 remained acceptable for the estimated model. Moreover, the discrepancy measure d_ ULS rose from 1.099 (saturated model) to 2.347 (estimated model), as it was natural since the estimated model contains structural restrictions of the data. The Chi-square values are shown as infinite and the NFI values are not available, which is typical in PLS-SEM applications that focus on predictive accuracy and variance explanation instead of on covariance-based fit measures. In general, the SRMR results indicate that the structural model has an acceptable fit with the observed data and the conceptual framework proposed for examining the relationship among the variables is appropriate.

From the findings of the present study, it can be seen that informative value ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.001$) and entertainment value ($\beta = 0.424$, $p < 0.001$) have significant impact on parasocial relationship, which means that both informational and entertaining content have a positive impact in creating stronger emotional bond between the influencer and the follower. This is aligned with the recent studies that suggested informative and entertaining social media content are important factors that contribute to audience engagement and parasocial interaction (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Migkos et al., 2025). It indicates that entertainment value is more influential than informative value, implying that customers may be more inclined to build relationships with influencers by consuming their enjoyable, emotionally stimulating content. Adesokan et al. (2024) reported similar findings, noting that more engagement was observed with entertainment-based content rather than informational content. The positive impact of content value on relationship building and audience attachment in the context of social media was also confirmed in previous research (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

Discussion

The results obtained from the present study aid in understanding how consumer purchasing intention is influenced in digital marketing environments through influencer-related characteristics. The findings show that informative value and entertainment value both significantly impact parasocial relationship, whereas trustworthiness and attractiveness significantly impact brand admiration. Of all these relationships, the strongest was the relationship between attractiveness and brand admiration, and the strongest effect was found between brand admiration and purchase intention. The results supports the key claim of the source credibility theory and the parasocial relationship theory, which suggest that the attitudes and behavioral intention of consumers are influenced by the characteristics of influencers both emotionally and

cognitively. Based on the positive results of informative value and entertainment value on parasocial relationship, the finding aligns with recent studies revealing positive result of these values on follower attachment and engagement with influencers (Migkos et al., 2025; Liu & Zheng, 2024). Likewise, the finding that trustworthiness and attractiveness significantly affect brand admiration aligns with the previous studies that focus on the role of influencer credibility and attractiveness in forming positive brand impressions (Zaki et al., 2025). The results of this study, however, demonstrate the greater impact of attractiveness over trustworthiness, which contrasts with some previous studies that found that Trustworthiness had a stronger effect on consumer reactions (Schouten et al., 2019; Reinikainen et al., 2020). This gap might be because of the visual nature of social media that require consumers to pay attention to each other's appearance and aesthetic appeal to create positive brand associations.

Theoretically, the present study builds upon the research that has been undertaken, as it merges the three theories into one framework, namely source credibility theory, parasocial relationship theory and the persuasion knowledge model. The previous research mainly focused on the theories separately, but this study shows the interaction between emotional and cognitive mechanisms in determining purchase intention. The results to some extent confirmed parasocial relationship theory in which informative value and entertainment value significantly increased parasocial relationship. But, in contrast to theory, parasocial relationship had no significant effect on purchase intention. This discovery of emotional attachment does not necessarily equal a purchase challenges the notion that people can simply be emotionally attached to influencers without buying anything. However, the direct effect of parasocial interactions on consumer decisions has been called into question in recent studies, indicating that consumers today are more likely to feel admiration for influencers than to make actual purchase decisions, which suggests that emotional admiration might influence consumer behaviour but not directly drive it (Adesokan et al., 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024). In addition, given the importance of brand admiration, it is proposed that emotional disposition towards brands could be more relevant than emotional disposition towards influencers when it comes to buying behavior. Previous research also found that positive brands can have a more powerful influence on consumer choices than positive interpersonal relationships with brands endorsers (Li et al., 2021; Reinikainen et al., 2020). The current results, therefore, are significant in extending the theoretical standpoints that have been explored so far where emotional mechanisms are discussed in different contexts of influencer marketing.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the role of the influencer's characteristics on consumer purchase intention, mediated by parasocial relationship and brand admiration, and moderated by persuasion knowledge. Results indicate that informative value and entertainment value have significant effect on parasocial relationship, while trustworthiness and attractiveness significantly affect brand admiration. Attractiveness was the most important predictor of brand admiration, and brand admiration was the most important predictor of purchase intention, when compared to other predictors. The results indicate that it is more likely that consumers will buy a product when they have a positive attitude toward a brand, and not just due to emotional connection to influencers. The same conclusions have been cited in the latest studies on influencer marketing that focus on the significance of emotional brand perceptions in consumer decision-making (Migkos et al., 2025; Zaki et al., 2025). Previous studies also emphasized the importance of the perception of the credibility of the influencer and the emotions attached to the brand for the purchase decision (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019).

Theoretically, this study adds to the literature by combining source credibility theory, parasocial relationship theory, and the persuasion knowledge model in one conceptual model. Results confirm the relevance of source credibility dimensions in explaining the consumers' reactions to influencer marketing and enrich the theory with an emotional and cognitive mechanism. The findings of no relationship between parasocial relationship and purchase intention is important for the theoretical aspect as it contradicts the current belief that when consumer has an emotional bond with influencers, it inevitably leads to their purchasing behaviour. Recent research has also indicated that consumers are much more critical of influencers' recommendations than they were in the past (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Adesokan et al., 2024). Thus the current results can help to deepen the understanding of the effectiveness of influencers in the current digital landscape.

Future Research Direction

The current framework has the potential to be extended, with additional variables considered in a future study that may influence the value of the purchase intention of the consumers within the scope of an influencer marketing strategy. There are many things that can lead to a greater understanding of consumer behaviour such as authenticity, homophily, influencer expertise, brand trust, perceived value and consumer engagement. Recent research has shed light on certain key determinants shaping consumer responses in digital environments, such as authenticity and influencer-brand congruence (Adesokan et al., 2024; Migkos et al., 2025). Additionally, other mediation variables such as trust, customer experience and perceived credibility, which may affect the impact of the attributes of influencers on their buying process, could be explored in subsequent research. Prior studies also suggest the need for the consideration of multiple psychological and relational processes together for the construction of more complete consumer decision-making models (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021).

The present study has some limitations methodologically, which may offer possibilities for further research. This research employs a cross sectional design, but cannot be used to show change over time in the attitudes and behaviors of consumers. The relationships between influencers and followers, and how these evolve over time, and what influence this relationship has on customers' buying decisions at multiple touch points of engagement is interesting and ripe for further research. Secondly, the study used a quantitative survey approach, which may not necessarily represent the full breadth of consumer experiences. The recent methodological literature suggests a mix between quantitative and qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into the perceptions and motivations of consumers (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2023). It's a blended technique that can be useful to analyze both emotional and cognitive dynamics at play in consumer behavior.

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