

The Evolution of Influencer Credibility Dimensions in the Skincare Industry: A Systematic Literature Review (2020–2026)

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The skincare market has experienced a structural transformation in recent years, shifting from an industry primarily driven by aesthetics toward one increasingly shaped by scientific literacy, ingredient transparency, and consumer education. As consumers have become more attentive to product ingredients and efficacy, digital platforms have emerged as critical spaces for information exchange. Within this ecosystem, social media influencers (SMI) play an important if not pivotal role. They have become not merely promoters, but intermediaries using their credibility to affect consumer purchasing decisions. The aim of this paper is to examine important dimensions of influencer credibility. For this purpose, we conducted a systematic literature review of skincare influencer credibility dimensions, covering the period from 2020 to 2026. The review categorizes existing research across core credibility dimensions, including knowledge, relatability, helpfulness, self-confidence and articulation. The paper further examines how these credibility dimensions interact with stages of the consumer decision-making process, from need recognition to post-purchase evaluation, thereby explaining variations in persuasive effectiveness among influencers. By offering a structured credibility map, this paper provides a foundation for future empirical research and practical guidance for marketing strategists operating in increasingly knowledge-driven consumer environments.

Keywords: *Influencer Credibility, Skincare Marketing, Trust, De-influencing, Consumer Behavior, Purchase Intention*

Introduction

The digital environment of the twenty-first century has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior, particularly within the beauty and skincare industry. Social media influencers (SMI) have emerged as one of the primary sources of information and persuasion, significantly shaping how new generations of customers select cosmetic products (Hassan et al., 2021; Jamil et al., 2024; Ametin-Gay et al., 2025). As the skincare market continues to expand (see Grand View Research, 2026), the concept of source credibility – traditionally grounded in expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness – remains the cornerstone of influencer marketing effectiveness (Hassan et al., 2021; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim 2021; Chavda & Chauhan, 2024).

The global cosmetics market size was valued at USD 330.10 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach USD 545.19 billion by 2033, growing at a CAGR of 6.6% from

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2026 to 2033 (Grand View Research, 2026). The continued expansion of the category is supported by growing consumer emphasis on self-care, wellness, personal grooming, and skin health, particularly among Millennials and Generation Z consumers who increasingly integrate beauty and skincare routines into their everyday lifestyles (Grand View Research 2026). Within this broader market, skincare represented the largest product category, accounting for 43.4% of the global cosmetics market in 2025 (Grand View Research 2026). This corresponds to approximately USD 143.3 billion, highlighting the substantial economic importance of skincare within the broader cosmetics industry.

Social media, influencer marketing, virtual try-on tools, and AI-driven beauty recommendations have transformed the way consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase cosmetics and especially skincare products (Grand View Research, 2026). Consumers frequently rely on influencers' product reviews, tutorials, recommendations, and personal experiences when making skincare purchase decisions (Ametin-Gay et al., 2025; Fauzi et al., 2024). This shift underscores the evolving dynamic between brand-owned and influencer-generated communications, where influencer-directed marketing consistently demonstrates a stronger capacity to build organic trust and drive customer engagement compared to traditional brand-directed marketing (Kumar et al., 2025). In addition, the skincare industry is highly visual, emotionally driven, and strongly connected to trust, credibility, perceived expertise, and authenticity, making it particularly relevant for influencer marketing research. Moreover, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have significantly transformed skincare marketing strategies, further increasing the importance of influencers in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

However, the growing commercialization of social media platforms has produced a marked increase in consumer skepticism (Harff and Le, 2026; Michaelidou et al., 2026). New generations of consumers are becoming increasingly adept at identifying conventional persuasion tactics, frequently perceiving 'highly polished' sponsored content as insincere or lacking moral accountability (Michaelidou et al., 2026; Mardon et al., 2023; Torres et al., 2019). This shift has given rise to the de-influencing trend – a phenomenon in which content creators gain prominence by actively discouraging followers from purchasing certain products, or by recommending more cost-effective alternatives, thereby prioritizing transparency and authenticity over immediate commercial gain (Penttinen et al., 2026).

The significance of this transformation is particularly pronounced in the skincare sector, where advice frequently borders on medical expertise and the risks associated with product failure are both personal and visible (Trepanowski and Grant-Kels, 2023). Unlike general lifestyle content, skincare demands a higher degree of perceived scientific literacy and specialized knowledge to sustain long-term follower trust (Hassan et al., 2021). Furthermore, the influencer-follower relationship has evolved from simple interaction into complex trans-parasocial dynamics, in which the integrity of the influencer becomes a critical driver of consumer engagement (Lou, 2022; Lou et al., 2023).

Despite the growing prominence of de-influencing, a limited systematic understanding of how this trend redefines traditional dimensions of influencer credibility is available in the concurrent body of knowledge. This study aims to

address that gap by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) following established methodological approaches in prior research (Aguinis, 2025; Joshi et al., 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021).

To achieve this objective, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the systematic inquiry:

- RQ1: Which specific dimensions of influencer credibility have been identified as critical for consumers in the skincare sector within the 2020–2026 period?
- RQ2: How does the “de-influencing” paradigm moderate traditional source credibility dimensions and affect consumer trust?
- RQ3: In what ways do these evolving credibility dimensions and de-influencing strategies interact with the different stages of the consumer decision-making process?

By synthesizing 50 scholarly contributions published between 2020 and 2026, this study examines the interaction between influencer characteristics, relational mechanisms, and the moderating roles of consumer skepticism and de-influencing (Michaelidou et al., 2026; Penttinen et al., 2026; Vrontis et al., 2021). The findings offer a comprehensive overview of evolving paradigms in digital influence, providing a strategic roadmap for both academic researchers and marketing practitioners in the industry.

The primary objective of this synthesis is to identify the key credibility factors of influencers in the contemporary digital environment. Accordingly, this study might serve as the theoretical foundation and framework for further studies investigating the de-influence paradigm.

The paper is structured in the following order. The next section delineates the methodology used in this study by explaining the main definitions, analytical framework and review strategy, data coding, and selection criteria (*Research Methodology*). The subsequent section reports and discusses the findings (*Findings and Discussion*). Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of theoretical and managerial contributions, limitations, and directions for future research (*Conclusion*).

Research Methodology

Explanation of the Study Context

Influencer credibility is an amorphous phenomenon without any firmly standardized definitions. To allow for any systematic search through the scholarly databases, we adopted a set of definitions used as further guidance in the study. Existing literature indicates that credibility and influence are treated as multidimensional concepts. Drawing on foundational works in digital marketing (Hassan et al., 2021), Table 1 presents the key constructs that form the theoretical foundation of this study.

Table 1. Definitions and Theoretical Grounding of Key Constructs

Concept	Theoretical Definition	Reference
Expertise	The degree to which a follower believes that an influencer possesses the knowledge and skills necessary to provide valid information about product formulations and performance.	(Hassan et al., 2021)
Trustworthiness	A follower's perception of the influencer's objectivity and integrity, reflecting the belief that the information provided is free from purely commercial interests.	(Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021)
Parasocial Interaction (PSI)	A psychological phenomenon in which a follower develops a one-sided sense of intimacy and attachment toward an influencer, treating them as a 'digital friend'.	(Schouten et al., 2021) (Fauzi et al., 2024)
De-influencing	An intentional communication strategy aimed at discouraging purchases in order to strengthen source authenticity and protect consumer interests against market saturation.	(Penttinen et al., 2026)

Expertise is conceptualized as the cognitive pillar of the model. In the skincare industry, where product formulations (such as acids, retinol, and peptides) are highly complex, expertise is not merely an aesthetic attribute but a functional necessity (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Following the theoretical insights of Hassan et al. (2021), consumers facing high information asymmetry transfer their cognitive burden to the influencer, relying on their specialized knowledge to guide purchase intentions and mitigate the risk of adverse product choices.

Trustworthiness acts as the moral filter within the model. As noted by Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2021), technical expertise loses its conversion power if the consumer perceives underlying commercial motives. Trustworthiness transforms the influencer's "cold" knowledge into consumer action, validating that the information provided is objective, transparent, and driven by personal integrity.

Parasocial Interaction (PSI) represents the affective (emotional) dimension of the relationship. According to Schouten et al. (2021), prolonged content consumption fosters an illusion of a reciprocal friendship, leading followers to perceive the influencer as a "digital friend." Within this research, PSI plays a critical role by altering how critical messages are received; recommendations or purchase discouragements from an influencer with high PSI are not processed as marketing tactics, but rather as benevolent advice from a trusted peer.

De-influencing is introduced as a strategic and corrective construct. Drawing upon the latest advancements in the literature (Penttinen et al., 2026), de-influencing is examined not merely as the sharing of negative reviews, but as a deliberate impression-management communication strategy. It serves as tangible proof of the influencer's autonomy from commercial brands, thereby "resetting" consumer skepticism and shifting the dynamics of long-term trustworthiness and audience retention in a saturated digital landscape.

Systematic Review Strategy

The review process is structured across three key phases as presented in Figure 1, ensuring traceability and replicability of the entire review process.

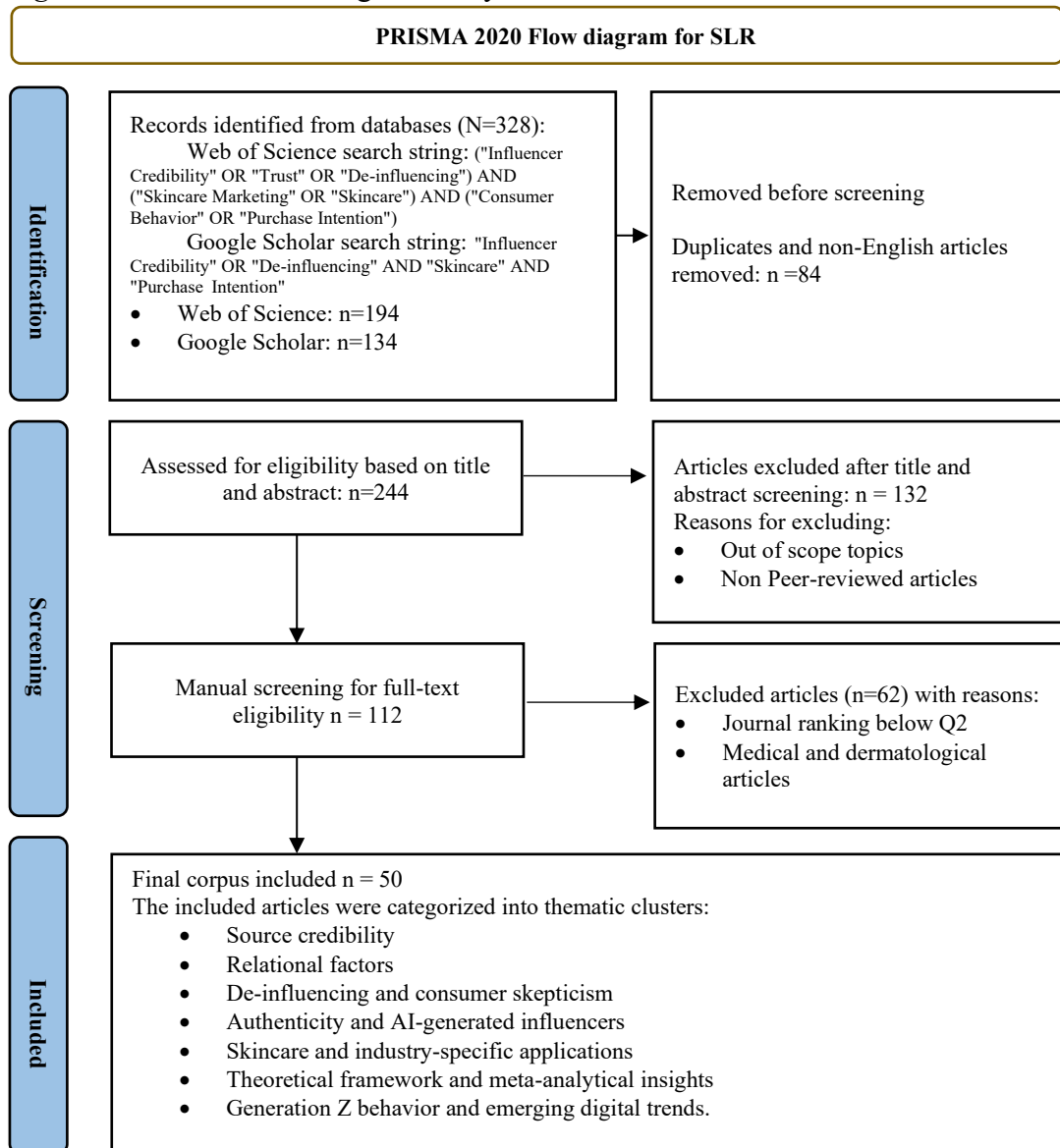
To ensure methodological transparency and replicability, the literature corpus was systematically compiled following the PRISMA guidelines. The search was conducted across Web of Science (WoS) and Google Scholar using a targeted boolean search string:

- Web of Science: ("Influencer Credibility" OR "Trust" OR "De-influencing") AND ("Skincare Marketing" OR "Skincare") AND ("Consumer Behavior" OR "Purchase Intention")
- Google Scholar: "Influencer Credibility" OR "De-influencing" AND "Skincare" AND "Purchase Intention"

Web of Science was prioritized to enforce a strict quality threshold, restricting the initial pool to high-quartile (Q1/Q2) peer-reviewed journals with rigorous impact factors. Google Scholar was utilized as a complementary validation layer to capture ahead-of-print articles (2025–2026) and emerging literature on de-influencing. In addition, WoS Core Collection indexing covers the vast majority of top-tier Q1/Q2 marketing and consumer behavior titles (e.g. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Business Research, Psychology & Marketing). The selection process was conducted through four sequential stages:

1. Identification: Initial database search yielded $N = 328$ records published between 2020 and 2026.
2. Screening and filtering: After removing duplicate entries and non-English articles ($n = 84$), 244 titles and abstracts were screened for thematic relevance.
3. Eligibility: A total of 112 full-text articles were evaluated against predefined Inclusion Criteria (peer-reviewed scientific publications, primary focus on skincare/influencer credibility/de-influencing, empirical or rigorous conceptual design) and Exclusion Criteria (non-peer reviewed gray literature, cosmetic surgery focus, low-involvement FMCG general fashion).
4. Included Corpus: This rigorous filtration resulted in a finalized, methodologically aligned corpus of exactly $N = 50$ primary scholarly articles. The final phase was focused on an in-depth analysis of the 50 most relevant publications, extracting qualitative data, and categorizing them into the Literature Synthesis Matrix for thematic cross-examination.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for Systematic Literature Phases



The Search Scope

The geographical scope of the review is international rather than restricted to a specific national or regional market. The review includes scholarly studies conducted across the geographical contexts represented in the available literature on influencer marketing, consumer behavior, and influencer credibility in the skincare and beauty-related context. Geographical context was considered as an analytical characteristic of the reviewed studies in order to identify patterns and underrepresented research settings. Based on the synthesis, the existing literature is concentrated in several Western and Asian markets, while the Western Balkans remain insufficiently represented. Therefore, the Western Balkans are treated in this study as an identified

geographical research gap and a potential context for future empirical investigation, rather than as a geographical boundary of the present systematic review.

This study follows established methodological principles for conducting systematic literature reviews (SLR) in marketing research (Aguinis, 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2025). The literature review focused on the period from 2020 to 2026 to ensure the relevance of findings to recent developments in digital marketing and influencer research (Barari et al., 2026; Pan et al., 2025). This period reflects the accelerated growth of influencer marketing research alongside the expansion of social media platforms and evolving patterns of digital consumer engagement (Joshi et al., 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021). Furthermore, this period reflects the emergence of new phenomena such as virtual influencers, de-influencing, AI-generated content, authenticity-related concerns, and increasing regulatory attention toward transparency and digital advertising practices.

Among the various segments of the beauty industry, the skincare sector has become one of the most strongly influenced by social media communication, influencer recommendations, and digital consumer engagement (Fitriasari et al., 2025). The growing demand for skincare products is closely associated with consumers' increasing reliance on online product education, authenticity cues, peer reviews, and influencer-generated content when making purchase decisions (Hassan et al., 2021; Trepanowski and Grant-Kels, 2023).

Search Strategy and Sample Filtering

The primary literature search was conducted using the databases Google Scholar and Web of Science. To capture the specific context of the skincare industry and emerging digital phenomena, the following keyword combinations in English were employed: *'skincare marketing'*, *'influencer credibility'*, *'de-influencing'*, *'consumer behavior'*, *'trust'*, and *'purchase intention'*.

A total of 328 studies were initially identified through the systematic database search. From these originally identified works, a multi-stage filtering process was applied based on title, abstract, and text relevance to the skincare and digital marketing sectors. Preference was given to studies published in Q1 and Q2 ranked journals, as well as those employing theoretical frameworks such as the Source Credibility Model and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Hassan et al., 2021; Spörl-Wang et al., 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021; Krstić et al., 2025). Following the exclusion of duplicates, non-indexed conference proceedings, and papers lacking empirical validation of influencer constructs, a final corpus of 50 core papers was selected for deep qualitative synthesis and content analysis based on the following specific criteria:

- Thematic Relevance: Studies that empirically or theoretically examine the influence of social media influencers on consumer behavior in the beauty and skincare industry (Hassan et al., 2021; Shabani Shojaei & Barbosa, 2026).
- Innovation: Inclusion of works analyzing moderating effects such as de-influencing and skepticism as responses to commercial market saturation (Michaelidou et al., 2026; Penttinen et al., 2026).

- Methodological Diversity: The corpus encompasses meta-analyses, quantitative studies based on structural equation modeling (SEM), and qualitative social media content analyses (Barari et al., 2026; Kästner & Baczynski, 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021).

Data Coding and Synthesis Matrix

To derive insights from the final corpus of 50 scholarly works, a qualitative content analysis and thematic synthesis approach were employed. The selected papers were systematically coded and structured into a Literature Synthesis Matrix (Table 2). This process was operationalized through a three-step coding mechanism: (1) Open Coding where each paper was initially screened to identify specific variables, such as the social media platform analyzed (e.g., TikTok, Instagram), the target demographic (e.g., Gen Z), and the dimensions of credibility measured; (2) Axial Coding meaning that the extracted codes were then grouped into broader relational categories. This allowed for the alignment of traditional source credibility elements (Expertise and Trustworthiness) with newer, defensive consumer mechanisms triggered by commercial saturation and (3) Selective Coding where the relationships between the core constructs were integrated into a unified conceptual framework. The spotlight was placed on isolating the occurrences of De-influencing and Parasocial Interaction (PSI), mapping how these constructs structurally alter, moderate, or reinforce the traditional path from influencer credibility to consumer purchase intentions and audience retention.

The structural mapping presented in the Literature Synthesis Matrix (Table 2) reveals a clear trajectory in digital marketing research. While traditional studies primarily addressed the 'Source Credibility' and 'Relational Factors' categories (Hassan et al., 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2021), the emergence of 'De-influencing & Skepticism' and 'AI Influencers' represents a newly developing and fragmented domain in the literature (Lou et al., 2023; Penttinen et al., 2026; Vuković & Pavković, 2026). Furthermore, the cross-examination of the selected corpus highlights a significant geographic and context-specific gap, as the vast majority of empirical validations have been conducted in Western and Asian markets (Han & Balabanis, 2024; Pan et al., 2025), leaving developing regional ecosystems less explored. By synthesizing these diverse categories, this matrix provides the foundational baseline for subsequent empirical research. Specifically, it establishes the operationalized constructs that may be tested in future empirical research examining contemporary influencer dynamics within the Western Balkan skincare market.

Table 2. Literature Synthesis Matrix

Category/Factor	Authors (Year)
1. Source Credibility	AlFarraj et al. (2021); Kästner & Baczynski (2025); Schouten et al. (2021); Rani et al. (2022); Hassan et al. (2021); Bahar & Hasan (2025); Lou & Yuan (2019); Vukmirović et al. (2020); Han & Balabanis (2024); Vrontis et al. (2021); Michaelidou et al. (2026); Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2021); Kumar et al. (2025)
2. Relational Factors	Zimmermann et al. (2025); Bevan-Dye (2025); Lou (2022); Lou et al. (2023); Krstić et al. (2025); Götzfried & Heitmayer (2026); Trepanowski & Grant-Kels (2023); Shoenberger & Kim (2023); Janssen et al. (2022)
3. De-influencing & Skepticism	Coutinho et al. (2023); Mardon et al. (2023); Harff & Le (2026); Torres et al. (2019); Penttinen et al. (2026); Michaelidou et al. (2026); Vuković & Pavković (2026); Bahar & Hasan (2025)
4. Authenticity & AI Influencers	Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2021); Lou et al. (2023); Kästner & Baczynski (2025); Janssen et al. (2022); Cooper (2025); Shoenberger & Kim (2023); Ren et al. (2023)
5. Skincare & Industry Specific	Echauri (2026); Naderer et al. (2021); Lou (2022); Trepanowski & Grant-Kels (2023); Rey & Tan (2025); Joshi et al. (2025); Fitriasisari et al. (2025); Ametin-Gay et al. (2025)
6. Meta-analyses & Theory	Barari et al. (2026); Boerman (2020); Ametin-Gay et al. (2025); Pan et al. (2025); Vrontis et al. (2021); Ren et al. (2023)
7. Gen Z & Digital Trends	Bevan-Dye (2025); Ekinici et al. (2025); Jamil et al. (2024); Janssen et al. (2022); Pan et al. (2025); Boerman (2020); Kim & Kim (2021); Fitriasisari et al. (2025)

Findings

Structural Mapping of the analyzed Publications

The research is based on contemporary and interdisciplinary literature that connects influencer marketing, consumer behavior, social media, digital marketing, influencer credibility, authenticity, the psychological effects of influencers, the beauty and dermatology industry, and the ethics and regulation of digital advertising. Literature predominantly belongs to the fields of marketing, consumer behavior, digital media,

and communications, with a smaller number of studies originating from dermatology, psychology, and information technology.

Table 3. Strategic Mapping and Ranking of Core Journals

Journal	Research Field	Representative Authors	Main Research Focus
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	Business research, marketing, consumer behavior, digital business, strategic management	Audrezet et al. (2020); Kim & Kim (2021); Spörl-Wang et al. (2025); Michaelidou et al. (2026)	Authenticity, trust, parasocial relationships, deinfluencing, influencer marketing effects
<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	Marketing theory, consumer research, strategic marketing, quantitative marketing studies	Barari et al. (2026); Pan et al. (2025); Penttinen et al. (2026)	Meta-analyses, influencer marketing effectiveness, theoretical syntheses
<i>Psychology & Marketing</i>	Consumer psychology, marketing behavior, decision-making, emotional and cognitive processes in consumption	Han & Balabanis (2024); Torres et al. (2019); Ekinci et al. (2025)	Psychological mechanisms, consumer behavior, deceptive practices
<i>International Journal of Advertising</i>	Advertising research, digital communication, persuasive communication, influencer advertising	Janssen et al., (2022); Naderer et al. (2021); Shoenberger & Kim (2023)	Influencer advertising, authenticity, homophily, advertising transparency
<i>Journal of Advertising</i>	Advertising theory, media effects, branded communication, consumer persuasion	Lou (2022); Lou & Yuan (2019); Lou et al. (2023)	Influencer credibility, branded content, virtual influencers
<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	Digital behavior, psychology of technology use, social media interaction, online communication	Boerman (2020); Götzfried & Heitmayer (2026)	Digital behavior, social media interaction, algorithmic effects
<i>Journal of Interactive Advertising</i>	Digital advertising, social media marketing, interactive media, online consumer engagement	Lou & Yuan (2019); Harff & Le (2026)	Consumer trust, negative reviews, influencer advertising
<i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i>	Consumer behavior, consumption patterns, consumer attitudes, sustainability and purchasing behavior	Ren et al. (2023); Vrontis et al. (2021)	Consumer attitudes, authenticity, digital marketing
<i>Journal of Consumer Behaviour</i>	Consumer decision-making, consumer behavior, psychological and social influences on consumption	Alim et al. (2026)	Influencer-follower interaction, behavioral responses
<i>Journal of Marketing Communications</i>	Branding, strategic communication, advertising, public relations, digital marketing communication	Elsharnouby et al. (2025)	Influencer credibility, similarity, brand image

Geographically, the literature covers Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the United States, and India. The most frequently analyzed generations are Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation Y, indicating that the research is focused on digitally active generations that intensively use social media. To ensure methodological rigor, Table 3 maps the most frequently used journals within this literature review, highlighting their research fields and focus.

The systematic review of 50 scholarly works (2020–2026) reveals a significant transformation in the way influencer credibility is constructed and perceived within the skincare industry. The following sections synthesize these findings, with a focus on the evolution of credibility dimensions and the emergence of de-influencing as a critical moderating factor.

Table 3a. Descriptive Overview of the Reviewed Corpus (N = 50)

Characteristic	Breakdown / Category	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
Publication Year	2020–2021	11	22%
	2022–2023	11	22%
	2024	4	8%
	2025–2026	24	48%
Geographical Scope	Western Markets (Europe, USA)	22	44%
	Asian & Middle Eastern Markets	18	36%
	Global / Multi-regional / Meta-analyses	10	20%
Methodological Approach	Quantitative (SEM, Survey, Experiments)	28	56%
	Meta-Analyses & Systematic Reviews	10	20%
	Qualitative (Content Analysis, Interviews, Netnography)	8	16%
	Mixed-Methods / Conceptual	4	8%
Primary Research Focus	Source Credibility & Parasocial Interaction	20	40%
	De-influencing, Skepticism & Ethics	12	24%
	Gen Z & Consumer Behavior Trends	7	14%
	Skincare & Dermatological Context	6	12%
	AI & Virtual Influencers	5	10%

Evolution of Core Credibility Dimensions

This study identifies five domain-specific dimensions that are critical for contemporary consumers in the skincare sector: (1) Knowledge, (2) Relatability, (3)

Helpfulness, (4) Self-confidence, and (5) Articulation. These dimensions are further explained below.

Table 3b. Evolutionary Shift in Influencer Credibility Dimensions (2020–2026)

Credibility Dimension	Traditional Phase (2020–2022)	Contemporary Phase (2023–2026)	Key Evolutionary Driver & Supporting Literature
Knowledge	Generic product familiarity: Credibility was tied to brand affiliations, social status, or surface-level product endorsements.	Scientific literacy: Focus shifted to active ingredients, biochemical mechanisms, and decoding INCI lists (e.g., retinoids vs. peptides).	"Skintelligent" consumer demand: Modern consumers demand high information transparency over brand status (Hassan et al., 2021)
Relatability	Aspirational perfection: Reliance on "perfect skin" ideals, curated lifestyle aesthetics, and high-status aspirational appeal.	Raw vulnerability: Authentic portrayal of real skin textures, acne, and hyperpigmentation.	Parasocial closeness & fatigue: Shift toward trans-parasocial relationships where shared skin struggles foster genuine trust (Jamil et al., 2024; Schouten et al., 2021; Lou, 2022).
Helpfulness	Superficial reviews: Focus on basic product placement, unboxing, and general aesthetic recommendations.	Educational routines: Actionable solutions, skin barrier repair, and personalized routine building.	Functional value seeking: Shift from commercial hype to concrete problem-solving value (Echauri, 2026; Trepanowski & Grant-Kels, 2023).
Self-Confidence	Persuasive delivery: Polished, highly structured, and brand-driven promotional communication.	Moral autonomy: Authority expressed through independence, objectivity, and willingness to reject sponsored deals.	Skepticism toward sponsored content: Willingness to issue negative reviews as a primary signal of authority (Elsharnouby et al., 2025; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Harff & Le, 2026).
Articulation	Promotional messaging: Simplified marketing scripts designed for quick consumer engagement.	Scientific translation: Ability to translate complex dermatological and chemical concepts into accessible peer language.	High information asymmetry: Bridging the gap between scientific beauty brands and digitally literate consumers (Spörl-Wang et al., 2025).

Modern ‘skintelligent’ consumers (Generation Z) demand influencers possessing high scientific literacy. Expertise is no longer validated by social status, but by the capacity to decode complex ingredient lists (INCI lists) and explain biochemical mechanisms – such as the comparative efficacy of retinoids versus peptides (Hassan et al., 2021).

In contrast to the ‘perfect skin’ ideals of previous eras, current research highlights that the authentic portrayal of real skin textures – including acne or hyperpigmentation

– fosters deeper trans-parasocial relationships. Consumers are more inclined to trust influencers whose skin concerns mirror their own (Jamil et al., 2024; Schouten et al., 2021).

Credibility is substantially enhanced when content offers concrete solutions rather than mere product placement. Influencers who provide ‘educational value’ – such as skincare routines for a compromised skin barrier – generate greater purchase intention (Echauri 2026; Trepanowski & Grant-Kels 2023).

An influencer’s articulation and decisive delivery serve as heuristic cues of authority. A confident presentation style, particularly in video formats, assists in overcoming initial consumer skepticism toward sponsored content (Elsharnouby et al., 2025; Lou and Yuan 2019).

The ability to translate complex dermatological science into broadly accessible language is essential for sustained audience engagement. Clear articulation bridges the gap between scientifically oriented brands and the end consumer (Spörl-Wang et al., 2025).

De-influencing as a Strategic Authenticity-Building Tool

A central finding of this review is the role of de-influencing as a moderating variable that redefines the influencer–follower relationship.

Whereas traditional models conceptualize influencer credibility as an aggregate of positive attributes (Hassan et al., 2021), the contemporary skincare context necessitates the inclusion of de-influencing as a ‘negative’ signal that paradoxically functions to validate sincerity. De-influencing operates as a filter that ‘cleanses’ credibility of suspicion regarding commercial motives.

In this sense, credibility in the skincare industry is now understood through the interaction of two sets of factors, as presented in Table 4.

By actively discouraging the purchase of over-promoted or ineffective products, influencers signal a transition from commercial motivation to moral accountability. This act of ‘negative reviewing’ paradoxically strengthens trustworthiness. The evidence suggests that when an influencer employs de-influencing, they reduce cognitive dissonance among followers, rendering subsequent positive recommendations considerably more authentic and objective (Michaelidou et al., 2026; Penttinen et al., 2026). However, this mechanism also presents a tactical paradox: while genuine de-influencing builds legitimate trust, creators can also strategically manipulate skepticism and selective disinformation to simulate authority and maintain long-term credibility (Bahar & Hasan 2025).

Table 4. *Positive and Negative Drivers of Influencer Credibility in the Skincare Industry*

Positive Drivers of Credibility	Description	Supporting Literature
Expertise	Knowledge about ingredients, formulations, and skincare performance	Hassan et al., 2021; AlFarraj et al., 2021
Trustworthiness	Perceived honesty and authenticity in recommendations	Hassan et al., 2021; Chavda & Chauhan 2024; AlFarraj et al., 2021; Schouten et al., 2021; Wiedmann and von Mettenheim, 2021
Attractiveness	Physical appearance and healthy skin aesthetics	Hassan et al., 2021; Wiedmann and von Mettenheim, 2021
Negative / Critical Factors		
Consumer Skepticism	Resistance toward sponsored influencer content	Harff and Le 2026; Michaelidou et al., 2026
Commercial Saturation	Overexposure to advertising reducing authenticity	Michaelidou et al., 2026
De-influencing	Corrective strategy aimed at restoring authenticity and long-term trust	Penttinen et al., 2026

Emerging Trends: AI Influencers and Hyper-personalization

A novel body of knowledge is signaling a shift toward technological integration to influence marketing, mostly related to the inclusion of AI influencing and hyper-personalization. As for the first one, novel literature is focused on examining whether artificially generated entities can achieve Relatability and Knowledge without possessing biological skin. While offering high Articulation, their lack of physical vulnerability represents a challenge for long-term Trustworthiness in the skincare domain (Kim and Kim 2021; Ren et al., 2023; Shoenberger and Kim 2023).

As for the latter one, the rise of AI-driven skin diagnostics enables influencers to move beyond general advice toward personalized skincare routines. This trend elevates the Helpfulness dimension to a predictive level, further reinforcing the trans-parasocial bond (Götzfried and Heitmayer 2026; Zimmermann et al., 2025).

The Paradox of Negative Influence

The synthesis reveals a ‘trust paradox’: negative information (de-influencing) produces positive marketing outcomes. For traditional skincare brands seeking to revitalize their image among Generation Z, this implies that radical transparency is no longer a risk but a strategic requirement. Authenticity has ceased to be an ambiguous

aesthetic and has become a measurable asset, with the influencer functioning as a 'guardian' of both the consumer's budget and wellbeing (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou 2022; Vuković and Pavković 2026).

A critical conceptual insight emerging from the systematic synthesis is what we propose to conceptualize as the Trust Paradox. The concept captures a counterintuitive mechanism in influencer marketing: an influencer may strengthen long-term credibility and persuasive effectiveness by deliberately reducing short-term commercial persuasion.

Traditional influencer marketing assumes that positive product evaluations and brand endorsements contribute directly to favorable consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. However, in increasingly commercialized social media environments, repeated promotional content may activate consumers' persuasion knowledge and increase skepticism toward the influencer's motives (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Boerman, 2020). In this context, the effectiveness of a recommendation may depend not only on what the influencer recommends, but also on whether the audience believes that the recommendation is independent of commercial pressure.

The Trust Paradox emerges when an influencer engages in commercially disconfirming behavior, for example, openly rejecting a sponsorship, criticizing a product, explaining why a popular product is unsuitable, or advising followers not to purchase it. Such behavior may represent a short-term sacrifice of commercial opportunity; however, it can simultaneously function as a credibility signal. By demonstrating a willingness to forgo immediate commercial benefits, the influencer may reduce perceptions of promotional intent and strengthen perceived authenticity, integrity, and trustworthiness (Audrezet et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2021; Penttinen et al., 2026).

The paradox therefore lies in the fact that less immediate commercial persuasion may create greater conditions for future persuasive influence. Rather than interpreting all influencer communication as commercially motivated, consumers may perceive occasional criticism and de-influencing as evidence that the influencer is willing to prioritize audience interests over sponsorship opportunities. This can increase the diagnostic value of subsequent recommendations: when an influencer who is known for occasionally rejecting or criticizing products does recommend a product, the endorsement may be perceived as more selective and therefore more credible.

Importantly, the Trust Paradox should not be understood as a claim that negative reviews automatically generate trust or sales. Rather, it represents a conceptual mechanism through which transparency and commercially costly forms of communication may mitigate skepticism and contribute to the development of longer-term relational value. The mechanism is particularly relevant in skincare, where consumers increasingly encounter highly commercialized content and may seek information that helps them distinguish between genuine product evaluation and promotional persuasion.

Within this framework, de-influencing represents a particularly visible manifestation of the Trust Paradox. De-influencing does not necessarily eliminate persuasion; instead, it may transform the basis of persuasion from overt product promotion toward perceived honesty, selectivity, and consumer advocacy. The proposed concept therefore provides a theoretical bridge between persuasion knowledge, influencer credibility, authenticity, and de-influencing, while also

identifying an empirical question for future research: whether commercially disconfirming behaviors actually produce stronger trust and greater responsiveness to subsequent recommendations among skincare consumers.

Discussion

This study presents a comprehensive systematic literature review of the evolution of influencer credibility in the skincare industry, with particular focus on the transformative role of de-influencing. The synthesis of 50 relevant scholarly works demonstrates that traditional credibility models are not sufficient to account for the complex interactions between digitally literate consumers – such as Generation Z – and contemporary influencer content.

Theoretical Implications: Structural Shift in Digital Credibility

By integrating the synthesized literature corpus, this study directly resolves RQ1 by establishing INCI literacy and moral transparency as primary credibility pillars, addresses RQ2 through the moderating filter of de-influencing within the Trust Paradox, and answers RQ3 by mapping these credibility shifts across the information search, evaluation, and post-purchase decision stages.

First, the paper puts a spotlight on the reconceptualization of Credibility. Credibility in the skincare sector now rests on five domain-specific pillars: ingredient knowledge, relatability, helpfulness, self-confidence, and clear articulation (Hassan et al., 2021; Spörl-Wang et al., 2025; Trepanowski & Grant-Kels 2023). Credibility is thus reconstructed as an analytical, skill-based construct rather than a purely aesthetic one.

Second, the paper emphasizes the strategic role of de-influencing. De-influencing is found to represent not a threat to marketing, but an indispensable authenticity filter. It enables influencers to reclaim consumer trust within a saturated digital environment, converting negative reviews into long-term relational capital (Michaelidou et al., 2026; Penttinen et al., 2026).

Third, the paper introduces the Trust Paradox as a conceptual mechanism. The synthesis posits a paradox in which the short-term sacrifice of commercial gain – through the rejection of brand collaborations or public criticism of products – enhances long-term relational capital and perceived authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020; Michaelidou et al., 2026; Penttinen et al., 2026). Rather than establishing a direct empirical increase in purchase intention, this framework highlights how commercial disinterest may mitigate consumer skepticism, thereby providing a theoretical baseline for future research to quantitatively test downstream behavioral outcomes. While the Trust Paradox suggests that commercial disinterest can strengthen long-term credibility, this relationship is neither universal nor immune to manipulation. De-influencing itself may be strategically monetized, with creators criticizing one product to build authenticity before promoting a sponsored alternative. Its visibility may also be shaped by platform algorithms that amplify controversy and emotionally charged content, meaning that the popularity of negative reviews does not necessarily reflect a genuine shift in consumer trust. Finally, cultural context

matters: critical content may be perceived differently across societies, with skepticism and negative product evaluations potentially carrying greater value in more individualistic or post-transition markets, such as the Western Balkans, than in highly collectivist or high-trust environments.

Practical and Managerial Implications for the Skincare Industry

For managers in the skincare industry, these findings suggest a strategic reorientation – away from insisting on exclusively positive brand narratives toward supporting influencer objectivity. Brands that embrace de-influencing as part of a broader dialogue on authenticity will be better positioned to successfully rejuvenate their image and attract new generations of consumers (Audrezet et al., 2020; Vuković and Pavković 2026).

To maintain brand equity in digitally saturated environments, practitioners would pivot away from traditional promotional control toward co-creating transparent value. Brands should actively collaborate with creators who possess genuine formulation literacy and accord them the editorial freedom to discuss both product benefits and potential ingredient incompatibilities. Furthermore, marketing managers should embrace de-influencing as a constructive market feedback mechanism.

Conclusions, Limitations and Further Recommendations

By synthesizing 50 scholarly contributions published between 2020 and 2026, this study provides a unified conceptual framework illustrating how consumer skepticism and de-influencing moderate the dynamic path between influencer source credibility and consumer trust. The analysis demonstrates that digital authority in high-involvement health and beauty sectors has undergone a fundamental paradigm shift: moving away from surface-level aesthetic appeal, follower counts, and scripted endorsements toward verified INCI ingredient literacy, chemical transparency, and commercial disinterest.

Furthermore, this review establishes that de-influencing is not merely a transient social media trend, but a structural authenticity filter through which digitally literate consumers (such as Generation Z) navigate market saturation. By conceptualizing the "Trust Paradox," this research suggests that an influencer's willingness to critique over-hyped products or forego short-term monetization may serve as a credibility signal, potentially building long-term relational capital and nuanced consumer trust, though its direct impact on purchase intentions warrants further empirical validation.

This study has several limitations. First, the review was limited to publications retrieved from Web of Science and Google Scholar between 2020 and 2026, which may have excluded relevant studies from other databases and regional sources. Second, although the analysis focuses on the skincare industry, some of the underlying evidence comes from broader influencer marketing research, limiting the direct generalizability of certain findings. Third, emerging phenomena such as de-influencing, AI influencers, and algorithmic effects remain conceptually fragmented and insufficiently tested over time. The proposed Trust Paradox should therefore be

viewed as an emerging conceptual framework rather than a confirmed causal model. Finally, differences in research methods, samples, cultural contexts, platforms, and definitions of key constructs make direct comparisons across studies difficult. As this research is based on a systematic synthesis of existing literature, its conclusions should be further examined through primary empirical research.

Based on the aforementioned limitations and having in mind the conceptual baseline established in this manuscript, a number of avenues open up for the future work. Quantitative and mixed-method approaches could examine how de-influencing, skepticism, and influencer credibility affect consumer trust and purchase decisions across different platforms and cultural contexts. Particular attention should be given to underrepresented markets, including the Western Balkans and South-Eastern Europe. Further research should also explore the long-term effects of emerging technologies, especially AI-generated influencers and personalized digital skincare advice, on perceptions of authenticity, expertise, and trust.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools during the preparation of this manuscript, specifically for English translation, proofreading, and language enhancement. These tools were utilized solely to improve the stylistic quality, grammatical accuracy, and clarity of the text. All conceptual development, theoretical frameworks, literature selection, and final synthesis remain entirely the product of the authors' original academic research and judgment.

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