

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

The skincare market has experienced a structural transformation in recent years, shifting from an industry primarily driven by aesthetics toward the 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 became not merely promoters, but intermediaries using their credibility to affect consumer purchasing decisions. The aim of this 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). 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 and von Mettenheim 2021).

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; Torres et al. 2019). This shift has given rise to the de-influencing trend – a phenomenon in which content creators gain

1 prominence by actively discouraging followers from purchasing certain
2 products, or by recommending more cost-effective alternatives, thereby
3 prioritizing transparency and authenticity over immediate commercial gain
4 (Penttinen et al. 2026).

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

15 Despite the growing prominence of de-influencing, a limited systematic
16 understanding of how this trend redefines traditional dimensions of influencer
17 credibility is available in the concurrent body of knowledge. This study aims to
18 address that gap by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) following
19 established methodological approaches in prior research (Aguinis 2025; Joshi et
20 al. 2025; Vrontis et al. 2021).

21 By synthesizing 50 scholarly contributions published between 2020 and
22 2026, this study examines the interaction between influencer characteristics,
23 relational mechanisms, and the moderating roles of consumer skepticism and de-
24 influencing (Michaelidou et al. 2026; Penttinen et al. 2026; Vrontis et al. 2021).
25 The findings offer a comprehensive overview of evolving paradigms in digital
26 influence, providing a strategic roadmap for both academic researchers and
27 marketing practitioners in the industry.

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

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

41 **Research Methodology**

43 *Explanation of the Study Context*

45 Influencer credibility is an amorphous phenomenon without any firmly
46 standardized definitions. To allow for any systematic search through the

1 scholarly databases, we adopted a set of definitions used as further guidance in
 2 the study. Existing literature indicates that credibility and influence are treated
 3 as multidimensional concepts. Drawing on foundational works in digital
 4 marketing (Hassan et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021), Table 1 presents the key
 5 constructs that form the theoretical foundation of this study.

6
 7 **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)
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)

8
 9 Expertise is conceptualized as the cognitive pillar of the model. In the
 10 skincare industry, where product formulations (such as acids, retinol, and
 11 peptides) are highly complex, expertise is not merely an aesthetic attribute but a
 12 functional necessity. Following the theoretical insights of Hassan et al. (2021),
 13 consumers facing high information asymmetry transfer their cognitive burden to
 14 the influencer, relying on their specialized knowledge to guide purchase
 15 intentions and mitigate the risk of adverse product choices.

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

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

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

8 9 *Systematic Review Strategy*

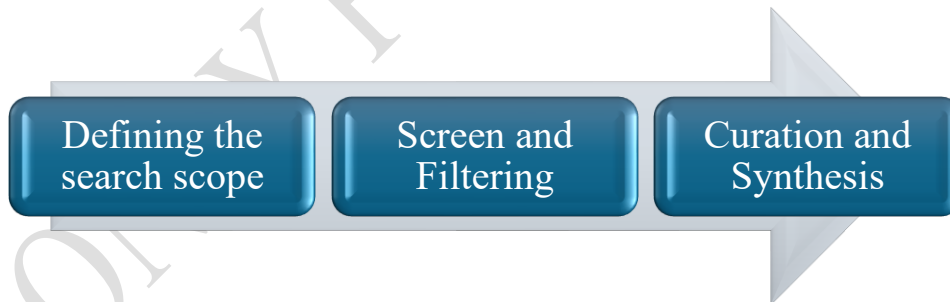
10
11 The review process is structured across three key phases as presented in
 12 Figure 1, ensuring traceability and replicability of the entire review process.

13 First, the search scope was defined. This foundational phase involved
 14 defining the boundaries of the study, establishing the 2020–2026 timeframe, and
 15 executing the initial search queries across Google Scholar and Web of Science
 16 using the predefined keyword combinations.

17 Second, manual screening and filtering was conducted. At this stage, strict
 18 inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The initial pool of 328 studies was
 19 systematically screened by reading titles and abstracts to remove duplicates and
 20 out-of-scope papers, followed by a full-text evaluation of journal rankings
 21 (Q1/Q2 focus) and theoretical anchoring.

22 Third, we conducted the curation and synthesis of the concurrent body of
 23 knowledge. The final phase was focused on an in-depth analysis of the 50 most
 24 relevant publications, extracting qualitative data, and categorizing them into the
 25 Literature Synthesis Matrix for thematic cross-examination.

26
27 **Figure 1.** *Systematic literature phases*



28 29 *The Search Scope*

30
31 This study follows established methodological principles for conducting
 32 systematic literature reviews (SLR) in marketing research (Aguinis 2025;
 33 Vrontis et al. 2021; Joshi et al. 2025). The literature review focused on the period
 34 from 2020 to 2026 to ensure the relevance of findings to recent developments in
 35 digital marketing and influencer research (Barari et al. 2026; Pan et al. 2025).
 36 This period reflects the accelerated growth of influencer marketing research
 37 alongside the expansion of social media platforms and evolving patterns of
 38 digital consumer engagement (Joshi et al. 2025; Vrontis et al. 2021).
 39 Furthermore, this period reflects the emergence of new phenomena such as

1 virtual influencers, de-influencing, AI-generated content, authenticity-related
2 concerns, and increasing regulatory attention toward transparency and digital
3 advertising practices.

4 Among the various segments of the beauty industry, the skincare sector has
5 become one of the most strongly influenced by social media communication,
6 influencer recommendations, and digital consumer engagement. The growing
7 demand for skincare products is closely associated with consumers' increasing
8 reliance on online product education, authenticity cues, peer reviews, and
9 influencer-generated content when making purchase decisions (Hassan et al.
10 2021; Trepanowski and Grant-Kels 2023; Thawanyarat et al. 2023).

11 The global cosmetics market size was valued at USD 330.10 million in 2025
12 and is projected to reach USD 545.19 million by 2033, growing at a CAGR of
13 6.6% from 2026 to 2033 (Grand View Research, 2026). This growth is largely
14 driven by the increasing emphasis on self-care, wellness, and personal grooming,
15 particularly among Millennials and Generation Z consumers, who increasingly
16 perceive beauty and skincare products as integral components of everyday
17 lifestyle and personal well-being (Grand View Research, 2026).

18 Social media, influencer marketing, virtual try-on tools, and AI-driven
19 beauty recommendations have transformed the way consumers discover,
20 evaluate, and purchase cosmetics (Grand View Research, 2026). Consumers
21 frequently rely on influencers' product reviews, tutorials, recommendations, and
22 personal experiences when making skincare purchase decisions. In addition, the
23 skincare industry is highly visual, emotionally driven, and strongly connected to
24 trust, credibility, perceived expertise, and authenticity, making it particularly
25 relevant for influencer marketing research. Moreover, platforms such as
26 Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have significantly transformed skincare
27 marketing strategies, further increasing the importance of influencers in shaping
28 consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

29 30 *Search Strategy and Sample Filtering*

31
32 The primary literature search was conducted using the databases Google
33 Scholar and Web of Science. To capture the specific context of the skincare
34 industry and emerging digital phenomena, the following keyword combinations
35 in English were employed: '*skincare marketing*', '*influencer credibility*', '*de-*
36 *influencing*', '*consumer behavior*', '*trust*', and '*purchase intention*'.

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

1 core papers was selected for deep qualitative synthesis and content analysis
2 based on the following specific criteria:

- 3
- 4 • Thematic Relevance: Studies that empirically or theoretically examine
5 the influence of social media influencers on consumer behavior in the
6 beauty and skincare industry (Hassan et al., 2021; Shabani Shojaei &
7 Barbosa, 2026).
 - 8 • Innovation: Inclusion of works analyzing moderating effects such as de-
9 influencing and skepticism as responses to commercial market saturation
10 (Michaelidou et al., 2026; Penttinen et al., 2026).
 - 11 • Methodological Diversity: The corpus encompasses meta-analyses,
12 quantitative studies based on structural equation modeling (SEM), and
13 qualitative social media content analyses (Barari et al., 2026; Kästner &
14 Baczynski, 2025; Vrontis et al., 2021).
- 15

16 *Data Coding and Synthesis Matrix*

17

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

35
36

1 **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)
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)
3. De-influencing & Skepticism	Coutinho et al. (2023); Harff & Le (2026); Torres et al. (2019); Penttinen et al. (2026); Michaelidou et al. (2026); Vuković & Pavković (2026)
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); Thawanyarat et al. (2023); Naderer et al. (2021); Lou (2022); Trepanowski & Grant-Kels (2023); Rey & Tan (2025); Joshi et al. (2025); Fitriasari 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); Ekinci et al. (2025); Jamil et al. (2024); Janssen et al. (2022); Pan et al. (2025); Boerman (2020); Kim & Kim (2021)

2
3 The structural mapping presented in the Literature Synthesis Matrix (Table
4 2) reveals a clear trajectory in digital marketing research. While traditional
5 studies primarily addressed the 'Source Credibility' and 'Relational Factors'
6 categories (Hassan et al., 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2021), the
7 emergence of 'De-influencing & Skepticism' and 'AI Influencers' represents a
8 newly developing and fragmented domain in the literature (Lou et al., 2023;
9 Penttinen et al., 2026; Vuković & Pavković, 2026). Furthermore, the cross-
10 examination of the selected corpus highlights a significant geographic and
11 context-specific gap, as the vast majority of empirical validations have been
12 conducted in Western and Asian markets (Han & Balabanis, 2024; Pan et al.,
13 2025), leaving developing regional ecosystems less explored. By synthesizing
14 these diverse categories, this matrix provides the foundational baseline for
15 subsequent empirical research. Specifically, it establishes the operationalized
16 constructs required to test and validate these contemporary influencer dynamics
17 within the context of the Western Balkan skincare market.

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.

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.

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); Ekinici 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	Lou (2022); Lou & Yuan (2019); Ye et al. (2021); Lou et al. (2023)	Influencer credibility, branded content, virtual influencers

	communication, consumer persuasion		
<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

1
2 The systematic review of 50 scholarly works (2020–2026) reveals a
3 significant transformation in the way influencer credibility is constructed and
4 perceived within the skincare industry. The following sections synthesize these
5 findings, with a focus on the evolution of credibility dimensions and the
6 emergence of de-influencing as a critical moderating factor.

7
8 *Evolution of Core Credibility Dimensions*

9
10 This study identifies five domain-specific dimensions that are critical for
11 contemporary consumers in the skincare sector: (1) Knowledge, (2) Relatability;
12 (3) Helpfulness, (4) Self-confidence, and (5) Articulation. These dimensions are
13 further explained below.

14 Modern ‘skintelligent’ consumers (Generation Z) demand influencers
15 possessing high scientific literacy. Expertise is no longer validated by social
16 status, but by the capacity to decode complex ingredient lists (INCI lists) and
17 explain biochemical mechanisms- such as the comparative efficacy of retinoids
18 versus peptides (Hassan et al. 2021; Thawanyarat et al. 2023).

1 In contrast to the ‘perfect skin’ ideals of previous eras, current research
 2 highlights that the authentic portrayal of real skin textures – including acne or
 3 hyperpigmentation – fosters deeper trans-parasocial relationships. Consumers
 4 are more inclined to trust influencers whose skin concerns mirror their own
 5 (Jamil et al. 2024; Schouten et al. 2021).

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

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

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

18 *De-influencing as a Strategic Authenticity-Building Tool*

19
 20
 21 A central finding of this review is the role of de-influencing as a moderating
 22 variable that redefines the influencer–follower relationship.

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

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

30
 31 **Table 4.** *Positive and Negative Drivers of Influencer Credibility in the Skincare*
 32 *Industry*

Positive Drivers of Credibility	Description	Supporting Literature
Expertise	Knowledge about ingredients, formulations, and skincare performance	(Hassan et al. 2021)
Trustworthiness	Perceived honesty and authenticity in recommendations	(Hassan et al. 2021)
Attractiveness	Physical appearance and healthy skin aesthetics	(Hassan et al. 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)

1
2 By actively discouraging the purchase of over-promoted or ineffective
3 products, influencers signal a transition from commercial motivation to moral
4 accountability. This act of ‘negative reviewing’ paradoxically strengthens
5 trustworthiness. The evidence suggests that when an influencer employs de-
6 influencing, they reduce cognitive dissonance among followers, rendering
7 subsequent positive recommendations considerably more authentic and
8 objective (Michaelidou et al. 2026; Penttinen et al. 2026).

9 10 *Emerging Trends: AI Influencers and Hyper-personalization*

11
12 A novel body of knowledge is signaling a shift toward technological
13 integration to influence marketing, mostly related to the inclusion of AI
14 influencing and hyper-personalization. As for the first one, novel literature is
15 focused on examining whether artificially generated entities can achieve
16 Relatability and Knowledge without possessing biological skin. While offering
17 high Articulation, their lack of physical vulnerability represents a challenge for
18 long-term Trustworthiness in the skincare domain (Kim and Kim 2021; Ren et
19 al. 2023; Shoenberger and Kim 2023).

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

25 26 *The Paradox of Negative Influence*

27
28 The synthesis reveals a ‘trust paradox’: negative information (de-influencing)
29 produces positive marketing outcomes. For traditional skincare brands seeking
30 to revitalize their image among Generation Z, this implies that radical
31 transparency is no longer a risk but a strategic requirement. Authenticity has
32 ceased to be an ambiguous aesthetic and has become a measurable asset, with
33 the influencer functioning as a ‘guardian’ of both the consumer’s budget and
34 wellbeing (Audrezet et al. 2020; Lou 2022; Vuković and Pavković 2026).

35 36 37 **Discussion and conclusions**

38
39 This study presents a comprehensive systematic literature review of the
40 evolution of influencer credibility in the skincare industry, with particular focus
41 on the transformative role of de-influencing. The synthesis of 50 relevant

1 scholarly works demonstrates that traditional credibility models are no sufficient
 2 to account for the complex interactions between digitally literate consumers –
 3 such as Generation Z – and contemporary influencer content.

4 The principal contributions of the paper can be summarized across three key
 5 dimensions. First, the paper puts a spotlight on the reconceptualization of
 6 Credibility. Credibility in the skincare sector now rests on five domain-specific
 7 pillars: ingredient knowledge, relatability, helpfulness, self-confidence, and
 8 clear articulation (Hassan et al. 2021; Spörl-Wang et al. 2025; Trepanowski and
 9 Grant-Kels 2023). Second, the paper emphasizes the strategic role of de-
 10 influencing. De-influencing is found to represent not a threat to marketing, but
 11 an indispensable authenticity filter. It enables influencers to reclaim consumer
 12 trust within a saturated digital environment, converting negative reviews into
 13 long-term relational capital (Michaelidou et al. 2026; Penttinen et al. 2026).
 14 Third, the paper touches upon the Trust Paradox. The study confirms a paradox
 15 in which the short-term sacrifice of commercial gain – through the rejection of
 16 brand collaborations or the public criticism of products – generates significantly
 17 greater purchase intention over time, as it validates the sincerity of the source
 18 (Michaelidou et al. 2026; Penttinen et al. 2026).

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

25 While the systematic literature review provides substantial theoretical
 26 insight, future studies should empirically test these relationships through
 27 structural equation modeling (SEM), with particular attention to the role of
 28 artificial intelligence and virtual influencers in trust formation (Kim and Kim
 29 2021; Zimmermann et al. 2025). Additional empirical work is also needed in
 30 underrepresented markets, particularly in Southeast Europe, where data on
 31 influencer-driven consumer behavior remains scarce.

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