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WHEN INFLUENCE PERSUADES AND TRUST CONSTRAINS: INTEGRATING MEDIA DEPENDENCY AND SOCIAL LEARNING MECHANISMS IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the role of perceived quality of information (PQI), emotional attachment (EMO), perceived influence (PIN), and credibility of eWOM (CWM) is examined to explain how TikTok influencers shape purchase intention (PUR) in social commerce. Under the guidance of Media Dependency Theory and Social Learning Theory, the research examines how influencer-driven content operates through the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer decision-making. Analysis of cross-sectional survey data from 434 TikTok users in Indonesia using PLS-SEM shows a positive relationship between PQI, EMO, and PIN, which subsequently drives PUR. However, EMO does not directly influence PUR, indicating that affective bonds alone are insufficient to trigger purchasing behaviour. Besides, CWM negatively moderates the connection between PIN and PUR, suggesting that greater trust in peer-generated information can constrain, rather than amplify, influencer persuasion, thereby challenging the common assumption that credibility uniformly strengthens influence effects. These findings explain the psychological processes that underlie an influencer's effectiveness. This study contributes to influencer marketing literature by identifying PIN as a central mediating mechanism and by clarifying the boundary conditions under which trust constrains, rather than amplifies, influencer effectiveness in algorithm-driven social commerce.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Purchase Intention, Perceived Influence, Credibility of eWOM, TikTok

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and others have attracted substantial interest over the past decades (Appel et al., 2020). People now are increasingly reliant on social media networks for obtaining information to make decisions (Hussain et al., 2020). Social media adoption recently surged toward promoting new and existing products because of its powerful ability to shape consumer purchasing decisions (Pan et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2023). In this context, users of social media actively produce multimedia content which includes brand and product reviews, as well as share it along with branded posts and fan pages (Appel et al., 2020; Ismagilova et al., 2020). Prior evidence suggests that user-generated content can be perceived as more credible than firm-generated one (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Verma et al., 2023), highlighting the importance of informational cues in influencer-based persuasion (Cheung et al., 2008).

Social media influencer marketing represents a vital promotional tool that multiple firms include in their marketing strategies (Joshi et al., 2023; Spörl-Wang et al., 2025). Users create short-form video content to promote products on social media platforms, typically lasting from a few seconds to several minutes (Meng et al., 2024). Followers regard influencers as trusted opinion leaders through personal content and relatability since they act as credible information sources to their followers, thus increasing the reach and impact of their recommendations (Freberg et al., 2011; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Advertisers utilize social media platforms to approach influencers and elicit their support for their brand marketing goals, which is known as influencer marketing (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). User engagement on TikTok is shaped by algorithmic personalisation and content features that influence visibility and recommendation outcomes (Ying et al., 2025; Zhou, 2024). TikTok builds an interactive journey between entertainment and business interactions through its distinctive features (Zhang et al., 2023; Zhao & Wagner, 2023).

TikTok provides marketing tools through TikTok Shop and live-stream shopping, which make it possible to create harmonious content–commerce interactions (Nugraha et al., 2023). Marketing professionals evaluate TikTok influencer campaigns as highly effective while simultaneously planning to raise their investments in TikTok influencers by more than half (Zhao & Wagner, 2023). Traditional word-of-mouth communication known as WOM has evolved into the electronic form of word-of-mouth named eWOM. Through TikTok, brands and users actively engage in product-related information exchange, enabling ordinary users to become influential sources of eWOM (Ngo et al., 2024; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The accelerated growth of TikTok along with its integrated shopping functions creates an extraordinary environment for studying influencer marketing through an algorithm-controlled platform experience (Zhang et al., 2023).

Research on influencer marketing has generated extensive attention, but important gaps remain regarding the psychological and informational mechanisms underlying consumer responses, particularly on recently emerging platforms like TikTok (Han & Balabanis, 2024; Pan et al., 2025). Studies show that audience responses heavily depend on two central elements: followers' perceptions of influencer information quality and their emotional bonds toward influencers, both of which foster higher trust and favorable purchase intention (PUR) (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Perceived influence (PIN) has been introduced as a mediating construct explaining how consumers translate such information and emotional responses into behavioural outcomes (Ki & Kim, 2019; Shah et al., 2023), while the credibility of eWOM (CWM) further shapes the strength of this influence on consumer behaviour (Ismagilova et al.,

2020; Ngo et al., 2024; Verma et al., 2023). Nevertheless, empirical studies integrating these mechanisms within algorithm-driven TikTok environments, particularly through the joint lens of Media Dependency Theory and Social Learning Theory, remain limited in emerging markets such as Indonesia.

This study employs Media Dependency Theory (MDT) and Social Learning Theory (SLT) as its theoretical foundations to explain this process. According to MDT, individuals' dependence on media for guidance and satisfaction magnifies the media's ability to influence their behaviour patterns (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). According to SLT, individuals acquire behaviours by watching reliable role models, especially when they express authenticity and trustworthy qualities (Casaló et al., 2020; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Accordingly, this study investigates the effects of perceived quality of information (PQI) and follower–influencer emotional attachment (EMO) on PUR in the TikTok context. This study further examines how PIN functions as a mediator between these antecedents, with eWOM credibility acting as a moderator, among Indonesian TikTok users. Indonesia represents a theoretically relevant context, ranking second globally in TikTok users, with more than 107 million as of early 2025 (Statista, 2025). This study contributes to influencer marketing theory by combining informational and emotional antecedents and clarifying the mediating process of influence while examining the conditions under which eWOM can boost persuasion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Background

Media Dependency Theory (MDT) argues that the more reliant a person is on a specific media source to satisfy their informational, affective, and social needs, the greater the source's influence on attitudes and behaviours (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). These demands are addressed by social media influencers who provide product information, lifestyle, and consumer advice (Appel et al., 2020; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). Followers interact more with influencers when their content is perceived as trustworthy and educational (Cheung et al., 2008; Hussain et al., 2020; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Verma et al., 2023). Consequently, followers may regard influencer recommendations as reliable and valuable when making purchasing decisions (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Shah et al., 2023).

From the standpoint of Social Learning Theory (SLT), PIN represents the internalisation of behaviours and beliefs modelled by influencers through observing and modelling the actions of others (Bandura, 1977). Digital communities connect followers with influencers whom they perceive as appealing, credible, or similar, thereby encouraging observational learning (Han & Balabanis, 2024; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Followers may internalise the lifestyles and product-related behaviours exhibited by influencers, particularly when observation is accompanied by emotional engagement (Conde & Casais, 2023; Du et al., 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). According to the identification principle of SLT, the modelling effects are more pronounced when followers develop EMO toward influencers perceived as competent and relatable (Berman et al., 2023; Han & Balabanis, 2024; Ki et al., 2020; Meng et al., 2024).

The integration of MDT and SLT offers a coherent explanation of how PQI and EMO influence PUR, both directly and indirectly through PIN. MDT elucidates how informational value promotes dependence on influencers (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), while SLT explains how emotional identification and observation translate into behavioural intentions (Bandura, 1977). This study integrates these theories to elucidate the joint influence of informational dependency and social learning on PUR in influencer-driven social commerce, as they have been infrequently incorporated into influencer marketing research (Han & Balabanis, 2024; Joshi et al., 2023).

2.2. Perceived Quality of Information

PQI refers to information quality perceived as helpful, reliable, and trustworthy, as presented in digital influencers' resources (Freberg et al., 2011). From an MDT perspective (Ball-Rokeach, 1985), high-quality information increases followers' reliance on influencers as primary information sources, while SLT (Bandura, 1977) suggests that such credible information enhances observational learning. This dependence translates into greater PIN, a cognitive mediator between PQI and behavioural outcomes (Shah et al., 2023). Informational and decision-making supportive content has conventionally led to positive attitudes and increased PUR (Dehghani et al., 2016; Ducoffe, 1995; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Pan et al., 2025). Providing comprehensive product information makes influencers appear as opinion leaders (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lin et al., 2018), thereby strengthening cognitive trust and informational authority (Ki et al., 2020). Grounded in MDT and SLT, high-quality influencer information strengthens followers' reliance and observational learning, thereby directly shaping PUR and indirectly influencing it through PIN (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Bandura, 1977; Shah et al., 2023).

H1. Perceived Quality of Information (PQI) has a significant effect on Purchase Intention (PUR).
H2. Perceived Quality of Information (PQI) has a significant effect on Perceived Influence (PIN).

2.3. Follower-influencer Emotional Attachment

EMO refers to the strong emotional connection users establish with influencers, which emerges from repeatedly satisfying social and individual needs (Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ki et al., 2020). In influencer marketing, this attachment occurs when followers see influencers as representing a system of intimacy, authenticity, and consistency (Garg & Bakshi, 2024a; Ki et al., 2020). On TikTok, the visual and interactive nature of content, along with algorithm-driven personalisation, fosters emotional proximity through short personal videos that appear authentic and relatable to the viewers (Alboqami, 2023; Casaló et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023).

The behavioural effects of EMO are validated by empirical research. Sokolova & Kefi (2020) highlighted that followers with an emotional attachment have more trust and PUR. Shah et al. (2023) further confirmed that strong emotional bonds enhance PIN, increasing followers' acceptance of brand recommendations. From a social learning perspective, EMO strengthens followers' identification with influencers and increases their receptiveness to the attitudes, behaviours, and recommendations they observe. Accordingly, EMO may directly motivate PUR through affective commitment while indirectly influencing PUR by strengthening PIN (Ki et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2025).

H3. Emotional Attachment (EMO) has a significant effect on Purchase Intention (PUR).
H4. Emotional Attachment (EMO) has a significant effect on Perceived Influence (PIN).

2.4. Perceived Influence

PIN refers to followers' belief that an influencer can shape their opinions, preferences, or purchase decisions (Phua & Kim, 2018). It represents a psychological pathway through which exposure to influencer content is translated into evaluative judgments and purchase-related responses. From a Social Learning Theory perspective, PIN emerges as followers emulate the attitudes and behaviours of others they perceive as credible (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, PIN serves as a mediating mechanism that facilitates the conversion of cognitive dependence on information quality and affective identification with influencers into PUR (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Shah et al., 2023).

Shah et al. (2023) illustrated that stronger emotional bonds enhance PIN, which in turn boosts PUR, a mechanism that is consistent with the findings of Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo (2021), who link influence-related behaviours directly to PIN. Similarly, Magno & Cassia (2018) emphasized that PIN acts as a mediator between influencer characteristics and consumers' behavioural choices. From a social learning perspective, PIN represents the internalisation of modelled beliefs and behaviours observed from influencers (Bandura, 1977). Once followers perceive influencers as influential, these learned attitudes are more likely to guide behavioural responses, including purchase decisions (Shah et al., 2023).

H5. Perceived Influence (PIN) has a significant effect on Purchase Intention (PUR).

2.5. Credibility of eWOM as a Moderator

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays an important role in helping consumers evaluate products and make purchase decisions in social commerce (Ngo et al., 2024; Verma & Dewani, 2021). Compared with traditional advertising, eWOM is generally perceived as more credible, personalised, and embedded within consumers' social interactions (Cheung et al., 2008; Ismagilova et al., 2020). Nonetheless, not all eWOM is equally persuasive, as its effectiveness largely depends on consumers' perceptions of source reliability, trustworthiness, and information quality (Ngo et al., 2024; Verma & Dewani, 2021). Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953) suggests that the impact of media messages on audience evaluations and behaviours depends largely on the perceived credibility of both the source and the information provided (Casaló et al., 2020; Garg & Bakshi, 2024b). When influencer content seems biased or excessively promotional, customers may depend on CWM to assess the recommendation.

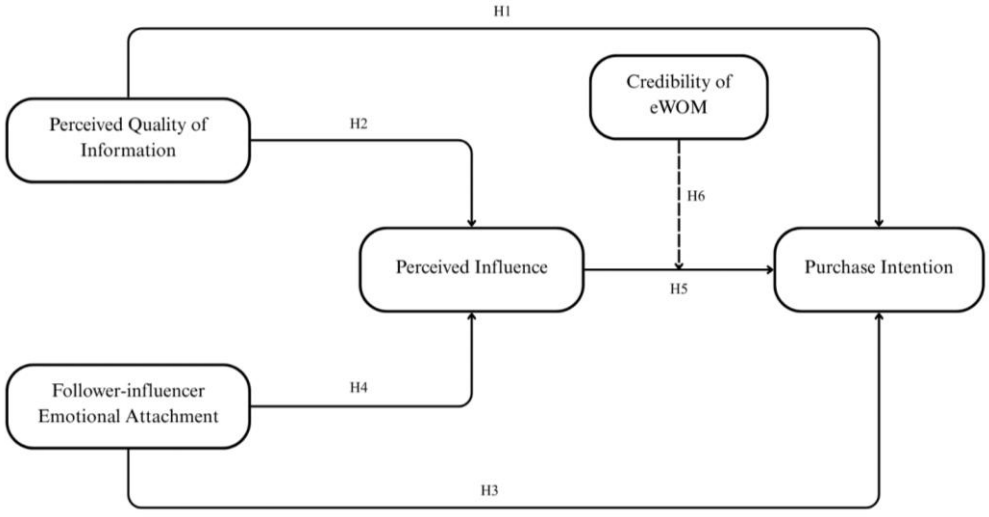
CWM may thus affect the degree to which PIN converts into PUR (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Verma & Dewani, 2021). Consumer evaluation of a product or service can be shaped by online reviews, especially when consumers perceive these sources to be credible and helpful (van Lohuizen & Trujillo-Barrera, 2020). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), credible information stimulates careful processing of messages and consequently consumers evaluate influencer recommendations more critically. Within the TikTok ecosystem, where influencer content coexists with user-generated reviews, CWM may strengthen or weaken the extent to which perceived influencer influence translates into PUR (Ngo et al., 2024; Zhao &

Wagner, 2023). The persuasive impact of PIN depends on CWM, which determines whether influencer-based persuasion translates into PUR (Ngo et al., 2024; Verma & Dewani, 2021).

H6. Credibility of eWOM (CWM) moderates the relationship between Perceived Influence (PIN) and Purchase Intention (PUR).

Based on the hypotheses developed above, Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual research model depicting the relationships among PQI, EMO, PIN, CWM, and PUR.

Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model



Source: Authors (2026).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Procedures

The quantitative research method used in this investigation employed a cross-sectional design. All research constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), and hypotheses were tested using SmartPLS 4.0, which is well-suited for research models involving mediation and moderation. The respondents were TikTok users who actively followed and interacted with digital influencers, as this consistent interaction is critical for examining how PQI and EMO shape purchase behaviour and credibility. Specifically, the questionnaire asked respondents to evaluate their perceptions of the quality of information delivered by influencers, their EMO toward influencers, the PIN exerted by influencers, the CWM encountered on TikTok, and their intention to purchase products promoted by influencers. Following Bagozzi and Yi's (2012) recommendation of a minimum sample size of 200 for SEM

analysis, and Kline (2016) suggested ratio of 10 to 20 responses per expected parameter, data were collected online via a Google Forms questionnaire distributed by email during April and May 2025. Each response was verified and approved, resulting in a final valid sample of 434 respondents, exceeding the recommended requirements for PLS-SEM analysis. Data gathering followed the protocol set by Phillips & Stawarski (2008).

The study employed a convenience sampling technique due to the accessibility of active TikTok users and the explanatory objective of examining structural relationships among constructs. While this approach facilitates efficient data collection in digital platform research, it may limit the generalisability of the findings beyond the sampled population; accordingly, the results should be interpreted as explanatory insights into behavioural mechanisms among active TikTok influencer followers rather than as population-level estimates. To be eligible to participate, respondents had to be active TikTok users, follow at least one digital influencer, and have prior exposure to influencer-generated content related to product or brand promotion, ensuring sufficient experience and familiarity with TikTok influencer marketing practices.

3.2. Demographic Profile

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 434 TikTok users who participated in the survey. The sample was predominantly female (79.0%) and concentrated in the 18–24 age group (62.9%), reflecting the platform's younger user base. Most respondents held a high school diploma (56.5%) or a bachelor's degree (38.9%), and the majority had substantial social media experience, with 64.3% using social media platforms for more than 5 years. These characteristics indicate that the sample is digitally active, relatively young, and well-acquainted with social media, making it appropriate for analyzing behavioural responses to influencer marketing on TikTok.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

	Description	**N (%)**
Gender	Female	343 (79%)
	Male	91 (21%)
Age	Below 18 years	47 (10.8%)
	18–24 years	273 (62.9%)
	25–30 years	88 (20.3%)
	More than 30 years	26 (6.0%)
Education	Bachelor’s Degree	169 (38.9%)
	High School	245 (56.5%)
	Junior High School	11 (2.5%)
	Other	9 (2.1%)
Social media experience	Less than 1 year	3 (0.7%)
	1-3 years	50 (11.5%)
	3–5 years	102 (23.5%)
	5–8 years	132 (30.4%)
	More than 8 years	147 (33.9%)

Notes: N = frequency; % = percentage.

3.3. Measurements

This study focuses on PUR, an important outcome in social media marketing because it indicates the extent to which persuasion messages from digital influencers are acted upon (Zhu et al., 2019). Following established prior research, validated multi-item scales were adopted and adapted to fit the TikTok influencer marketing context. PQI was assessed using four items derived from Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo (2021). EMO was measured using five items adapted from Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo (2021). PIN was assessed using three items adapted from Shah et al. (2023). PUR was measured using four items adapted from Zhang (2024) that assess respondents' interest in purchasing products promoted by influencers. CWM was measured using four items adapted from Cuong (2024). Respondents rated each item on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". All items were reviewed and rephrased for clarity and contextual appropriateness using back-translation approaches, with feedback received during the pre-test of the pilot phase. Prior to the main data collection, a pretest involving 50 respondents was conducted to evaluate item clarity, wording, and contextual relevance within the TikTok influencer marketing setting. Feedback from the pretest led to minor refinements in item phrasing to enhance comprehensibility and reduce potential ambiguity, thereby supporting the content validity of the measurement instruments.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analysed using SmartPLS 4.0, a partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) software that allows the simultaneous estimation of the measurement and structural models (Ringle et al., 2024). This method is widely recommended for research models involving mediation and moderation, especially when the objective is prediction-oriented and the model is complex (Hair et al., 2021). A total of five first-order reflective constructs were examined in this study: PQI, EMO, PIN, CWM, and PUR. The data analysis included evaluating the measurement model (to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs), followed by the structural model (to test hypotheses), mediation analysis, moderation testing, and multigroup analysis (MGA).

Given that the data were collected using a self-reported, single-source questionnaire, common method bias was assessed using the full collinearity approach by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all latent constructs in SmartPLS. All VIF values were below the recommended threshold, indicating that common method bias is unlikely to pose a serious concern in this study. Control variables such as age, gender, and prior usage characteristics were not included in the structural model, as the analysis focused on theory-driven relationships among the core constructs. Demographic variables were therefore reported descriptively to provide contextual understanding of the sample characteristics rather than as predictors in the PLS-SEM model.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Measurement Model Evaluation

Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2021), the analysis began with an assessment of the approximate model fit. With an SRMR of 0.068 (below the 0.08 threshold), the model indicates an acceptable fit. Altogether, these indices indicate that the measurement model performs well, with

satisfactory global goodness of fit. These results suggest that the proposed measurement model is appropriate for further structural analysis. In order to assess reliability and convergent validity, outer loadings of each item, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were examined for each construct. In Table 2, all the standardized factor loadings for all the items are above the threshold of 0.708, with the exception of PUR2 (0.684) and PUR4 (0.680) in the PUR construct, which are slightly below the recommended threshold but remain acceptable given adequate CR and AVE values (Hair et al., 2021). Additional results indicated that composite reliability exceeding 0.70 is the minimum acceptable level for all constructs, as CR values ranged from 0.833 to 0.933 and average variance extracted levels also exceeded 0.50 (0.557 to 0.736), further verifying adequate convergent validity.

To investigate discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio were applied. As shown in Table 2, the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) (given the diagonal row) surpassed its relationships with other constructs to fulfill the Fornell–Larcker standard (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, all HTMT ratios across construct pairs were well below the conservative benchmark of 0.90, as shown in Table 3, supporting construct discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Based on these results, the measurement model indicated acceptable reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 2: Measurement Items

Items	Loadings	α	CR	AVE
Perceived quality of information (PQI)		0.841	0.893	0.677
PQI1 – I gain knowledge from the information shared by the influencer I follow	0.861			
PQI2 – I receive new information through the influencer I follow	0.847			
PQI3 – I obtain interesting information from the influencer I follow	0.774			
PQI4 - The information provided by the influencer I follow is useful and beneficial for making decisions	0.807			
Follower-influencer emotional attachment (EMO)		0.910	0.933	0.736
EMO1 – I feel emotionally connected to the influencer I follow	0.830			
EMO2 – I feel a sense of bonding with the influencer I follow	0.901			
EMO3 – I am emotionally attached to the TikTok influencer I follow	0.881			
EMO4 – The influencer I follow feels special to me	0.859			
EMO5 – I miss the TikTok influencer I follow when they rarely upload videos or when I can't see their posts	0.817			
Perceived influence (PIN)		0.728	0.846	0.647
PIN1 – My perceptions often change after receiving information from the influencer I follow	0.768			
PIN2 – I value the influencer's opinion as if they were a close and trusted person	0.843			
PIN3 – The influencer I follow often recommends products or brands that are beneficial to me	0.800			
Credibility of eWOM (CWM)		0.846	0.897	0.686
CWM1 – I believe that consumer reviews (positive or negative) about a product or brand on TikTok are persuasive	0.739			
CWM2 – I believe that consumer reviews on TikTok are strong and convincing	0.861			
CWM3 – I feel that consumer reviews about products or brands on TikTok are trustworthy	0.858			

Items	Loadings	α	CR	AVE
CWM4 - I believe that consumer reviews on TikTok are accurate	0.848			
Purchase Intention (PUR)		0.735	0.833	0.557
PUR1 – I am likely to try one of the products or brands promoted by the influencer on TikTok	0.812			
PUR2 – I consider buying the product or brand used or recommended by the influencer on TikTok	0.684			
PUR3 – I am likely to make a future purchase of the product or brand promoted by the influencer on TikTok	0.798			
PUR4 – I am likely to buy another product from the brand promoted by the influencer on TikTok	0.680			

Notes: α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3: HTMT Ratio Analysis

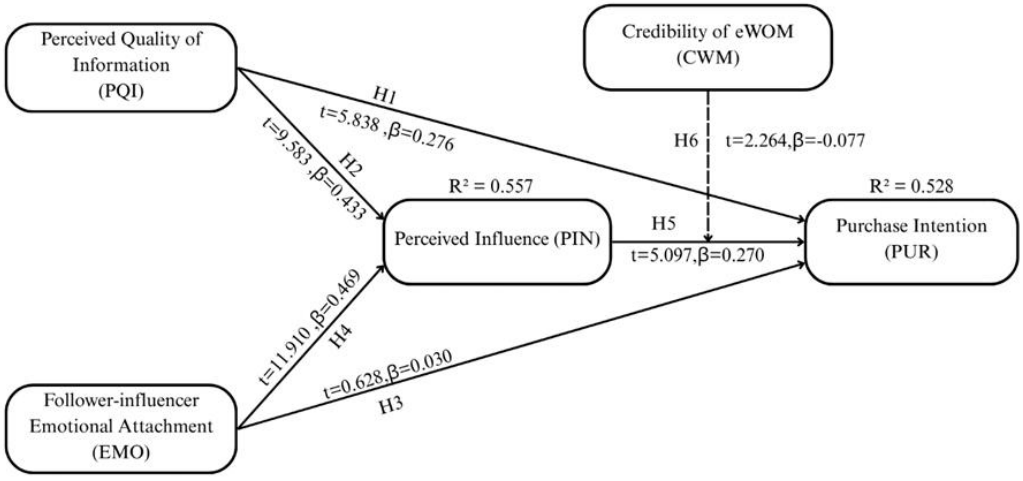
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. CWM						
2. EMO	0.652					
3. PIN	0.758	0.766				
4. PQI	0.544	0.412	0.764			
5. PUR	0.735	0.543	0.840	0.737		
6. CWM x PIN	0.083	0.182	0.051	0.111	0.107	

Notes: HTMT = Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio.

4.2. Structural Model Evaluation

This study used the methodological approach suggested by Hair et al. (2021), which focuses on the interpretation of path coefficients, t-values, p-values, and R^2 statistics. Table 4 and Figure 2 present the path estimates for the structural model. The results demonstrated a strong positive and significant relationship between PQI and PIN ($\beta = 0.433$, $t = 9.583$, $p = 0.000$), supporting H2. The results also revealed that EMO positively influenced PIN ($\beta = 0.469$, $t = 11.910$, $p = 0.000$), supporting H4. PQI had a strong direct impact on PUR ($\beta = 0.276$, $t = 5.838$, $p = 0.000$), supporting H1, whereas EMO was not directly associated with PUR, leading to the rejection of H3 ($\beta = 0.030$, $t = 0.628$, $p = 0.530$). PIN had a significant positive influence on PUR ($\beta = 0.270$, $t = 5.097$, $p = 0.000$), supporting H5. The moderating relationship between the CWM and the PIN–PUR relationship was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.077$, $t = 2.264$, $p = 0.024$), supporting H6.

Figure 2: Structural Model



Source: Authors (2026).

Table 4: Path Estimates

Structural Paths	β	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value	p-Value	Decision	f² Value
H1: PQI → PUR	0.276*	0.274	0.047	5.838	0.000	Accepted	0.098
H2: PQI → PIN	0.433*	0.433	0.045	9.583	0.000	Accepted	0.367
H3: EMO → PUR	0.030	0.029	0.047	0.628	0.530	Rejected	0.001
H4: EMO → PIN	0.469*	0.471	0.039	11.910	0.000	Accepted	0.431
H5: PIN → PUR	0.270*	0.271	0.053	5.097	0.000	Accepted	0.064
H6: CWM × PIN → PUR	-0.077*	-0.074	0.034	2.264	0.024	Accepted	0.014

Notes: $p < 0.05$. PQI = Perceived Quality of Information; EMO = Follower-influencer Emotional Attachment; PIN = Perceived Influence; PUR = Purchase Intention; CWM = Credibility of eWOM.

4.3. Model Quality Evaluation

The quality of the structural model was further assessed using effect size (f^2) and coefficient of determination (R^2). Effect sizes ranged from 0.001 to 0.431; following Cohen (1988) guidelines, effect sizes exceeding 0.35 are considered large. PIN was most strongly influenced by EMO ($f^2 = 0.431$, large effect), followed by PQI → PIN ($f^2 = 0.367$, also large). Small effect sizes were found for PQI → PUR ($f^2 = 0.098$) and PIN → PUR ($f^2 = 0.064$), while negligible effects were observed for EMO → PUR ($f^2 = 0.001$) and the moderation path CWM × PIN → PUR ($f^2 = 0.014$). The model explained 55.7% of the variance in PIN and 52.8% of the variance in PUR ($R^2 = 0.557$ and 0.528, respectively), indicating moderate explanatory power (Hair et al., 2021).

4.4. Multigroup Analysis (MGA)

To examine whether the structural relationships differed between Occasional Buyers and Major Buyers, a PLS-MGA procedure with 5,000 bootstrap resamples was conducted after establishing partial measurement invariance using the MICOM procedure. The results indicated that none of the structural paths differed significantly between the two groups (all $p > 0.05$), suggesting that the proposed relationships are stable across buyer segments. These findings indicate that purchase frequency does not alter the structural relationships specified in the proposed model.

4.5. Discussion on findings

The results of the study confirm that PIN serves as the central psychological mechanism that explains how informational and emotional factors shape consumer behaviour in influencer marketing. Both PQI and EMO contribute significantly to PIN, indicating that rational evaluation and emotional connection jointly determine how persuasive an influencer is judged to be. High-quality, useful, and well-structured information establishes influencers as knowledgeable sources to whom followers turn for advice on what to think or buy (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This is in line with previous research emphasizing informational value in influencing PIN in digital endorsement settings (Pan et al., 2025; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). This finding supports Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), especially in algorithm-driven environments like TikTok, where influencers are primary sources of information and platform technology shapes how content is organized, leading to a broader dependency on the influencer persona as well as the informational utility of curated content streams (Zhao & Wagner, 2023; Zhou, 2024).

At the same time, emotional closeness toward influencers strongly shapes followers' perceptions of their persuasive power. Consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), followers tend to internalise the attitudes and values of admired role models. Prior research has similarly found that emotional closeness increases followers' acceptance of persuasive messages (Shah et al., 2023; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). However, the present findings show that emotional bonds, when detached from credible and diagnostic information, are insufficient to directly trigger purchase decisions even though they significantly strengthen perceived influence. This pattern diverges from studies in Instagram and YouTube contexts, which often report a stronger direct effect of EMO on PUR (Ki et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), suggesting that TikTok's platform-specific affordances may shape how affective engagement translates into behaviour.

These informational and emotional routes integrate into a dual-process model where PIN serves as an organismic evaluation in the S–O–R framework: PQI and EMO serve as stimuli, PIN integrates cognitive and affective responses, and PUR becomes a behavioural response only after internal processing. The importance of PIN aligns with earlier studies in the domain of influencer marketing in tourism, fashion and beauty, and new TikTok environments (Casaló et al., 2020; Magno & Cassia, 2018; Zhao & Wagner, 2023), underlining that establishing a strong sense of influence is a crucial process for brands to achieve the best results of digital endorsement.

Apart from its mediating role, PQI has a significant direct effect on PUR, whereas EMO does not. This is consistent with prior studies showing that high-quality information reduces uncertainty and enhances purchase decisions through cognitive evaluation (Chen & Chang, 2018; Pan et al., 2025). Moreover, information adoption and elaboration perspectives suggest that credible and useful

information can elicit behavioural responses without strong EMO (Cheung et al., 2008; Cuong, 2024; Ngo et al., 2024; Verma et al., 2023). This pattern differs from contexts where EMO has a greater direct influence on behavioural intention, such as in fashion and lifestyle influencers (Casaló et al., 2020; Garg & Bakshi, 2024a; Ladhari et al., 2020), and suggests that emotional resonance alone may strengthen PIN but still requires a cognitive trigger such as credibility to influence purchase intention (Lou & Kim, 2019). The significant PIN → PUR path (H5) supports the mediation pattern, demonstrating that consumer behaviour is conditioned by the recommendations of the influencer only when they are perceived as influential, which is in line with Bandura (1986), who argues that individuals are more likely to adopt modelled behaviours when the source is perceived as credible and worthy of identification.

Finally, CWM exerts a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between PIN and PUR: the more credible the peer-generated eWOM, the less persuasive the effect of PIN on PUR becomes. This finding is contrary to a large body of eWOM literature that treats credibility as a reinforcing mechanism (Hsu & Tsou, 2011; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Matute et al., 2016; Verma & Dewani, 2021). This finding extends Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), where influencers tend to be perceived as trustworthy, and credible content created by others such as comments and stitches can be a substitute for influencer authority rather than reinforcement (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Ngo et al., 2024; Verma et al., 2023). As the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) further suggests, when eWOM credibility is high, followers are less likely to depend on influencer cues and more likely to process peer-generated information centrally, with more critical evaluation, rather than peripherally, based on influencer authority. Prior research also shows that trustworthy user-generated reviews tend to have a stronger impact on purchase decisions than influencer endorsement (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Ngo et al., 2024; van Lohuizen & Trujillo-Barrera, 2020; Ying et al., 2025), a mechanism likely amplified in the participatory, algorithmic environment of TikTok, where peer content is constantly juxtaposed with influencer content (Zhou, 2024). This transfer of persuasive power from individual influencer authority to peer group judgment shows that brands cannot rely solely on influencer reputation to maintain persuasive influence. To maintain influence, influencer communication must meet the standards of organic eWOM for tone, clarity, and credibility.

4.6. Theoretical and practical implications

This study theoretically expands the applicability of Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) in influencer-driven social commerce by elucidating how informational and emotional mechanisms collaboratively impact PUR. The PQI directly enhances PUR and amplifies PIN, but EMO influences PUR solely through PIN. This discrepancy indicates that emotional proximity alone is unable to generate PUR unless followers regard the influencer as competent in influencing their assessments and choices. PIN serves as the primary affective-cognitive mechanism that converts informational reliance and emotional identification into behavioural intention. The research also recognises CWM as a significant boundary condition for influencer persuasion. Its adverse moderating effect contests the presumption that credible information invariably enhances persuasive results (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Verma & Dewani, 2021). When consumers have confidence in peer-generated reviews, they may assess product recommendations more autonomously and depend less on influencer authority. Consequently, CWM may serve as an alternate basis for evaluation rather than solely enhancing

influencer persuasion, so broadening the current comprehension of trust dynamics within social commerce contexts.

Influencers should be chosen by brands based on their capacity to convey credible, clear, and useful product information, rather than solely on their popularity, attractiveness, or emotional appeal. The quality of information should be complemented by emotional relatability, not replaced by it. Brand-influencer fit should therefore take into account the influencer's ability to assist consumer decision-making, audience relevance, communication manner, and shared values. Brands should also manage influencer communication and peer-generated eWOM as interconnected sources of persuasion. Credible consumer reviews may validate influencer claims, but they may also expose inconsistencies and weaken persuasive impact. Social-listening tools can help identify gaps between influencer messages and consumer experiences, while transparent responses and authentic customer reviews can strengthen message consistency. Ultimately, influencer campaigns are more likely to remain persuasive when product claims, influencer communication, and actual consumer experiences are aligned.

4.7. Limitations and future suggestions

This study has several limitations that offer valuable directions for future research. First, the cross-sectional, self-reported design of the study limits causal inference and captures PUR rather than actual purchasing behaviour. Future studies should incorporate behavioural measures, such as purchase records, click-through activity, or engagement data, and employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine how PIN translates into actual consumer behaviour over time. Using multiple data sources may further strengthen the robustness of future findings, although common method bias was not found to be a serious concern in this study. Secondly, the use of convenience sampling and the prevalence of younger female participants may restrict the generalisability of the results. Subsequent studies may employ quota or stratified sampling to achieve more demographically balanced samples and investigate the model across other countries and cultural situations. Such comparisons would reveal whether these relationships hold beyond Indonesian TikTok users.

This study concentrates on a singular platform and fails to differentiate across influencer or content categories. Future research may analyse micro-, macro-, and celebrity influencers, with video reviews, live broadcasts, and interactive material across both short- and long-form platforms. Investigating platform affordances and algorithmic curation may elucidate whether the processes reported in this study maintain stability across various social commerce contexts. The adverse moderating effect of CWM warrants further examination. Experimental research could vary the trustworthiness and consistency of peer reviews of influencer claims to determine when eWOM corroborates influencer persuasion and when it serves as an alternative source of evaluation, diminishing dependence on influencer authority. This research would yield a clearer comprehension of the interplay between individual influence and collective peer assessment in social commerce.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined how emotional and cognitive mechanisms jointly shape PUR in the context of influencer marketing, using a model grounded in Media Dependency Theory and Social Learning Theory and tested through PLS-SEM analysis. Observations show that when followers believe information is high quality, they tend to perceive the influencer as having high persuasive skills and are more likely to buy the product. EMO significantly strengthened PIN, indicating that stronger relational ties increase followers' susceptibility to influencer persuasion, while EMO alone did not directly translate into purchase decisions, highlighting the mediating role of PIN. In addition, PIN predicted PUR (H5), confirming that it is a key mechanism behind the role of influencer traits in influencing consumer behaviour. The findings indicate that higher CWM weakens the relationship between PIN and PUR, suggesting that strong trust in peer-generated information can reduce reliance on influencer persuasion. In short, the study proposes a model that explains how PUR is affected by both influencer traits and trust in e-WOM. The results suggest that persuasive power in social commerce emerges from the interaction between individual influencer authority and collective peer judgment. These findings underscore the importance of balancing influencer-driven persuasion with credible peer-generated information, given that persuasive impact depends on the interaction between individual authority and collective judgment. Furthermore, by providing insights into transparent, trustworthy, and effective digital communication practices, the findings contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), supporting the development of sustainable digital commerce ecosystems. Taken together, these insights enhance understanding of how influence, trust, and behavioural intention interact within contemporary, algorithm-driven social commerce ecosystems.

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