

The Authenticity & Aspiration Paradox in Influencer Marketing: A Systematic Review Analysis

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Abstract

In the contemporary marketing world, social media influencers are expected to appear genuine, and relatable while simultaneously presenting their lifestyles, achievements, and consumption patterns that followers may admire and aspire to emulate. Although authenticity and aspiration are both integral aspects in influencer marketing but generally examined through separate theoretical perspectives. However, limited attention has been given to the study of how these two aspects coexist, complement one another, or create tension when coexist. The present study addresses this gap through a systematic literature review supported by bibliometric visualization. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using multi-database and a total of 354 research studies published between 2015 and 2026 were identified for initial screening. The systematic review followed PRISMA framework that helped in identification, screening, inclusion, and exclusion of studies. Following the relevance-based screening 55 studies were retained for the review. VOSviewer is used to visualize the bibliographic structure of the reviewed literature. The thematic synthesis focused on two domains basically influencer authenticity and aspirational appeal. The findings indicate that authenticity is perceived as genuineness, trustworthiness, credibility, and reliability between an influencers' identity and commercial activities. Whereas, aspirational appeal is understood through para social relationships, admiration, inspiration, role modelling and the desire to emulate an influencers' lifestyle and recommendations. Based on these finding, the study proposed Authenticity Aspiration Matrix comprising four combinations: Relatable Influencer, Credible Influencer, Transactional Influencer, Idealized Influencer. The study focused on complementary and competing expectations placed on contemporary influencers and provide directions for future research related to influencer marketing.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Influencer Marketing, Authenticity, Aspirational Appeal, Consumer Behaviour, Systematic Literature Review.

1. Introduction

Social Media Influencers have become strong cultural and commercial intermediaries in the contemporary marketplace. The social media influencers are those people who possess the potential to engage and persuade audience with their content generated and posted on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snap Chat, X, and other such platforms. The social media influencers

share their opinions, experiences, personal stories, lifestyles, and product recommendations with the audience at large, that helps them to gain visibility and popularity amongst audience. And the influencers who are perceived to be genuine and more relatable are followed by the social media users (Abidin, 2023; Driel et al., 2021). This characteristic of influencer communication has made authenticity an important area of research. It is normally observed that followers expect influencers to be genuine, credible, and relatable. The prior studies have examined authenticity in relation with commercial collaborations, audience perceptions, self-presentation, and increasing influencer professionalism (Kapitan et al., 2022; Zniva et al., 2023). Though, it is perceived that the brand-influencers collaborations affect influencers' authenticity, but it is also observed in past studies that influencers are expected to monetize their content and collaborate with the brands and at same time they can maintain their identity and authenticity through proper sponsorship disclosures, honest reviews and with proper conduct online. Influencers are not followed simply because they are approachable and genuine, but many influencers are followed because they represent something inspiring or worth admiring. They may look attractive, successful, talented, creative, fit, fashionable, expert in their domain or showcase a lifestyle that audience admire. The followers gradually perceive influencers as their role models and wish to emulate their lifestyle or personal recommendations based on their para social (one-sided) interactions. This has made aspirational appeal of an influencer another very important area of research. The prior studies have examined the aspirational orientation through concepts such as para social relationships, mimicry, admiration, role, modelling, inspiration, and self-discrepancy (Leite et al., 2022). However, these two areas have been studied on different parameters. Authenticity is examined in relation to credibility, trust, transparency, and audience engagement while aspirational appeal is often understood through admiration, emulation, imitation, social comparison, para social relationship, desire to mimic or self-discrepancy. The consumers look for both authenticity and aspirational appeal in an influencer. This makes these concepts related, but limited attention has been given that how authenticity and aspiration operate together within the same influencer identity.

People normally presume that higher authenticity always produces more favorable consumer responses. But prior research has shown (Andonopoulos et al., 2023) that an influencer perceived as inauthentic may still generate inspiration and positive purchase intentions. Similarly, research on self-discrepancy indicates that aspirational behaviour can attract more followers while also creating psychological distance (Aw et al., 2021). These findings reveal that authenticity and aspiration may complement one another in some situations but they oppose in others.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study focuses on the intersection of the two domains: authenticity and aspiration. The study has following objectives:

- To evaluate how the concept of authenticity is defined, conceptualized, and discussed within current influencer marketing literature.
- To analyze how existing literature explains aspirational appeal of social media influencers and its impact on consumer responses.
- To conduct systematic review of existing literature and bibliometric visualization to map out citation network and thematic trends across the intersection of authenticity and aspiration domains.
- To develop and propose an Authenticity-Aspiration Matrix as the theoretical framework, classifying four categories of influencers that merged from interaction between authenticity and aspirational appeal.

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3. Significance of the Study

The study contributes to influencer marketing literature in three ways:

1. The study brings together two related yet generally separate areas of research, the authenticity and aspirational appeal of the social media influencers.
2. The study helps to understand that authenticity and aspiration should not automatically be assumed to move in same direction.
3. The study proposes a simple conceptual framework that may help future researchers, practitioners, and readers in understanding two related yet distinct domains of a social media influencer.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Authenticity in Influencer Marketing

In influencer marketing, authenticity of influencers is defined as an extent to which the consumers perceive influencers to be credible, trustworthy, relatable, and genuine. Authenticity in influencers' economy is a major concern as influencer marketing involves commercialization of personal identity. Today, the brands are investing more in influencer marketing for endorsing their products/services because the influencers hold great potential in persuading consumer buying behaviour. Influencers are not just spokespersons delivering brand message, but their personal experiences, conduct, lifestyle, and choices often become part of communication itself. The distinction between the influencer's authenticity and the promotional message can become blurred. Authenticity in influencer marketing can be theoretically explained through Source Credibility Theory, originally proposed by (Hovland et al., 1953). The theory suggests that a communicator's perceived credibility influence the persuasiveness of the communicated message. In influencer context, the perceived genuineness, honesty, and trustworthiness, can make an influencer perceived as a more credible source. Thereby, increasing the likelihood that followers accept and respond to the influencers' communication.

(Luoma-aho et al., 2019) demonstrated that authenticity is not an objective characteristic to judge an influencer, but it is interpreted by the audience as authenticity perceptions can be influenced by contextual cues or related ideas such as genuineness, sincerity, consistency, relatability, truthful self-presentation, and perceived realness. Similarly, (Archer et al., 2024) highlighted the importance of authenticity in influencer-based endorsements, as findings revealed that followers evaluate whether an influencers' recommendations and commercial associations appear consistent with their identity and communication. Influencers depend on brand collaboration and sponsored content as one of the major sources of their income, but excessive commercialization may lead their followers to question their authenticity and genuineness. The influencers wisely select and manage collaborations that remain compatible with followers' expectations and their self-presentation. (Zniva et al., 2023) contributed by examining how influencer authenticity can be managed strategically if sufficient consistency is maintained in their conduct. The meaning of authenticity may also vary across audiences over time. (Singer et al., 2023) examines differences in how Generation Z and Millennials defined influencer authenticity and explained that authenticity is dynamic and shaped by changing consumer expectations. (Abidin, 2023) presented authenticity as a nuanced phenomenon and differentiated between authentic & inauthentic communication. The consumers' expectations, cultural contexts and behaviour can interpret different forms of self-presentation.

A common pattern is observed across the literature that authenticity appears to depend substantially on perceived congruence of influencers' personality, conduct, commercial activities, and consumer perception. Thus, authenticity in influencer marketing can be understood as influencer remains believable as a person while also functioning as the face of the brand for commercial activities. The perceived authenticity creates a psychological closeness and relatability. However, authenticity alone does not explain why followers admire or aspire to be like an influencer. The aspirational dimension therefore requires separate consideration.

4.2 Aspirational Appeal in Influencer Marketing

The aspirational dimension is reflected in several studies of influencer marketing. (Ki et al., 2019) examined consumers' desire to mimic social media influencers as they embody success, beauty expertise, creativity, independence, or a particular lifestyle that followers may find attractive. Mimicry represents an aspirational orientation in which followers analyze influencers' appearance, lifestyle, behaviour, and consumption patterns. The theoretical perspective on aspirational appeal can be understood through Social Comparison Theory proposed by (Festinger Leon, 1975) explains that individuals evaluate their own abilities, attributes, and social position by comparing themselves with others. In influencer marketing, the followers slowly and steadily perceive the influencers as their role model and develop a desire to mimic or emulate as they tend to compare themselves with the influencers they admire. Such admiration leads to motivation for self-improvement and imitation of influencers' lifestyle, achievements, appearance, or recommendations, thereby contributing to the influencers' aspirational appeal. (Archer et al., 2024) discussed influencers perceived as role models, suggesting that their influence may extend beyond consumption decisions and may shape how followers evaluate desirable identities and imagine their future self-possibilities. (Zimmermann et al., 2024) work is relevant to the present study as it brings authenticity and aspirational influence into closer conceptual proximity. The study explained the connection among influencers' self-presentation, authenticity, and the role model function. The studies have even revealed that aspirational appeal may create psychological tension and distance between followers and influencers. (Aw et al., 2021) examined self-discrepancy in relationship between consumers and social media influencers. An influencer may represent an admirable and attractive ideal but excessive distance between the followers' actual self and influencers' idealized image may create tension or discomfort rather than identification. (Andonopoulos et al., 2023) demonstrated that perceived inauthenticity does not eliminate consumer responses. An influencer may continue to inspire followers when the influencer is not perceived as completely authentic. The literature therefore suggests that aspirational appeal should not be restricted to beauty, wealth, or luxury. An influencer maybe aspirational because of personal achievement, confidence, creativity, expertise, or values. The study revealed common element is that influencer represents an identity, situation, or lifestyle that followers perceive as desirable.

The existing literature on authenticity and aspiration reveals an important contrast. Authenticity may reduce psychological distance by making an influencer appear accessible and believable. Aspirational appeal may require a certain degree of distance because followers must see something desirable that they do not possess themselves. However, an integrated conceptual explanation of their relationship remains limited.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

A systematic literature review is done and supported with bibliometric visualization and thematic analysis.

The purpose of the review is focused on the relationship between authenticity and aspirational appeal of the social media influencer. The review is conducted in four stages. First, relevant literature is searched through a structured database search. Second, a PRISMA-based selection process is used to identify and shortlist relevant studies. Third, VOSviewer is used to provide a visual presentation of the bibliometric structure of the literature. Finally, the selected studies were examined through a focused thematic synthesis.

5.2 Search Strategy

The research study selection is conducted using multi-database such as Scopus, Web Of Science, and Google Scholar. The search strategy combined terms related to influencer marketing along with terms related to authenticity, aspiration, and consumer behaviour. The terms included social media influencer, influencer marketing, authenticity, relatability, trustworthiness, aspiration, admiration, consumer behaviour, purchase intent, and purchase intention. A Boolean string is used in the following manner. ("social media influencer*" OR "influencer marketing") AND ("authenticity" OR "relatability" OR "trustworthiness" OR "aspiration*" OR "admiration") AND ("consumer behaviour" OR "purchase inten*")

The search was applied to title and abstracts of journal articles published between 2015 and 2026. The initial search identified 354 research studies. The retrieved studies were subsequently assessed for relevance to the conceptual purpose of this study. Studies that contributed directly to understanding of influencer authenticity, aspirational appeal and consumer responses were retained and remaining were excluded.

5.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1 presents the criteria for selecting the studies.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

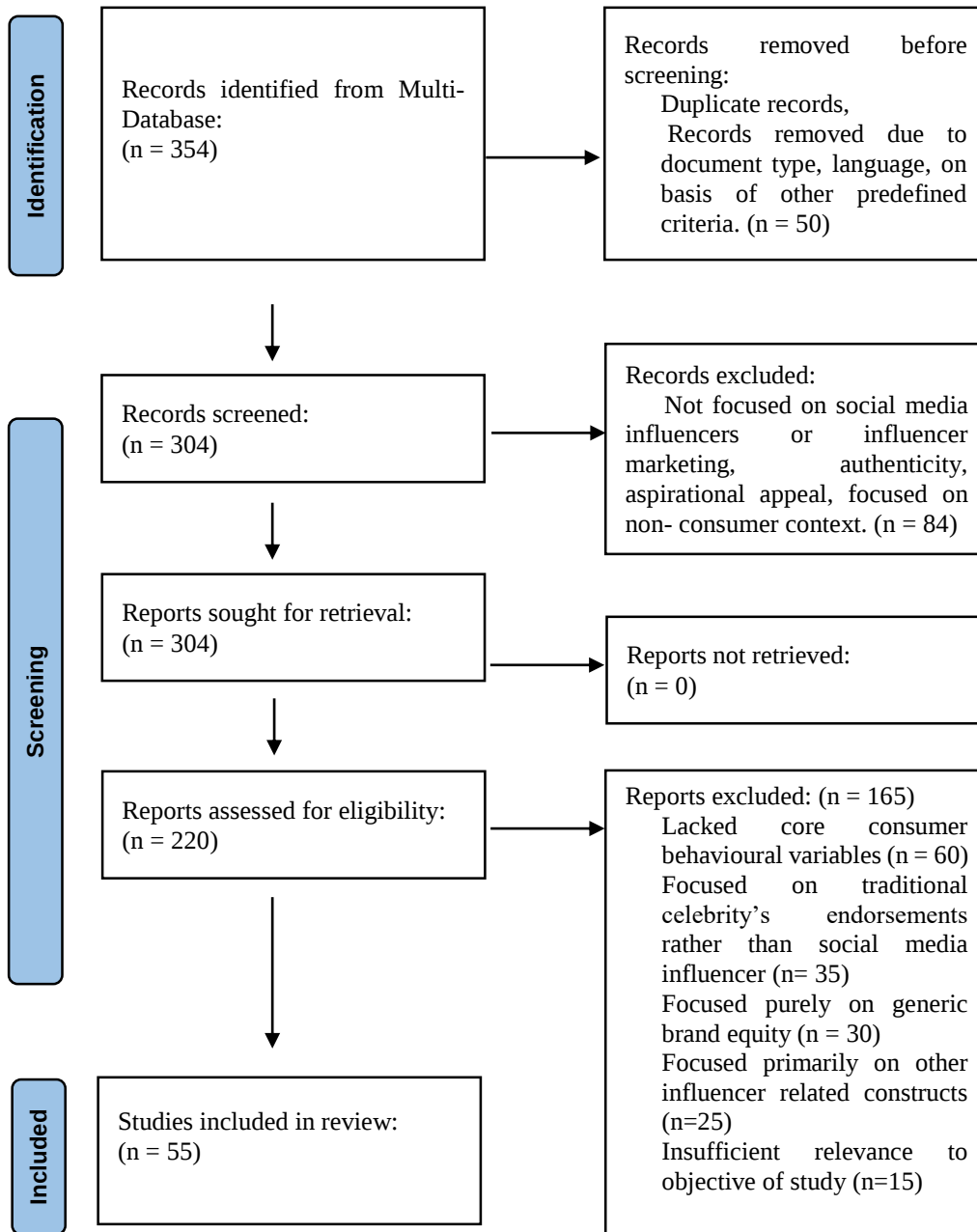
Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Research Context	Social media influencers or influencer marketing.	Studies unrelated to social media influencers or influencer marketing.
Conceptual Focus	Authenticity, relatability, trustworthiness, aspiration, admiration, or closely related.	Studies with no meaningful relevance to two focal domains.
Consumer Relevance	Consumer behaviour, purchase intent or purchase intention.	Not related to consumer behavioural responses, platform focused, related to brand awareness, brand attitude.
Document Type	Journal articles	Editorials, book reviews, and non-article publications.
Publication Period	2015 to 2026	Publications outside the selected period.
Review Suitability	Studies written in English language.	Studies in other languages or not suitable for review process.

5.4 PRISMA-Based Process

A PRISMA based process (Page et al., 2021) was followed to provide transparency regarding the selection of studies. The initial database search generated 354 records. These recorded were assessed based on

inclusion and exclusion criteria. The final corpus consisted of 55 studies. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA Model.

Figure 1: PRISMA Based Study Selection Process



The focused selection is considered appropriate because the initial selection included related concepts as well thus overlooking the relevant studies. However, the final synthesis remained centered on authenticity and aspirational appeal of the social media influencers and their impact on consumer responses.

5.5 Bibliometric Visualization and Thematic Synthesis

VOSviewer is used to provide a visual presentation of the bibliographic structure of the reviewed literature. The available visualization is used as supplementary overview of the conceptual study. The principal analytical emphasis was placed on thematic synthesis. The selected studies were reviewed to identify how

authenticity and aspirational appeal are conceptualized and suggested the evidence related to authenticity-aspiration paradox.

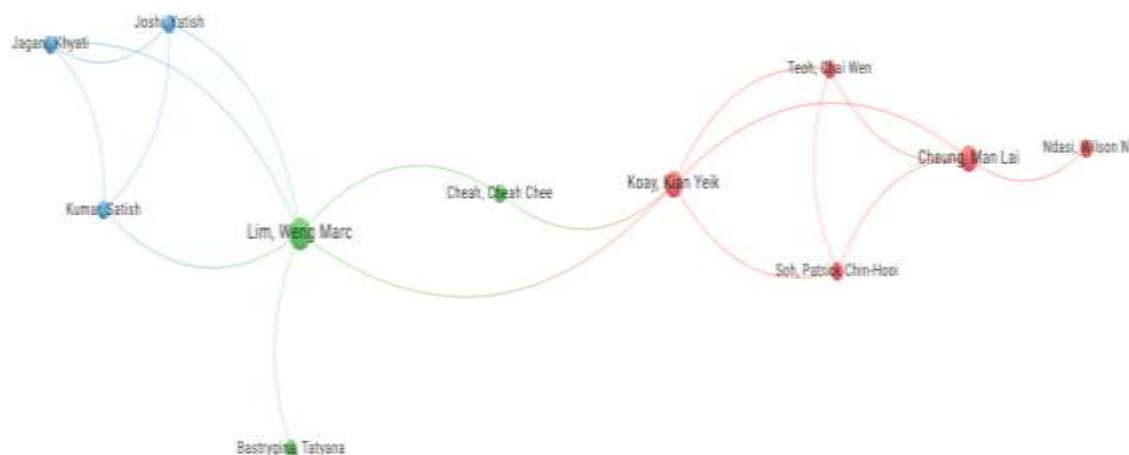
6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Overview of Reviewed Literature

The reviewed literature reflects the growth of influencer marketing over the period of 2015 to 2026. Earlier studies were primarily concerned whether influencers could function as effective and efficient endorsers. But recent studies have increasingly examined authenticity, credibility, trustworthiness, commercialization, aspiration, desire to mimic, role-modelling, inspiration, and the psychological relationship between influencers and followers. The existing study highlights that these two aspects have been studied to understand their impact on consumer responses. The review indicates that authenticity and aspiration are not entirely isolated areas. Studies examining role modelling, self-presentation, self-discrepancy, and inspiration increasingly bring the two concepts into closer proximity.

The bibliometric mapping was conducted on 354 records retrieved from the search, using VOSviewer (Eck et al., 2010) to examine the author co-authorship and keyword co-occurrence patterns.

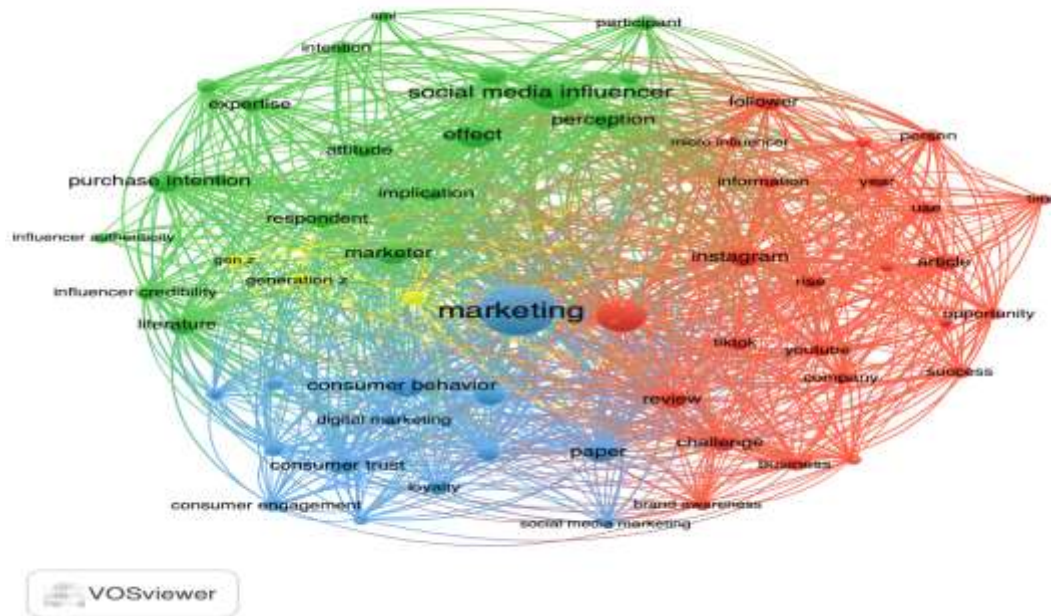
Figure 2: Author Co-authorship Network



Source: Author's own analysis using VOSviewer

The author co-authorship network indicates the presence of interconnected research groups within influencer marketing literature. The prominent contributions include (Joshi et al., 2025) identified authenticity as one of major research aspects in social media influencer marketing alongside para social relationships, sponsorship, and engagement. (Koay et al., 2022) examined consumer-influencer congruence and wishful identification in relation with online impulse buying intentions. Wishful identification is basically when consumers view influencers as figures they would like to emulate. (Koay et al., 2021) examined sincerity, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise of influencers in relation to online impulse buying. This shows that consumer look for credibility in influencers recommendation that prompts their buying decisions. (Bastrygina et al., 2023) identified authenticity, attractiveness, credibility, expertise, originality, relatability, and trustworthiness among important influencer related antecedents of consumer engagement.

Figure 3: Keyword co-occurrence Network



Source: Author's own analysis using VOSviewer

The keyword co-occurrence network of 354 retrieved records reveals that influencer marketing research is primarily centered on themes such as marketing, social media influencer, consumer behaviour, digital marketing, social media marketing, influencer authenticity, influencer credibility, consumer engagement, consumer trust, loyalty, expertise, perception, attitude, Instagram, YouTube, purchase intention, brand awareness and other keywords. While influencer authenticity emerges as a visible thematic concept, but aspirational appeal or admiration does not appear as a prominent or consolidated keyword theme, this observation indicates a potential gap in the existing literature and provides a basis for focused analysis of 55 studies retained through the PRISMA based screening process.

Following the bibliometric mapping of 354 retrieved records, the subsequent thematic analysis focuses on the 55 studies retained through the PRISMA to examine how authenticity and aspirational appeal have been conceptualized in the existing literature.

6.2 Authenticity as Perceived Realness

The first major domain identified through the review highlights the expectation that the influencers should appear genuine. Authenticity is important because influencer marketing is based on the perception that influencers' marketing communication is considered more relatable, approachable, and genuine rather than fictional traditional advertisements. However, the findings indicate that authenticity should not be interpreted as complete absence of commercial activity. The influencers curate content, edit images, manage collaborations, and develop professional identities. The issue remains that how far do the followers perceive such commercial activities authentic. As it is observed that, over commercialization hamper an influencer's perceived authenticity. The research relating to sponsored content and endorsement practices indicate that followers are increasingly aware of commercial nature of influencer marketing (Evans et al., 2017). According to (Boerman et al., 2017) the onus is on both influencers and brands that proper sponsorship disclosure must be done. These studies highlight that clear disclosure of commercial collaborations can enhance consumers' trust and make an influencer more authentic. The authenticity is weakened when commercial partnerships appear inconsistent with an influencer's

established identity or values. The review therefore explains that authenticity is relational as it emerges from interaction between an influencers' self-presentation and followers' expectations. A highly polished influencer may be perceived as authentic if their presentation is consistent with their established identity. And on other hand, an influencer may appear inauthentic if the followers interpret the communication as strategically manufactured. The increasing commercialization poses a challenge in relation with influencers' authenticity. Influencers must manage commercial relationships while preserving their personal identities that perceive authentic to their followers.

Thus, the first major finding of the review is that authenticity can be understood as perceived congruence between an influencers' projected identity, communication values, commercial activities, and followers' perception.

6.3 Aspirational Appeal as a Desire to Mimic

The second major domain concerns the influencers' ability to prompt a desire amongst the followers to mimic them. Influencers may attract followers through their innate capabilities such as charisma, expertise, values, creativity and acquired capabilities such as subject knowledge, success, achievements, or personal lifestyle. The literature review identifies several expressions of aspirational appeal. Mimicry represents an expression where followers feel the urge to imitate or emulate the characteristics, appearance, lifestyle, or recommendations of the influencers they follow (Ki et al., 2019). Admiration explains the para social relationship developed between influencers and followers. The one-sided emotional connect may influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Trivedi et al., 2020). Role Modelling provides a broader expression of aspirational appeal. The followers tend to perceive the influencers as their role models and imagine their desirable identities or future possibilities (Archer et al., 2024). Similarly, inspiration may motivate followers towards a desired action, behaviour, or identity (Andonopoulos et al., 2023). Though the concepts are not identical, but they collectively suggest that followers may not simply trust an influencer but may also acquire qualities, experiences, products, or lifestyle associated with that influencer. The study highlights that aspirational appeal involves a balance between distance and attainability. If an influencer seems too distant or unattainable, then this creates tension and followers may experience disengagement even though they admire the influencer. The second finding suggests that aspiration is strongest when followers perceive something desirable while still being able to feel a connection between themselves and desired identity.

6.4 Authenticity and Aspiration Paradox

The authenticity and aspiration paradox explains different patterns when these two aspects complement each other, when authenticity exists without strong aspiration, when aspiration survives despite low authenticity and when neither authenticity nor aspiration is strong.

The first pattern emerged from the review is the possibility that authenticity and aspiration may reinforce one another. An influencer may be successful, attractive, or socially desirable while remaining sufficiently relatable and believable. The followers may admire an influencer without feeling disconnected from them, the path to attain that desirable identity appears understandable and realistic. The follower's response can be that they admire the influencer and at same time relate to their journey. This combination explains the third finding, that authenticity provides psychological accessibility, while aspiration provides upward motivation.

The second pattern occurs when an influencer is perceived as highly authentic but possesses relatively low aspirational appeal. Such influencers may be valued because they appear relatable, similar, trustworthy, credible, and genuine to the followers. The influence is basically more on identification rather than upward

aspiration. The follower's response can be that the influencer seems relatable. This does not imply that such influencers are ineffective as relatability can enhance engagement & loyalty. The fourth finding suggest that a highly curated or idealized influencer is not always a necessary condition for aspirational influence.

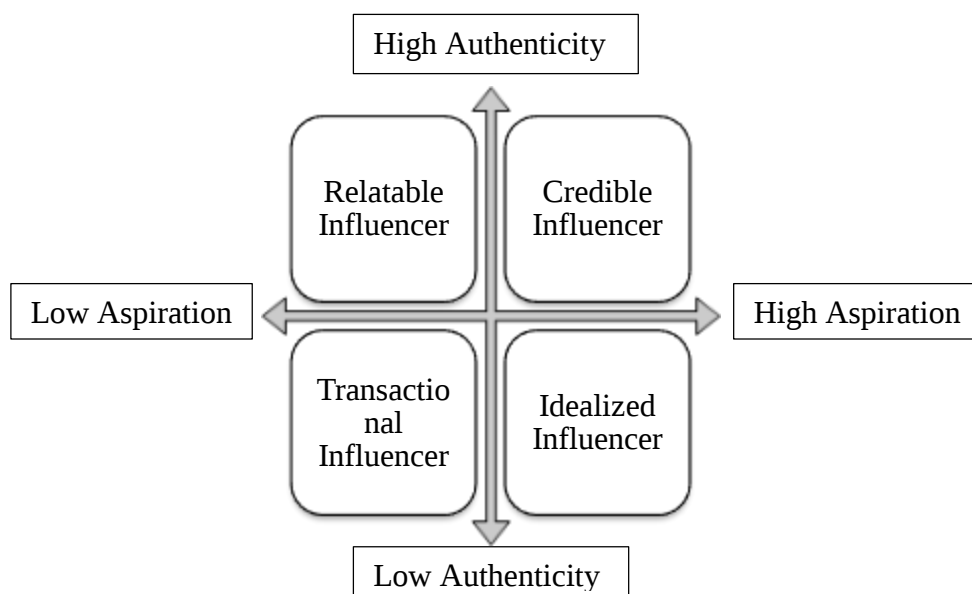
The third pattern explains that aspirational appeal may survive even when perceived authenticity is weak. This challenges the assumption that authenticity is always essential for influencer effectiveness. (Andonopoulos et al., 2023) demonstrate that influencers though perceived as inauthentic may still generate positive consumer responses through inspiration. A highly curated lifestyle may be recognized as strategically presented while continuing to remain attractive. The followers understand that social media influencers' content is edited, sponsored, or structured but still they admire the associated lifestyle. The fifth finding is important as it suggests that followers may separate their judgment of an influencer's realness from their desire to emulate what the influencer represents.

The fourth pattern represents influencers who are neither perceived authentic nor particularly have strong aspirational appeal. Such a position occur may occur when the influencers' commercialized activity appears too staged and fictional or inauthentic and simultaneously influencer fails to provide a desirable identity, lifestyle, or achievements that followers find aspirational. This category has received relatively less direct attention because influencer research frequently focuses on successful influencers. Nevertheless, it is conceptually important to discuss this pattern considering influencer marketing context. The possible follower's response can be that they neither relate to the influencer nor aspire to become like them. The sixth finding suggest this position demonstrates that visibility of influencer is insufficient to create meaningful influence.

7. The Authenticity Aspiration Matrix

Based on the thematic synthesis, an Authenticity Aspiration Matrix is proposed. The framework is based on two dimensions: Authenticity and Aspiration. Figure 4 explains the authenticity aspiration matrix.

Figure 4: The Authenticity Aspiration Matrix



The framework explains that an influencer position may change depending on level of authenticity and aspirational appeal.

7.1 Relatable Influencer

This position represents high authenticity and low aspirational appeal. The influencer is valued for their genuineness, accessibility, and similarity. Such influencers may be particularly effective when the followers prefer relatability, similarity, identification more important than idealized lifestyles. The followers perceive influencers as their friends and implicitly trust their recommendations. The purchasing influence in this case is restricted to everyday household items rather than lifestyle-shifting premium brands.

7.2 Credible Influencer

This position explains both high authenticity and high aspirational appeal. The influencer is admired and seem relatable at the same time. The position represents a particularly balanced form of influencer appeal. The influencer provides an aspirational image without creating psychological distance. These influencers display exceptional talent, high level skills but they openly share their failures, struggles or behind the scenes efforts. This quadrant is most important for creating long term purchase intentions because the advice feel both credible and acceptable.

7.3 Transactional Influencer

This position represents low authenticity and low aspirational appeal. The influencer may appear over commercial, unrelatable, or unconvincing while simultaneously failing to provide a compelling identity or lifestyle. They are perceived as human billboard reading a corporate or brand message. These influencers possess low originality with high sponsorship disclosure tags and unauthentic content. The influencers even lack desirable personality that followers actively scroll past or unfollow, leading to the lowest purchase intention rates.

7.4 Idealized Influencer

This position explains high aspirational appeal combined with relatively low perceived authenticity. The influencer may display a highly polished, luxurious, curated, or constructed identity. The followers possess doubt regarding influencer's authenticity while continuing to admire aspects of their lifestyle or identity. This position captures the central paradox identified through the review. An influencer may not need to be perceived as completely authentic to remain aspirational and influential. The consumers look at influencers for aesthetic inspiration, but they maintain psychological distance because the content lacks transparency or organic flaws.

8. Implications and Future Research

The present study offers implications for both influencer marketing research and practice. The findings suggest that authenticity and aspirational appeal should not always be treated as sole or independent factors influencers' effectiveness. Instead, their interaction may create different forms of influencer appeal. The proposed Authenticity Aspiration Matrix provides a framework through which influencers may be positioned as Relatable, Credible, Transactional, and Idealized Influencers, depending on their relative levels of perceived authenticity and aspirational appeal. This perspective may also help researchers to move beyond treating authenticity as a direct predictor of trust or purchase intention and they may explore its relationship with consumers' desire to mimic, emulate, admire, or identify with the influencers.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that influencer section should extend beyond their follower count - and engagement metrics. The brands must pay heed to the fact that collaborations might impact influen-

ers' perceived authenticity and aspirational appeal. Brands may consider whether influencer characteristics align with the campaign objectives. Relatable influencers may be suitable for building trust and identification through their authenticity, while idealized influencers may be more effective when the objective is to build strong relationship between followers & influencers through admiration and aspiration.

The future research may empirically test the proposed matrix across different influencer categories, platforms, and product categories. Experimental and survey-based studies could examine how the four influencers' positions influence trust, inspiration, para social relationships, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Longitudinal research may further help to explore whether influencers shift between these positions as their popularity and commercial involvement evolve.

9. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that influencer marketing is shaped by two important but potentially competing expectations. The influencers are expected to appear real to create connection and sufficiently appealing to provide followers with something to aspire to. The present study has examined authenticity through perceived genuineness, consistency, trustworthiness, relatability, and believable self-presentation. And aspirational appeal has been examined through role modelling, admiration, mimicry, inspiration, and self-discrepancy. The existing paradox between these two aspects demonstrates that authenticity and aspiration do not necessarily move in the same direction. An influencer may be highly authentic without being strongly aspirational and an influencer may depict high aspirational appeal despite being perceived as curated or less authentic. The authenticity Aspiration Matrix is an outcome of systematic review analysis that explains four different positions of influencers categories: Relatable Influencer, Inspiring Influencer, Transactional Influencer, and Idealized Influencer.

The central implication of the study is that being perceived as real and being perceived as desirable are not identical forms of influencer appeal. Some influencers may be considered influential because the followers see the person they wish to become, and some influencers may be considered influential because they seem relatable or genuine. the strongest form of influencer appeal may emerge when these two aspects coexist. However, the review also indicates that influence may continue even when an influencer has both low authenticity and low aspirational appeal as in case of Transactional Influencers. The proposed study therefore provides a basis for future empirical research examining how influencers strike a balance between authenticity and aspirational appeal within an increasingly commercialized social media environment.

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