

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54663/2182-9306.2024.v.12.n.22.54-74>

*Research Paper*

## **Did you like, share and comment? An essay on the effect of the influencer image on the behavior of followers.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

When defining content marketing strategies, it is vital that managers understand how the influencer interferes with the behavioral responses of followers. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the behavior of followers in relation to tips from influencers, and examines the extent to which the user's engagement level and frequency of use of social media affects this relationship. For that, a theoretical model is proposed, which is tested with users of social networks, in a transversal approach. As theoretical insights, the findings of the study highlight three points. First, there is empirical evidence that reveals the effect of influencer image on consumer behavioral cues. Second, consumer engagement plays a moderating role in the relationship between influencer image and follower behavior. Third, the data did not support frequency of use as a moderating element. Thus, the paper contributes to a better understanding of consumer behavior on social networks and brings advances on how the influencer fits into this dynamic. This is a relevant strategic path both for composing marketing actions and for their greater effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Influencer image, behavioral of followers, consumer engagement, social media.

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**Received on:** 2023.10.09

**Approved on:** 2024.06.23

*Evaluated by a double-blind review system*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media represents one of the sources of information in the consumer's decision-making process (Pop *et al.*, 2021). Users routinely access social media to collect information and suggestions about tourist destinations (Gaffar *et al.*, 2022; Pop *et al.*, 2021), diets (Mosca and Quaranta, 2016), and fashion (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020; Loureiro, Maximiano and Panchapakesan, 2018), among others. This online space allows consumers to share personal insights (experiences, opinions and knowledge), which influence the behavior of others (Palalic *et al.*, 2021), for example, a greater predisposition to generate positive electronic word-of-mouth (Ryu and Park, 2020). This puts social media at the forefront of corporate strategies (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020; Swani *et al.*, 2017; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021) and reveals itself as fertile ground for influencers (Ata *et al.*, 2022; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021).

In this scenario, influencers are protagonists and share routines, skills, judgments, and indications about something (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020). They attract a mass audience, build a fan base, and become a source of advice for their followers (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). They are perceived as subjects with high communication power in social media and that affects the decision of other consumers (Palalic *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, individuals tend to value influencers' tips for several reasons: expertise, attractiveness (physical, familiarity, and friendliness), social prestige, trust, congruence between the influencer's image and the endorsed brand, and popularity, among others (Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Pittman & Abell, 2021; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). The influencer image is noted as a significant variable in understanding consumer behavior (Pereira Filho & Añez, 2021; Su, Kunkel & Ye, 2021). Consumers' feelings and judgments about a name (influencer) impact their attitudes on social media, such as intentions to imitate and recommend. Consumers are expected to endorse the influencer's recommendations only when the perceived image of the celebrity is favorable and serves as a motivational framework for accepting the recommendation (Schan, Chen & Lin, 2020). However, the consumer's motivational state of mind (consumer engagement) can also impact their interactive responses to social media (Dwivedi, 2015). For example, a follower can vary their level of interaction with social media, depending on how

engaged they feel. Greater engagement may reflect more active follower behavior (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). Otherwise, the result is an inert position of a follower. Thus, lower engagement is expected to reduce the consumer's willingness to interact with the influencer's posts.

Another recent point raised in the literature is the relationship between the frequency of use of social media and their interactive responses to the recommendations of influencers. The study by Vasconcelos *et al.* (2020) shows the positive relationship between these variables. For them, the greater the consumer's use of social media, the greater the likelihood of interacting with the influencer's posts.

In light of the above, this study aims to evaluate the behavior of followers about tips from influencers. A key question guides the assessment: a) to what extent does the influencer's perceived image affect followers' behavioral intentions? The aim is to investigate the direction and magnitude of a probable relationship between consumer behavior and influencer image. To deepen this understanding, the moderating effect of two variables on the relationship between perceived image and behavioral intentions is tested, namely: consumer engagement and frequency of use of social media. For this, a theoretical model is proposed, which is tested with social media users, using a transversal approach. In addition, structural equations are used to evaluate the data.

Theoretical and practical reasons underlie the study. First, Vrontis *et al.* (2021) ensure that it is necessary to shed light on the role of influencers in the consumer's decision journey. This research domain is incipient and there is a call to develop a broader vision, grounded and robust on the topic (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). The power of influence of these actors on the formation of consumer attitudes and behaviors is an emerging area (Palalic *et al.*, 2021). In response, the paper expands on the current state of the literature on influencer marketing. Second, the relationship between influencer image and consumer engagement is an underexplored domain (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, there are demands from the literature for empirical works that help to understand this gap. Third, the study helps marketers understand how influencer marketing explains consumer attitudes. Understanding how the influencer affects the purchase intentions of current and potential customers makes it possible to clarify the criteria for choosing the most appropriate influencer for the company's marketing practices (Palalic *et al.*, 2021; Vasconcelos *et al.*, 2020).

The article is structured into the following sections: theoretical basis and development of hypotheses, method, results, discussion, conclusion with limitations, and future research directions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

People form impressions about brands. Some consumers prefer one product to another, as well as an influencer to another, just because it aligns more with their identity, or because it signals their belonging to a social group. The consumer-brand interface is the result of the perceived congruence between a business name and an individual (Kervyn, Fiske & Malone, 2022). This helps to clarify the relationship of credibility between the influencer and the follower (potential consumer), as high attunement is a typical element of this relationship. Among thousands of influencers available on social media, consumers are free to choose who to follow or unfollow at any time (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). A consumer establishes a strong and positive bond with the preferred influencer, for one reason or another: they represent an ideal self or they both have similar interests (Boerman, 2020). Therefore, if a consumer has a preferred influencer and that celebrity promotes a product that is consistent with the user's image, there is a high probability that this consumer will also evaluate the product positively. However, if the customer perceives that the link between the influencer and the product is incoherent, this can disrupt this connection (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). There is a psychological and attitudinal proximity between the influencer and follower. Those who share the same self-concept with influencers often see them as role models (Hermada, Sumarwan & Tinaprillia, 2019).

It is noted that the information generated by the influencer causes changes in users' beliefs or attitudes (Bhattacharjee & Premkumar, 2004). That is, empirical studies prove this finding in industries such as fashion (Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Quelhas-Brito *et al.*, 2020), entertainment, beauty (Torres, Augusto & Matos, 2019; Hermada, Sumarwan & Tinaprillia, 2019), electronic products (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). The studies of Quelhas-Brito *et al.* (2020) and Farivar, Wang, and Yuan (2021), for example, show the effect of opinion leadership on the intention of the social media user to follow the advice offered by the influencer. Consumers are used to making purchase decisions based on the guidelines of the preferred influencer (Quelhas-Brito *et al.*, 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2020), as they see him as an individual with extensive experience and competence on the topic of the post (Quelhas-Brito *et al.*, 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2020, Farivar, Wang & Yuan, 2021). Thus, the influencer image serves as an emotional framework and impacts consumer judgments. When the influencer's image is congruent with the consumer's self-image, the consumer becomes more willing to develop attitudes favorable to the brand (Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019; Shan, Chen & Lin, 2020).

For Vrontis *et al.* (2021), as the content posted by the influencer is attractive, demonstrates expertise, and conveys prestige, consumers exhibit positive attitudes towards the influencer, for example, the desire to imitate him. Equivalent findings are presented in studies by Torres, Augusto, and Matos (2019), Kim and Kim (2021), and Reinikainen *et al.* (2020). For them, consumer purchase intentions are affected by the influencer's friendliness, trust, and familiarity.

Supported by Belanche *et al.* (2021) and Schan, Chen and Lin (2020), the discussion above suggests that the perceived image of the influencer (composed of credibility and attitudes) can affect user behavior on social media. So, it is proposed that:

- H<sub>1</sub>**. The influencer's credibility positively affects the user's intention to imitate him;
- H<sub>2</sub>**. The influencer's credibility positively affects the user's intention to follow the account;
- H<sub>3</sub>**. The influencer's credibility positively affects the user's intention to recommend him;
- H<sub>4</sub>**. The attitude towards the influencer positively affects the user's intention to imitate him;
- H<sub>5</sub>**. The attitude towards the influencer positively affects the user's intention to follow the account;
- H<sub>6</sub>**. The attitude towards the influencer positively affects the user's intention to recommend him.

In turn, the work of Lou, Tan and Chen (2019) narrows the relationship between influencer image, engagement, and social media user behavior. The study points to the direct relationship between the influencer's image and the user's engagement level. Therefore, preferred personalities, who have a favorable image, enjoy a greater degree of consumer involvement, either through likes or comments (Lou, Tan & Chen, 2019). However, the relationship between the three variables seems to have an intersection point: the concept of consumer engagement. Engagement is understood as a psychological and motivational state related to a name, and the result of interactive experiences between subjects (Dwivedi, 2015; Vander Shee *et al.*, 2020). Depending on the context, an individual oscillates between different levels of engagement (Taheri *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the image of the influencer may promote greater effects on user behavior, if their level of engagement is high (Pereira Filho & Añez, 2021; Su, Kunkel & Ye, 2021). On the other hand, if users invest less voluntary efforts to establish interactions with the influencer, they are not happy with the interactions, they feel less enthusiastic and inspired to carry out interactions with the influencer, the impact of the influencer's image on the behavior of the user tends to be lower (Omar *et al.*, 2018). So, it is suggested that there is a moderating effect of engagement on the relationship between influencer image and user behavior. This leads to the following assumptions:

**H<sub>1A</sub>.** The effect of the influencer's credibility on the user's intention to imitate him is stronger in those who have a higher level of engagement;

**H<sub>2A</sub>.** The effect of an influencer's credibility on the user's intention to follow the account is stronger for those with the highest level of engagement;

**H<sub>3A</sub>.** The effect of the influencer's credibility on the user's intention to recommend him is stronger in those who have a higher level of engagement;

**H<sub>4A</sub>.** The effect of the attitude towards the influencer on the user's intention to imitate him is stronger in those who have a higher level of engagement;

**H<sub>5A</sub>.** The effect of attitude towards the influencer on the user's intention to follow the account is stronger in those who have a higher level of engagement;

**H<sub>6A</sub>.** The effect of the attitude towards the influencer on the user's intention to recommend him is stronger in those who have a higher level of engagement.

Furthermore, people tend to value the opinions of others and regularly base their purchasing decisions on peer recommendations. In this scenario, influencers gain prominence, by issuing evaluations, thoughts, and recommendations that guide the purchase decisions of followers (Su, Kunkel & Ye, 2021). However, little is known about the effect of the frequency of use of social media on the relationship between influencer image and consumer behavior. Balaban *et al.* (2020) mention that followers who constantly visit the influencer's account perceive more usefulness and have greater confidence in the tips issued by the celebrity. Assiduous followers are likely to be more familiar with the celebrity, which can increase both the user's expectations of the influencer's indications and the influencer's image. On the other hand, it is expected that followers who rarely visit the influencer's account do not have such a strong perceived congruence, and identify less with his indications (Pereira Filho, 2015, 2020). So, a moderating effect of the frequency of use is suggested. This leads to the proposition of the following hypotheses:

**H<sub>1B</sub>.** The effect of the influencer's credibility on the user's intention to imitate him is stronger in those who are more assiduous;

**H<sub>2B</sub>.** The effect of the influencer's credibility on the user's intention to follow the account is stronger in those who are more assiduous;

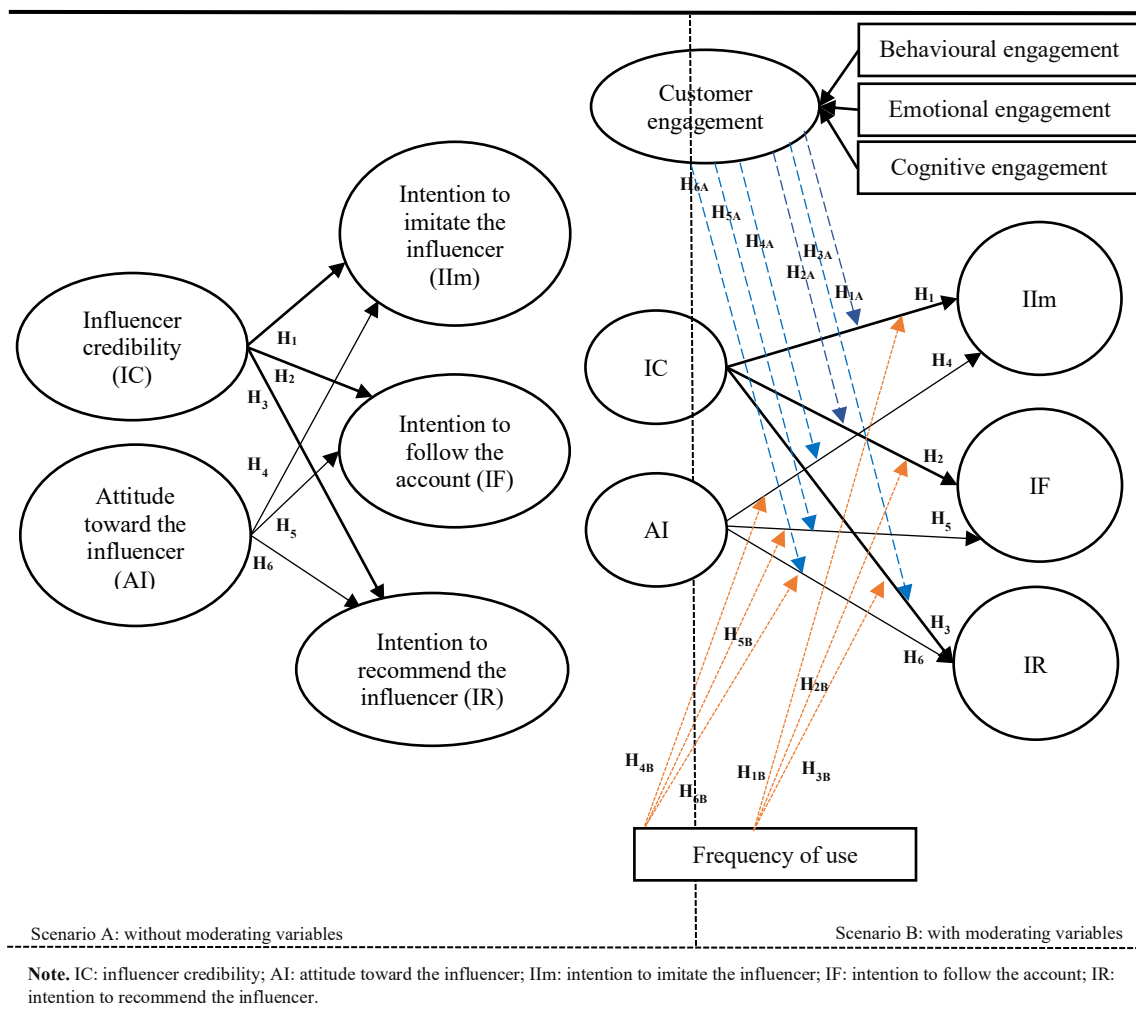
**H<sub>3B</sub>.** The effect of the influencer's credibility on the user's intention to recommend him is stronger in those who are more assiduous;

**H<sub>4B</sub>**. The effect of the attitude towards the influencer on the user's intention to imitate him is stronger in those who are more assiduous;

**H<sub>5B</sub>**. The effect of the attitude towards the influencer on the user's intention to follow the account is stronger in those who are more assiduous;

**H<sub>6B</sub>**. The effect of the attitude towards the influencer on the user's intention to recommend him is stronger in those who are more assiduous.

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model proposed in this article, considering its latent variables (influencer's perceived image, consumer behavior, and engagement). On the one hand, the image of the influencer is formed by credibility (IC) and attitudes towards him (AI).



**Figure 1.** The theoretical model established firstly

On the other hand, consumer behavior is circumscribed by the intention to imitate him (IIm), the intention to follow the account (IF), intention to recommend him (IR). These latent variables are not observable, and need other elements directly measured (manifest variables) to formulate them (Marôco, 2010). The connections presented are supported by the literature (Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Shan, Chen & Lin, 2020; Lou, Tan & Chen, 2019; Pereira Filho, 2020).

It highlights the effect of the influencer's perceived image on the consumer's decision journey. This research domain is incipient and there is a call to develop a broader vision, grounded and robust on the topic (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). In addition, this modeling seeks to assess the moderating effect of two variables on the relationship between perceived image and behavioral intentions, namely: consumer engagement and frequency of use of social media. These reasons offer uniqueness to the study.

### 3. METHOD

The study uses a set of thirty-one measures (see Appendix A) that were chosen to operationalize the latent variables of the theoretical model and compose the research instrument. This process preserved the minimum amount of three variables manifested by the latent construct (Marôco, 2010). In this paper, the influencer's perceived image represents the personality's reputation for the user. This construct covers perceived credibility and attitude toward the influencer (4 items each), making use of adjusted sentences in the literature (Ata *et al.*, 2022; Silvera & Austad, 2004). Consumer behavior is captured from eleven items adapted from Belanche *et al.* (2021). Attributes inherent to the intention to continue to follow the account, intention to imitate him, and intention to recommend him are mentioned. In turn, consumer engagement symbolizes a motivational state of mind toward something (Dwivedi, 2015). Twelve items demarcate consumer engagement, based on sentences extracted from studies by Kosiba *et al.* (2020), Algharabat *et al.* (2018).

A structured questionnaire is developed, whose composition has two modules. The first module contemplates five questions distributed as follows: three related to demographic information (age, gender, and residence), one oriented to capture the time of use of social media, and the other to indicate the respondent's preferred influencer. The second module captures the image that the respondent builds about the influencer, the degree of respondent engagement, and behavioral intentions. For this, thirty-one assertions are exposed to respondents who point out the levels of (dis)agreement for each one, using a scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).



Before the application of the instrument, a pilot test with 23 social media users is developed in which it is possible to reexamine the difficulty of understanding one or the other question. This process allowed for final adjustments of the tool, resulting in the reform of two questions (Q9 e Q29). It is also noted that the average response time is 3 min.

Self-administered questionnaire is applied to social media users in Brazil. Instagram was chosen as the study setting. Each user should list a preferred influencer. The collection was carried out in 2022, being the respondents were invited by email to participate in the research. The non-probabilistic sampling technique was used in the study due to the difficulty of finding an inclusive and updated list of social media users (Instagram). Free and informed consent is requested from research subjects. At that moment, the researcher guarantees the anonymity of the respondents as well as the possibility to leave the research at any time, without harm.

A total of 234 valid responses (return rate of 41.67%) were captured in the current study, after eliminating incomplete questionnaires and those who marked more than one answer per question. The sample has the following characteristics regarding: age (in years, to 24 years [56.84%], 25–31 [20.51%], 32–38 [11.54%], 39–45 [4,70%], 46 or older [6.41%]); residence (Patos, Paraíba [31.20%], another city in Paraíba [61,54%], city of Rio Grande do Norte [5.98%], city of Pernambuco [1,28%]); gender (men [35.90%], women [64.10%]); time of use of social media (less than 1 hour a day [13.68%], from 1 to 5 hours a day [60.68%], more than 5 hours a day [25.64%]). As for the preferred influencer, users were grouped into hedonic and utilitarian. Hedonics are users who choose the influencer for pleasure (whether humor or entertainment, among others), while utilitarians are those who select it for a certain purpose (education, finance, news, business, among others). From the sample, 71.79% of users choose the influencer for pleasure, while 28.21% opt for a more rational choice, to meet a certain purpose.

#### **4. RESULTS**

For analysis, structural equation modeling based on partial least squares (PLS) was used, with data provided by social media users as input. Two scenarios were designed: first, without moderating variables ( $H_1$  to  $H_6$ ); second, with their presence - customer engagement and frequency of use ( $H_{1A}$  to  $H_{6A}$  and  $H_{2A}$  to  $H_{6A}$ ). Thus, this technique allows the assessment of causal relationships between constructs and tests the existence of differences between the structural parameters of one scenario and another (Hair *et al.*, 2005). This is useful because it is assumed that the moderating variables

(customer engagement and frequency of use) can change the impact of influencer image (credibility and attitudes) on consumer behavior (intent to imitate, to follow the account, and to recommend the influencer).

#### **4.1 Measurement model**

The measurement models are tested based on validity (convergent and discriminant) and reliability. The convergent validity is obtained by checking the average variances extracted (AVE) and represents how much the manifest variables can explain the latent variable to which they were proposed. For Hair *et al.* (2005), if the value of the average variances is equal to or greater than 0.50, it is possible to admit that the model converges to a satisfactory result. This is identified in the “attitudes” and “influencer credibility” dimensions for both scenarios: “with” and “without” moderating variables. Values range from 0.586 to 0.683. The same does not occur for the dimensions that symbolize consumer behavior: intention to imitate, intention to follow, and intention to recommend (AVE between 0.478 and 0.698). However, the researchers opted for a parsimonious stance and did not exclude these dimensions from the analysis. The reasons are supported by two pillars: the values are relatively close to the parameter established by Hair *et al.* (2005), and there is theoretical support to maintain them (Belanche *et al.*, 2021).

Discriminant validity portrays the level of uniqueness of a latent variable about others. It symbolizes how the dimension differs from the others. This analysis is based on the simultaneous examination of cross loads (cross loading) and the criterion of Fornell and Larcker. The results are shown in Table 1.

As for the first criterion, it appears that the highest factor loads were found in the respective latent variable. There is no evidence of high factor loads in two or more constructs. The second criterion compares the variance of the construct (AVE square root) and shared variance (correlations between constructs). It is expected that there will be a higher value for the first about the other (Hair *et al.*, 2005). The square root of AVE scores (in bold) for the latent variables IC (0.826; 0.825; 0.811), AI (0.822; 0.766; 0.800), IIm (0.834; 0.822; 0.692), IF (0.790; 0.836; 0.790), IR (0.813; 0.792; 0.785) are higher, in all cases than the correlation scores between the construct and the others. Therefore, the findings indicate admissible discriminant validity. As for reliability, the composite reliability that imprisons the level of internal consistency of the scales is evaluated. Values varied between 0.692 and 0.898. These levels reveal acceptable levels, according to Hair *et al.* (2005).

**Table 1.** Discriminant validity based on the Fornell and Larcker criterion

<i>Scenario without moderator</i>					
<i>Latent Variables</i>	IC	AI	IIm	IF	IR
Influencer credibility (IC)	<b>0.826</b>				
Attitude (AI)	0.625	<b>0.822</b>			
Intention to imitate (IIm)	0.608	0.724	<b>0.834</b>		
Intention to follow (IF)	0.702	0.461	0.673	<b>0.790</b>	
Intention to recommend (IR)	0.369	0.419	0.512	0.375	<b>0.813</b>
<i>Scenario with moderator (consumer engagement)</i>					
<i>Latent Variables</i>	IC	AI	IIm	IF	IR
Influencer credibility (IC)	<b>0.825</b>				
Attitude (AI)	0.538	<b>0.766</b>			
Intention to imitate (IIm)	0.751	0.674	<b>0.822</b>		
Intention to follow (IF)	0.720	0.402	0.652	<b>0.836</b>	
Intention to recommend (IR)	0.318	0.421	0.482	0.328	<b>0.792</b>
<i>Scenario with moderator (frequency of use)</i>					
<i>Latent Variables</i>	IC	AI	IIm	IF	IR
Influencer credibility (IC)	<b>0.811</b>				
Attitude (AI)	0.512	<b>0.800</b>			
Intention to imitate (IIm)	0.691	0.672	<b>0.692</b>		
Intention to follow (IF)	0.702	0.456	0.651	<b>0.790</b>	
Intention to recommend (IR)	0.359	0.398	0.391	0.362	<b>0.785</b>

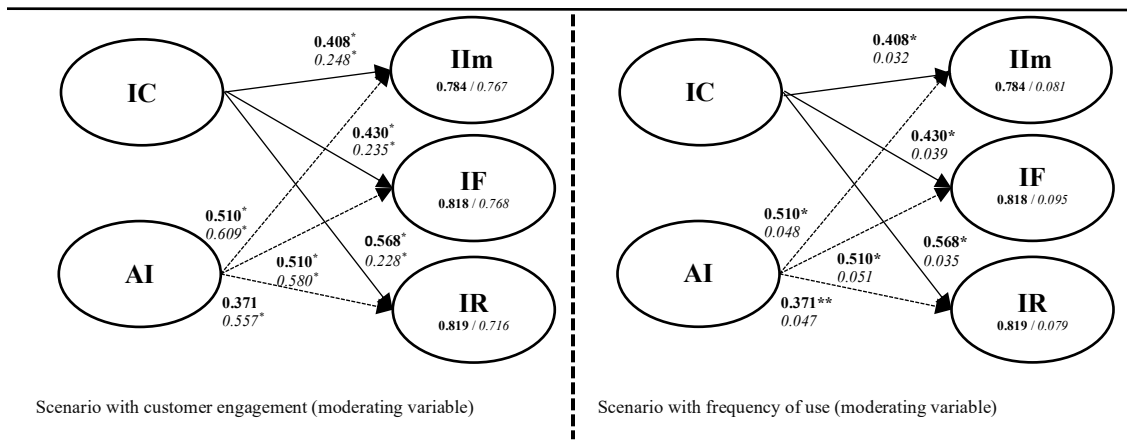
**Note.** scores in bold (diagonal) represent the square root of the extracted mean variance (AVE) of each latent variable. Scores outside the diagonal are correlations between latent variables.

## 4.2 Structural model

The bootstrapping approach (with subsamples of 500) was used to estimate the structural model. The results were presented in Figure 2, which include explained variance (adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value) and path coefficients (significant paths are marked with an asterisk). The indices of the “without moderating variable” scenario are highlighted in bold, while those for the “with moderator variable” scenario are in italics.

Credibility and attitudes towards the influencer explain between 78.40% and 81.90% of the total variation in consumer behavior (intentions to imitate, follow, and recommend), according to

perceptions of social media users. It is noted that these explained portions are very expressive when referring to the social sciences (Hair *et al.*, 2005). However, with the inclusion of the moderating variable “consumer engagement” in the model, these levels are reduced (indices between 71.60% and 76.80%). With this, two conclusions are drawn. First, the indicators reinforce the thesis of Belanche *et al.* (2021) in which the influencer's image impacts consumer judgments. The data recognize the credibility and attitudes towards the influencer (variables related to the image) as the driving force of the consumer's behavioral intentions. Creating a consistent image drives favorable consumer behaviors. Second, the results indicate that other elements explain the relationship between influencer image and consumer behavior. Consumer engagement and frequency of use were tested as moderating variables, however, only engagement held up. It is noticed that the consumer who has a long-lasting, deep, and emotional relationship with a renowned influencer (positive image), makes more careful choices about the celebrity's tips, as a result, he becomes more selective to act (imitate, follow, or to recommend). He doesn't act from just any post. This justifies the percentage difference between the scenarios.



**Figure 2 - Structural Model**

**Note.** \*significant at the 0.05 level. \*\*significant at the 0.10 level. Indicators in bold correspond to those without a moderating variable. IC: influencer credibility; AI: attitude toward the influencer; IIm: intention to imitate the influencer; IF: intention to follow the account; IR: intention to recommend the influencer.

In a scenario without moderating variables, the path loads indicate that the influencer's image (credibility and attitudes) has a significant, direct, and positive effect on consumer behavior (intentions to imitate, follow, and recommend). This impact undergoes changes in magnitude with the inclusion of customer engagement as a moderating variable but maintains statistical significance. Depending on the dimension, the type of change is different. If you look at the

“influencer credibility” dimension, there is a reduction in the effect (from scenario  $A_0$  to scenario  $A_1$ :  $A_0 \rightarrow A_1$ . The values change from  $0.408 \rightarrow 0.248$ ;  $0.430 \rightarrow 0.235$ ;  $0.568 \rightarrow 0.228$ ; with  $p < 0.05$ ). It seems that consumers with high engagement value less the credibility attributed to personality, and do not highlight this dimension as one of the main triggers to explain their behavioral intentions. On the other hand, an increase in the impact of the attitude towards the influencer on consumer behavior is noted (from scenario  $A_0$  to scenario  $A_1$ :  $A_0 \rightarrow A_1$ . The values change from  $0.510 \rightarrow 0.609$ ;  $0.510 \rightarrow 0.580$ ;  $0.371 \rightarrow 0.557$ ; with  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the influencer's actions daily seem to intensify the consumer's willingness to react to the posts. What the influencer does seems to have a prominent weight. As for the frequency of use, the data did not support the moderating effect on the relationship between image and consumer behavior.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The understanding of the effect of influencer credibility and attitudes on the behavior of followers on social media is still limited (Raza *et al.*, 2023). From this academic gap, the article sheds light on this relationship, adding empirical efforts to the works of Belanche *et al.* (2021) and Schan, Chen and Lin (2020) to examine its validity. It is proposed that the influencer's image (credibility and attitudes) form a structure capable of directing the behavioral intentions of followers. In addition, the moderating role of two variables in this configuration is tested, which are: consumer engagement and frequency of use of social media. It is expected that this arrangement will appropriately capture the behavioral responses of followers. For this, eighteen hypotheses are tested.

The main conclusions are summarized in three points. First, the influencer's image impacts consumer judgments. The findings of this study reveal a positive and significant effect, as shown in Table 2. The followers' behavior on social media reflects the perceptions they form about the influencer's credibility and attitudes. Consumers may develop a closer, solid, and reliable relationship with an influencer, and this leads them to attribute greater weight to the influencer's opinion and posts, consequently leading to favorable behavioral intentions, for example, the act of recommending the influencer's account, with greater intensity. Overall, the results outline an effective interaction between the influencer's tips and the followers' behavioral responses. A post that the influencer launches on social media can be easily accepted by the follower, as their perceptions regarding the credibility and attitudes of the influencer are favorable. This aligns with

the findings of Pittman and Abell (2021), Belanche *et al.* (2021), and Raza *et al.* (2023). That said, the hypotheses H<sub>1</sub> to H<sub>6</sub> are supported by the data.

**Table 2.** Hypothesis results

moderating variable: none				moderating variable: customer engagement			
hypotheses	$\beta$	p-value	result	hypotheses	$\beta$	p-value	result
H <sub>1</sub> : IC → IIm	0.408	0.002**	SH	H <sub>1A</sub> : IC → IIm	0.248	0.034**	PSH
H <sub>2</sub> : IC → IF	0.430	0.002**	SH	H <sub>2A</sub> : IC → IF	0.235	0.036**	PSH
H <sub>3</sub> : IC → IR	0.568	0.020**	SH	H <sub>3A</sub> : IC → IR	0.228	0.043**	PSH
H <sub>4</sub> : AI → IIm	0.510	0.003**	SH	H <sub>4A</sub> : AI → IIm	0.609	0.000**	SH
H <sub>5</sub> : AI → IF	0.510	0.000**	SH	H <sub>5A</sub> : AI → IF	0.580	0.000**	SH
H <sub>6</sub> : AI → IR	0.371	0.060**	SH	H <sub>6A</sub> : AI → IR	0.557	0.000**	SH
				moderating variable: frequency of use			
hypotheses	$\beta$	p-value	result	hypotheses	$\beta$	p-value	result
H <sub>1B</sub> : IC → IIm	0.032	0.627	USH	H <sub>1B</sub> : IC → IIm	0.032	0.627	USH
H <sub>2B</sub> : IC → IF	0.039	0.598	USH	H <sub>2B</sub> : IC → IF	0.039	0.598	USH
H <sub>3B</sub> : IC → IR	0.035	0.540	USH	H <sub>3B</sub> : IC → IR	0.035	0.540	USH
H <sub>4B</sub> : AI → IIm	0.048	0.548	USH	H <sub>4B</sub> : AI → IIm	0.048	0.548	USH
H <sub>5B</sub> : AI → IF	0.051	0.539	USH	H <sub>5B</sub> : AI → IF	0.051	0.539	USH
H <sub>6B</sub> : AI → IR	0.047	0.548	USH	H <sub>6B</sub> : AI → IR	0.047	0.548	USH

**Note.** \*significant at the 0.05 level. \*\*significant at the 0.10 level. SH: supported hypothesis. PSH: partially supported hypothesis. USH: unsupported hypothesis.

Second, consumer engagement plays a moderating role in the relationship between influencer image and follower behavior. There are magnitude changes in the effect of the influencer's image (credibility and attitudes) on the behavioral responses of followers, depending on the user's degree of engagement. These findings corroborate the essays by Pereira Filho and Añez (2021), Su, Kunkel and Ye (2021), and Vrontis *et al.* (2021). Such changes in the effect occur in a contradictory way, if you look at credibility, if you look at the influencer's attitudes. The impact of influencer credibility on consumer behavior is reduced when consumer involvement intensifies. Therefore, the hypotheses H<sub>1A</sub> to H<sub>3A</sub> are partially supported. Consumer responses are not very sensitive to the reputation built by the influencer, especially when the follower's level of involvement is intense. A more solid relationship with the influencer, in which there is greater engagement, makes the consumer more discerning and cautious about the tips released by the celebrity. The follower's action is little driven by what the celebrity represents.

On the other hand, greater engagement increases the effect of influencer attitudes towards follower behavior. This reinforces what the influencer does, the actions he presents to the follower. The social media users end up giving greater weight to the influencer's actions, and this increases the likelihood of following their tips. These results are close to the study by Raza *et al.* (2023). That said, hypotheses H<sub>4A</sub> to H<sub>6A</sub> are supported by the data.

Third, the frequency of use of social media does not interfere with the impact of the influencer's image on consumer behavior. Being more regular on social media in no way impacts this relationship. A more regular follower does not necessarily project a favorable image of the influencer, nor is he more likely to follow the influencer's posts. Thus, the hypotheses H<sub>1B</sub> to H<sub>6B</sub> are not supported.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study offers valuable contributions to researchers and practitioners. The literature gains in two respects. First, this article advances research on the role of influencers in the consumer decision journey. The results indicate that there is empirical support to demonstrate the power of influence of these actors in the formation of consumer behavioral responses. In this direction, the work adds to the efforts of other empirical essays, such as Belanche *et al.* (2021) and Raza *et al.* (2023), and helps fill a still incipient and emerging research gap (Palalic *et al.*, 2021; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). In response, the article adds value to the literature on influencer marketing. Second, the study also broadens the discussion about which factors explain possible follower behaviors. The antecedents tested are the credibility and attitudes of the influencer (personality image). Two moderators are examined given the relationship between influencer image and consumer behaviors, which are: consumer engagement and frequency of use on social media. This fact gives uniqueness to the study, being a pioneer in the art of measuring these moderating effects, and meets the appeals of Vrontis *et al.* (2021).

As for the implications for managerial practice, understanding how consumer behavior on social media is affected by influencer cues helps managers design marketing strategies. Managers can choose influencers as a distribution and dissemination channel for brand content, however, this strategy becomes effective and sustainable if there is an adequate fit between influencers and followers. Influencers can be used as facilitators to build empathy, and relationships and connect with consumers, however, following an influencer tip requires an intimate connection with the

follower. For Belanche *et al.* (2021), marketers need to identify the right influencers and use them to drive consumer engagement, making communication relevant to the target audience. To this end, the findings show that influencers' tips are considered authentic and more likely to guide consumer behavior, as reputation and personality attitudes are perceived as favorable. In addition, greater weight is attributed to the attitudes that the influencer promotes on social media, and that drives users' behavioral responses with greater intensity.

The work has some limitations that offer interesting opportunities for future research. First, the study does not include all the dimensions that explain the behavioral responses of followers. These authors see personal relevance, trust, and perceived risk as ingredients of consumer behavior, but they were not included in the current article. For this reason, it is recommended that future research fill this gap and assess the effect of the following dimensions on follower behavior. Second, both the use of nominal scales and the use of non-probabilistic and convenience samples can promote statistical biases. The results of this study cannot be generalized to broader populations. Something that allows exploring more robust statistical techniques in new investigations. Third, this research evaluated the impact of the influencer's image on consumer behavior from a cross-sectional perspective. It considered the impact only in a single moment of contact in the relationship between the influencer and the follower. Indeed, influencers are interested in developing long-term relationships with their followers (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). So, it is interesting to analyze how this effect evolves, at different times when the follower consumes information released by the influencer. Therefore, further research is needed to overcome the limitations of this work. It is recommended that a longitudinal approach be applied by other scholars so that results can be compared and generalizations are possible. These replications will allow validation the model proposed here.

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**Appendix A - Measures used in the study**

<b>Constructs and items</b>	
<b><i>Emotional engagement</i></b>	
I am enthusiastic in relation to influencers' posts. (Q15)	Kosiba <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Seeing the influencers' posts makes me happy. (Q5)	Algharabata <i>et al.</i>
I'm proud to see influencer' posts. (Q23)	(2018)
I feel good when I see influencer' posts. (Q10)	
<b><i>Cognitive engagement</i></b>	
When I use my social media, my mind is very focused on influencers' posts. (Q4)	Kosiba <i>et al.</i> (2020)
I focus a great deal of attention on influencers' posts. (Q27)	Algharabata <i>et al.</i>
The longer I use social media, the greater my interest in finding out more about influencers' posts. (Q1)	(2018)
I think a lot about influencers' posts when I'm using social media. (Q30)	
<b><i>Behavioural engagement</i></b>	
I exert my full effort to follow the influencers' posts. (Q31)	Kosiba <i>et al.</i> (2020)
I am very active in relation to the influencers' posts. (Q11)	Algharabata <i>et al.</i>
I spend a lot of time following the influencers' posts, compared to other accounts. (Q26)	(2018)
Whenever I'm using social media, I usually follow influencers' posts. (Q24)	
<b><i>Perceived credibility of the influencer (IC)</i></b>	
This influencer is trustworthy (Q16)	Ata <i>et al.</i> (2022)
This influencer is honest (Q28)	
This influencer is an expert on the topic (Q13)	
This influencer is experienced (Q20)	
<b><i>Attitude toward the influencer (AI)</i></b>	
I think that this influencer is interesting (Q2)	Silvera and Austad
I think that this influencer is pleasant (Q21)	(2004)
I think that this influencer is likeable (Q19)	Ata <i>et al.</i> (2022)
I have a favorable opinion about the influencer (Q25)	
<b><i>Intention to continue following the influencer's account (IF)</i></b>	
I have the intention to continue following this influencer account in the near future (Q14)	Belanche <i>et al.</i>
I predict that I will continue following this influencer account (Q3)	
I will probably look for new content published on this influencer account (Q12)	
<b><i>Intention to imitate the influencer (II<sub>m</sub>)</i></b>	
I would feel comfortable dressing as shown in the pictures of this influencer (Q29)	Belanche <i>et al.</i>
I would not hesitate to take into account the suggestions about clothing I find in the pictures published by this influencer (Q8)	
I would feel secure in following the suggestions about clothing made by this influencer (Q22)	
I would rely on the recommendations about clothing made by this influencer (Q18)	
<b><i>Intention to recommend the influencer (IR)</i></b>	
I would recommend the influencer's account to other people (Q7)	Belanche <i>et al.</i>
I would say positive things about the influencer's account to other people (Q9)	
I would be likely to recommend the influencer to friends and relatives interested in fashion (Q17)	
I would seldom miss an opportunity to tell others interested in fashion about this influencer (Q6)	

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**How to cite this article:**

Filho, E. P. (2024). Did you like, share and comment? An essay on the effect of the influencer image on the behavior of followers. *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, Vol. 12, N° 22, June 2024, pp. 54-74.