Authenticity in Action: The Mediating Role of Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection in Influencer Marketing on Bilibili

Insights from China's Digital 3C Consumer Market

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Master's Thesis
June 2025

Word Count: 12515 words

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media platforms like Bilibili has transformed how Chinese consumers make purchasing decisions, especially in the digital 3C (Computer, Communication, Consumer Electronics) product category. This study explores how the Perceived Authenticity of influencers affects consumer Purchasing Behavior and examines the mediating roles of Follower Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection.

A quantitative research method was adopted, with data collected through structured online survey from 177 Chinese users who follow digital 3C influencers on Bilibili. The data were analyzed using SPSS, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, factor analysis, and mediation regression tests.

The findings show that Perceived Authenticity has a strong positive effect on consumer Purchasing Behavior. This effect is partially mediated by Follower Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection. Among these three mediators, Trust had the strongest influence, suggesting that when followers see influencers as authentic, they are more likely to feel a sense of reliability and confidence in them. This kind of trust plays an important role in turning Perceived Authenticity into real Purchasing Behavior. Engagement and Emotional Connection also played meaningful roles, showing that interactive actions and emotional ties help reinforce the persuasive power of influencer marketing.

This study adds to the expanding research on influencer marketing in China by providing a detailed understanding of how Perceived Authenticity functions through Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection. The insights may help marketers and brands refine their influencer strategies to build stronger, more meaningful relationships with consumers in the digital 3C space in China.

KEYWORDS: influencer authenticity, digital 3*C products, consumer behavior, trust, engagement, emotional connection, Bilibili, China, influencer marketing*

Preface

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Lijie Zheng. Your meticulous guidance and unwavering support made this thesis possible. Your sharp insights and detailed feedback challenged me to think deeper and work harder. Without your supervision, this work simply could not have taken shape.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Bobo and Hermie. Thank you for being my anchors throughout this year in the Netherlands, a time often marked by grey skies, endless rain, and the occasional heath crisis. Your companionship brought light and warmth to even the dullest days. Thank you for walking with me through this chapter of my life.

I am also deeply thankful to August. When the overwhelming demands of running a business nearly pushed me to the edge, you were there, calmly helping me stay afloat, reminding me (sometimes repeatedly) of assignment deadlines, and making sure I didn't completely fall apart. I owe a big part of this journey to your steady presence.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I want to thank myself. For making the bold decision to move from the United States to the Netherlands. For juggling academic demands and entrepreneurial chaos at the same time. And for simply surviving. It wasn't easy, but I did it.

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1.Introduction

In China, due to the rapid development of social media, the direct integration of traditional e-commerce platforms with social media has become one of the most significant changes in the current business landscape (Hu, 2023, p. 12). Bilibili is China's largest mid-length video platform, similar in nature to YouTube (Tian, 2021, p. 2853). Bilibili started as just a platform for users who like ACG (Animation, Comic, and Game) subculture, but with the development, Bilibili has become a national video platform covering different cultural interests and different age groups (Tian, 2021, p. 2853).

However, unlike YouTube, Bilibili has consistently maintained an ad-free platform model, meaning that viewers do not watch ads before the video begins. Instead, it encourages content creators to seamlessly insert advertisements into their videos. This practice is known as "qiafan" derived from the phrase "influencers also need food to eat." This reflects the understanding that without taking on advertisements, creators would struggle to sustain their channels and make a living (Yang et al., 2024, p. 1). Therefore, it is quite common for influencers on Bilibili to incorporate advertisements in a way that feels personal and aligned with their content style (Yang et al., 2024, p. 2). These promotions are often smoothly integrated into product demonstrations, lifestyle vlogs, or narrative content, rather than being presented as distinct or interruptive advertising segments (Sun et al., 2023, p. 82).

Furthermore, another unique feature of Bilibili is its highly participatory platform culture (Wang, 2022, p. 55), which plays a vital role in shaping how advertising is delivered and received. Unlike other video platforms, Bilibili has a strong sense of community through interactive features such as flying comments (danmu), fan subgroups, and content co-creation. These features encourage users to participate actively in the content ecosystem rather than passively consume media (Wang, 2022, p. 57). Within this participatory culture, followers develop deeper emotional connections with content creators, expecting them to reflect the shared values of creativity, humor, and authenticity. Therefore, influencers on Bilibili are not

only content producers but also community members, and their Perceived Authenticity becomes especially critical in maintaining follower trust.

Among all categories of sponsored advertisements, digital 3C (Computer, Communication, Consumer Electronics) products demonstrate higher consumer Engagement, especially in coin-giving behavior (a viewer-initiated virtual donation to influencer on Bilibili), which shows their strong commercial value (Sun et al., 2023, pp. 89-90). In recent years, China has become one of the largest consumer markets of digital 3C products (Zhou, 2024, para. 3). The competitive landscape is highly saturated, with new product launches occurring frequently and product differentiation becoming increasingly difficult (Zhou, 2024, para. 3). As a result, brands are under pressure to develop more creative and targeted marketing strategies to stand out in the market (Chen, 2024, p. 5). Since these products typically have multiple functional aspects, such as the performance, camera of a smartphone, it is often difficult for consumers to accurately assess the true quality of the product (Hamisena & Sudyasjayanti, 2024, p. 3654). As a result, Chinese consumers tend to rely on social platforms to check influencers' reviews and purchase recommendations for various digital products. Therefore, Digital manufacturers rely on influencer channels as an important part of their marketing strategy (Chen, 2024, p. 5). In this ecosystem, influencers serve not only as promoters of products but also as trusted bridges that connect brands with their audiences (Breves et al., 2019, p. 442). Their Perceived Authenticity plays an important role in shaping consumers' motivation to accept and follow product recommendations (Breves et al., 2019, pp. 441-442).

As more consumers turn to influencer content as a decision-making aid, especially in a high involvement field like 3C electronics, the question of how Authenticity translates into actual purchasing behavior becomes increasingly relevant. Although previous research has investigated influencer marketing, a gap remains in understanding the mechanism of Perceived Authenticity influences consumer purchasing behavior, especially in China's unique digital 3C product category. Therefore, the research question is:

RQ1: *To what extent does the Perceived Authenticity of influencers impact consumer Purchasing Behavior in the digital 3C product category in China?*

The mechanism from watching content created by influencers to deciding to make a purchase is a complex psychological journey, in which many psychological factors influence the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and consumer behavior, such as Trust and Emotional Connection (Chavda & Chauhan, 2024, p. 2).

Previous research has increasingly shown that consumers do not make decisions just by reasoning logically under influencer marketing (Gunawan & Iskandar, 2020, pp. 350-351). Instead, interpersonal elements such as Emotional Connection, and parasocial interaction frequently influence how Authenticity is perceived and translated into behavior (Hoffner & Bond, 2022, p. 1). Moreover, as Kim and Kim (2021) state, influencers' Authenticity and expertise function as valuable relational resources that foster psychological Trust, which mediates desirable outcomes such as Purchasing Behavior and loyalty (p. 225). Their findings show the idea that Authenticity functions not in isolation, but within a broader psychological context including, Emotional ties, and Engagement. Accordingly, the second research question is raised:

RQ2： *To what extent do psychological factors mediate the relationship between Perceived Authenticity of influencer and consumer Purchasing Behavior in the digital 3C product category in China?*

1.1 Social Relevance

This research is socially relevant, especially considering more and more Chinese consumers are turning to social media platforms like Bilibili when making decisions about digital 3C products, including smartphones, computers, and other electronic devices. Bilibili's ad-free platform system helps show how Perceived Authenticity works, giving companies a chance to improve their strategies so they can connect more naturally with their audiences. Specifically, the platform encourages influencers to integrate product promotions into narrative content such as unboxing

videos, personal vlogs, or product tutorials. These formats that consumers see as more genuine and less focused on selling than traditional advertisements.

The results of this study may also encourage brands to change how they view influencer partnerships, treating influencers not just as promotional tools but as genuine partners in open communication. Instead of only paying attention to short-term traffic or reach, companies might start to care more about building long-term relationships, like working with influencers to create content that shows their personal values or using follower feedback to help develop future products. Therefore, brands could begin building collaborations that feel more natural, relatable, and aligned with what audiences truly care about. Over time, this kind of shift could help improve standards across the industry by encouraging marketing that values openness and mutual respect. More importantly, it could help build stronger and more meaningful connections between brands and the communities they want to reach. For example, in the competitive digital 3C sector, the community-rooted authenticity may lead to more loyal consumer bases and improved conversion rates, especially when influencers act as long-term product testers or brand advocates who genuinely use and review the devices they promote.

1.2 Scientific Relevance

This study adds value to the research on social media marketing, consumer behavior, and digital communication. This study looks at three important mediators that have not been studied enough: Follower Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection in the context of influencer marketing. Many earlier studies explore about how influencer marketing works, but they often focus on surface-level results like sales or reach. They do not always explain how or why people choose to trust and follow certain influencers. Furthermore, given the distinctive characteristics of China's digital ecosystem, it is essential to delve deeper into these mediators to reveal the underlying mechanisms at play. Due to differences in cultural and social backgrounds, Chinese consumers' Purchasing Behavior is influenced by influencers in ways that differ from those in Western countries (Yang, 2022, pp. 360-361). For

example, due to China's collectivist cultural orientation, individuals are generally more sensitive to social cues and group-based evaluations than those in individualistic societies (Yang, 2022, p. 360). As a result, Chinese consumers often place more importance on relational warmth, perceived effort, and interactive behaviors specific to the platform, such as participating in flying comments (danmu) and replying to comments. These culturally rooted expectations are often overlooked in studies of influencer Authenticity that focus primarily on Western contexts.

By studying these patterns in the local context, this study not only builds upon and extends existing theoretical frameworks but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of how Perceived Authenticity shapes consumer decision-making. In particular, the inclusion of Bilibili broadens the range of influencer marketing research beyond globally dominant platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, providing insights into a context that remains overlooked in current literature.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Influencer Marketing in China: An Industrial Context

In the era of social media, many companies have shifted to viewing social media marketing as an important component of their overall marketing strategy. Unlike the traditional marketing methods, when companies primarily shared promotional content through their official accounts, many brands now prefer to adopt influencer marketing as a key approach (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 223). In the context of China, this type of influencer marketing is particularly common in the 3C electronics market. Due to the multiple dimensions used to evaluate the quality of electronic products, consumers often find it challenging to make informed purchasing decisions. As a result, they tend to seek content from relevant influencers or Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) as a reference before making a purchase (Shuyi et al., 2022, p. 345). Some of those companies send products to influencers, requesting them to create videos praising the products according to the companies' plans, with influencers being paid for their efforts (Wijerathna & Wijesundara, 2022, pp. 1-2).

However, some influencers disclose in their videos that this content is sponsored, while others do not (Sun et al., 2023, p. 82). Research shows that 52% of marketing campaigns now include sponsorships for influencers on social media platforms (Wijerathna & Wijesundara, 2022, p. 1). This type of influencer marketing, characterized by paid endorsements from celebrities who share product information or reviews on social media platforms, reached a market value of $10 billion in 2020 (Wijerathna & Wijesundara, 2022, p. 2). The results of influencer marketing largely depend on how the promotional content is presented and perceived by the audience (Shah et al., 2023, p. 4). Rather than simply showcasing product specifications, successful influencers often embed the product into relatable scenarios, such as unboxing experiences, real-life usage, or side-by-side comparisons with competing products. These formats help reduce the perceived distance between influencers and their followers, creating a stronger sense of authenticity and encouraging the development of trust.

The evolving role of influencers also reflects changing media consumption habits. Audiences today are not simply passive recipients of advertising, they actively engage with content, expecting interactivity, transparency, and emotional connection (Levesque & Pons, 2023, p. 1741). Therefore, influencer marketing in China has moved beyond one-way promotional messaging into a space where Authenticity and Engagement play central roles in driving consumer Purchasing Behavior (Shah et al., 2023, p. 2). This is especially important in China's saturated electronics market, where consumers often face information overload and rely heavily on perceived credibility when making purchasing decisions (Chen, 2024, p. 2).

2.2 The Role of Perceived Authenticity in Influencer Marketing: The Perspective of Parasocial Relationship

With the development of social media platforms, influencers are now able to attract large numbers of followers. Although influencers may appear polished online, the personas they present on social media often differ from their authentic selves. This contrast draws attention to the concept of personal Authenticity, which refers to the degree to which individuals remain true to their identity in the face of external pressures (Andonopoulos, 2021, p. 45).

Authenticity has been considered important across many academic fields. Goffman (1959) explored how people shape their identities, take on roles in front of others, and try to present themselves in ways that seem believable to gain social acceptance. Vannini and Franzese (2008) emphasized that Authenticity, in this sociological context, involves a process of self-awareness and emotional expression (p. 1623). Instead of focusing on a fixed inner self, this perspective pays attention to how expression and behavior are shaped by social environments. Goffman (1959) explained that when individuals perform in front of others, they highlight certain parts of themselves to create a specific impression, while hiding parts that do not support that image. These visible elements appear on the "front stage"(public) and the hidden parts remain "backstage"(private) (p. 53).

In today's digital environment, particularly on social media platforms, Perceived Authenticity means presenting oneself in an honest and open way, without trying to create a fake or overly polished image (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 223). It also means that an influencer's online appearance should reflect their real personality and values (Dekavalla, 2019, p. 78). Ryan and Ryan (2018) noted that Authenticity is not something fixed. Instead, it is flexible and depends on the situation (p. 1). In influencer marketing, this means influencers often have to find a balance between showing their real selves and creating content that matches what their audience wants to see. They also need to consider platform rules and commercial goals while doing this (Andonopoulos, 2021, pp. 48-49). In other words, Authenticity is shaped by both cultural values and social feedback over time (Dekavalla, 2019, p. 78). On highly interactive platforms like Bilibili, Authenticity often shows through the way influencers share daily life moments, tell personal stories, and choose what parts of their private life to reveal or keep to themselves (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 3).

Looking at this from the perspective of social relationships, followers often feel a sense of closeness or connection with influencers. In real life, influencers do not personally know their followers. This type of one-sided connection can be seen to guide the audience and build a relationship through media which called parasocial relationship (Chung & Cho, 2017, pp. 482-483). A strong parasocial relationship is important in influencer marketing because an influencer's eWOM (electronic word of mouth) can have a strong impact on followers' preferences (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006, p. 40). Influencers are visible in public and have influence online, but they are seen as more relatable than celebrities. Their content tends to feel more personal and easier to connect with, which helps make their parasocial relationship stronger (Chung & Cho, 2017, p. 489). For example, Sokolova and Kefi (2019) examined how parasocial interaction and influencer Authenticity affect consumer Purchasing Behavior on YouTube. Their study found that parasocial relationship has a strong and significant positive impact on Purchase Behavior (p. 5). Furthermore, they highlighted that parasocial bonds are more likely to develop when influencers display social attractiveness and shared values, which are factors associated with Perceived

Authenticity (p. 7). While their study focused on YouTube, similar patterns are likely to be found on Bilibili because the two platforms are structurally similar. Like YouTube, Bilibili offers mid-length videos and supports user interaction, replies, and content co-creation. Both platforms give viewers repeated chances to watch the same influencers through personal vlogs, product reviews which help build a sense of closeness and emotional connection (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 3). So, it is reasonable to suggest that parasocial interaction on Bilibili is also shaped by Perceived Authenticity.

Given that Bilibili users likewise engage with familiar, recurring influencer figures and value emotional resonance in content, it is reasonable to expect a similar mechanism at play in this context. Based on the above findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *The Perceived Authenticity of influencers has a positive impact on consumer Purchasing Behavior in the digital 3C product category in China.*

2.3 How Trust Mediates the Relationship Between Perceived Authenticity and Consumer Purchasing Behavior

Trust refers to the confidence people have in the reliability and integrity of those they interact with. It is built when both sides follow through on their promises (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 225). Trust becomes an important factor in shaping consumers' perceptions of influencers and their endorsements on social media (Wijerathna & Wijesundara, 2022, p. 4). According to Kong and Li (2025), Trust in influencer marketing can be understood through four core dimensions: honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, and sincerity (p. 109).

First, influencer honesty refers to the extent to which an influencer tells the truth and refrains from misleading their audience (Kong & Li, 2025, p. 109). This is particularly relevant in the digital 3C field, where product specifications are often complex and highly technical. As a result, consumers are more likely to be misled, especially when they lack professional product knowledge or depend heavily on influencer content to inform their purchasing decisions (Hamisena & Sudyasjayanti,

2024, p. 3654). Followers tend to pay close attention to whether influencers disclose potential drawbacks or provide balanced evaluations, as this greatly contributes to the trust of their content (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 4).

Second, trustworthiness is about how much the listener feels confident in and accepts both the speaker and the message they're sharing (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). This dimension of trust develops over time as followers see whether influencers consistently share accurate and valuable content (Lee et al., 2021, p. 2). When an influencer builds a record of dependability in their product recommendations or personal opinions, followers are more likely to trust them and take action based on their advice in content (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 825).

Third, reliability refers to the belief that the influencer will offer accurate and dependable information (Kong & Li, 2025, p. 109). When influencer demonstrate professional knowledge about the products showed in the content, followers are more likely to trust their recommendations (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 224). Additionally, influencers who consistently offer accurate and detailed reviews are often perceived as competent and reliable sources of information. Their perceived expertise not only boosts the credibility of the products they promote but also strengthens the trustworthiness of their overall content (Zniva et al., 2023, p. 1492).

Fourth, sincerity is linked to transparency in sponsorship disclosures in influencer marketing field (Kong & Li, 2025, p. 109). Social media users are increasingly aware of the presence of sponsorships. This awareness often leads them to question the motivations behind an influencer's promotion of specific products or services (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 225). When influencers clearly label sponsored content, explain why they chose to promote a particular product, and share their own experiences with that product, audiences are more likely to trust that they are being sincere. In a digital environment where influencer marketing often faces skepticism, this kind of openness plays an important role in building Trust (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 4). Moreover, when followers observe consistency between the influencer's past behavior, values, and current promotional content, they are more likely to interpret these actions as genuine rather than purely profit-driven (Zniva et al., 2023, p. 1504).

However, consumers are becoming increasingly careful in evaluating influencers' marketing information, and if they only perceive an influencer's authenticity but do not genuinely trust them, they are unlikely to make a purchase (Andonopoulos, 2021, p. 17). This suggests that Perceived Authenticity alone is not enough. Consumers need to feel a sense of Trust before they are willing to take any further action. Therefore, Trust serves as a key link that turns Perceived Authenticity into real consumer behavior. Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *Follower Trust mediates the relationship between the Perceived Authenticity of influencers and consumer Purchasing Behavior in the digital 3C product category in China.*

2.4 How Follower Engagement Mediates the Relationship Between Perceived Authenticity and Consumer Purchasing Behavior

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) suggests that individuals actively seek out media to fulfill specific social and psychological needs (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979, p. 156). On social media platforms, users interact with influencers through activities such as viewing, liking, commenting, and sharing, which are collectively referred to as Follower Engagement (Rahman et al., 2017, p. 668). At the same time, Follower Engagement is also an important criterion for evaluating the attractiveness of an influencer's content. For example, followers with high Engagement are often considered more commercially valuable in the field of influencer marketing (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 4). Research has shown that products promoted by influencers with high Follower Engagement typically achieve higher conversion rates, which refers to the percentage of users who purchase the product after viewing the influencer's content (Rahman et al., 2017, p. 676).

Moreover, Follower Engagement is not a singular concept but rather a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Levesque & Pons, 2023, p. 1743). Cognitive Engagement refers to how thoughtfully followers pay attention to and process the content they see. Affective Engagement

captures their emotional responses, such as feeling excited, moved, or connected. Behavioral Engagement is the most visible form, shown through actions like likes, shares, and comments (Levesque & Pons, 2023, pp. 1743-1744). Together, these different types of Engagement reveal how deeply followers care about the influencer and the content they create.

Furthermore, Follower Engagement plays an important role in both influencing other viewers and affecting how platform algorithms work. Zhang (2024) explains that when Engagement levels are high, algorithms are more likely to push the content to more users, increasing its visibility on people's feeds. This creates a loop in which Engagement not only signals follower interest but also helps the influencer expand their reach (pp. 575–576). On Bilibili, this is particularly relevant, as highly engaged videos are more likely to appear in trending categories or be recommended via the "For You" algorithm.

In the digital 3C category, these Engagement forms often take shape through active discussions in comment sections, reposts to tech forums, or long-term loyalty shown by continuously watching reviews and tutorials. For instance, a highly engaged follower may comment on performance differences across devices, seek direct replies from the influencer, or even participate in livestream Q&As. This visible interaction increases the content's reach and improves its algorithmic ranking, making it more likely to be promoted to other users who might share similar interests (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 1). Moreover, when followers observe high Engagement levels on an influencer's content, they are more likely to perceive the product as credible and the influencer as trustworthy (Sun et al., 2023, p. 84).

At the same time, the higher the level of Authenticity an influencer demonstrates, the more likely the audience is to engage with them (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 2). When an influencer's content consistently invites interaction, the audience may perceive the influencer as more approachable and transparent (Sun et al., 2023, pp. 84-85). This helps bridge the psychological distance between the follower and the influencer, increasing the likelihood that the follower will accept product recommendations as credible. However, if the Perceived Authenticity fails to

generate Engagement, consumers are unlikely to make purchasing decisions based on content with low interaction, such as lower comments or likes (Rahman et al., 2017, p. 676). Therefore, Follower Engagement is not only an outcome of Perceived Authenticity, but it also shapes how Perceived Authenticity is interpreted and acted by potential consumers. Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *Follower Engagement mediates the relationship between the Perceived Authenticity of influencers and consumer Purchase Behavior in the digital 3C product category in China.*

2.5 How Follower Emotional Connection Mediates the Relationship Between Perceived Authenticity and Consumer Purchasing Behavior

On social media platforms, influencers are more likely than celebrities to form Emotional Connections with users. This is because most influencers are perceived by their followers as ordinary individuals, making them feel more relatable and approachable (Weinlich & Semerádová, 2022, p. 67). These Emotional Connections often stem from the influencers' ability to share personal stories, engage directly with followers, and maintain consistent interaction, which fosters a sense of intimacy and trust (Ballester et al., 2024, p. 4). Para-social relationship theory (PSR) provides a useful framework for understanding these Emotional Connections. PSRs are one-sided socio-emotional bonds that audiences develop with media figures, such as influencers, celebrities, or fictional characters (Hoffner & Bond, 2022, p. 1). A key driver of PSR is the Perceived Authenticity, as perceived genuineness, transparency, and value alignment foster follower attachment (Nah, 2022, p. 2). Emotional Connection is conceptually different from Trust and Engagement. As discussed in the previous two sections, Trust involves a cognitive assessment of the influencer's honesty and competence, while Engagement relates to visible behavioral responses and algorithmic amplification. In contrast, Emotional Connection refers to a felt bond grounded in shared values and emotional closeness. This type of connection often

emerges when followers see the influencer as emotionally real, not only open but also vulnerable, relatable, and emotionally expressive (Chung & Cho, 2017, p. 489).

Recent research shows that Emotional Connection may be significantly reinforced through self-disclosure by the influencer. As Nah (2022) demonstrated, when media performers engage in personal, honest self-disclosure, they are perceived as more authentic and likable (p. 4). This sense of Authenticity can strengthen what are known as parasocial friendships. These relationships are marked by a feeling of closeness, a sense of trust, and the belief that the follower and the influencer genuinely understand each other (Nah, 2022, p. 3).

In the context of platforms like Bilibili, where influencers often incorporate personal anecdotes and emotionally resonant content into product reviews or vlogs, these moments of vulnerability function as key markers of sincerity. When followers feel emotionally touched or genuinely understood, their connection with the influencer becomes stronger. This emotional closeness makes them more open to the influencer's product recommendations (Shah et al., 2023, p. 5). Rather than feeling like a simple transaction, the interaction begins to resemble a shared experience built on trust and emotional resonance. Over time, these parasocial bonds can lead to greater brand loyalty and a higher likelihood of purchase, even when the products being promoted are new or unfamiliar (Nah, 2022, pp. 3–4).

Therefore, Emotional Connection should not be seen as just a side effect of Authenticity. It is a strategic pathway that allows Authenticity to translate into real consumer behavior. Influencers who can build lasting emotional bonds with their followers are more likely to see repeated purchases and ongoing loyalty, especially in high-involvement categories such as 3C electronics. Based on above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: *Follower Emotional Connection mediates the relationship between the Perceived Authenticity of influencers and consumer Purchasing Behavior in the digital 3C product category in China.*
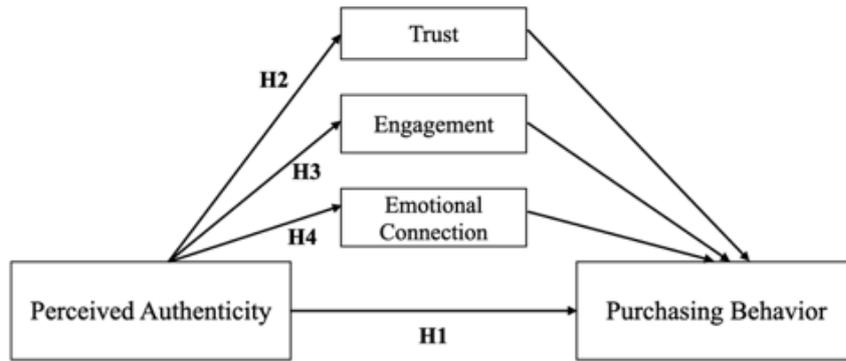
Figure 1: Research Framework Model

3. Methodology

3.1 Justification of Research Method

To effectively answer the research questions, this study adopted a quantitative methodology. This approach is particularly well suited for examining the relationships between variables through the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data. As Jensen (2007) explains, quantitative research involves a structured process designed to measure and test hypotheses through statistical techniques (p. 67).

In this research, carefully designed surveys were used as the main method for data collection. The questions in the survey were designed in a structured way to keep the responses consistent and comparable. This was important for making sure the statistical analysis was thorough and reliable.

Surveys are particularly suitable for this research as they enable efficient data collection from a large and geographically diverse sample, ensuring the findings can generalize to China's broad consumer base.

3.2 Population and Sampling

This study focuses on social media users over 18 years old in China who followed at least one influencer in the digital 3C section on the platform Bilibili. To provide meaningful insight into how Perceived Authenticity affects follower Purchasing Behavior, Since the research focused on a particular user behavior, namely making purchase decisions influenced by online creators, it was essential to identify a population that accurately reflects this behavior.

Respondents were required to meet specific criteria. They must reside in Mainland China to ensure geographic relevance and alignment with local consumer behavior. This was especially important in the context of China's distinct media landscape, where platform design, censorship practices, and local consumer expectations differ significantly from those in Western countries (Yang, 2022, pp. 360-361). They were required to be active users of Bilibili. Additionally, they need to follow at least one influencer specializing in digital 3C product content. This threshold was set to ensure that respondents have sufficient exposure to influencer

content to meaningfully evaluate Perceived Authenticity, Emotional Connection, and Engagement. Lastly, they must be 18 years or older to provide informed consent and meet ethical standards.

Although non-probability sampling methods have certain limitations like unclear population boundaries and reduced generalizability, they are still widely used in social media research. In this study, Wenjuanxing's paid sampling service was used to target respondents who meet specific sampling criteria. Wenjuanxing provided a structured panel system with pre-screened participants. This makes it possible to recruit participants who match specific behavioral and demographic criteria. Compared to convenience sampling, the platform offers a more controlled environment for reaching users who are active on Bilibili and followed digital 3C influencer. This enhances the contextual relevance and validity of the sample. Therefore, the method was considered as a practical and effective approach to reaching a relevant and diverse sample within the limited time and available resources.

3.3 Survey Development

The data collection was carried out in three carefully planned stages to ensure that the questionnaire was clear, reliable, and methodologically sound. These stages included a wording review, a pilot test, and the final round of formal data collection.

The survey used structured questionnaires with Likert-scale items to measure key constructs. At the same time, demographic data, including age, gender, and social media usage frequency, were also collected to identify potential differences across consumer subgroups.

The questionnaire was translated from English to Simplified Chinese using a back-to-back translation process. One bilingual researcher translated the items into Chinese, while another translated them back into English to check for semantic consistency. Any discrepancies were resolved through researcher review to maintain the integrity and meaning of each item.

During the wording test phase, feedback was obtained from five native Mandarin-speaking participants to evaluate whether the questionnaire items were clearly expressed, easy to comprehend, and culturally appropriate for a Chinese context. Based on their comments, several minor wording modifications were made to enhance readability. This step was important to ensure that participants can understand the items without confusion.

In the following stage, a pilot test was conducted with 37 respondents who matched the final sampling criteria. The purpose of this stage was to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement scales in the context of China's digital 3C product consumer base. Participants were asked to share feedback on the readability and logic of the items. In pilot test, some respondents tended to choose the highest possible scores across items, which indicates a ceiling effect that reduced the scale's effectiveness. To improve response variability and increase the sensitivity of the measurement, the original 5-point Likert scale was adjusted to a 7-point format. Further explanation of this change can be found in the Operationalization section.

Moreover, some item descriptions were still found to be culturally incongruent when translated into Chinese in the pilot test. To address this, minor wording adjustments were made to the four items in Question 9 of the questionnaire to improve clarity and ensure better respondent understanding. See Appendix 2.2 Q9.

This study followed strict ethical standards to protect the rights and well-being of participants. All respondents provided informed consent before participating in the survey, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study and how their data would be used. Participants were assured of their anonymity, with no personally identifiable information collected. Participants were informed that their responses would be aggregated and analyzed only for academic purposes. Wenjuanxing provided a stipend to participants, and they could withdraw at any point without penalty.

The questionnaire remained open from May 9th to May 13th, 2025, and was closed once the valid sample reached 177 valid responses. Data was stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

3.4 Operationalization

This section outlines the measurement scales used to operationalize the variables in the study, ensuring alignment with the research questions and hypotheses. A structured questionnaire was developed based on validated scales from prior research, with modifications to fit the context of China's digital 3C product market. Each variable (Perceived Authenticity, Trust, Engagement, Emotional Connection, and Purchasing Behavior) was measured using multiple items to enhance reliability and validity. The questionnaire employed a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*), which reduces central tendency bias and allows for finer distinctions in responses.

Perceived Authenticity was measured in this study using the scale developed by Ilicic and Webster (2016, p. 415). This scale consists of four items adapted from Kernis and Goldman's (2006) Authenticity Inventory. This scale has tested high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.96) in Ilicic & Webster's research and is widely recognized as a reliable measure of perceived celebrity brand Authenticity. Items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale. Example items include: "This influencer tries to act in a manner that is consistent with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so," "This influencer cares about openness and honesty in close relationships with others," "In general, this influencer places a good deal of importance on others understanding who he truly is," "People can count on this influencer being who he is regardless of the situation." (Ilicic & Webster, 2016, p. 417).

Purchasing Behavior was measured in this study using a 7-point Likert scale adapted from Fakhreddin and Foroudi (2021, p. 808). The original scale was designed to capture consumers' behavioral responses to influencer recommendations. Example items include: "The probability that I would purchase the beauty products recommended by this content creator is very high," "I will try to purchase the beauty products recommended by this content creator within the next 12 months," This scale offers a comprehensive measure of both actual and planned consumer behavior in

response to influencer marketing. To better fit with the context of this study, all references to beauty products were adapted to digital products, and the platform was changed from Instagram to Bilibili. This adjustment ensures consistency with the study's focus on digital 3C product consumption influenced by Bilibili influencer (Fakhreddin & Foroudi, 2021, p. 808).

During the pilot test, the original Trust scale was adopted from English-language literature. However, after translation into Chinese, respondents had difficulty understanding some of the key terms used to describe Trust. As a result, the final version of the Trust measurement adopted a scale from Chinese literature to ensure cultural relevance and clarity.

Trust was measured in this study using the scale developed by Kong and Li (2025, p. 110). The scale was originally based on a 5-point Likert scale and designed to assess consumers' level of Trust resulting from influencer endorsements. The Trust scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$, and met the thresholds for convergent and discriminant validity based on confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, to ensure consistency across all constructs in the questionnaire and solve the ceiling effect appeared in pilot test, the scale was adapted to a 7-point Likert scale in this study, aligning with the measurement of other four variables. Example items include: "I believe this influencer is honest," "I believe this influencer is trustworthy," "I believe this influencer is reliable," and "I believe this influencer is sincere." (Kong & Li, 2025, p. 110).

Engagement was measured in this study using the scale established by Levesque and Pons (2023, p. 1749), who reported a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$. This measurement fits our definition of follower Engagement as including both focused attention and active behaviors, making sure it captures the level of attention and the interactive actions that drive Engagement in the digital 3C context. It has been widely used to examine the role of Engagement in fostering loyalty and behavioral intentions toward influencer-promoted brands. This scale based on a 7-point Likert scale. Example items include: "I comment on my influencer's posts" and "I am bursting with energy when I interact with my influencer." (Levesque & Pons, 2023, p. 1749).

Emotional Connection was measured using items adapted from Shah et al. (Shah et al., 2023, p. 6), who reported a Cronbach's α = 0.88. This scale consists of four items assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. This scale captures the essence of Emotional Connection by evaluating the level of attachment and personal bonding followers feel with influencers. This scale has been widely used in exploring the role of emotional bonds in influencing consumer behavior and loyalty in the context of influencer marketing. To ensure consistency across all constructs in the questionnaire, the scale was adapted to a 7-point Likert scale in this study, aligning with the measurement of other variables. Example items include: "I am very attached to this social media influencer." and "I feel like there is a bond between me and this social media influencer." (Shah et al., 2023, p. 6).

To ensure contextual relevance, all measurement items used in this study were adapted to reflect the specific user experience of Bilibili's content environment. These modifications ensured that respondents could relate the statements directly to their experiences with digital 3C product recommendations on the platform.

3.5 Data Cleaning and Screening

Before proceeding with statistical tests, the dataset was cleaned to ensure its accuracy and reliability. This cleaning process was conducted by Wenjuanxing's paid sampling service, which applies a multi-step validation protocol to filter out invalid or low-quality responses.

First, any responses that did not align with the sampling criteria, such as demographic information or behavior-related mismatches, were automatically excluded. Second, the online survey system included a set of attention-check items, often referred to as trap questions. These questions were designed to verify whether participants were reading the survey or not. These questions were based on simple logic or common sense, and any participant who answered them incorrectly was excluded. Third, Wenjuanxing's staff manually reviewed the data and removed responses that showed clear signs of invalidity, such as extremely short completion

times or identical answers across all items. All the above data cleaning results were manually checked by the researcher of this study.

As a result of this multi-tiered screening, the number of usable responses was reduced from 199 to 177. This final sample was considered valid and representative for the purposes of the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 29.

After data cleaning, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the sample characteristics, including means and standard deviations. For evaluating the reliability of the measurement scales, internal consistency was assessed through the Cronbach's alpha. Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the validity of the measurement model and ensure that each construct accurately reflected its intended theoretical dimension.

After conducting the factor analysis and confirming the reliability of each construct, new composite variables were computed as the mean values of the items within each extracted factor. These variables were then used in subsequent regression analyses. The mean scores of the items under each factor were calculated using SPSS's "Compute Variable" function. This process generated five new variables that represent the averaged values of each Factor. The newly computed variables were renamed as *Authenticity_Mean* for Perceived Authenticity, *Trust_Mean* for Trust, *Engagement_Mean* for Engagement, *EmotionConnection_Mean* for Emotional Connection, and *Purchasing_Mean* for Purchasing Behavior.

To test the research hypotheses, simple linear regression was used to examine how the Perceived Authenticity of influencers affects Follower Purchasing Behavior. This regression test was conducted to assess the total effect of Perceived Authenticity on Purchasing Behavior before considering potential mediating variables.

The next step, to examine these mediation effects, the stepwise regression method outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) was applied. According to this approach, three conditions must be met to demonstrate mediation: First, it is necessary to

confirm that the independent variable Perceived Authenticity has a significant effect on the proposed mediator. Second, it must also significantly predict the dependent variable Purchasing Behavior. Third, when the regression model includes both the mediator and the independent variable, the mediator should show a significant effect on the dependent variable, while the effect of the independent variable should decrease or no longer reach statistical significance.

To evaluate the mediation process, each mediator: Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection, was first entered into a separate regression model with Purchasing Behavior as the dependent variable. These individual regressions were conducted to address the second condition of the mediation procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986), which requires that the mediator significantly predicts the outcome variable.

Following this, a set of multiple regression analyses was performed. In each model, Perceived Authenticity and one of the mediators were entered together as independent variables of Purchasing Behavior. This step was designed to examine whether the inclusion of the mediator would weaken the total effect of Perceived Authenticity on Purchasing Behavior, which would suggest the existence of a mediating effect.

After completing these regression analyses, examining whether the inclusion of each mediator, Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection, caused a noticeable reduction in the total effect between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior. When the total effect of Perceived Authenticity remained statistically significant but became weaker after the mediator was included, this suggested partial mediation. If the direct effect was no longer significant, it suggested full mediation. By systematically comparing the total and direct effects before and after including each mediator, the study provided empirical support for the proposed mediation hypotheses.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to protect participants' rights and ensure that the study complied with academic research standards. Only individuals who were 18 years old or above were allowed to participate, ensuring that all respondents were legal adults capable of providing informed consent independently. Before starting the questionnaire, participants were informed that the survey would take approximately two to five minutes to complete. They were also assured that all responses would remain completely confidential and anonymous.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Respondents were encouraged to answer truthfully and were told that there were no right or wrong answers. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. By continuing with the questionnaire, participants acknowledged that they had read the introduction, understood the aim of the study, and consent to participate voluntarily. All responses were collected solely for academic research and were not disclosed to any third parties.

4.Results

4.1 Sample Description

After data cleaning, the final sample comprises 177 valid participants from diverse demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. In terms of gender, 110 individuals (62.1%) identified as male, 66 (37.3%) as female, and 1 respondent (0.6%) chose not to disclose their gender identity.

The respondents' ages range from 18 to 55 years old. The most frequent age group is 18–25 years old, with 49 respondents (27.7%). The 26–30 age group with 44 respondents (24.9%). The 31–35 age group with 48 respondents (27.1%). Fewer respondents fall into the older age brackets: 21 respondents (11.9%) are aged 36–40, 9 respondents (5.1%) are aged 41–45, 2 respondents (1.1%) are aged 46–50, and 4 respondents (2.3%) are aged 51–55. The age distribution indicates that a significant number of participants are younger than 35, indicating a predominantly young demographic engaged in the topic of study. The participants are from various provinces throughout China, reflecting a broad geographic spread. Guangdong Province accounts for the highest number of respondents, with 22 individuals (12.4%). Sichuan Province (16 respondents, 9.0%), Jiangsu Province (10 respondents, 5.6%), and Zhejiang, Henan, and Hunan Provinces (each with 9 respondents, 5.1%). Other provinces with notable representation include Shanghai, Shandong, Anhui, and Hubei (each with 8 respondents, 4.5%). Additional representation includes Beijing (5 respondents, 2.8%), Shanxi and Hebei (each with 4 respondents, 2.3%), Fujian and Guangxi (each with 6 respondents, 3.4%), and Chongqing (7 respondents, 4.0%). Provinces contributing a smaller proportion of the sample include Inner Mongolia, Jiangxi, and Tianjin (each with 2 to 3 respondents), while provinces such as Gansu and Xinjiang report only 1 respondent each (0.6%). Some northeastern provinces like Heilongjiang and Jilin are not represented in the sample.

This distribution highlights a strong concentration of respondents from southern and eastern China, particularly in economically active coastal and central provinces.

4.2 Factor Analysis and Reliability

To ensure the appropriateness of conducting factor analysis, both a priori and posteriori criteria were considered. The a priori conditions included the following: the sample size exceeded 150 participants, each factor contained at least three items, and the items were measured on continuous scales. These conditions satisfied the general requirements for factor analysis as recommended in previous research.

Following the factor extraction, a posteriori evaluation was carried out using three basic checks. First, at least one-third of the item correlations had to be above 0.30. Second, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value needed to be 0.60 or higher (Kaiser, 1970). Third, Bartlett's test of sphericity had to show statistical significance p < .050 (Bartlett, 1954). All these conditions were met in this study, supporting the appropriateness of the factor solution. The correlation matrix used to assess the first condition is included in Appendix 1.

In addition, Cronbach's alpha was employed to examine the internal consistency of the items within each scale, ensuring they captured the same underlying construct. A reliability threshold of 0.70 or above was applied, which is commonly accepted in similar research. This study followed that standard to confirm the reliability of each scale.

4.2.1 Factor Analysis and Reliability of Perceived Authenticity

Perceived Authenticity which was measured using a Likert scale were analyzed through Principal Component Analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.74, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was statistically significant with χ^2 (N = 177, 6) = 154.55, p < .001. The analysis extracted a single factor with an eigenvalue of 2.28, accounting for 57.0% of the total variance in the construct of Perceived Authenticity. Furthermore, reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha reached a value of 0.75, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70. These results confirm that the Authenticity scale used in this study is internally consistent, reliable, and valid. After checking the Cronbach's alpha values, the alpha if item deleted was examined. No item deletion was found to significantly increase the alpha value above 0.80.

Therefore, all items were retained to maintain the informativeness of the scale, as a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 is already considered acceptable.

Table 4.1 Factor loadings explained variance and reliability for the scale *Authenticity* *(N = 177)*

Item	Authenticity
This Influencer tries to act in a manner that is consistent with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so.	.765
This influencer cares about openness and honesty in close relationships with others.	.756
In general, this influencer places a good deal of importance on others understanding who he truly is.	.717
People can count on this influencer being who he is regardless of the situation.	.780
R²	57.0%
Eigenvalue	2.28
Cronbach's α	.75

4.2.2 Factor Analysis and Reliability of Trust

Trust was measured using four Likert-scale items and analyzed through Principal Component Analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.77, indicating good sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was statistically significant, χ^2 (N = 177, 6) = 230.66, $p < .001$. These results confirmed that the data were suitable for factor analysis. One factor was extracted with an Eigenvalue of 2.56, explaining 63.97% of the total variance. Furthermore, reliability analysis demonstrated that the scale had high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha reaching 0.81, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. These results

indicate that the Trust scale used in this study is both reliable and valid. Since the Cronbach's alpha already exceeds the preferable threshold of 0.80, no further analysis of alpha if item deleted was necessary, and all items were retained.

Table 4.2 Factor loadings explained variance and reliability for the scale *Trust (N = 177)*

Item	Trust
This influencer appeared sincere.	.797
I think this influencer is trustworthy.	.821
I think this influencer is reliable.	.804
I think this influencer is honest.	.777
R²	64.0%
Eigenvalue	2.56
Cronbach's α	.81

Note: Items are translated from Chinese for better reading.

4.2.3 Factor Analysis and Reliability of Engagement

Engagement which was measured using a Likert scale was analyzed through Principal Component Analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.88, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was statistically significant with χ^2 (N = 177, 21) = 662.03, $p < .001$. The analysis extracted a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 4.31, accounting for 61.6% of the total variance in the construct of Engagement. Furthermore, reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha reached a value of 0.90, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70. These results confirm that the Engagement scale used in this study is internally consistent, reliable, and valid. Since the Cronbach's alpha already exceeds the preferable threshold of 0.80, no further analysis of alpha if item deleted was necessary, and all items were retained.

Table 4.3 Factor loadings explained variance and reliability for the scale *Engagement (N = 177).*

Item	Engagement

I comment on this influencer's posts.	.756
I comment on this influencer's livestreams.	.787
I am bursting with energy when I interact with this influencer.	.774
If this influencer doesn't post for some time, I get worried.	.771
I miss this influencer when they are not posting.	.815
My days wouldn't be the same without this influencer.	.820
Positive feelings about this influencer come to mind regularly.	.770
R^2	61.6%
Eigenvalue	4.31
Cronbach's α	.90

4.2.4 Factor Analysis and Reliability of Emotional Connection

Emotional Connection which was measured using a Likert scale were analyzed through Principal Component Analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.81, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was statistically significant with χ^2 (N = 177, 6) = 245.59, $p < .001$. The analysis extracted a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 2.63, accounting for 65.9% of the total variance in the construct of Emotional Connection. Furthermore, reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha reached a value of 0.82, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70. These results confirm that the Emotional Connection scale used in this study is internally consistent, reliable, and valid. Since the Cronbach's alpha already exceeds the preferable threshold of 0.80, no further analysis of alpha if item deleted was necessary, and all items were retained.

Table 4.4 Factor loadings explained variance and reliability for the scale *Emotional Connection (N = 177)*

Item	Emotional Connection
I am very attached to this social media influencer.	.814
I feel this social influencer is a part of my life.	.782
I feel like there is a bond between me and this social media influencer.	.832
No other social media influencer can compare to him.	.818
R²	65.9%
Eigenvalue	2.63
Cronbach's α	.82

4.2.5 Factor Analysis and Reliability of Purchasing Behavior

Purchasing Behavior, which was measured using a Likert scale, was analyzed through Principal Component Analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.905, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was statistically significant with χ^2 (N = 177, 28) = 696.46, $p < .001$. The analysis extracted a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 4.64, accounting for 58.0% of the total variance in the construct of Purchasing Behavior. Furthermore, reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha reached a value of 0.89, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70. These results confirm that the Purchasing Behavior scale used in this study is internally consistent, reliable, and valid. Since the Cronbach's alpha already exceeds the preferable threshold of 0.80, no further analysis of alpha if item deleted was necessary, and all items were retained.

Table 4.5 Factor loadings explained variance and reliability for the scale *Purchasing Behavior (N = 177)*.

Item	Purchasing Behavior
The probability that I would purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator is very high.	.731
I will try to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator within the next 12 months.	.727
I plan to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator within the next year.	.759
If I were to purchase digital products, I would consider buying the brands recommended by this content creator.	.668
Whenever I purchase digital products, I choose the ones recommended by this content creator.	.801
I have no doubts about recommending the digital products endorsed by this content creator.	.761
Whenever I purchase digital products, I clearly prefer the ones recommended by this content creator.	.810
The brands recommended by this content creator are my first choices whenever I purchase digital products.	.825
R²	58.0%
Eigenvalue	4.64
Cronbach's α	.89

4.3 The Total Effect of Perceived Authenticity on Purchasing Behavior

To examine H1, a simple linear regression was performed to assess the impact of Perceived Authenticity (IV) on Purchasing Behavior (DV). The model was found to be statistically significant, F (1, 175) = 149.91, p < .001. This regression model was effective in predicting Purchasing Behavior, as 46.1% of the variance in Purchasing Behavior could be explained by Perceived Authenticity (R^2 = .46, Adjusted R^2 = .46). Perceived Authenticity had a significant strong positive influence on Purchasing Behavior (b^* = .68, t (175) = 12.24, p < .001). Based on the results, the H1 was accepted.

4.4 Mediating effects of Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection

In testing Hypotheses H2 through H4, it was proposed that Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection would each serve as mediators in the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and followers' Purchasing Behavior.

4.4.1 Mediating Effect of Trust on Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior

The first model investigates how the independent variable Perceived Authenticity influences the mediator Trust. Results indicated that Perceived Authenticity significantly predicted Trust (R^2 = .60), with an F (1, 175) = 261.35, p < .001. The coefficient for this model showed that Perceived Authenticity was a significant strong positive predictor of Trust, b = .75, t (175) = 16.17, p < .001.

The second model investigates the effect of Perceived Authenticity on the Purchasing Behavior. Previously reported in Section 4.3.

The third model includes both Perceived Authenticity and Trust to predict Purchasing Behavior. The results indicated that the model was significant (R^2 = .49), with an F (2, 174) = 84.51, p < .001. The coefficients in this model showed that Trust was a significant moderate positive predictor of Purchasing Behavior, b = .35, t (174) = 3.28, p = .001, while the coefficient for Perceived Authenticity predicting Purchasing Behavior dropped to b^* = .57, t (174) = 5.43, p < .001.

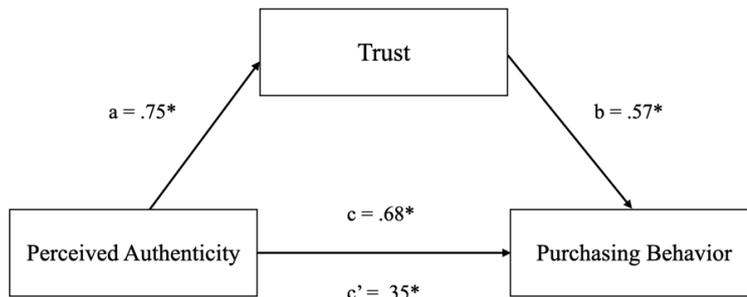The summary of these results is shown in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2

Figure 4.2
Mediation model illustrating the effect of Perceived Authenticity on Purchasing Behavior via Trust.

The results indicate that Perceived Authenticity significantly predicts both Trust and Purchasing Behavior when analyzed separately. However, when both predictors (Perceived Authenticity and Trust) are included in the model predicting Purchasing Behavior, the effect of Perceived Authenticity is reduced while Trust also becomes a significant predictor. This suggests that Trust partially mediates the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior. Hypothesis H2 was accepted.

4.4.2 Mediating Effect of Engagement on Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior

The first model investigates how the independent variable Perceived Authenticity affects the mediator Engagement. Results indicated that Perceived Authenticity significantly predicted Engagement ($R^2 = .31$), with an $F(1, 175) = 79.19$, $p < .001$. The coefficient for this model showed that Perceived Authenticity was a significant very strong positive predictor of Engagement, $b = .81$, $t(175) = 8.90$, $p < .001$.

The second model investigates the effect of Perceived Authenticity on the Purchasing Behavior. Previously reported in Section 4.3.

The third model includes both Perceived Authenticity and Engagement to predict Purchasing Behavior. The regression model was significant ($R^2 = .73$), with an

F (2, 174) = 238.68, p < .001. The coefficients in this model showed that Engagement was a significant strong positive predictor of Purchasing Behavior, b = .53, t (174) = 13.30, p < .001, while the coefficient for Perceived Authenticity predicting Purchasing Behavior dropped to b^* = .40, t (174) = 6.96, p < .001.

The summary of these results is presented in Figure 4.3 below.
Figure 4.3

Figure 4.3
Mediation model illustrating the effect of Perceived Authenticity on Purchasing Behavior via Engagement.

The results show that Perceived Authenticity is a significant predictor of both Engagement and Purchasing Behavior when assessed separately. However, when both predictors (Perceived Authenticity and Engagement) are included in the regression model, the effect of Perceived Authenticity is reduced while Engagement also becomes a significant predictor. This suggests that Engagement partially mediates the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior. Hypothesis H3 was accepted.

4.4.3 Mediating Effect of Emotional Connection on Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior

The first model investigates how the independent variable Perceived Authenticity affects the mediator Emotional Connection. The results showed that Perceived Authenticity significantly predicted Emotional Connection (R^2 = .31), with an F (1, 175) = 77.39, p < .001. The coefficient for this model showed that Perceived Authenticity was a significant strong positive predictor of Emotional Connection, b

$= .73$, $t (175) = 8.80$, $p < .001$.

The second model investigates the effect of Perceived Authenticity on the Purchasing Behavior. Previously reported in Section 4.3.

The third model includes both Perceived Authenticity and Emotional Connection into the regression predicting Purchasing Behavior. The model was significant ($R^2 = .64$), with an $F (2, 174) = 152.87$, $p < .001$. The coefficients in this model showed that Emotional Connection was a significant moderate positive predictor of Purchasing Behavior, $b = .47$, $t (174) = 9.19$, $p < .001$, while the coefficient for Perceived Authenticity predicting Purchasing Behavior dropped to, $b^*= .49$, $t (174) = 7.30$, $p < .001$.

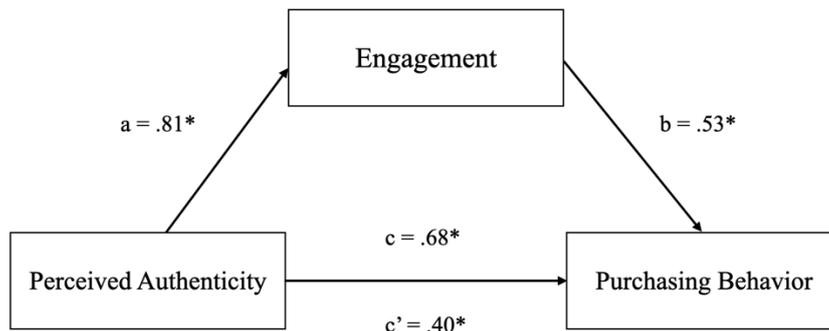The summary of these results is displayed in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4
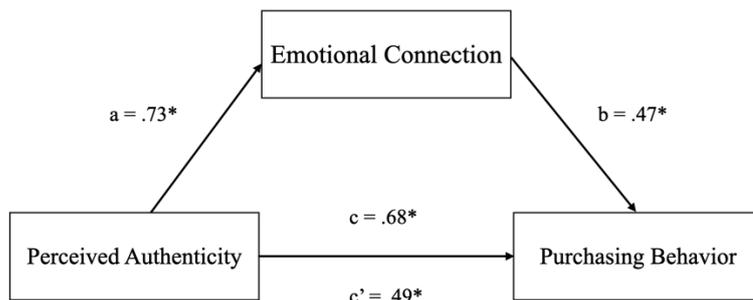
Figure 4.4
Mediation model illustrating the effect of Perceived Authenticity on Purchasing Behavior via Emotional Connection.

The results indicate that Perceived Authenticity significantly predicts both Emotional Connection and Purchasing Behavior when analyzed separately. However, when both predictors (Perceived Authenticity and Emotional Connection) are included in the model predicting Purchasing Behavior, the effect of Perceived Authenticity is reduced while Emotional Connection also becomes a significant predictor. This suggests that Emotional Connection partially mediates the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior. Hypothesis H4 was accepted.

4.5 Summary of Statistical Results

This section presents a clear summary of the statistical findings related to the hypotheses tested in the study. The analysis aimed to explore how Perceived Authenticity influences consumer Purchasing Behavior within the context of digital 3C influencer marketing on Bilibili. To examine both direct and indirect effects, regression-based mediation analysis was conducted. The mediating roles of follower Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection were evaluated using the stepwise method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). The outcomes of each hypothesis are summarized in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 Results

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Result
H1: Perceived Authenticity has a positive influence on Purchasing Behavior	Accepted
H2: Trust mediates the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior	Accepted (Partial Mediation)
H3: Engagement mediates the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior	Accepted (Partial Mediation)
H4: Emotional Connection mediates the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior	Accepted (Partial Mediation)

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Summary of the Main Findings

This study aimed to explore how the Perceived Authenticity of influencers impacts consumer purchasing behavior in the digital 3C product category in China, in the Bilibili platform context. The research focused on three key psychological mediators: Follower Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection, to uncover the mechanisms behind this effect. The study shows that Perceived Authenticity has a strong influence on driving purchase decisions, both directly and indirectly. This effect is partially mediated by Follower Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection. The key findings are discussed as follows, each contextualized within Bilibili's influencer commerce environment and related to prior research.

5.2 Perceived Authenticity and Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Bilibili Context

The results of this study confirm that Perceived Authenticity has a significant strong positive influence on consumer Purchasing Behavior within the digital 3C category on Bilibili, supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding is consistent with previous research, which suggests that when followers see an influencer as genuine, they become more open to accepting their product recommendations. Authenticity is not just about revealing one's true self. Instead, it depends on how people express their values and interact within particular social contexts (Goffman, 1959, p. 53). In digital context, audiences often judge influencers by looking at how consistently and openly they share their emotions and actions over time.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Authenticity on social media is often seen as showing oneself in a way that reflects real values and personality, rather than creating a carefully planned or overly polished image (Dekavalla, 2019, p. 78). This idea emphasizes that Perceived Authenticity is not fixed but emerges through how influencers engage with their audiences across different contexts. On Bilibili platform, this becomes particularly important, as the platform's participatory culture encourages influencers to share personal stories, emotions, and moments from daily life. These

practices give followers the chance to see how consistent and sincere the influencer is over time, and making Authenticity a key part of how audiences build a connection with them (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 3).

Furthermore, the total effect and direct effect show that even when Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection are considered as mediating variables, Perceived Authenticity still has a strong influence on Purchasing Behavior. This suggests that Perceived Authenticity has persuasive power that goes beyond its indirect psychological effects. When an influencer's online behavior matches their perceived identity, followers can make judgments about their credibility, which can influence Purchasing Behavior even if Emotional or Engaged bonds are weak.

5.2.1 Follower Trust as a Mediator in Bilibili Context

The results revealed that Follower Trust served as a partial mediator between Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior, providing support for Hypothesis 2. In the analysis, higher Perceived Authenticity led to stronger trust in the influencer, which increased the likelihood of making a purchase. However, since Authenticity still had a significant direct effect, Trust only partially explained this relationship. This mediating effect is in line with earlier research showing that Trust is a key pathway through which Authenticity shapes consumer outcomes (Andonopoulos, 2021, pp. 77-78). As consumers become more aware of the commercial goals behind influencer content, Authenticity helps them form initial impressions, but it is Trust that turns those impressions into actual purchasing actions.

This pattern aligns with earlier studies that highlight Trust as a key outcome of Perceived Authenticity and an important predictor of Purchasing Behavior (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 225). Influencers who are transparent in labeling sponsored content and who consistently stick to their values tend to be perceived as more trustworthy by their followers (Liao & Chen, 2024, p. 4). On Bilibili platform, where advertising is often embedded in personal stories, being open and sincere matters a lot. Our results show that when followers believe influencers truly support the 3C products they promote, and at the same time Trust that the influencers are not purely motivated by

profit, they feel more confident in buying. This supports the idea from credibility theory that Trust in the messenger increases persuasion and purchasing.

5.2.2 Follower Engagement as a Mediator in Bilibili Context

The results show that Engagement plays a significant mediating role between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior, supporting Hypothesis 3. When followers perceive an influencer as authentic, they are more likely to engage with their content through interaction such as liking, commenting, sharing, and staying updated with their posts. This increased level of interaction enhances the likelihood of the Purchasing Behavior. This finding is consistent with the view that Perceived Authenticity strengthens parasocial interaction, which then leads to deeper audience Engagement (Liao & Chen, 2024, pp. 2-4).

On highly interactive platforms like Bilibili, users often engage with influencers they perceive as sincere by leaving comments or posting flying comments which called "danmu" (Wang, 2022, pp. 62-63). The more influencers interact with their followers, the better they understand their audience. This allows them to personalize their content in ways that better match the preferences of their followers. This is consistent with what Sun et al. (2023, pp. 83-85) emphasize. Engagement goes beyond exposure or visibility and reflects an interactive process in which followers actively shape meaning and emotional relevance through their participation. Through this process, Perceived Authenticity can evolve into a sense of community and shared values, which can strengthen the credibility of product recommendations. In this context, Engagement is not only a behavioral indicator. It represents a deeper level of involvement that plays a meaningful role in driving consumer Purchasing Behavior.

Although Perceived Authenticity has a strong total effect on Purchasing Behavior, the addition of Engagement as a mediator shows that a considerable portion of this influence goes through interactive behaviors. Engagement acts as a behavioral bridge, transforming the perception of authenticity into concrete actions. This is particularly relevant in the digital 3C category, where consumers often rely on shared user experiences and feedback to make their decisions.

5.2.3 Emotional Connection as a Mediator in Bilibili Context

This study finds that Emotional Connection also partially mediates the relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior, supporting Hypothesis 4. When followers perceive influencers as authentic, they are more likely to form emotional bonds which can increase their psychological investment in the influencer's content. This sense of emotional closeness makes followers more willing to act on the influencer's recommendations. This result echoes what Hoffner and Bond (2022, p. 1) explain. These parasocial relationships often resemble real friendships and are shaped by consistent media strategies. On Bilibili, where influencers frequently use personal storytelling and speak directly to the camera in vlogs or review videos, these connections are especially easy to form. As a result, followers may begin to feel as if they personally know the influencer, even though the relationship remains one-sided.

Although Perceived Authenticity has a strong total effect on Purchasing Behavior, the inclusion of Emotional Connection as a mediator suggests that part of this effect is shaped by how followers emotionally relate to the influencer. Rather than focusing only on product features, followers may be more influenced by the emotional tone and perceived sincerity in an influencer's content. On platforms like Bilibili, where creators often show vulnerability or share genuine moments from their lives, this Emotional Connection becomes an important part of how persuasive their influence can be (Nah, 2022, pp. 3–4).

5.3 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of how influencer Authenticity operates within the context of digital 3C product marketing on Bilibili. This research applies established theoretical frameworks to confirm their relevance in the Chinese context.

Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation argues that individuals manage their identities between frontstage (public) and backstage (private) behaviors by

selectively displaying self-attributes to shape their desired impression (Goffman, 1959, p. 53). In the context of social media, influencers meet audience expectations while maintaining Authenticity. The results show that Perceived Authenticity, achieved by influencer's authentic self-presentation, significantly affects Followers' Trust, Engagement, and Emotional Connection. For example, when influencers present a persona that genuinely reflects their real-life identity, followers are more likely to trust the products they promote. This is consistent with Goffman's framework, because influencers' authentic self-presentation on Bilibili's frontstage can enhance Perceived Authenticity and Purchasing Behavior. Unlike studies based on Western platforms, this research extends Goffman's theory by applying it to influencer marketing in the Chinese context. Authenticity is continuously negotiated through community interaction under Bilibili context. The findings suggest that while the line between frontstage and backstage is becoming more and more blurred, it remains essential for establishing and maintaining influence.

The results also show that although Trust serves only as a partial mediator, it is the strongest among the three, highlighting its key role in translating Perceived Authenticity into actual purchasing behavior. This finding supports Kong and Li's (2025) Trust model. Influencers seen as highly authentic tend to meet these criteria, which boosts followers' confidence. For example, showing technical expertise in 3C product reviews reflects reliability, while being transparent about sponsored content demonstrates sincerity. Within Bilibili's 3C community, this kind of authentic behavior helps ease consumer uncertainty about complex product details, making it easier for Perceived Authenticity to lead to Purchasing Behavior.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) by Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) suggests that individuals actively seek media to fulfill specific social and psychological needs (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979, p. 156). This finding supports UGT by illustrating how authentic content meets followers' needs for reliable information and meaningful social interaction. For example, authentic influencers on Bilibili often respond actively to follower comments, creating opportunities for deeper interaction. This practice not only strengthens the connection with their followers but

also encourages more followers to leave comments. They are more likely to engage when they know there is a chance the influencer will reply. As a result, Engagement increases, which in turn raises the likelihood of purchasing. This aligns with Rahman et al. (2017), who argue that active follower behavior enhances content visibility and persuasive power (Rahman et al., 2017, p. 668).

Authentic self-presentation helps build a sense of closeness and loyalty, similar to the parasocial friendship. Nah (2022) found that self-disclosure can strengthen emotional closeness, making influencers appear more authentic and likable (Nah, 2022, p. 4). This study supports these insights by showing that authentic influencers on Bilibili strengthen emotional ties, which increases followers' acceptance to their recommendations. It also extends parasocial theory by placing it within Bilibili's unique cultural context. In the survey, respondents who felt that an influencer was "someone I resonate with, and feel is special" were significantly more likely to purchase a 3C product recommended by that influencer. Their behavior resembled that of taking advice from a close friend, illustrating the powerful impact these one-sided relationships can have in the purchasing context.

In sum, the findings suggest that while these theories remain relevant, their expression varies within Bilibili's unique cultural environment. Practices like "qiafan" influence the way audiences interpret and evaluate an influencer's Authenticity (Yang et al., 2024, p. 1).

5.4 Practical and Managerial Implications

The findings of this study also have valid research for practical purposes of influencers, marketers, and platform strategists in the field of digital marketing. The takeaway for influencers and content creators is more than just the buzzword. It is an applicable strategic plan that directly enhances their influence on followers' purchases. Influencers should try to reflect a natural persona by sharing their true feelings, being honest about both the pros and the cons of the products they are promoting, and offering consistency between their personal brand and the 3C products they are promoting. Creators on Bilibili could utilize the platform's storytelling and

community characteristic to personify their content. This way, they could disclose personal aspects of their lives or offering a more unfiltered look into their routines that help boost their credibility (Zniva et al., 2023, p. 1492). When followers observe that the influencers' values and actions are consistent over time, they find the endorsements not only credible but also worthy of allegiance, resulting in higher probability of sticking to and purchasing the recommended products.

For marketing professionals and brands, this study implies that choosing and managing influencers should be more than just a criterion of their follower count or those so-called facade metrics. It is vital to check whether the influencer is objectively consistent and capable of gathering the following and building Trust. Brands should collaborate with influencers who are generally regarded credible and authentic. For example, people who can be trusted to share unbiased reviews or even those who have built a solid respect for personal values are more likely to successfully influence followers. The results demonstrated that even the most renowned influencers in the platform could lag sales conversions if their followers assume that they are acting just for endorsements. From this perspective, brands may consider using Authenticity audits for their influencers' selection and censor their content to evaluate if they are transparently informing their audience and interacting with them in a genuine way. Besides, in campaigns, influencer Authenticity should be promoted, rather than negated. Instead of vocalizing strict scripts to influencers, brands could provide creative freedom so that promotions could feel natural and look like the influencer's personal style. The avoidance of a rift between an influencer's follower and the sponsor may also be obtained through the logos of the brand through the influencer's endorsements of the brand.

5.5 Limitations and Future Study

Although the research contains a lot of valuable insights, it still involves some notable methodological limitations.

First, this study used a cross-sectional survey design. The participants were chosen from among those who filled out a survey between May 9th and 13th, 2025. Data were captured for a single point in time. However, it does not provide insight into how these relationships might change over time. Followers' perceptions of influencer Authenticity or Trust can shift with continued exposure and changes in content. To better capture this, future studies could include control variables such as how long a respondent has followed a particular influencer. This would offer a more dynamic understanding of how Perceived Authenticity develops over time and how it shapes purchasing decisions. Furthermore, future research could consider respondents' levels of technical knowledge about digital 3C products. Because those with more expertise may be less dependent on influencer recommendations when making purchasing decisions. Some of them may already be digital enthusiasts who watch influencer content simply to double-check their own purchasing choices.

Second, this study focused on Bilibili, a platform characterized by its mid-length video format and strong participatory culture. Bilibili provides a valuable context for understanding community-based Engagement and Authenticity. However, its user dynamics are notably different from those of other platforms. Future research could study whether similar psychological mechanisms operate on short-form video platforms such as TikTok, hybrid content environments like Xiaohongshu (Red Note), or text-based platforms such as Zhihu. Since each platform has different content formats and social interactions, expanding the study to these contexts would help develop a more comprehensive understanding of the proposed mediation model within the Chinese social media environment.

Third, this study used a four dimensional framework developed by Kong and Li (2025) to measure mediator Trust, which includes honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, and sincerity. This approach was chosen because the items in their scale are easier for respondents to understand and are more consistent with Chinese cultural expressions of trust. However, existing research on Trust offers various theoretical frameworks, including the well-known model by Mayer et al. (1995), which has three dimensions: Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity as core components (p. 719). This model is

particularly relevant in the context of influencer marketing, where followers are constantly evaluating whether an influencer's behavior aligns with the values they have previously expressed. Future studies could consider developing a more comprehensive measurement approach that brings together insights from different Trust models. This approach may lead to a more detailed understanding of how Trust functions within influencer-follower relationships, particularly when considering differences across platforms and types of products.

Fourth, as digital media landscapes continue to develop, new content mode such as virtual influencers and AI-generated influencer are changing the way audiences perceive authenticity. For example, AI-powered avatars of Chinese livestreamer Yonghao Luo generated approximately RMB 55 million (USD 7.65 million) in sales within just seven hours (Cheng, 2025, para. 2). Unlike, human influencers, virtual figures are often seen as being managed by companies or driven by algorithms. Future research could explore how consumers make sense of authenticity in non-human agents. This could contribute to the expansion of existing theoretical models by incorporating these emerging forms into our understanding Perceived Authenticity in online environments.

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List of Abbreviations

ACG: Animation, Comic, and Game

CFA: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

KMO: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

KOL: Key Opinion Leader

PSR: Parasocial Relationship

UGT: Uses and Gratifications Theory

Digital 3C: Computer, Communication, Consumer Electronics

Appendix

Appendix 1

Follower Perceived Authenticity Factor Correlation Matrix:

Correlation Matrix

		This Influencer tries to act in a manner that is consistent with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so.	This influencer cares about openness and honesty in close relationships with others.	In general, This influencer places a good deal of importance on others understanding who he truly is.	People can count on this influencer being who he is regardless of the situation.
Correlation	This Influencer tries to act in a manner that is consistent with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so.	1.000	.461	.435	.410
	This influencer cares about openness and honesty in close relationships with others.	.461	1.000	.325	.491
	In general, This influencer places a good deal of importance on others understanding who he truly is.	.435	.325	1.000	.437
	People can count on this influencer being who he is regardless of the situation.	.410	.491	.437	1.000

Follower Trust Factor Correlation Matrix:

Correlation Matrix

		I believe this influencer is honest	I believe this influencer is trustworthy	I believe this influencer is dependable	I believe this influencer is sincere
Correlation	I believe this influencer is honest	1.000	.508	.590	.451
	I believe this influencer is trustworthy	.508	1.000	.519	.589
	I believe this influencer is dependable	.590	.519	1.000	.459
	I believe this influencer is sincere	.451	.589	.459	1.000

Follower Engagement Factor Correlation Matrix:

Correlation Matrix

		I comment on this influencer's posts.	I comment on this influencer's livestream.	I am bursting with energy when I interact with this influencer.	If this influencer doesn't post for some time, I get worried.	I miss this influencer when they are not posting.	My days wouldn't be the same without this influencer.	Positive feelings about this influencer come to mind regularly.
Correlation	I comment on this influencer's posts.	1.000	.717	.560	.435	.496	.481	.485
	I comment on this influencer's livestream.	.717	1.000	.586	.477	.490	.545	.517
	I am bursting with energy when I interact with this influencer.	.560	.586	1.000	.453	.591	.532	.536
	If this influencer doesn't post for some time, I get worried.	.435	.477	.453	1.000	.632	.702	.533
	I miss this influencer when they are not posting.	.496	.490	.591	.632	1.000	.652	.597
	My days wouldn't be the same without this influencer.	.481	.545	.532	.702	.652	1.000	.569
	Positive feelings about this influencer come to mind regularly.	.485	.517	.536	.533	.597	.569	1.000

Follower Emotional Connection Factor Correlation Matrix:

Correlation Matrix

		I am very attached to this social media influencer.	I feel this social influencer is a part of my life.	I feel like there is a bond between me and this social media influencer.	No other social media influencer can compare to him.
Correlation	I am very attached to this social media influencer.	1.000	.532	.557	.551
	I feel this social influencer is a part of my life.	.532	1.000	.529	.493
	I feel like there is a bond between me and this social media influencer.	.557	.529	1.000	.604
	No other social media influencer can compare to him.	.551	.493	.604	1.000

Follower Purchasing Behavior Factor Correlation Matrix:

Correlation Matrix

		The probability that I would purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator is very high.	I will try to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator within the next 12 months.	I plan to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator within the next year.	If I were to purchase digital products, I would consider buying the brands recommended by this content creator.	Whenever I purchase digital products, I choose the ones recommended by this content creator.	I have no doubts about recommending the digital products endorsed by this content creator.	Whenever I purchase digital products, I clearly prefer the ones recommended by this content creator.	The brands recommended by this content creator are my first choices whenever I purchase digital products.
Correlation	The probability that I would purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator is very high.	1.000	.442	.542	.438	.506	.451	.512	.577
	I will try to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator within the next 12 months.	.442	1.000	.544	.528	.437	.435	.554	.522
	I plan to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator within the next year.	.542	.544	1.000	.429	.555	.450	.520	.582
	If I were to purchase digital products, I would consider buying the brands recommended by this content creator.	.438	.528	.429	1.000	.399	.397	.518	.439
	Whenever I purchase digital products, I choose the ones recommended by this content creator.	.506	.437	.555	.399	1.000	.715	.601	.623
	I have no doubts about recommending the digital products endorsed by this content creator.	.451	.435	.450	.397	.715	1.000	.561	.600
	Whenever I purchase digital products, I clearly prefer the ones recommended by this content creator.	.512	.554	.520	.518	.601	.561	1.000	.634
	The brands recommended by this content creator are my first choices whenever I purchase digital products.	.577	.522	.582	.439	.623	.600	.634	1.000

Appendix 2

2.1 Survey (English Version)

Erasmus University Rotterdam Master's Thesis Research Survey

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

This questionnaire is part of my Master's thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam. The study aims to explore how Chinese consumers perceive the authenticity of social media influencers and how this perception influences their purchasing behavior in the digital 3C product category (Computer, Communication, and Consumer Electronics).

You will be asked to name one digital influencer on Bilibili whom you watch most frequently, and then respond to a few questions about that influencer and your own behaviors. These questions focus on your perception of the influencer's authenticity, your level of trust, engagement behaviors, and emotional connection. All items are measured on a Likert scale. There are no right or wrong answers, your honest opinions are highly valuable for this research. The survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be collected anonymously. No identifying personal information (such as your name or contact details) will be requested or stored. In the final research report, participants will only be referred to collectively (e.g., as "respondents"), fully protecting your privacy.

Participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. You may also skip any question you prefer not to answer. Since this survey is anonymous, your privacy will be protected in all published or written results. No personally identifiable information will be included unless explicitly requested by you.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me at 686258yl@eur.nl.

Thank you again for your time and participation!

1. By clicking the "Next" button, you indicate that you have read this explanation, understand the purpose of this study, and agree to participate in this survey. [Single choice] *

○I agree

○I DO NOT agree

2. What is your age? [Single choice] *

○ 18–25
○ 26–30
○ 31–35
○ 36–40
○ 41–45
○ 46–50
○ 51–55
○ 55 or above

3. What is your gender? [Single choice] *

○ Male
○ Female
○ Other / Prefer not to say

4. How many digital 3C influencers do you follow or frequently watch? [Single choice] *

○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 or more

5. Please write the channel name of the digital 3C influencer you watch most frequently: [Open question] *

*

The following questions refer specifically to the digital 3C influencer you mentioned above. Please keep their image in mind as you respond.

6. Please recall this influencer's overall performance in their videos and indicate how much you agree with the following statements: [Matrix single choice] *

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This Influencer tries to act in a manner that is consistent with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This influencer cares about openness and honesty in close relationships with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
In general, this influencer places a good deal of	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

importance on others understanding who he truly is.							
People can count on this influencer being who he is regardless of the situation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

7. Thinking about this digital 3C influencer's overall performance in the video, please indicate whether the following statement matches your perception： [Matrix single choice] *

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe this influencer is honest	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe this influencer is trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe this influencer is	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

dependab le							
I believe this influence r is sincere	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

8. Thinking about this digital 3C influencer's overall performance in the video, please indicate whether the following statement matches your perception： [Matrix single choice] *

	Strongl y Disagre e	Disagre e	Somew hat Disagre e	Neither agree nor disagree	Somew hat Agree	Agree	Strongl y Agree
I comment on this influence r's posts.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I comment on this influence r's livestrea m.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am bursting with energy when I interact with this influence r.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly	Disagree	Somewhat	Neither agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If this influencer doesn't post for some time, I get worried.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I miss this influencer when they are not posting.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My days wouldn't be the same without this influencer.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Positive feelings about this influencer come to mind regularly.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

9. Thinking about this digital 3C influencer's overall performance in the video, please indicate whether the following statement matches your perception： [Matrix single choice] *

	Strongly	Disagree	Somewhat	Neither agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

	Disagree		Disagree	nor disagree			
I am very attached to this social media influencer.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel this social influencer is a part of my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like there is a bond between me and this social media influencer.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
No other social media influencer can compare to him.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. Thinking about this digital 3C influencer's overall performance in the video, please indicate whether the following statement matches your perception： [Matrix single choice] *

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The probability that I would purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator is very high.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will try to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator within the next 12 months.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to purchase the digital products recommended by this content creator	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

within the next year.							
If I were to purchase digital products, I would consider buying the brands recommended by this content creator.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Whenever I purchase digital products, I choose the ones recommended by this content creator.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have no doubts about recommending the digital products endorsed by this content creator.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Whenever I	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

purchase digital products, I clearly prefer the ones recommended by this content creator.							
The brands recommended by this content creator are my first choices whenever I purchase digital products.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

2.2 Survey (Chinese Version)

伊拉斯谟鹿特丹大学硕士项目研究项目问卷调查

亲爱的参与者： 感谢您参与本次调研。

本问卷是我在鹿特丹伊拉斯谟大学（Erasmus University Rotterdam）撰写硕士论文的一部分，旨在探讨中国消费者如何感知社交媒体意见领袖（即"网红"）的真实感（authenticity），以及这种感知如何影响消费者在数码 3C 产品（电脑、通信和消费电子）领域的购买行为。

在问卷中，您将被邀请列出您在 Bilibili（B 站）平台上最常观看的一位数码类 UP 主。随后，您将回答一些关于该 UP 主的感受与您自身行为的问题。 这些问题涵盖了您对该 UP 主的真实感知、信任程度、互动行为以及情感连接等方面。所有问题均采用李克特量表形式，无对错之分，您的真实想法对本研究极具价值。整个调查预计耗时约为 5 分钟。

您的回答将以匿名方式收集，不会要求或存储任何可识别您身份的信息（如姓名、联系方式等）。在研究报告中，参与者仅以整体形式（如"受访者"）提及，以充分保护您的隐私。

您的参与完全自愿。您有权随时撤回同意或停止参与，不会有任何惩罚。您也有权跳过任何不想回答的问题。由于本问卷为匿名形式，您的个人隐私将在所有发布或书面的研究数据中得到保护。除非您明确要求，否则将不会包含任何可识别身份的信息。

如您对本研究有任何疑问，欢迎通过邮箱 686258yl@eur.nl 与我联系。

再次感谢您的时间与参与！

1. 通过点击"我同意"，您即表示已阅读本说明，理解本研究目的，并同意参与本次调查。 [单选题] *

○我同意

○我不同意

2. 您的年龄是 [单选题] *

○18-25 岁

○26-30 岁

○31-35 岁

○36-40 岁

○41-45 岁

○46-50 岁

○51-55 岁

○55 岁及以上

3. 您的性别是 [单选题] *

○男性

○女性

○其他/不方便透露

4. 您关注或经常观看数码 3C 相关博主/UP 主的数量是： [单选题] *

○1 位

○2 位

○3 位

○4 位

○5 位及以上

5. 请您在下方列举您最常观看的一位数码 3C 博主／UP 主的频道名 [填空题] *

_____

接下来问题主要围绕您最熟悉/最常观看的一位数码 3C 博主/UP 主进行回答。

请在以下问题中，脑海中明确"该博主/UP 主"的形象，并以此为基准进行评价。

6. 请回想这位数码 3C 博主/UP 主在视频中的整体表现，判断下列描述与您的感受是否符合：[矩阵单选题] *

	非常不同意	比较不同意	略微不同意	一般	略微同意	比较同意	非常同意
即使会遭到质疑或	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

争议，这位数码博主依然坚持按照自己真实的价值观进行内容创作							
这位数码博主在与粉丝或观众的互动中，表现出开放和诚实的态度	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
总体而言，这位数码博主非常重视让观众了	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

解真正的自己，而不仅仅是他/她的"人设"							
无论在什么平台或场合，这位数码博主都能保持真实的一面，不轻易"换面具"	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

7. 请回想这位数码 3C 博主/UP 主在视频中的整体表现，判断下列描述与您的感受是否符合：[矩阵单选题] *

	非常不同意	比较不同意	略微不同意	一般	略微同意	比较同意	非常同意

我认为该博主是诚实的	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
我认为该博主是值得信赖的	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
我认为该博主是可靠的	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
我认为该博主是真诚的	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

8. 请回想这位数码 3C 博主/UP 主在视频中的整体表现，判断下列描述与您的感受是否符合：[矩阵单选题] *

	非常不同意	比较不同意	略微不同意	一般	略微同意	比较同意	非常同意
我会在这位博主的视频下留言评论	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

我会在这位博主的直播中发表评论	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
每当与这位博主互动时，我都感觉充满能量	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
如果这位博主一段时间没有发布内容，我会感到担心	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
当这位博主没有更新时，我会想念他/她	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

没有这位博主的日子会感觉有所不同	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
我经常会自然地想到关于这位博主的积极感受	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

9. 请回想这位数码 3C 博主/UP 主在视频中的整体表现，判断下列描述与您的感受是否符合： [矩阵单选题] *

	非常不同意	比较不同意	略微不同意	一般	略微同意	比较同意	非常同意
我很喜欢这位博主	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
这位博主是我生活的一部分	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

我觉得和该博主之间有共鸣	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
我认为没有其他博主能比的上他/她	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. 请回想这位数码 3C 博主/UP 主在视频中的整体表现，判断下列描述与您的感受是否符合：[矩阵单选题] *

	非常不同意	比较不同意	略微不同意	一般	略微同意	比较同意	非常同意
这个数码博主推荐的数码产品，我购买的可能性很高	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
我会在未来 12 个月内尝试	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

购买这个数码博主推荐的数码产品						
我计划在明年内购买这个数码博主推荐的数码产品	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
如果我要购买数码产品，我会考虑购买这个数码博主推荐的品牌	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
无论何时我购买数码产品，我都会选	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

择这个数码博主推荐的产品						
我毫不犹豫地推荐这个数码博主推荐的数码产品	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
无论何时我购买数码产品，我明显偏好这个数码博主推荐的产品	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
这个数码博主推荐的品牌是我购买数	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

码产品时							
的首选							