





# “How argument quality shapes consumer conformity on social media”

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# HOW ARGUMENT QUALITY SHAPES CONSUMER CONFORMITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

## Abstract

The research on influencer marketing often treats social influence as a monolithic concept, overlooking the distinct persuasion mechanisms that underlie it. This study addresses that gap by disentangling social influence into two pathways: informational and normative, within the context of Vietnam, an emerging market with a characteristic collectivist culture. A theoretical model is proposed wherein influencer trustworthiness and expertise affect purchase intention through these pathways, moderated by argument quality. The study is based on survey data from 301 followers of social media influencers in Ho Chi Minh City. This sample was purposefully selected, as young, predominantly university-educated individuals are the primary consumers of influencer content and drivers of influencer-led marketing activities, making their responses a relevant lens for understanding persuasion dynamics in this demographic. Acknowledging its specific scope, the findings are not for direct global generalization but offer contextualized insights into a non-Western market, providing a valuable counterpoint to existing literature. The results show that both informational and normative influences positively affect purchase intention, with trustworthiness being a stronger predictor than expertise. The study's most unique contribution is revealing the asymmetric moderating role of argument quality: it significantly strengthens the relationship between normative social influence and purchase intention. Still, it does not affect the informational influence path. This discovery suggests that in a collectivist context, a logical argument's power is amplified when it aligns with the consumer's desire for social conformity. This distinction advances persuasion theory by clarifying how source credibility and message content interplay differently across social influence mechanisms.

**Keywords** social media influencers, argument quality, trustworthiness, expertise, purchase intention

**JEL Classification** M30, M31

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has created a new marketing landscape where consumers are not passive receivers of brand messages but active participants who interact, evaluate, and share opinions online (Hu et al., 2019). Within this environment, social media influencers (SMI) have emerged as a powerful communication channel that connects firms with target audiences and directly shapes purchase intention (Liang et al., 2021). Recent evidence shows that businesses now allocate up to 40% of their marketing budgets to SMI, compared to only 28% for traditional celebrities (Zaman et al., 2024), underscoring its strategic importance in influencing consumer behavior.

While prior studies have highlighted that characteristics such as trustworthiness, expertise, make SMI an influential driver of consumer responses (Malik et al., 2023; Sardar & Vijay, 2025; Lee & Johnson, 2022), consumer decision-making in the digital era extends beyond SMI alone. Current platform interfaces allow customers to directly exchange opinions and evaluate product-related arguments, meaning



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that consumers simultaneously receive two streams of information: one from SMI and another from argument content. According to Cho and Chan (2021), argument quality (AQ) is a powerful driver shaping purchase intention, since the essence of online purchasing decisions lies in information search and comparison, while also depending on the evaluations of other customers, often referred to as herd behavior (Pham et al., 2023). Therefore, the influence of AQ must coexist with SMI and may even outweigh its effect on purchase intention. However, only by evaluating SMI and AQ together can researchers capture a multidimensional perspective of messages that combine business-driven communication with market-generated information. Yet, despite this relevance, AQ has received surprisingly limited scholarly attention (Huang, 2020; Ozuem et al., 2021).

This research not only contributes to communication and consumer behavior theory by clarifying the interplay between individual factors and external contexts but also provides important managerial implications, particularly in deciding whether to prioritize long-term investment in cultivating SMI or to adjust strategies toward message management and leveraging the power of online communities.

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## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Purchase intention is the likelihood that a consumer plans or is willing to buy a particular brand. According to Huang et al. (2011), purchase intention is significantly influenced by social media marketing activities. The rapid development of digital communication platforms has captured the attention of marketers seeking to leverage new opportunities to shape consumer behavior. Among the most widely adopted strategies is influencer marketing through SMI (Chetioui et al., 2020). Ladhari et al. (2020) claim that the favor of SMI substantially improves their ability to affect consumer buying determinations. A familiar example is the use of celebrities, where their image can directly impact consumers' purchase intention by growing the likelihood of brand choice (Thangavel et al., 2021). Thus, SMIs' reputation is a powerful tool for brand promotion.

The impact of SMI on consumer behavior has reached new heights due to the growing influence of informational social influence (ISI). According to Kuan et al. (2014), ISI is altering one's beliefs or actions to conform to those of someone they respect. Followers change their purchase behavior after seeing a celebrity or influencer endorse or use a product. It can be said that they automatically trust the information. Advertising strategies featuring celebrities or SMI tend to instantly shift consumer behavior (Cheah et al., 2019). Fu et al. (2020) suggest that while ISI performs, people obtain information without mental challenges or risks because reli-

ance on others' evaluations or reviews as evidence is considered an acceptable standard. Higher levels of ISI make people operable at lower levels of scrutiny (Hu et al., 2019). Thus, couponing, celebrity endorsements, and influencer sponsorships become significant conduits of information flow that consumers are prone to accept without critical thought.

In addition to ISI, normative social influence (NSI) also plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior. NSI refers to one's tendency to conform to others' expectations to gain social acceptance (Ru et al., 2019). According to Fu et al. (2020), when individuals are part of a social media community, they are more likely to be affected by the collective decisions. So, consumers decide to win over other group members based on personal preference (Hu et al., 2019). This type of impact enables social incentive, which directs customers to choose things that are popular with others to follow current trends (Kim & Srivastava, 2007). SMIs' suggestions strengthen viewers' buying intentions by allowing established consumption standards (Hu et al., 2019).

In order to successfully affect consumers' purchase intention, SMI need to be credible. Ohanian (1990) asserts that a source's credibility is strongly related to the communicator's personality and perceived positive traits, which affect how convincing the message is. According to Ohanian (1990), source credibility is a notion that consists of two main components: expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to the extent to which a source is qualified to provide accurate and valid information or to discuss a specific subject mat-

ter (Hovland et al., 1953). It also encompasses the knowledge, skills, or experience possessed by the endorser (Erdogan, 1999). It is particularly vital in online settings, where the overwhelming volume of available content requires consumers to filter information and rely on quality signals to determine its trustworthiness. As a result, people are more likely to be persuaded and accept information when an SMI presents it, and they perceive it as an expert (van Reijmersdal et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, social norms influence persons with high levels of expertise, which is what is known as the “normative” social influence. According to Ohanian (1990), experts are defined as having a trustworthy expert opinion on issues that concern them. Further, connecting or networking with such experts not only enhances the understanding of the consumers but also contributes to their self-image, giving them a confident feeling while being influenced by expert shoppers (Hu et al., 2019). Understanding someone’s background, academic exploits, and work experiences speaks a lot about their social media credibility and influence, as people tend to regard those with vast knowledge in the fields, such as emerging domains from which they specialize (Fu et al., 2020). Information given by experts is persuasive because, through their contribution, they provide inline information that is also socially accepted and strengthens the NSI, which encourages people to act as the more significant population would expect (Chung & Han, 2017; Li, 2013).

With trust as an external element for credibility in shaping consumers’ response towards messages, it is vital to their role in NSI and ISI. According to Ohanian (1990), trustworthiness value is “the level of trust consumers have or place on the communicator’s ability and willingness to authentically give the most accurate declaration.” Trustworthiness reflects the ethical or moral dimensions of the source under consideration as capable of providing reliable information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Most people accept the reliability of the information quickly when it comes from a reliable source (Henderson & Shteynberg, 2020). Followers consider SMI, which is assumed to have good credibility and trust, and therefore value and rely on their recommendations. This means greater trustworthiness strengthens ISI and increases the tendency

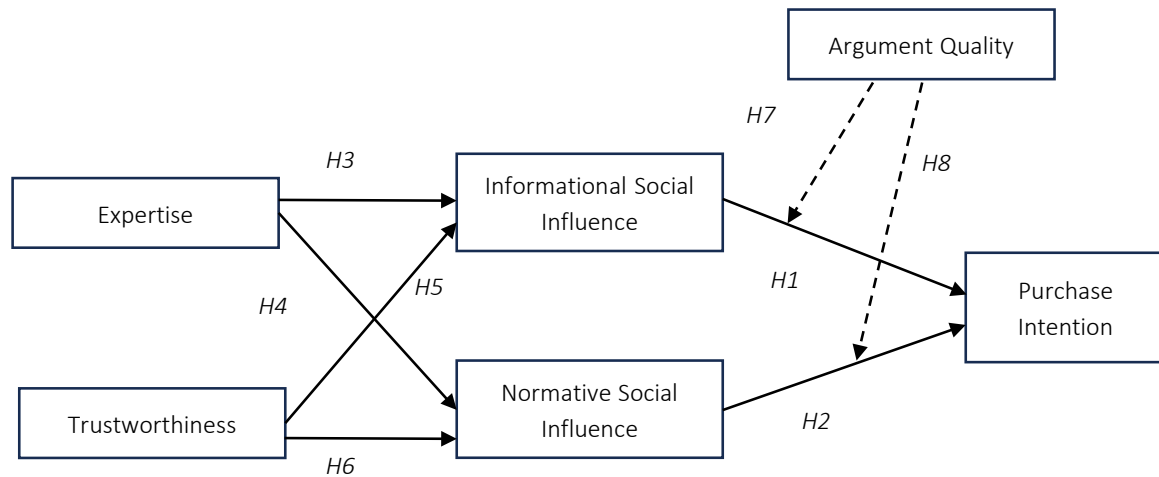
to manipulate consumers into accepting the information given. As a result, credibility enhances the persuasive value of information and the high acceptance rate (Hu et al., 2019).

According to D. Henningsen and M. Henningsen (2003), NSI occurs when individuals make decisions based on the opinions of other group members. Consumers tend to believe trustworthy individuals are more likely to provide accurate information and genuine purchase recommendations in purchasing contexts. This perception helps them feel more secure and confident when acting aligned with perceived group expectations (Hu et al., 2019). When consumers perceive SMI as trustworthy, they are more susceptible to being influenced by the behaviors and endorsements of those individuals (Liang et al., 2021).

AQ has been defined by Kaplan (1989) as the pressure that arises when individuals seek and evaluate reliable information from others. Faced with many information sources, individuals rely on messages perceived as well-founded, logical, and persuasive to make informed decisions. As such, AQ serves as a cognitive filter, increasing trust and accelerating decision-making when the information is credible. Consequently, ISI becomes more impactful when the messages are well-structured and convincing, directly shaping the receiver’s behavioral intentions (Cho & Chan, 2021).

Furthermore, AQ also plays a significant role in consumer behavior influenced by NSI. It enables individuals to distinguish between genuinely worthwhile products recommended by SMI and those promoted purely as part of popular trends. When consumers perceive that the information they receive is trustworthy and valuable, they are more likely to purchase based on objective evaluation rather than emotional conformity. In this sense, AQ enhances their ability to assess marketing messages critically and reinforces confidence in their choices, thereby strengthening purchase intention. Thus, AQ is a moderating factor in the relationship between NSI and purchase intention.

Building on these gaps, this study aims to re-examine the mechanism through which SMI influences purchase intention, specifically by: (i) analyzing the impact of expertise and trustworthiness



**Figure 1.** Research framework

of SMI based on Source Credibility Theory and (ii) examining the moderating role of AQ.

Figure 1 presents the proposed research model, in which the hypotheses are formulated to explain the relationships among the study variables. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses have been developed:

- H1: In social media marketing, Informational Social Influence positively impacts Purchase Intention.*
- H2: In social media marketing, Normative Social Influence positively impacts Purchase Intention.*
- H3: The Expertise positively affects Informational Social Influence.*
- H4: The Expertise positively affects Normative Social Influence.*
- H5: Trustworthiness positively affects Informational Social Influence.*
- H6: Trustworthiness positively affects Normative Social Influence.*
- H7: Argument Quality strongly moderates the relationship between Informational Social Influence and Purchase Intention.*
- H8: Argument Quality strongly moderates the relationship between Normative Social Influence and Purchase Intention.*

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Data were collected online using a structured survey distributed via Google Forms between January and March 2025. The research focused on individuals residing and working in Ho Chi Minh City who actively engage with online platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. This study selected Ho Chi Minh City as the research site because it is characterized by high population density, significant purchasing potential, a substantial inflow of labor from other regions, and a relatively high level of educational attainment (National Statistics Office, 2024). Therefore, Ho Chi Minh City represents an appropriate location for conducting the research. The target participants were those who follow SMI involved in affiliate marketing, livestreaming, or product advertising, as these individuals are most likely to be exposed to persuasive online messages and to demonstrate purchase intentions influenced by such activities. This study followed the survey procedure of Babu et al. (2024) and Saima and Khan (2021). Specifically, screening questions were used to ensure sample relevance: only respondents who followed at least one social media influencer and could identify a specific account were directed to the main questionnaire, which included introductory statements and consent declarations.

Prior to the main survey, a pilot study with 50 participants was conducted to test the reliability and appropriateness of the scales. The pilot results confirmed the validity of the instruments, supporting their use in the formal survey. According to Chin (1998) and Kline (2023), a minimum of 200 respondents is recommended to reduce potential biases and

ensure statistical reliability in multivariate analysis. Besides, following the popular “10-times rule” proposed by Hair et al. (2012), the minimum sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a construct in the inner model or the maximum number of formative indicators of a construct in the outer model. In our present model, the peak figure is four; consequently, the minimum threshold is 40. The final dataset of 301 valid responses therefore exceeds these requirements.

Of 301 respondents, 108 were men (35.90%) and 193 were women (64.10%). Every participant followed influencers on social media. 87.04% of respondents were between 18 and 30, 6.64% under 18, 5.32% between the ages of 31 and 45, and just 1.00% beyond 45. These numbers indicate that younger people are the most interested in the research topic, reflecting its growing appeal to young individuals. Regarding educational background, 75.70% of respondents were university students, 9.30% were high school students, and 9.00% were university graduates. This suggests that most participants were still in school or university, which is consistent with the reported income levels: 60.13% earned less than VND 5 million monthly. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of respondents (29.90%) had graduated and held stable employment, with monthly incomes ranging from VND 16 million to VND 30 million (see Table 1).

The questionnaire was structured into three sections. The first section provided contextual information, ensuring that respondents clearly understood the purpose of the study and the survey framework. The second section collected demographic information, including gender, age, education, and income. The third section contained the measurement items for the study constructs: expertise, trustworthiness, NSI, AQ, ISI, and purchase intention. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with anchors ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The measurement scales were adapted from well-established instruments in previous studies: AQ and NSI from Tseng and Wang (2016), ISI from Liang et al. (2021), trustworthiness and expertise from Lou and Kim (2019), and purchase intention from Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019). These scales have been widely applied and validated across different research contexts, supporting their applicability in the present study.

The dataset analyzed in this paper is distinct and non-duplicative. Although aligned with a larger research agenda, it was collected independently at a specific time point and reflects contextual conditions unique to that period. This approach guarantees that the evidence presented here cannot be conflated with data from prior or subsequent studies within the same project. The combination of temporal independence, methodological rigor in instrument adaptation, and the pilot validation process substantiates the uniqueness and robustness of the dataset for addressing the research objectives of this study.

The study also adhered to strict ethical standards. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study’s objectives, procedures, and their rights as participants. A confidentiality statement and informed consent declaration were included at the beginning of the survey. Anonymity was strictly guaranteed, and all data collected were used solely for academic purposes. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by Ho Chi Minh City Open University, thereby ensuring compliance with institutional and ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the software SmartPLS 4.0. This approach was chosen because it is well suited for predictive research models with multiple constructs, allows assessment of both measurement and structural models simultaneously, and is robust with medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2012).

**Table 1.** Demographic information

Demographics variables	Categories	Freq.	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	108	35.90
	Female	193	64.10
Age	<18	20	6.64
	18-30	262	87.04
	31-45	16	5.32
	>45	3	1.00
Educational background	High school	28	9.30
	College/intermediate	18	6.00
	University	228	75.70
	Graduate	27	9.00
Monthly income (VND)	<5 million	181	60.13
	5-15 million	23	7.64
	16-30 million	90	29.90
	>30 million	7	2.33

### 3. RESULTS

Initially, the research team assessed the convergent validity of the measuring scales and used Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) to determine the model’s reliability. According to the analysis results shown in Table 2, Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.860 to 0.901, and the  $\alpha$  coefficients ranged from 0.789 to 0.854. Since all values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7, the measurement scales demonstrate strong internal consistency reliability (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021; Bagozzi & Yi, 1989). Furthermore, as per Hair et al. (2019), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceed 0.5. The outer loadings are more significant than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014), indicat-

ing that the scales achieve adequate convergent validity and are capable of explaining a substantial proportion of variance in their respective constructs. Therefore, based on Table 2, all AVE values and outer loadings meet the minimum required thresholds of 0.5 and 0.7, respectively, confirming that the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

To assess the discriminant validity between the measurement scales, the research team chose to examine the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The evaluation criterion is based on the principle that the correlation coefficients should be larger than the cross-correlation coefficients, and all HTMT values should be less

**Table 2.** Reliability and convergent validity

	Scale	Outer loading	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
AQ	AQ1 – The information shared by influencers on social media is accurate.	0.745	0.789	0.860	0.606
	AQ2 – The information shared by influencers on social media ensures appropriateness.	0.744			
	AQ3 – The information shared by influencers on social media is highly detailed and comprehensive.	0.803			
	AQ4 – The information shared by influencers on social media is always updated in a timely manner.	0.819			
ISI	ISI1 – I often refer to influencers’ opinions on social media to help me select the most suitable products.	0.835	0.854	0.901	0.696
	ISI2 – I frequently search for information from influencers on social media about the products I intend to purchase.	0.854			
	ISI3 – To ensure that I buy the right product or brand, I usually pay attention to what influencers or their followers are purchasing and using on social media.	0.835			
	ISI4 – If I do not have much experience with a product, I often seek advice from influencers or their followers on social media regarding that product.	0.812			
NSI	NSI1 – I gain a sense of belonging when purchasing the same products and brands recommended by the influencers I follow.	0.794	0.821	0.881	0.650
	NSI2 – I often try to purchase similar brands or products in order to resemble the influencers I follow.	0.809			
	NSI3 – What the influencer’s follower community values is also important to me.	0.812			
	NSI4 – When making purchases, I tend to choose the brands recommended by the influencers I follow.	0.811			
Trust	Trust1 – I perceive the influencers I follow as honest individuals.	0.847	0.833	0.900	0.750
	Trust2 – I consider the influencers I follow to be trustworthy.	0.888			
	Trust3 – I feel that the influencers I follow tell the truth.	0.863			
EXP	EXP1 – The influencers I follow are highly knowledgeable.	0.800	0.846	0.897	0.685
	EXP2 – The influencers I follow possess sufficient professional competence.	0.840			
	EXP3 – The influencers I follow are experts in their respective fields.	0.841			
	EXP4 – I believe that the influencers I follow have adequate experience to make claims within their domain.	0.827			
PCI	PCI1 – I am willing to follow brand recommendations made by the influencers I follow.	0.848	0.832	0.899	0.749
	PCI2 – I am willing to purchase brands based on the advice of the influencers I follow.	0.893			
	PCI3 – I intend to purchase products of the brands endorsed by the influencers I follow in the future.	0.855			

Note: AQ = Argument Quality; EXP = Expertise; ISI = Informational Social Influence; NSI = Normative Social Influence; PCI = Purchase Intention; Trust = Trustworthiness.

than 0.85. If these conditions are met, the measurement scales demonstrate adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015), thus satisfying the requirements for subsequent analysis steps.

**Table 3.** HTMT

	AQ	EXP	ISI	NSI	PCI	Trust
AQ						
EXP	0.192					
ISI	0.228	0.754				
NSI	0.321	0.697	0.776			
PCI	0.185	0.845	0.843	0.843		
Trust	0.365	0.824	0.801	0.821	0.812	

Note: AQ = Argument quality; EXP = Expertise; ISI = Informational Social Influence; NSI = Normative Social Influence; PCI = Purchase Intention; Trust = Trustworthiness.

In the next phase, the research team continued to evaluate the structural model. The team assessed the multicollinearity between the measurement scales through the variance inflation factor (VIF). According to the threshold proposed by Hair et al. (2019), multicollinearity is not an issue when the VIF of a model is below 3. On the other hand, according to Kock (2015), when the VIF exceeds 3.3, methodological bias may affect the hypothesized model. Table 4 shows that the VIF values range from 1.474 to 2.290, which meets the required criteria.

Additionally, R<sup>2</sup> represents the degree of dependence of the independent variables on the dependent variables of the model, with the number of dependent variables corresponding to the number of occurrences of R<sup>2</sup>. Table 4 shows that the R<sup>2</sup> of ISI is 0.514, meaning that the independent variables expertise and trustworthiness ex-

plain 51.4% of the variation in ISI, and similarly for NSI and purchase intention. Meanwhile, the Q<sup>2</sup> coefficient represents the out-of-sample predictive relevance. When 0 < Q<sup>2</sup> < 0.25, the predictive accuracy is low; when 0.25 ≤ Q<sup>2</sup> ≤ 0.5, the predictive accuracy is moderate; and when Q<sup>2</sup> > 0.5, the predictive accuracy is high. The data table shows that the model corresponding to ISI and purchase intention has Q<sup>2</sup> values of 0.505 and 0.538, indicating high predictive accuracy, while the model corresponding to NSI has a lower predictive accuracy (0.483).

**Table 4.** VIF, R<sup>2</sup>, Q<sup>2</sup>

	VIF	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
AQ	1.474–1.655	–	–
Trust	1.729–2.190	–	–
EXP	1.758–2.290	–	–
ISI	1.824–2.102	0.514	0.505
NSI	1.654–1.832	0.489	0.483
PCI	1.817–2.176	0.621	0.538

Note: AQ = Argument Quality; EXP = Expertise; ISI = Informational Social Influence; NSI = Normative Social Influence; PCI = Purchase Intention; Trust = Trustworthiness.

In the final step, the research team employed the Bootstrapping method with 5,000 iterations to confirm whether the hypotheses were statistically significant. The results from Table 5 show that both ISI and NSI positively affect purchase intention. Therefore, Hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported (H1: β = 0.404, t = 6.733, p = 0.000; H2: β = 0.357, t = 6.496, p = 0.000). Furthermore, SMI with high expertise will strongly influence ISI and NSI (H3: β = 0.333, t = 4.282, p = 0.000; H4: β = 0.218, t = 3.423, p = 0.001). Therefore, Hypotheses H3 and H4 are supported.

Moreover, Table 5 also shows that the trustworthiness of SMI has a strong and positive effect on

**Table 5.** PLS-SEM results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t	p	Results
H1	ISI → PCI	0.404	6.733	0.000	Accepted
H2	NSI → PCI	0.357	6.496	0.000	Accepted
H3	EXP → ISI	0.333	4.282	0.000	Accepted
H4	EXP → NSI	0.218	3.423	0.001	Accepted
H5	Trust → ISI	0.447	5.789	0.000	Accepted
H6	Trust → NSI	0.532	8.341	0.000	Accepted
H7	AQ x ISI → PCI	0.012	0.172	0.864	Rejected
H8	AQ x NSI → PCI	0.134	2.215	0.027	Accepted

Note: AQ = Argument Quality; EXP = Expertise; ISI = Informational Social Influence; NSI = Normative Social Influence; PCI = Purchase Intention; Trust = Trustworthiness.

both ISI ( $H5: \beta = 0.447, t = 5.789, p = 0.000$ ) and NSI ( $H6: \beta = 0.532, t = 8.341, p = 0.000$ ). Thus, Hypotheses 5 and 6 are supported. Additionally, the analysis results indicate that AQ positively moderates the relationship between NSI and purchase intention ( $H8: \beta = 0.134, t = 2.215, p = 0.027$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 8 is supported. However, we did not find any effect of AQ on the relationship between ISI and purchase intention ( $H7: \beta = 0.012, t = 0.172, p = 0.864$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 7 is rejected.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that ISI has a strong and positive impact on purchase intention, consistent with previous studies by Thangavel et al. (2021) conducted in India and Ladhari et al. (2020) conducted in the United States. This similarity suggests that the mechanism of informational social influence may be universal across cultural differences. Interestingly, when AQ is incorporated into the model, the effect of ISI is no longer significant, while NSI still maintains its influence on purchase intention. This result may reflect the characteristics of the Vietnamese market as a society that values community (Pham et al., 2024; Dang et al., 2025). When arguments are sufficiently logical and well-evidenced, consumers are persuaded directly by reasoning without relying on the majority to validate the information. However, the desire to integrate and act like the group still exists, so NSI continues to play a role in driving purchase behavior. Besides, unlike these prior studies, which examined larger and more mature markets, our findings extend this relationship to Vietnam, where social commerce is still in its early stages of development. This suggests that in emerging economies, the influence of ISI may be even more pronounced because consumers lack sufficient product experience and therefore rely heavily on information shared by trusted SMI (Hu et al., 2019). Furthermore, NSI also exerts a significant influence on purchase intention, reflecting that conformity and social belonging play an important role in shaping purchase decisions in collectivist societies such as Vietnam.

To build trust among followers, SMI must possess expertise and high trustworthiness. The results in Table 5 show that these factors significantly influ-

ence ISI and NSI; however, trustworthiness has a more powerful effect. When considering a recommendation from SMI, customers generally prioritize the trust factor. Only when SMI establishes solid credibility can they influence their followers' thoughts, behaviors, and decisions. A trustworthy SMI encourages followers to accept information and motivates them to share and act on those recommendations. On the contrary, if trust declines, regardless of how appealing the content may be, the effect of SMI will be limited and may even result in backlash. This finding aligns with Liang et al. (2021) who state that messages deemed trustworthy are more easily received and accepted within a given group, which aids in norm formation. Nevertheless, our findings emphasize that credibility is the decisive factor in the Vietnamese context: only when influencers establish solid trustworthiness can they effectively shape consumers' attitudes and purchasing decisions. In other words, customers' trust cannot be formed independently if the SMI has not first established the necessary credibility. This is particularly meaningful in contexts strongly influenced by NSI, such as Vietnam (Pham et al., 2024), where consumers tend to rely on credibility recognized within the community before accepting and following recommendations. Moreover, the rise of social media strengthens relationships among people. It encourages following social norms and defining 'appropriate' buying habits in an attempt to conform and be accepted within a society (Lin & Lu, 2011).

Apart from reliability, expertise has a major effect on ISI and NSI, with ISI being more affected than NSI. The distinctions between the two social influence systems are the cause of this. NSI is primarily impacted by societal pressure, whereas ISI is associated with seeking trustworthy information to support purchasing decisions (Clark & Goldsmith, 2006; Kaplan, 1989; Lu et al., 2005). Our results contribute by showing that in online shopping environments, where product quality cannot be directly verified, consumers tend to rely on influencers' expertise to reduce uncertainty and make more confident purchase decisions. Since it can be challenging to confirm the quality of products when shopping online directly, consumers frequently resort to SMI with expertise for guidance. Customers are more likely to believe the in-

formation and make better decisions when expertise offers evaluations (Shen et al., 2010). Expertise does affect NSI. However, it does not sufficiently encourage conforming behavior. Instead of pressuring consumers to buy, expertise gives them a more comprehensive view of the product and a foundation for assessment rather than depending only on the prevailing trend. This lessens the effect of expertise on NSI by encouraging customers to base their judgments on their own considerations.

The research findings reveal an interesting observation: AQ plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between NSI and purchase intention, but does not significantly affect the relationship between ISI and purchase intention. This suggests that the presentation of information, whether structured or not, does not significantly impact purchase decisions based on ISI. When seeking information from SMI, consumers are primarily

concerned with the information's popularity, the source's trustworthiness, or the bandwagon effect rather than the detailed reasoning behind the argument. As a result, AQ does not alter the impact of ISI on purchase intention. On the other hand, AQ has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between NSI and purchase intention. Specifically, AQ helps customers filter and select trusted information sources, reinforcing the impact of NSI on purchase intention. When many consumers support a product, a clear and logical presentation of information increases trust and encourages consumers to make purchasing decisions based on the prevailing trend. This shows that not only does the popularity of the information matter, but the way the information is presented logically also contributes to reinforcing consumption trends. With the combination of persuasive content and the influence of SMI, customers are more likely to make purchasing decisions more easily and quickly.

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## CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study set out to examine how informational and normative social influences shape consumer purchase intentions on social media. The findings show that both types of influence encourage positive intentions, but through distinct mechanisms. Informational influence works by providing cues that strengthen consumers' confidence in their decisions, whereas normative influence relies on conformity to group expectations.

Based on source credibility, this study advances theoretical understanding by showing that influencers' expertise and trustworthiness not only directly enhance persuasiveness but also function as foundational antecedents that activate two social influence mechanisms, informational and normative influence. This finding underscores that, in the context of digital communication, credibility is a central factor in explaining how consumers process information and form purchase intentions, thereby reinforcing the suitability of source credibility theory as a framework for analyzing consumer behavior in digital environments.

From a practical perspective, several points can be drawn. First, SMI should be selected on the basis of their expertise and credibility in relation to the product promoted, rather than on message style alone. Second, companies need to recognize that normative influence is particularly powerful: consumers often decide based on alignment with community values and norms rather than rational argumentation. Third, influencers themselves must actively build and demonstrate expertise, since credibility enhances both their persuasiveness and the trust of their audience. These insights underline that in digital markets, social proof and perceived authenticity are more decisive than purely logical persuasion.

This study, however, has a few boundaries. One was that the moderating variable represents only one component of social influence, meaning social impact purchase intention is not captured fully, restricting the comprehensive evaluation of this effect. The other limitation is that the study used a convenience sample, which could result in sampling homogeneity bias. Besides, the collected data are limited in both quantity and depth, and therefore cannot fully capture the potential factors influencing the examined

relationships. Expanding the scope of data collection with a larger sample size or combining multiple research methods would be beneficial. Another limitation is the significant sample bias, as the majority of respondents are concentrated in aged 18-30 and hold a university degree, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research should adopt a more balanced and diverse sampling strategy to ensure better representativeness of the population. Lastly, the information gathered is cross-sectional, lacking any longitudinal changes. To fill these gaps, further research should look into changing the hypothesized moderators or broadening them to assess the impact of the focal variable more accurately. Furthermore, conducting the study across multiple timeframes is important to analyze the longitudinal stability according to the offered concepts. Continuing to expand these directions not only helps to perfect the theoretical model but also provides valuable practical evidence for businesses in their digital communication strategies.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Conceptualization: Hao Yen Tran, Thom Hoai Thi Nguyen.

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Formal analysis: Le Thi My Le, Vy Thao Thi Nguyen.

Investigation: Le Thi My Le.

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Project administration: Le Thi My Le.

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Not applicable.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

Author(s) reported no conflict of interest.

## **ETHICAL APPROVAL**

Although our university does not operate a formal ethics committee or require multiple institutional approvals, the research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Committee for Human Research at Ho Chi Minh City Open University. This approval confirms that the study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (1975).

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

Prior to data collection, all participants were informed of the study's objectives, assured of the anonymity of their responses, and notified that the data would be used solely for academic purposes. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before proceeding with the survey. All 301 individuals invited to participate agreed voluntarily.

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