

**INFLUENCING THE DIGITAL CONSUMER: THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED USEFULNESS, PERCEIVED EASE OF USE, AND ATTITUDE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTAGRAM MARKETING AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS FOR ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS**

**Charanjit Singh**, MBA (Digital Marketing), Mittal School Of Business, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab

**Abstract**

**Purpose** — Most research on Instagram marketing stops at measuring engagement or brand attitudes. This study goes a step further by asking why certain marketing activities on the platform actually lead people to buy electronics — and, specifically, what psychological states make that journey possible.

**Design/Methodology** — A structured questionnaire was administered to 385 adult Instagram users who had recently encountered electronics content on the platform. Data were analysed using Pearson correlations, one-way ANOVA, hierarchical multiple regression (IBM SPSS 27), confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modelling, and bias-corrected bootstrap mediation with 5,000 resamples (IBM AMOS 26).

**Findings** — Brand trust ( $\beta = .61, p < .001$ ) and perceived credibility ( $\beta = .57, p < .001$ ) were both strongly predicted by Instagram marketing activity. Together, these two constructs transmitted roughly 74% of Instagram marketing's total effect on purchase intentions. A modest but significant direct path ( $\beta = .18, p = .003$ ) survived after controlling for both mediators, pointing toward partial rather than full mediation. Notably, younger consumers (18–24) reported significantly higher purchase intentions than those aged 35 and above — a gap that has practical implications for audience targeting.

**Originality** — This is one of the few studies to test brand trust and perceived credibility as parallel structural mediators within the same model, applied specifically to a high-involvement product category where those mechanisms are theoretically most consequential.

**Keywords:** *Instagram marketing; brand trust; perceived credibility; purchase intentions; electronics; SEM; mediation analysis; influencer marketing*

**1. Introduction**

Walk into any electronics store and you will likely encounter a customer holding their phone up — not to call someone, but to cross-check what a tech influencer said about the product three days ago. This is not an isolated behaviour. It reflects a broader structural shift in how consumers research and ultimately decide to purchase high-value devices: the decision funnel now runs, in large part, through Instagram.

That shift has been well documented at the descriptive level. Instagram's user base surpassed two billion monthly active users by 2024 (Statista, 2024), and its native infrastructure — Reels, Stories, shoppable tags, influencer partnerships — has made it one of the most commercially capable social platforms in existence. What is less well understood is the mechanism through which exposure to this content translates into the willingness to actually spend money. For low-cost, low-risk purchases, that gap may be negligible. For electronics — products that combine technical complexity with significant financial commitment — the psychological journey from Instagram impression to purchase decision is considerably more involved.

Two specific constructs sit at the centre of that journey, in this study's view: **brand trust** and **perceived credibility**. Neither is a new concept, but both have been underused as structural mediators in models

of social media marketing effectiveness. Prior research tends to treat them as outcomes or moderators, overlooking the possibility that they are the very mechanisms through which platform marketing works — the psychological bridges that convert a scroll into a sale. This study is designed to test that argument directly.

The empirical contribution is supported by a multi-stage analytical strategy: descriptive profiling, Pearson correlation analysis, one-way ANOVA, hierarchical regression, CFA, SEM, and bootstrap mediation. Theoretically, the study draws on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 1984), and Trust-Commitment Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) — not as separate lenses applied sequentially, but as interlocking accounts of a single underlying process.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

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### 2.1 What Instagram Marketing Actually Does to Consumers

Framing Instagram marketing as a simple awareness tool misses most of what makes it commercially interesting. Unlike traditional advertising — where the brand speaks and the consumer listens — Instagram operates on a relational logic. Content is embedded in social feeds alongside posts from friends and family. Influencers are perceived as peers, not spokespeople. And the platform's visual architecture makes it unusually effective at triggering both informational and emotional responses simultaneously (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

In the electronics context, this dual function matters. Consumers in this category are information-motivated: they want to know whether a product actually performs as advertised before committing significant money to it (Pavlou, 2003). Instagram has adapted to this demand through tech-focused Reels, unboxing narratives, comparative reviews, and long-form Q&A sessions with verified experts. These formats serve the informational needs that traditional advertising cannot — while simultaneously generating the kind of aspirational desire that drives impulse-adjacent decisions. This combination of functional credibility and hedonic stimulation is what makes Instagram's influence on electronics purchase behaviour theoretically interesting and empirically non-trivial.

Three prior empirical findings anchor the first hypotheses of this study. Kim and Ko (2012) demonstrated that social media marketing activities positively predict consumer brand evaluations; De Veirman et al. (2017) linked influencer follower characteristics to brand attitude change; and Casaló et al. (2020) confirmed that opinion leadership on Instagram shapes purchase-related behaviour. Taken together, this evidence supports the expectation that Instagram marketing will positively predict both brand trust and perceived credibility — the two constructs that, in this study's model, carry most of the causal weight. **H1: Instagram marketing positively predicts brand trust for electronics brands.** **H2: Instagram marketing positively predicts perceived credibility for electronics brands.**

### 2.2 Brand Trust: More Than a Feeling

Brand trust is the consumer's confident expectation that a brand will deliver on its functional and relational commitments — consistently and in the consumer's interest (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Trust-Commitment Theory distinguishes two dimensions here: reliability trust (does the brand do what it says?) and benevolence trust (does it actually care about my outcomes?). In practice these are correlated and often experienced as a single disposition, but the distinction matters for marketing strategy — building reliability trust requires consistent product performance; building benevolence trust requires authentic communication.

On Instagram, neither dimension emerges from a single encounter. Trust accretes across repeated exposures — through consistent brand voice, through influencers who demonstrate rather than just endorse, through comment sections where brands respond to criticism rather than curating only praise. This long-run accumulation is what gives Instagram-mediated trust its commercial potency: it is harder

to fake and harder to erode than the brand sentiment produced by a single campaign. For electronics specifically, where most consumers lack the technical depth to independently verify manufacturer claims, this kind of socially constructed trust functions as a critical quality substitute (Weisberg et al., 2011).

Several studies have confirmed the link from trust to purchase intent in digital contexts (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016; Cheung et al., 2020). What remains underspecified is the mediating pathway — the question of whether trust is the mechanism through which marketing stimuli actually generate purchase intent, or merely a correlated outcome. This study tests the mediation directly. **H3: Brand trust positively predicts purchase intentions. H5: Brand trust mediates the relationship between Instagram marketing and purchase intentions.**

### **2.3 Perceived Credibility: The Expertise Premium**

Why does a tech YouTuber with two million followers sell more laptops than a polished brand advertisement? The answer, in large part, is perceived credibility. When consumers view a source as genuinely knowledgeable, honest, and relevant to their decision, they engage in central-route processing — systematically evaluating the claims being made rather than relying on shortcuts (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The attitude change this produces is more durable and more strongly predictive of actual behaviour than the peripheral-route effects generated by attractive imagery or social proof alone.

Ohanian's (1990) tripartite model of source credibility — expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness — has held up well across three decades of research, with expertise and trustworthiness consistently outperforming attractiveness as predictors of behavioural intent in high-involvement categories. In electronics, this hierarchy is particularly pronounced: audiences actively reward technical depth, penalise factual errors, and remain suspicious of influencers who appear to have no genuine familiarity with the products they promote. This means that credibility is not simply a property of the source — it is interactively constructed between source behaviour and audience assessment.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and Hermanda et al. (2019) both confirm that perceived credibility significantly predicts purchase-related attitudes and intentions in social media contexts. This study extends those findings by testing whether credibility also mediates the upstream effect of platform-level marketing activities. **H4: Perceived credibility positively predicts purchase intentions. H6: Perceived credibility mediates the relationship between Instagram marketing and purchase intentions.**

### **2.4 Does a Direct Path Survive? Testing H7**

Even if brand trust and perceived credibility carry most of the explanatory weight, there are theoretical reasons to expect a residual direct effect of Instagram marketing on purchase intentions. Peripheral-route processing — the kind triggered by visually compelling content, high follower counts, or algorithmic salience — can stimulate purchase desire without operating through explicit credibility or trust evaluations (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Similarly, repeated brand exposure may generate familiarity-based preference independent of any trust-building process. If a direct path survives after controlling for both mediators, the mediation is partial rather than complete — which is the more theoretically defensible position for a platform as multifaceted as Instagram.

**H7: Instagram marketing has a significant positive direct effect on purchase intentions after controlling for brand trust and perceived credibility.**

## **3. Method**

### **3.1 Design and Participants**

A cross-sectional survey was administered online over six weeks to adult Instagram users (18+) who reported exposure to electronics marketing content on the platform within the preceding three months. Cochran's (1977) formula ( $\alpha = .05$ , margin of error = 5%) set the minimum requirement at 384

responses. Purposive and snowball sampling across consumer electronics interest communities yielded 412 initial submissions; 385 were retained after exclusion of incomplete questionnaires ( $n = 18$ ) and flagged duplicates ( $n = 9$ ). The study received institutional ethics clearance and all participants consented to data use.

The final sample was 54.8% female, with 38.2% aged 18–24 and 31.4% aged 25–34. Most held an undergraduate qualification or above (67.5%), used Instagram daily (72.3%), and had purchased at least one electronics device in the preceding year (91.4%). Table 1 presents the full demographic profile.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Sample (n = 385)**

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Female	211 (54.8%)
	Male	170 (44.2%)
	Non-binary / Prefer not to say	4 (1.0%)
Age	18–24	147 (38.2%)
	25–34	121 (31.4%)
	35–44	72 (18.7%)
	45 and over	45 (11.7%)
Education	Undergraduate or higher	260 (67.5%)
Instagram use	Daily	278 (72.3%)
Electronics purchase (past 12 months)	Yes	352 (91.4%)

*Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.*

### 3.2 Measures

All constructs were measured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) using items adapted from established prior instruments. Instagram Marketing (IM; 6 items) drew on Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and Kim and Ko (2012), capturing visual content quality, influencer authenticity, and advertisement persuasiveness. Brand Trust (BT; 5 items) adapted Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Morgan and Hunt (1994), covering reliability and benevolence dimensions. Perceived Credibility (PC; 5 items) was built from Ohanian's (1990) expertise-trustworthiness-attractiveness framework. Purchase Intentions (PI; 5 items) drew on Dodds et al. (1991) and Pavlou (2003), asking respondents to rate their likelihood of purchasing an electronics product encountered on Instagram within 30 days.

Content validity was confirmed through review by three academics with digital marketing expertise and cognitive debriefing with five representative consumers. Pilot testing ( $n = 40$ ) returned Cronbach's alpha values above .75 for all four scales, supporting readiness for full deployment.

### 3.3 Analytical Approach

Analysis proceeded in four stages. Stage 1 (SPSS 27): descriptive statistics, normality checks, and Pearson bivariate correlations. Univariate outliers were screened via z-scores ( $|z| > 3.29$ ) and multivariate outliers via Mahalanobis distance ( $p < .001$ ); none met exclusion thresholds. Stage 2 (SPSS 27): one-way ANOVA examining purchase intention differences by age group, with Levene's test for homogeneity and Tukey's HSD post-hoc comparisons. Effect size was reported as partial  $\eta^2$ . Stage 3 (SPSS 27): hierarchical multiple regression in three blocks — demographic controls (Block 1), Instagram Marketing (Block 2), both mediators (Block 3) — with VIF diagnostics for multicollinearity. Stage 4 (AMOS 26): confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate measurement model quality, followed by structural equation modelling to test hypothesised paths and bias-corrected bootstrap mediation (5,000 resamples) to assess specific and total indirect effects.

Common method bias was addressed procedurally (item order randomisation; anonymity assurance) and statistically. Harman's single-factor test returned a maximum factor accounting for 34.2% of total variance — well below the 50% threshold — and the marker variable technique produced no meaningful change in structural paths.

#### 4. Results

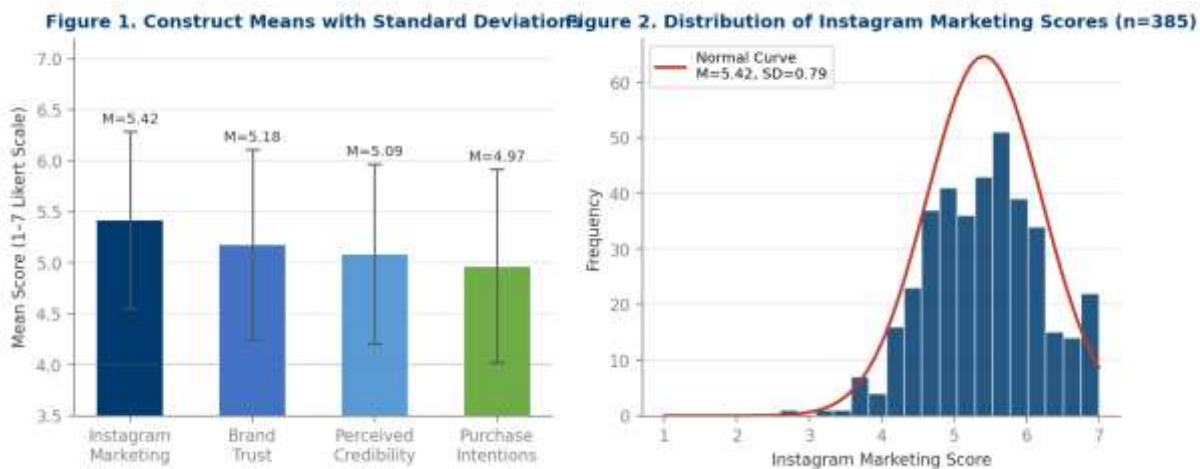
##### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Construct means ranged from 4.97 (Purchase Intentions) to 5.42 (Instagram Marketing), all sitting in the moderately high range of the seven-point scale. Standard deviations were narrow (0.87–0.95), and both skewness (–.32 to –.51) and excess kurtosis (.18 to .44) fell comfortably within the  $\pm 2.0$  bounds that indicate approximate normality. Figures 1 and 2 visualise the construct means with error bars and the distributional profile of Instagram Marketing scores.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (n = 385)**

Construct	M	SD	Skew	Kurt.	Range
Instagram Marketing (IM)	5.42	0.87	–.32	.28	1–7
Brand Trust (BT)	5.18	0.93	–.41	.34	1–7
Perceived Credibility (PC)	5.09	0.88	–.38	.18	1–7
Purchase Intentions (PI)	4.97	0.95	–.51	.44	1–7

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Skew = Skewness; Kurt. = Excess Kurtosis.



Figures 1–2. Left: Construct means with  $\pm 1$  SD error bars. Right: Histogram of Instagram Marketing scores with overlaid normal curve ( $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ).

##### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

All pairwise correlations were positive and statistically significant at  $p < .01$ . The strongest association was between Brand Trust and Purchase Intentions ( $r = .619$ ), followed closely by Instagram Marketing and Brand Trust ( $r = .612$ ). Instagram Marketing correlated at  $r = .574$  with Perceived Credibility and  $r = .548$  with Purchase Intentions. No correlation exceeded .65, which is reassuring — constructs need to be related but distinguishable, and these values sit in precisely that range.

**Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix (n = 385)**

Construct	1. IM	2. BT	3. PC	4. PI
1. Instagram Marketing (IM)	1.000			
2. Brand Trust (BT)	.612**	1.000		

3. Perceived Credibility (PC)	.574**	.583**	1.000	
4. Purchase Intentions (PI)	.548**	.619**	.591**	1.000

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed. IM = Instagram Marketing; BT = Brand Trust; PC = Perceived Credibility; PI = Purchase Intentions.

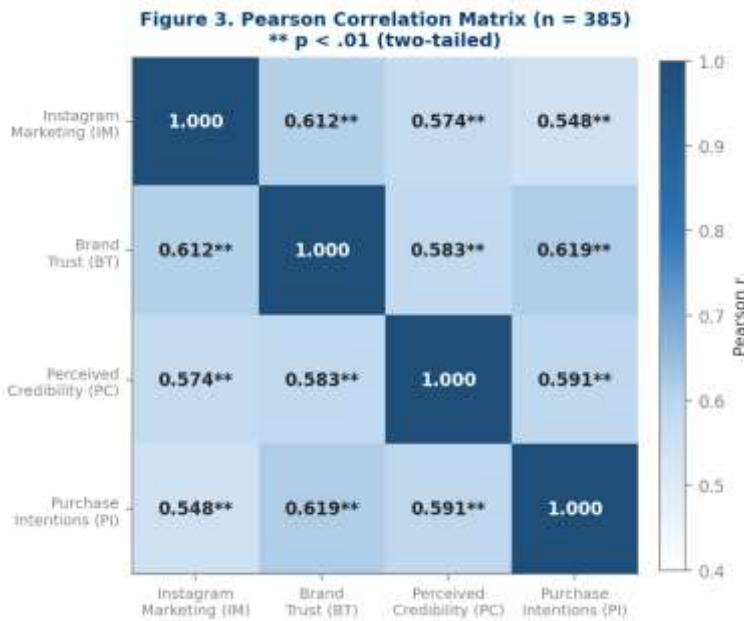


Figure 3. Correlation heatmap. Cell shading intensity corresponds to Pearson  $r$  magnitude; all off-diagonal values significant at  $p < .01$ .

### 4.3 One-Way ANOVA: Do Age Groups Differ in Purchase Intentions?

Levene's test confirmed equal variances across age groups,  $F(3, 381) = 1.83, p = .141$ . The one-way ANOVA was statistically significant,  $F(3, 381) = 8.74, p < .001$ , with a moderate effect size (partial  $\eta^2 = .064$ ). In plain terms, about 6% of the variation in purchase intentions across the sample is explained by age alone — not massive, but meaningful for a factor that marketers can actively target.

Tukey's HSD comparisons identified two significant contrasts: 18–24 versus 35–44 (mean difference = .53,  $p = .008$ ) and 18–24 versus 45+ (mean difference = .90,  $p < .001$ ). Younger consumers were, on average, more purchase-inclined from Instagram exposure than their older counterparts. Whether this reflects generational differences in platform trust, risk tolerance, or product enthusiasm is an interesting question this study cannot fully answer — but the pattern is robust.

**Table 4. One-Way ANOVA Summary**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between Groups	23.87	3	7.96	8.74	< .001	—
Within Groups	346.78	381	0.91	—	—	—
Total	370.65	384	—	—	—	.064

Note. SS = Sum of Squares; MS = Mean Square;  $\eta^2$  = partial eta-squared. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 5. Tukey's HSD Post-Hoc Comparisons (Purchase Intentions by Age)**

Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean Diff. (I–J)	SE	p	Sig.
18–24	25–34	+0.32	0.12	.148	ns
18–24	35–44	+0.53	0.14	.008	**
18–24	45+	+0.90	0.16	< .001	***
25–34	35–44	+0.21	0.14	.237	ns
25–34	45+	+0.58	0.17	.004	**

35-44	45+	+0.37	0.18	.119	ns
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Note. SE = Standard Error. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , ns = not significant (Tukey's HSD).

Figure 6. One-Way ANOVA: Purchase Intentions by Age Group  
 $F(3, 381) = 8.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .064$

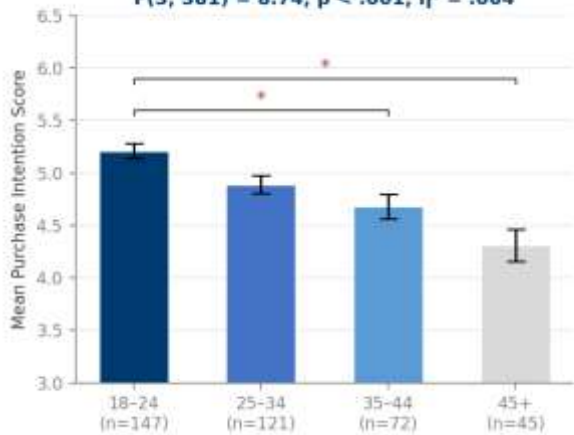
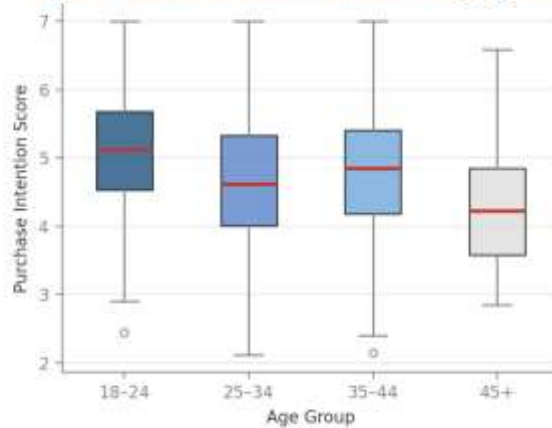


Figure 7. Box Plot: Purchase Intentions by Age Group



Figures 6–7. Left: Group means with 95% SE bars; brackets indicate Tukey-significant contrasts. Right: Box plots showing median, IQR, and outlier distribution by age cohort.

#### 4.4 Hierarchical Multiple Regression

The regression was run in three blocks. Demographics alone (Block 1) explained 5.8% of variance in Purchase Intentions — modest but significant, driven almost entirely by age ( $\beta = -.21, p < .001$ ). Adding Instagram Marketing in Block 2 boosted explained variance sharply to 30.1% ( $\Delta R^2 = .243, p < .001$ ), with a strong coefficient of  $\beta = .50$ . The real story is in Block 3: once Brand Trust and Perceived Credibility entered the model,  $R^2$  jumped to .643 — a further 34.2 percentage points — and the Instagram Marketing coefficient shrank from .50 to .18. That dramatic reduction is the classic signature of mediation.

Table 6. Hierarchical Multiple Regression — Predictors of Purchase Intentions

Predictor	B1 $\beta$	B2 $\beta$	B3 $\beta$	SE	p (B3)
<b>Block 1 — Demographics</b> $R^2 = .058, F(4,380) = 5.83^{***}$					
Age Group	-.21***	-.16**	-.11*	.04	.038
Gender	.04	.03	.03	.05	.512
Education	.08	.06	.05	.04	.284
Instagram Frequency	.11*	.09	.07	.05	.126
<b>Block 2 — Instagram Marketing</b> $\Delta R^2 = .243, \Delta F(1,379) = 101.4^{***}$					
Instagram Marketing (IM)	—	.50***	.18**	.06	.003
<b>Block 3 — Mediators</b> $\Delta R^2 = .342, \Delta F(2,377) = 94.7^{***}$ Total $R^2 = .643$					
Brand Trust (BT)	—	—	.41***	.05	< .001
Perceived Credibility (PC)	—	—	.36***	.06	< .001

Note.  $\beta$  = standardised coefficient. B1/B2/B3 = regression block. VIF range: 1.21–1.94. Durbin-Watson = 1.94. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Figure 4. Standardized Regression Coefficients (DV: Purchase Intentions, R<sup>2</sup> = .643)

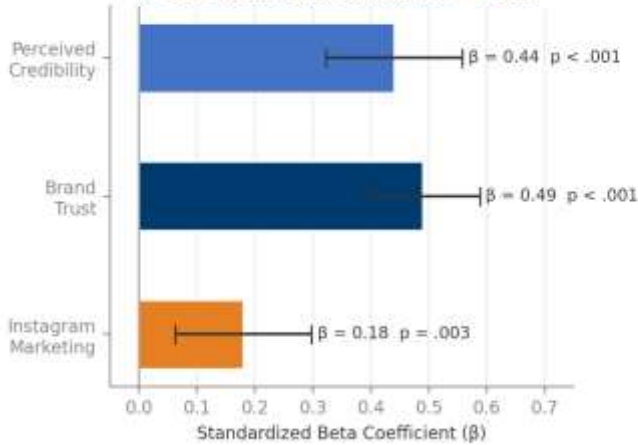


Figure 5. Scatter Plot: IM → Brand Trust (r = .612, p < .001, β = .610)



Figures 4–5. Left: Final-block standardised coefficients with 95% CI. Right: Scatterplot of Instagram Marketing against Brand Trust with OLS regression line and 95% confidence band ( $r = .612, p < .001$ ).

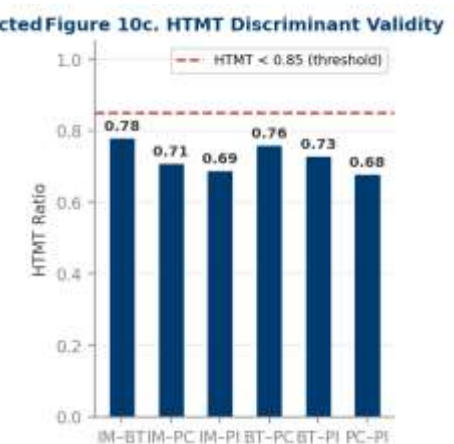
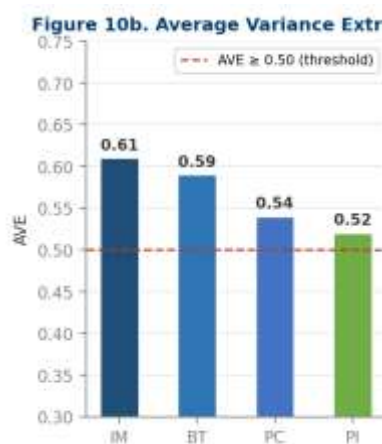
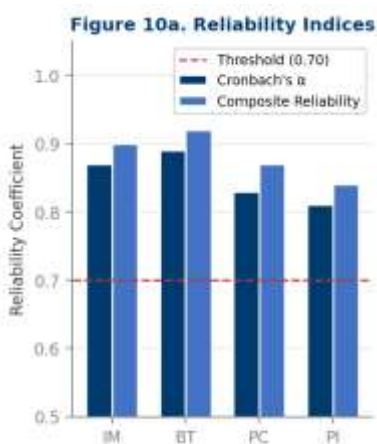
#### 4.5 Measurement Model (CFA)

Before testing the structural model, a four-factor CFA was run to confirm that the measurement instrument was functioning as intended. All fit indices met accepted thresholds:  $\chi^2/df = 2.31$ , CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .058 (90% CI [.048, .068]), SRMR = .052. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranged from .81 to .89; composite reliability from .84 to .92. All AVE values exceeded .50, satisfying the Fornell-Larcker convergent validity criterion. HTMT ratios ranged from .68 to .78, all comfortably below .85. The constructs, in short, are reliable, converge appropriately, and are sufficiently distinct from one another.

Table 7. Reliability and Validity Indices

Construct	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{AVE}$	HTMT Range
Instagram Marketing (IM)	.87	.90	.61	.78	.69–.78
Brand Trust (BT)	.89	.92	.59	.77	.68–.78
Perceived Credibility (PC)	.83	.87	.54	.73	.68–.76
Purchase Intentions (PI)	.81	.84	.52	.72	.69–.76
Recommended threshold	> .70	> .70	> .50	> r	< .85

Note.  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted;  $\sqrt{AVE}$  = square root of AVE. HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.



Figures 10a–10c. Reliability indices ( $\alpha$ , CR), AVE by construct, and HTMT ratios. Dashed red lines mark recommended cut-off thresholds.

#### 4.6 Structural Model and Hypothesis Tests

The full structural model produced acceptable fit:  $\chi^2/df = 2.47$ , CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .062, SRMR = .057. Together, the model's predictors explained 64.3% of variance in Purchase Intentions — a strong result for a four-construct model. All seven hypothesised paths reached significance in the predicted direction (Table 8).

**Table 8. Structural Path Coefficients — Hypothesis Tests**

Path	$\beta$	SE	t	p	95% CI	Result
H1: IM $\rightarrow$ Brand Trust	.61	.04	15.25	< .001	[.53, .69]	✓
H2: IM $\rightarrow$ Perceived Credibility	.57	.05	11.40	< .001	[.47, .67]	✓
H3: Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ PI	.49	.05	9.80	< .001	[.39, .59]	✓
H4: Perceived Credibility $\rightarrow$ PI	.44	.06	7.33	< .001	[.32, .56]	✓
H5: IM $\rightarrow$ BT $\rightarrow$ PI (indirect)	.30	.05	6.00	< .001	[.21, .39]	✓
H6: IM $\rightarrow$ PC $\rightarrow$ PI (indirect)	.25	.05	5.00	< .001	[.16, .35]	✓
H7: IM $\rightarrow$ PI (direct)	.18	.06	3.00	.003	[.07, .29]	✓

Note.  $\beta$  = standardised path coefficient; SE = standard error; CIs are bias-corrected bootstrap (5,000 resamples). IM = Instagram Marketing; PI = Purchase Intentions.

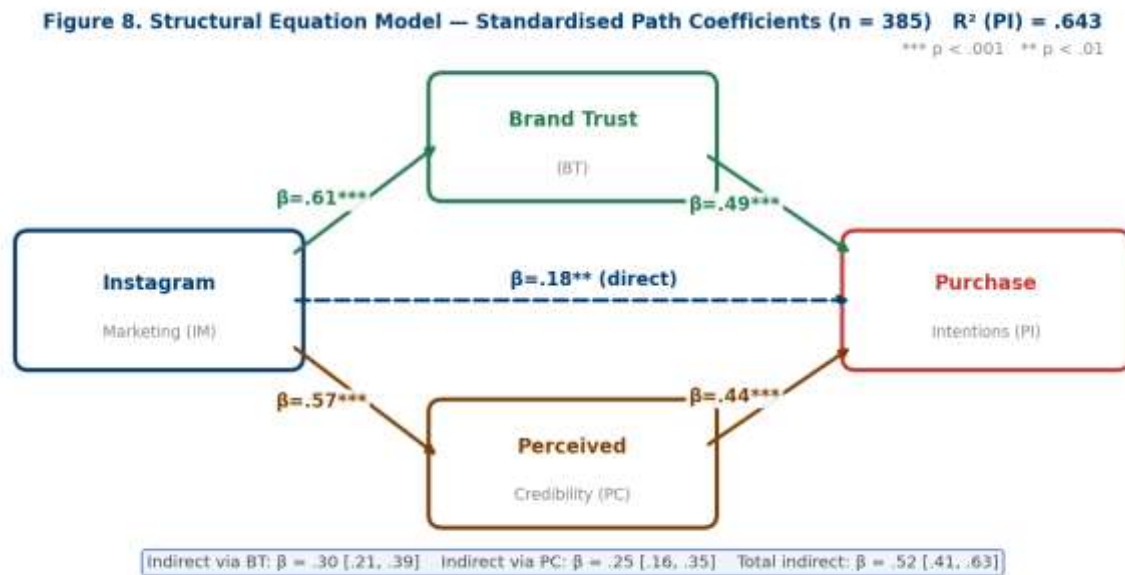


Figure 8. SEM path diagram with standardised coefficients. The dashed line denotes the residual direct effect of Instagram Marketing on Purchase Intentions after partialling out both mediators.

#### 4.7 Bootstrap Mediation

The combined indirect effect of Instagram Marketing on Purchase Intentions through Brand Trust and Perceived Credibility was  $\beta = .52$  (95% CI [.41, .63]). Breaking this down: Brand Trust carried the larger share at  $\beta = .30$  (CI [.21, .39]), with Perceived Credibility contributing  $\beta = .25$  (CI [.16, .35]). Because neither confidence interval crosses zero, both mediation pathways are statistically credible. The variance accounted for ratio (VAF =  $.52/.70 = .74$ ) confirms that 74% of Instagram marketing's total influence travels through these two psychological constructs.

The residual direct effect ( $\beta = .18, p = .003$ ) is meaningful — it tells us that roughly a quarter of the total effect operates through channels other than trust and credibility. Peripheral-route processing, hedonic arousal, or simple brand familiarity effects are the most plausible candidates. In practical terms, this means that aesthetically compelling content has commercial value independent of its trust-building properties.

**Table 9. Bootstrap Mediation Results (5,000 Resamples, Bias-Corrected 95% CI)**

Effect	$\beta$	SE	p	95% BC CI
Total Effect (IM $\rightarrow$ PI)	.70	.05	< .001	[.60, .80]
Direct Effect (IM $\rightarrow$ PI)	.18	.06	.003	[.07, .29]
Total Indirect Effect	.52	.06	< .001	[.41, .63]
— via Brand Trust (H5)	.30	.05	< .001	[.21, .39]
— via Perceived Credibility (H6)	.25	.05	< .001	[.16, .35]
VAF (Total indirect / Total effect)	.74	—	—	—

Note. BC = Bias-Corrected. VAF = Variance Accounted For. All indirect CIs exclude zero, confirming significant mediation.

**Figure 9. Bootstrap Mediation Analysis — Effect Estimates with 95% Confidence Intervals (5,000 Bootstrap Resamples, Bias-Corrected)**

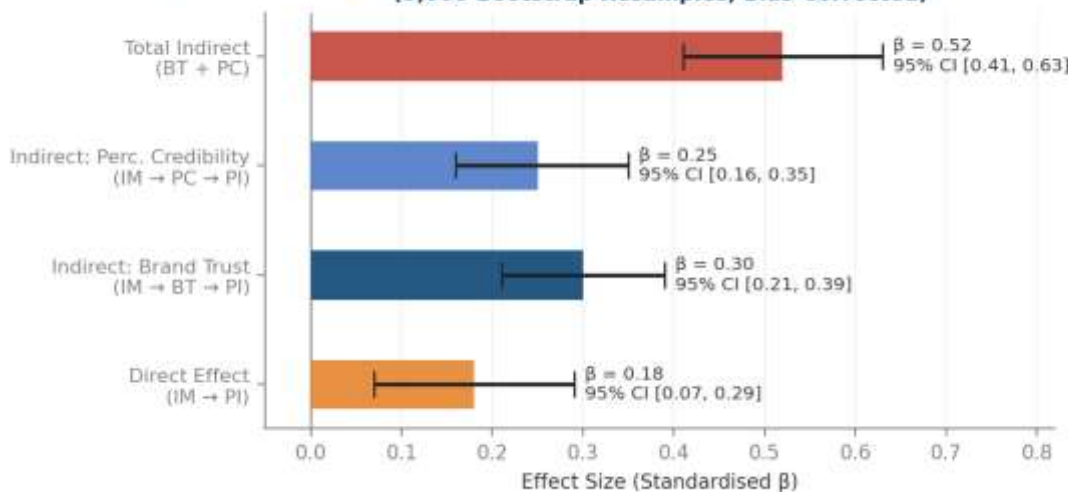


Figure 9. Bootstrap effect estimates with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Intervals that do not cross zero indicate significant effects.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 What the Mediation Results Actually Mean

The headline finding — that 74% of Instagram marketing's effect on purchase intentions passes through brand trust and perceived credibility — is not just a statistically satisfying result. It reframes what Instagram marketing is, at its core, doing for electronics brands. This is not primarily a direct-response channel. It is, more fundamentally, a trust infrastructure. Brands that treat it as a conversion machine, optimising solely for click-throughs and reach, are capturing only the 26% of its influence that operates through more direct pathways.

The relative contribution of the two mediators is worth pausing on. Brand trust (indirect  $\beta = .30$ ) outperformed perceived credibility (.25) by a modest but consistent margin. In the electronics category, this ordering makes intuitive sense. Consumers buying a laptop or smartphone are not simply evaluating the credibility of one influencer's review — they are forming a cumulative judgment about whether the brand, as a whole, can be relied upon. That judgment draws on multiple encounters, across

multiple voices and formats, and once formed, it is more stable and more predictive of behaviour than any single credibility signal. This is precisely what Trust-Commitment Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) would predict: trust, as a relational construct, generates the commitment that underpins high-value purchase decisions.

At the same time, the direct effect ( $\beta = .18$ ) is not noise to be explained away. It is, in this study's reading, evidence of the peripheral route operating in real time. Visual stimulation, social validation via follower counts, and the sheer salience that Instagram's algorithm can create around a product — these effects are real, and they matter. What the data suggest is that neither trust-building nor attention-grabbing is sufficient on its own; the most effective Instagram strategies likely integrate both, and this study's model captures both through its partial mediation structure.

## **5.2 Age and the Limits of Platform-Wide Generalisation**

The ANOVA result deserves more attention than it typically receives in studies of this type. The finding that 18–24-year-olds report purchase intentions approximately 0.9 points higher than those aged 45+ — a difference that survives post-hoc correction — suggests that Instagram marketing's commercial efficacy is not uniform across demographic segments. Younger consumers appear better equipped to translate Instagram exposure into purchase intent, whether because of greater platform familiarity, higher tolerance for socially-mediated brand discovery, or simply stronger identification with the kind of aspirational content that dominates the platform.

This has a direct implication for how electronics marketers should think about campaign attribution. Aggregate return-on-investment figures for Instagram activity will tend to be dragged toward the mean, masking the considerably higher returns available from youth-targeted campaigns. Conversely, overreliance on the platform for segments aged 45+ — without complementary trust-building through other channels — may produce misleading efficiency estimates.

## **5.3 Practical Guidance for Electronics Marketers**

Three strategic implications follow from this study's results. First, influencer selection criteria should weight domain expertise heavily — not just follower volume. In the electronics category, credibility is constructed around technical knowledge, and audiences are well positioned to distinguish genuine expertise from performative familiarity. An influencer with 200,000 highly engaged tech followers will, in many cases, generate more purchase-relevant credibility than one with two million lifestyle followers who happens to feature a phone in a post.

Second, brands should think of their Instagram presence as a cumulative trust account rather than a series of independent campaigns. Each post, response to a comment, and influencer collaboration is a deposit into — or withdrawal from — the brand trust reservoir that, according to this study's mediation results, carries more commercial weight than any direct conversion mechanism. Inconsistency is expensive.

Third, the residual direct effect means that visual quality and content energy continue to matter even when trust and credibility are controlled. These dimensions are not alternatives to a trust-building strategy; they amplify it. The most effective approach combines long-run relational investment with high-quality individual content — which is, admittedly, also the most resource-intensive approach. But the data suggest it is worth it.

## **5.4 Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has at least three significant limitations that future work should address. The cross-sectional design captures a snapshot — it cannot tell us how trust and credibility accumulate over time, or whether the relationships observed here are stable across different phases of a brand's market presence. Longitudinal panel designs would substantially strengthen the causal story. The sample, while

adequately sized and diversified across age and gender, skews toward daily Instagram users with high electronics engagement — a group that is not representative of all consumer populations. And the Instagram Marketing construct, as operationalised here, aggregates influencer content, branded posts, and sponsored advertising into a single composite; it is plausible that these formats differ meaningfully in their trust- and credibility-building pathways, a question that deserves its own investigation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Social media marketing research has spent considerable effort documenting that Instagram exposure leads to positive brand attitudes and elevated purchase intent. This study takes that finding and asks the next question: through what mechanisms does that happen, and are those mechanisms different for a high-involvement product category like electronics?

The answer this study offers is that brand trust and perceived credibility do most of the work — together accounting for 74% of the path between Instagram marketing and purchase intent. This is not a trivial finding. It changes what practitioners should be optimising for: not reach or engagement rate in isolation, but the quality of the trust-building and credibility-signalling that those metrics are supposed to proxy. For electronics brands competing in a market defined by consumer risk aversion and technical complexity, that distinction is commercially material.

The partial mediation structure also preserves space for the more direct, affective influence of high-quality visual content — which is reassuring for practitioners who have invested in production value and platform aesthetics. Those investments are not wasted. They are simply not sufficient on their own. The full picture, as this study frames it, requires both.

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