IMAD TRIBAK – ÁRPÁD PAPP-VÁRY – ZOLTÁN SZABÓ

# TRANSPARENCY MATTERS – HOW SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE FORMAT SHAPES CREDIBILITY AND CONSUMER RESPONSES THROUGH PERCEIVED TRANSPARENCY IN INSTAGRAM MICRO-INFLUENCER MARKETING?

# A TRANSZPARENCIA SZÁMÍT – HOGYAN ALAKÍTJA A SZPONZORÁCIÓS KÖZZÉTÉTEL FORMÁTUMA A HITELESSÉGET ÉS A FOGYASZTÓI REAKCIÓKAT AZ ÉSZLELT TRANSZPARENCIÁN KERESZTÜL AZ INSTAGRAM MIKROINFLUENCER MARKETINGBEN?

This study examines how sponsorship disclosure format and influencer compensation nature shape perceived sponsorship transparency and its effects on source credibility, information credibility, online engagement, and purchase intention among Instagram micro-influencers. Drawing on the Persuasion Knowledge Model, Communication Transparency Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Source Credibility Theory, the study conceptualizes perceived sponsorship transparency as consumers' holistic judgment of how openly the commercial relationship is communicated. A between-subjects experiment (420 participants) was analyzed using two-way analysis of variance, regression, and serial mediation. Disclosure format, but not compensation nature, influenced perceived transparency, with platform-integrated disclosures outperforming hashtag-based ones, extending the Persuasion Knowledge Model to platform-governed ecosystems. Transparency sequentially mediated behavioral outcomes through source and information credibility, with source credibility the stronger mediator. Limitations include snowball sampling, a fictitious influencer and brand, and no confirmatory factor analysis.

Keywords: **sponsorship disclosure format, compensation nature, perceived sponsorship transparency, credibility, online engagement, purchase intention, micro-influencer**

Ez a tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogyan befolyásolja a szponzorációs közzététel formátuma és az influencer-kompenzáció jellege az észlelt szponzorációs transzparenciát, és annak hatásait a forrás- és információs hitelességre, az online elköteleződésre és a vásárlási szándékra az Instagram mikroinfluencerek körében. A Meggyőzési Tudás Modellre, a Kommunikációs Transzparencia Elméletre, a Paraszociális Interakció Elméletre és a Forrás Hitelesség Elméletre támaszkodva az észlelt szponzorációs transzparenciát a kereskedelmi kapcsolat nyíltságáról alkotott átfogó fogyasztói ítéletként értelmezik a szerzők. Csoportközi kísérlet (420 résztvevő) adatait kétszempontos varianciaanalízissel, regresszióval és soros mediációs elemzéssel értékelték. A közzététel formátuma, de nem a kompenzáció jellege befolyásolta az észlelt transzparenciát: a platformba integrált közzétételek erősebb transzparenciát eredményeztek, mint a hashtag-alapúak, kiterjesztve a Meggyőzési Tudás Modellt a platformvezérelt ökoszisztémákra. A transzparencia szekvenciálisan mediálta a viselkedéses kimeneteleket a forrás- és információs hitelességen keresztül, a forráshitelesség bizonyult erősebb mediátornak. Korlátok: hólabda-mintavétel, fiktív influencer és márka, valamint a konfirmatorikus faktorelemzés hiánya.

Kulcsszavak: **szponzorációs közzététel formátuma, kompenzáció jellege, észlelt szponzorációs transzparencia, hitelesség, online elköteleződés, vásárlási szándék, mikroinfluencer**

**Funding/Finanszírozás:**
The authors did not receive any grant or institutional support in relation with the preparation of the study.
A szerzők a tanulmány elkészítésével összefüggésben nem részesültek pályázati vagy intézményi támogatásban.

**Authors/Szerzők:**
Imad Tribak[a] (Tribak.imad.37@unibge.hu) PhD student (https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2337-5928); Dr. Árpád Papp-Váry[a] (papp-vary.arpad@uni-bge.hu) associate professor (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0395-4315); Dr. Zoltán Szabó[b] (szabo.zoltan@uni-sopron.hu) associate professor (https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8842-290X)

[a]Budapest University of Economics and Business (Budapesti Gazdasági Egyetem) Hungary (Magyarország); [b]University of Sopron (Soproni Egyetem) Hungary (Magyarország)

The article was received: 15. 12. 2025, revised: 24. 03. 2026, 29. 03. 2026, 11. 04. 2026 and 27. 04. 2026, accepted: 11. 05. 2026.
A cikk beérkezett: 2025. 12. 15-én, javítva: 2026. 03. 24-én, 2026. 03. 29-én, 2026. 04. 11-én és 2026. 04. 27-én, elfogadva: 2026. 05. 11-én.

Copyright (c) 2026 Corvinus University of Budapest, publisher of Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review.
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Social media influencers shape purchase behavior and consumer attitudes (Zhang & Szabó, 2024), making influencer marketing one of the most effective forms of digital advertising. Over 80% of marketers consider it highly effective, and nearly 64% of brands include influencers in their 2025 media strategies (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025). Instagram remains the primary channel, with over three billion monthly active users (Demand Sage, 2026), and the global influencer marketing industry is projected to surpass $31 billion by 2027 (Statista, 2026). However, increasing commercialization has raised concerns about credibility, authenticity, and transparency (Baghel, 2023), as even digitally fluent consumers struggle to distinguish sponsored from organic content (Evans et al., 2017; Sárközi & Szabó, 2024).

Among influencer tiers, micro-influencers (10 000–100 000 followers) occupy an intermediary role between brands and consumers, leveraging perceived authenticity, niche expertise, and relational closeness (Conde & Casais, 2023; De Cicco et al., 2021). Their content reflects personal experiences that enhance trust, engagement, and the likelihood of acting on recommendations (Aldlimi et al., 2025).

Micro-influencers often engage in hybrid compensation models combining financial and in-kind partnerships, blurring boundaries between personal endorsement and paid promotion (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Sponsorship disclosures are therefore critical, as transparency influences credibility, engagement, and purchase intention (Evans et al., 2017). Despite regulatory requirements, introduced by the FTC (2013) and EASA (2018), compliance remains low, with only about 20% of influencers fully adhering to guidelines (European Parliament, 2025), and platform tools such as Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag are applied inconsistently (Carpenter & Bonin II, 2021).

A key gap remains in understanding how different disclosure formats influence consumer perceptions of micro-influencers. Few studies compare multiple formats (none, implicit, explicit, platform-tagged) while examining the mediating role of perceived sponsorship transparency on credibility and behavioral responses such as engagement and purchase intention. Prior research highlights a paradox: explicit disclosures increase advertising recognition but may reduce perceived trustworthiness (Boerman, 2020; Jhawar et al., 2025), posing challenges for micro-influencers whose effectiveness depends on authenticity.

Much of the disclosure literature conceptualizes transparency as advertising recognition (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016; Boerman et al., 2017). However, contemporary influencer marketing operates within platform-governed environments where disclosure is embedded in interface design (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022; Cao & Belo, 2024). For Generation Y and Z, transparency is evaluated not only by recognizing advertising, but by how openly the commercial relationship is communicated (Evans et al., 2019; Wojdynski et al., 2018), as an evaluative interpretation rather than mere persuasion knowledge activation (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2023; Eisend et al., 2020).

The present study examines how different sponsorship disclosure formats shape perceived sponsorship transparency and influence credibility and customer responses. Disclosure is conceptualized as activating cognitive evaluation processes operating through perceived sponsorship transparency rather than directly determining behavioral outcomes. Drawing on Wojdynski et al.'s (2018) multidimensional framework and Communication Transparency Theory, transparency is conceptualized as consumers' evaluation of the influencer–brand relationship, encompassing brand presence clarity, commercial arrangement visibility, and absence of deceptive intent, understood as an evaluative judgment particularly consequential for advertising-literate Generation Y and Z audiences.

This evaluative process triggers credibility judgments at two levels. Source credibility reflects transparency's influence on audience evaluations of the influencer, including trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity (Ohanian, 1990; Munnukka et al., 2016), dimensions especially salient where parasocial closeness heightens sensitivity to authenticity cues. Information credibility captures evaluations of the sponsored message's reliability and accuracy (Xiao et al., 2018). Together these dimensions mediate the relationship from perceived sponsorship transparency to online engagement and purchase intention. The framework integrates the Persuasion Knowledge Model as the primary theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory as relational context, Communication Transparency Theory as the mechanism through which openness is interpreted, and Source Credibility Theory as the link between transparency and credibility, with perceived sponsorship transparency as the central construct.

The study is guided by the following main research question: To what extent does perceived sponsorship transparency mediate the relationship between sponsorship disclosure format and customer responses among Instagram micro-influencers? Sub-questions examined are:

- **RQ1:** Does sponsorship disclosure format differentially influence perceived sponsorship transparency across disclosure conditions?
- **RQ2:** Does the nature of influencer compensation (financial vs. in-kind) influence perceived sponsorship transparency?
- **RQ3a:** Does perceived sponsorship transparency positively influence source credibility?
- **RQ3b:** Does perceived sponsorship transparency positively influence information credibility?
- **RQ3c:** Does perceived sponsorship transparency indirectly influence online engagement through source and information credibility?
- **RQ3d:** Does perceived sponsorship transparency indirectly influence purchase intention through source and information credibility?

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: the next section presents the literature review and conceptual framework, followed by the materials and methods, results, and discussion of key findings, implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

## Literature Review

### Influencers and Parasocial Relationships

Influencers are social media personalities who cultivate engaged followings in specialized fields such as fashion, lifestyle, gaming, or technology (Chen et al., 2024; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020). Micro-influencers, typically having between 5 000 and 100 000 followers (Janssen et al., 2022), generate higher engagement and trust than macro counterparts (Conde & Casais, 2023; De Cicco et al., 2021) through niche expertise and genuine interests (Aldlimi et al., 2025).

Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin et al., 1985) describes these dynamics as one-sided psychological connections resembling friendships, increasing perceived intimacy and strengthening persuasion (Schouten et al., 2020; Boerman, 2020). Followers apply interpersonal norms of honesty and sincerity when evaluating influencer behavior, interpreting communications as relational interactions rather than purely commercial messages (Balaban et al., 2022).

This relational closeness creates vulnerability; poorly disclosed sponsorships can undermine trust and heighten betrayal when economic motives remain hidden (Jin et al., 2019; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Open acknowledgment of commercial intent may be interpreted as relational integrity (Audrezet et al., 2020), whereas concealed sponsorship may violate expectations associated with perceived friendship (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). The strength of parasocial bonds directly conditions message acceptance; followers perceiving high relational closeness are more likely to accept transparent disclosures as consistent with the influencer's authentic self (Breves et al., 2021), while the same followers may be disproportionately resistant when transparency is absent (Balaban et al., 2022), making commercial intent communication a decisive factor in whether sponsored content is accepted or rejected (Sheng et al., 2023).

When commercial intent is revealed clearly, it may reduce perceptions of deception and be interpreted as relational transparency rather than regulatory compliance (Karagür et al., 2022). Conversely, vague disclosures may obscure commercial intent, creating the impression that content is genuine rather than commercially motivated, thereby violating relational norms. This relational sensitivity provides the contextual foundation for understanding how disclosure formats influence perceived sponsorship transparency.

### The Persuasion Knowledge Model and Disclosure Effects

While Parasocial Interaction Theory establishes the relational context in which disclosure is evaluated, the Persuasion Knowledge Model explains the cognitive mechanism through which consumers process and respond to sponsorship cues.

The PKM (Friestad & Wright, 1994) posits that consumers activate persuasion knowledge when exposed to marketing tactics, though this does not automatically lead to resistance (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022); responses depend on how the persuasive attempt is evaluated in terms of honesty and fairness (Lee et al., 2021; Karagür et al., 2022). In influencer marketing, disclosure triggers persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2017), but whether awareness results in skepticism or acceptance depends on how transparently the commercial relationship is communicated (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022). When perceived as open and non-deceptive, activated persuasion knowledge may generate perceptions of honesty rather than resistance (Cao & Belo, 2023), with perceived sponsorship transparency representing the evaluative stage shaping whether disclosure enhances or undermines credibility (Karagür et al., 2022).

Drawing on PKM alongside Communication Transparency Theory (Rawlins, 2008; Men et al., 2020), explicit disclosure signals relational integrity. Communication Transparency Theory identifies three core dimensions; substantive information sharing, participatory communication, and accountability, translating in the influencer context into clarity of brand identification, openness of disclosure language, and perceived absence of manipulative intent (Karagür et al., 2022), collectively shaping whether disclosures are evaluated as genuinely transparent or merely performative (De Cicco et al., 2021).

Explicit disclosures signal commercial intent while communicating openness (Boerman, 2020), whereas implicit disclosures may activate persuasion knowledge without sufficiently signaling honesty (Audrezet et al., 2020; Bu et al., 2022). Transparency perceptions may also depend on compensation nature; in-kind rewards appear more authentic, whereas monetary compensation is interpreted as more transactional (Audrezet et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2019), and when compensation arrangements are perceived as congruent with authentic self-presentation, transparency perceptions are strengthened (Breves et al., 2021; Xie & Feng, 2023). Monetary compensation may increase the importance of clear disclosure (Xie & Feng, 2023; De Cicco et al., 2021), whereas in-kind compensation may reduce reliance on explicit disclosure cues (Audrezet et al., 2020). Accordingly:

> *H1: Sponsorship disclosure format and influencer compensation nature jointly influence perceived sponsorship transparency.*
> *H1a: Sponsorship disclosure format differentially influences perceived sponsorship transparency across disclosure conditions.*
> *H1b: The nature of influencer compensation (financial vs. in-kind) influences perceived sponsorship transparency.*

Within PKM, perceived sponsorship transparency functions as the cognitive bridge between disclosure recognition and subsequent evaluations.

### From Transparency to Credibility and Customer Responses

Transparent disclosure has downstream consequences for both the influencer and the message. Source Credibility

Theory (Hovland et al., 1954; Ohanian, 1990) posits that communicator effectiveness depends on attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity (Munnukka et al., 2016), dimensions in which micro-influencers typically perform strongly. Integrating PKM with Source Credibility Theory, transparency serves as a diagnostic cue signaling the influencer's credibility; perceived transparency strengthens credibility evaluations by reducing suspicions of hidden motives (Boerman et al., 2017; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013), functioning as a reputational safeguard maintaining authenticity and sincerity (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020; Woodroof et al., 2020). Accordingly:

*H2: Perceived sponsorship transparency positively influences source credibility.*

Information credibility refers to the perceived reliability, accuracy, and neutrality of the sponsored message (Johnson & Kaye, 2015; Jamal et al., 2021; Ou & Ho, 2024). Transparent sponsorship leads audiences to view messages as honest and unbiased, whereas ambiguous disclosures raise suspicion and reduce confidence in message claims (Cao & Belo, 2023; Sheng et al., 2023). From a PKM perspective, openly communicated persuasive intent reduces the need for cognitive defense, translating into greater willingness to accept message content as reliable (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022; De Cicco et al., 2021), with information credibility further emerging from social cues such as likes and peer engagement (Yin et al., 2018). Accordingly:

*H3: Perceived sponsorship transparency positively influences information credibility.*

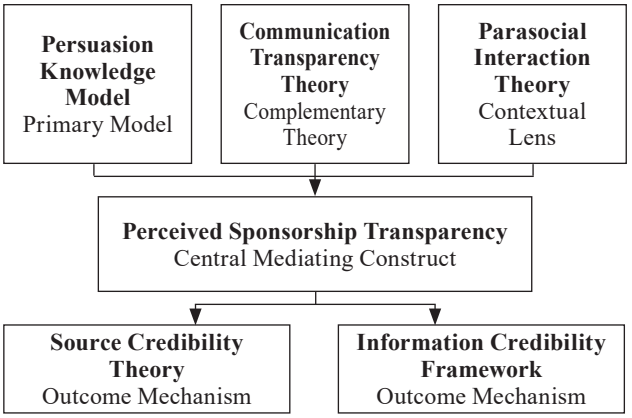
Although conceptually related, source and information credibility represent analytically distinct evaluations; audiences may perceive an influencer as trustworthy while questioning product claims, or vice versa (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024), and are therefore conceptualized as parallel mediating mechanisms through which perceived sponsorship transparency influences customer responses. Within the parasocial and PKM frameworks established earlier, credibility judgments shaped by transparency perceptions function as the evaluative outcomes that ultimately drive behavioral responses. Credible influencers generate stronger engagement and purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Martínez-López et al., 2020), and when sponsored information is perceived as accurate, message plausibility increases, enhancing willingness to interact and consider product adoption (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Han & Balabanis, 2024).

*H4a: Source credibility positively influences online engagement.*
*H4b: Source credibility positively influences purchase intention.*
*H5a: Information credibility positively influences online engagement.*
*H5b: Information credibility positively influences purchase intention.*

Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical theoretical summary of the present study, depicting the integrative role of the four theoretical perspectives and their convergence through perceived sponsorship transparency as the central mediating construct.

Figure 1

**Hierarchical Theoretical Summary**

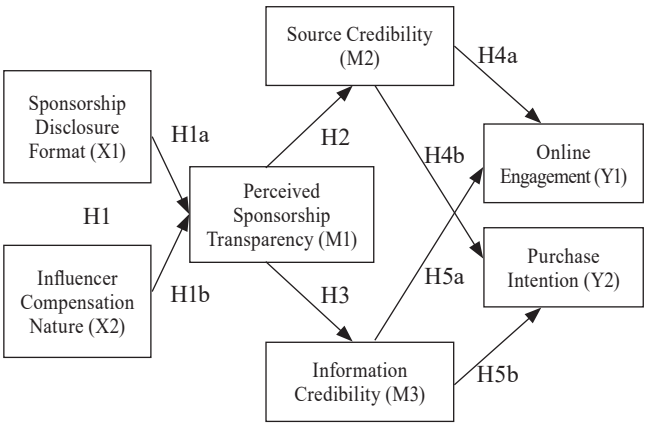



*Source: own elaboration Authors who use AI tools in the writing of a manuscript, production of images or graphical elements of the paper, or in the collection and analysis of data, must do so responsibly and in accordance with all our editorial policies, and they must be transparent in disclosing this fact. If authors used generative AI or AI-assisted technology, they should include the following statement directly before the references at the end of the manuscript:*
*During the preparation of this work the author(s) used [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] in order to [REASON]. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.*

The conceptual model (Figure 2) summarizes these relationships. Sponsorship disclosure format and compensation nature serve as independent variables influencing perceived sponsorship transparency (mediator 1). Transparency affects source (mediator 2) and information credibility (mediator 3), which drive online engagement and purchase intention (dependent variables). The framework integrates cognitive and relational processes to explain how transparency transforms disclosure practices into customer responses.

Figure 2

**Conceptual Framework**




*Source: own elaboration*

The following section details the research design, measurement scales, and data analysis techniques, followed by the results and discussion of key findings, implications, limitations, directions for future research, and conclusions.

## Method

### Research Approach and Design

To investigate how Instagram sponsorship disclosures affect perceived sponsorship transparency, a quantitative approach was used to test hypotheses and quantify relationships. The study employed a deductive, causal design to examine cause-and-effect links between sponsorship disclosure format, compensation nature, perceived sponsorship transparency, credibility, and customer responses (Hernán & Robins, 2020).

A between-subjects experimental design manipulated two independent variables: sponsorship disclosure format (none, implicit, explicit, and explicit with Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag) and compensation nature (financial or in-kind). These manipulations created seven experimental conditions. Participants were randomly assigned, with a target of 60 respondents per condition.

### Sampling and Data Collection

Non-probability snowball sampling was used via an online questionnaire distributed on social media. While not fully representative, it is suitable for targeting Instagram users aged 18–39 (Generations Y and Z), the primary audience of influencer marketing.

Data were collected via Google Forms between October 2024 and April 2025. There were 420 valid responses, equally distributed across seven conditions (n = 60 per group) (Table 1).

To ensure alignment with the research objective, examining perceived sponsorship transparency among Instagram micro-influencers, several inclusion criteria were applied. Participants were required to:

1. Be between 18 and 39 years of age.
2. Possess an active Instagram account.
3. Report prior exposure to influencer content on Instagram
4. Indicate familiarity with sponsored posts or paid partnerships on the platform
5. Report familiarity with or prior exposure to micro-influencer content, defined as accounts with between 5,000 and 100,000 followers operating within niche interest areas.

Familiarity with micro-influencer content was particularly important given the study's focus on this influencer tier, ensuring participants could meaningfully evaluate sponsorship disclosure formats and transparency cues within influencer content. Responses were screened for eligibility and completeness prior to analysis, with incomplete responses or those not meeting inclusion criteria excluded before group allocation. Data collection continued until 420 valid responses were achieved, yielding equal group sizes across seven conditions (n = 60 per group) (Table 1). All participants demonstrated meaningful engagement with influencer content and met the micro-influencer familiarity criterion, confirming sample relevance. Demographic characteristics, Instagram usage patterns, and prior experience with sponsored content are reported in section 4.1.

### Experimental Stimuli and Scenario Design

Participants viewed a mock Instagram post created with Zeoob.com to simulate realistic influencer marketing setting (see Appendix 1). The stimuli featured Emma Morgan, a fictional micro-influencer, promoting Latifa, a fictional phone accessory brand. The profile, young, tech-savvy, and relatable, reflected typical micro-influencer characteristics, while the fictional brand minimized pre-existing bias.

Seven distinct posts represented each condition, varying in compensation framing and disclosure visibility: no disclosure, implicit disclosure (like "Shoutout to @Latifa!"), explicit disclosure (like "#ad" or "#sponsored"), and explicit disclosure paired with Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag. Compensation was described as "supporting me" or "gifted product". Each post included a photo, caption, and disclosure statement mimicking Instagram's interface (Table 2).

Table 1

**Experimental Design**

| Sponsorship Disclosure Format / Compensation Nature | No Disclosure | Implicit Disclosure | Explicit Disclosure | Explicit Disclosure Combined with Instagram Tag "Paid Partnership" |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Financial Compensation** | – | 60 participants (random distribution) | 60 participants (random distribution) | 60 participants (random distribution) |
| **In-Kind Compensation** | – | 60 participants (random distribution) | 60 participants (random distribution) | 60 participants (random distribution) |
| **No Compensation** | 60 participants (random distribution) | – | – | – |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 2

**Seven Experimental Groups**

| | No Disclosure | Implicit Disclosure | Explicit Disclosure | Explicit Disclosure Combined with Instagram Tool |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Financial Compensation** | – | Shoutout to @ Latifa! #Ad | Shoutout to @Latifa for supporting me! #Sponsored | *Paid partnership with Latifa* + Shoutout to @Latifa for supporting me! #Sponsored |
| **In-Kind Compensation** | – | Shoutout to @ Latifa! #Gifted | Shoutout to @Latifa for this complimentary! #Sponsored | *Paid partnership with Latifa* + Shoutout to @Latifa for this complimentary! #Sponsored |
| **No Compensation** | N/A | – | – | – |

*Source: own elaboration*

### Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire contained five sections. The first included screening questions verifying eligibility based on the inclusion criteria mentioned previously, followed by perceptions of the Instagram post, followed by measures of perceived sponsorship transparency, source credibility, and information credibility. Subsequent sections evaluated online engagement and purchase intention for the product. The final section collected demographics and Instagram usage patterns.

### Measurement Scales

All key constructs were measured using previously validated multi-item scales adapted for the Instagram context, employing a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

Perceived sponsorship transparency was measured using the 12-item scale developed by Wojdynski et al. (2018), which captures brand presence, sponsorship clarity, disclosure visibility, and the perceived absence of deception. This scale was selected because it was specifically designed to measure how audiences evaluate transparency in sponsored and native advertising contexts, making it highly suitable for examining disclosure practices on Instagram ($\alpha = 0.86–0.95$).

Source credibility was measured using the scale developed by Munnukka et al. (2016), adapted from the model proposed by Ohanian (1990). The scale includes four dimensions, attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity, and was chosen because it specifically evaluates the credibility of peer endorsers in social media environments, which closely aligns with the role of influencers ($\alpha = 0.82–0.91$).

Information credibility was assessed using a five-item scale adapted from Xiao et al. (2018). This scale measures perceived accuracy, trustworthiness, and reliability of influencer-generated content and was selected due to its relevance to evaluating credibility within social media influencer contexts ($\alpha = 0.97$).

Online engagement was measured through six items derived from Boerman (2020), capturing behavioral and attitudinal engagement such as liking, commenting, sharing, and following the influencer. This scale was chosen because it was developed specifically to examine audience responses to disclosure practices on Instagram, aligning closely with the experimental setting of the present study ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Purchase intention was captured using a five-item scale based on Dabholkar and Sheng (2012), which evaluates respondents' likelihood of purchasing the featured product. This scale was selected because it is widely used in online consumer behavior research and reliably measures consumers' behavioral intentions in digital purchasing contexts ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Full scale items and adaptations for all constructs are provided in Appendix 2.

## Data Analysis

Data were screened for completeness and outliers before hypothesis testing. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and key patterns. Reliability and validity were confirmed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.05$), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (KMO > 0.70). Principal Component Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation verified discriminant validity and dimensional structure.

A two-way ANOVA assessed mean differences among the experimental groups, examining the main effects of sponsorship disclosure format and compensation nature on perceived sponsorship transparency, as well as their interaction effect. Regression analyses determined the extent to which independent variables explained variance in mediating and dependent variables. Stepwise multiple regression identified which dimensions of perceived sponsorship transparency and source credibility contributed most strongly to online engagement and purchase intention.

Hayes' PROCESS macro (Version 4.3) for SPSS examined mediation effects (Hayes, 2022). Model 6 investigated serial mediation, where relationships between sponsorship disclosure format and dependent variables were mediated by perceived sponsorship transparency (M1) source credibility (M2), and information credibility (M3), adjusting for compensation nature. Bootstrap technique used 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals; indirect effects were significant when intervals excluded zero.

This analytical approach provided comprehensive analysis of direct and indirect effects by combining relational, cognitive, and communicative aspects of influencer marketing.

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

*Demographic Profile*

The final sample included 420 participants randomly assigned to seven conditions (60 per group). Respondents were 55.2% female, 39% male, and 5.7% preferred not to disclose gender. All participants were aged 18-39 (Generations Y and Z), and 85.8% held or were pursuing university degrees (Table 3).

Table 3

**Demographic Profile**

| Variable | Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 232 | 55.2% |
| | Male | 164 | 39% |
| | I prefer not to answer | 24 | 5.7% |
| **Age** | 18 - 25 | 162 | 38.6% |
| | 26 - 30 | 186 | 44.3% |
| | 31 - 35 | 48 | 11.4% |
| | 36 - 39 | 24 | 5.7% |
| **Education** | High school degree | 40 | 9.5% |
| | Vocational training | 20 | 4.8% |
| | Bachelor's degree | 130 | 31% |
| | Master's degree | 186 | 44.3% |
| | PhD | 44 | 10.5% |

*Source: own elaboration*

*Instagram Use*

83.8% of participants used Instagram daily and 16.2% weekly, with 21% identifying as influencers themselves, indicating high familiarity with influencer content. These characteristics confirm the sample represents the target audience of young, tech-savvy users (Table 4).

Table 4

**Instagram Use**

| Variable | Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do you have an Instagram account? | Yes | 420 | 100% |
| | No | 0 | 0% |
| Usage frequency | Daily | 352 | 83.8% |
| | Weekly | 68 | 16.2% |
| Do you consider yourself an influencer? | Yes | 88 | 21% |
| | No | 332 | 79% |

*Source: own elaboration*

### Reliability and Validity of the Scales

All scales demonstrated adequate reliability and validity, confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, KMO index, and Bartlett's test. Perceived sponsorship transparency retained three dimensions (brand presence, disclosure, and lack of deception) after eliminating the "sponsorship clarity" dimension due to low internal consistency ($\alpha = .522$). A second exploratory factor analysis yielded high sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.893), significant Bartlett's test ($p < .001$), substantial explained variance (87.4%), and satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.779$–$0.888$), with all factor loadings exceeding the commonly accepted threshold, collectively providing reasonable empirical support for the coherence and validity of the retained construct. The absence of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is acknowledged as a limitation of the present study.

Source credibility retained four dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity (KMO = 0.872; variance = 85.7%), with one item ("The influencer looks sexy") *removed* due to cross-loading, and all factors exceeding $\alpha > .70$. Information credibility was unidimensional with five items, showing strong reliability ($\alpha = .928$) and validity (KMO = 0.926; variance = 65%). Online engagement demonstrated exceptional reliability ($\alpha = .967$), KMO = 0.939, and variance = 98.6%. Purchase intention showed strong reliability ($\alpha = .928$) and validity (KMO = 0.864; variance = 82.8%) after removing one negatively worded item "I don't believe I'd ever consider buying this product."

### Descriptive Statistics

Mean scores for perceived sponsorship transparency (M = 4.14), source credibility (M = 5.59), information credibility (M = 5.38), online engagement (M = 5.15), and purchase intention (M = 4.86) all exceeded the scale midpoint, suggesting favorable perceptions and behavioral intentions. Source credibility showed the highest mean and lowest variability (SD = 1.00), while information credibility, online engagement, and purchase intention reflected greater variability (SDs = 1.94–2.04). Explicit disclosures, particularly combined with Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag, yielded the highest scores across constructs, while no-disclosure conditions yielded the lowest, suggesting explicit disclosures enhance credibility perceptions and customer responses (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5

**Descriptive Statistics of the Measurement Scales**

| Scale | N | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Sponsorship Transparency. | 420 | 1.00 | 6.33 | 4.1397 | 1.20789 | 1.461 |
| Source Credibility | 420 | 2.57 | 7.00 | 5.5874 | 1.00071 | 1.001 |
| Information Credibility | 420 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.3829 | 1.94067 | 3.766 |
| Online Engagement | 420 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 5.1508 | 1.99847 | 3.994 |
| Purchase Intent | 420 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 4.8560 | 2.03933 | 4.159 |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 6

**Descriptive Statistics of the Measurement Scales according to the Experimental Groups**

| Scale | No disclosure | Implicit disclosure | | Explicit disclosure | | Explicit disclosure combined with Instagram tool | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Financial | In-kind | Financial | In-kind | Financial | In-kind |
| Perceived Sponsorship Transparency. | 2.0593 | 3.8519 | 3.1037 | 4.8185 | 4.7963 | 5.2704 | 5.0778 |
| Source Credibility | 4.8310 | 4.7976 | 4.8000 | 5.9071 | 6.1738 | 6.3476 | 6.2548 |
| Information Credibility | 3.8667 | 3.5667 | 3.8333 | 6.5200 | 6.4000 | 6.7400 | 6.7533 |
| Online Engagement | 3.6500 | 3.5167 | 3.5000 | 6.2111 | 6.3000 | 6.5733 | 6.2889 |
| Purchase Intent | 3.2000 | 3.2000 | 3.1833 | 6.1500 | 6.0000 | 6.2917 | 5.9667 |

*Source: own elaboration*

## Hypotheses Testing

### *Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure Format and Influencer Compensation Nature (H1a, H1b, and H1)*

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with sponsorship disclosure format and compensation nature as between-subject factors. Three sponsorship disclosure formats (implicit, explicit, and explicit combined with Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag) were crossed with two compensation types (financial and in-kind), yielding six active experimental conditions. An additional baseline condition (n = 60) received no disclosure and no compensation information, serving as a reference point for post-hoc comparisons. Due to the incomplete factorial structure, whereby the no-disclosure condition existed only in combination with no compensation, the two-way ANOVA was conducted on the six active conditions. Results revealed a significant main effect of sponsorship disclosure format on perceived sponsorship transparency ($F(2) = 3.114$, $p = .041$), confirming H1a. Explicit disclosures and those combined with Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag generated significantly higher transparency perceptions than the no-disclosure baseline. Compensation nature showed no significant main effect ($F(1) = 0.654$, $p = .401$), rejecting H1b. The interaction effect was also non-significant ($F(2) = 0.443$, $p = .654$), indicating that sponsorship disclosure format and compensation nature operate independently rather than jointly, partially challenging the premise of H1 (Table 7)

Post-hoc Scheffé tests revealed that the only significant pairwise difference was between the no-disclosure baseline and explicit disclosure combined with Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag (difference = 0.37), suggesting explicit disclosure alone does not substantially affect transparency perceptions unless reinforced by the platform tag (Table 8).

Table 7

**Tests of Between-Subject Effects**

| | Sum of squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Hypothesis result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sponsorship Disclosure Format | 4.019 | 2 | 2.009 | 3.114 | 0.041 | Supported |
| Compensation nature | 0.416 | 1 | 0.416 | 0.654 | 0.401 | Not supported |
| Sponsorship Disclosure Format X Compensation Nature | 0.564 | 2 | 0.282 | 0.443 | 0.654 | Not supported |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 8

**Post-Hoc Analysis of The Significant Differences**

| Sponsorship Disclosure Format (A) | Sponsorship Disclosure Format (B) | Difference (A-B) | Standard Error | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No Disclosure | Implicit Disclosure | -0.1126 | 0.13013 | 0.840 |
| | Explicit Disclosure | -0.2759 | 0.13198 | 0.207 |
| | Explicit Disclosure Combined with IG Tool | -0.3746* | 0.13037 | 0.038 |
| Implicit Disclosure | No Disclosure | 0.1126 | 0.13013 | 0.840 |
| | Explicit Disclosure | -0.1663 | 0.10696 | 0.471 |
| | Explicit Disclosure with IG Tool | -0.2603 | 0.10502 | 0.101 |
| Explicit Disclosure | No Disclosure | 0.2759 | 0.13198 | 0.207 |
| | Implicit Disclosure | 0.1663 | 0.10696 | 0.471 |
| | Explicit Disclosure with IG Tool | -0.0922 | 0.10704 | 0.847 |
| Explicit Disclosure Combined with IG Tool. | No disclosure | 0.3746* | 0.13037 | 0.038 |
| | Implicit Disclosure | 0.2603 | 0.10502 | 0.101 |
| | Explicit Disclosure | 0.0922 | 0.10704 | 0.847 |

*Source: own elaboration*

### *Relationships between Perceived Sponsorship Transparency, Credibility, and Customer Responses (H2–H5b)*

*Simple Regression*

Simple regression confirmed all hypotheses (H2–H5b) with statistical significance ($p < .001$). Perceived sponsorship transparency positively influenced source credibility ($\beta = 0.337$, $t = 6.98$, $R^2 = 0.11$) and information credibility ($\beta = 0.241$, $t = 5.03$, $R^2 = 0.054$), confirming H2 and H3, though transparency impacted source credibility more strongly than information credibility. Source credibility strongly predicted online engagement ($\beta = 0.791$, $t = 26.89$, $R^2 = 0.633$) and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.817$, $t = 28.69$, $R^2 = 0.666$), confirming H4a and H4b. Information credibility positively predicted online engagement ($\beta = 0.599$, $t = 14.09$, $R^2 = 0.349$) and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.572$, $t = 14.95$, $R^2 = 0.366$), confirming H5a and H5b (Table 9)

*Stepwise Multiple Regression*

Stepwise regression was conducted as an exploratory complement to hypothesis testing to identify which dimensions of perceived sponsorship transparency and source credibility most strongly predicted dependent variables. Since these dimensions are conceptually parallel rather than hierarchically ordered, stepwise regression was retained as the most appropriate method for identifying relative predictive importance without imposing an arbitrary entry sequence. Results should be interpreted as indicative of construct dimension importance rather than definitive causal hierarchies.

For H2, disclosure ($\beta = 0.36$) and lack of deception ($\beta = 0.25$) positively predicted source credibility, while brand presence showed a slight negative effect ($\beta = -0.10$, $p = .029$). For H3, brand presence ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = .046$) and disclosure ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .001$) predicted information credibility, with lack of deception removed due to insignificance.

Table 9

**Statistical significance of the model (H2, H3, H4a, H4b, H5a, and H5b)**

| Hypothesis | Independent Variable | Dependent Variable | F | Sig. | R Square | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Hypothesis Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H2 | Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Source Credibility | 46.789 | 0.000 | 0.109 | 0.495 | 0.069 | 0.337 | 6.983 | Confirmed |
| H3 | Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Information Credibility | 25.386 | 0.000 | 0.054 | 0.338 | 0.057 | 0.241 | 5.026 | Confirmed |
| H4a | Source Credibility | Online Engagement | 739.586 | 0.000 | 0.633 | 1.273 | 0.042 | 0.791 | 26.892 | Confirmed |
| H4b | Source Credibility | Purchase Intention | 793.189 | 0.000 | 0.666 | 1.215 | 0.037 | 0.817 | 28.688 | Confirmed |
| H5a | Information Credibility | Online Engagement | 265.086 | 0.000 | 0.349 | 1.016 | 0.054 | 0.599 | 14.089 | Confirmed |
| H5b | Information Credibility | Purchase Intention | 248.073 | 0.000 | 0.366 | 0.979 | 0.058 | 0.572 | 14.948 | Confirmed |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 10

**Statistical significance of the stepwise model (H3a, H3b, H4a, and H4b)**

| Hypothesis | Independent Variable | Dimension | Beta | t | Sig. | Dependent Variable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H2 | Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Disclosure | 0.362 | 7.587 | 0.000 | Source Credibility |
| | | Lack of Deception | 0.249 | 5.545 | 0.000 | |
| | | Brand Presence | -0.102 | -2.138 | 0.029 | |
| H3 | Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Disclosure | 0.259 | 5.417 | 0.000 | Information Credibility |
| | | Brand Presence | 0.088 | 1.951 | 0.046 | |
| H4a | Source Credibility | Attractiveness | 0.103 | 2.617 | 0.008 | Online Engagement |
| | | Expertise | 0.237 | 6.193 | 0.000 | |
| | | Similarity | 0.566 | 14.561 | 0.000 | |
| H4b | Source Credibility | Expertise | 0.307 | 8.784 | 0.000 | Purchase Intention |
| | | Similarity | 0.561 | 17.381 | 0.000 | |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 11

**Removed dimensions from the stepwise model:**

| Hypothesis | Independent Variable | Removed Dimension | t-value | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H3 | Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Lack of Deception | 0.348 | 0.716 |
| H4a | Source Credibility | Trustworthiness | 1.583 | 0.103 |
| H4b | Source Credibility | Attractiveness | 1.935 | 0.052 |
| | | Trustworthiness | 1.528 | 0.117 |

*Source: own elaboration*

For H4a, expertise (β = 0.24), similarity (β = 0.57), and attractiveness (β = 0.10) predicted online engagement, with similarity as the strongest predictor. For H4b, only expertise (β = 0.31) and similarity (β = 0.56) predicted purchase intention (Tables 10 and 11).

### *Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Macro, Model 6)*

Serial mediation models tested whether perceived sponsorship transparency (M1), source credibility (M2), and information credibility (M3) mediated sponsorship disclosure format's impact on online engagement and purchase intention, with compensation nature as a covariate.

*Model 1* (disclosure → transparency → source credibility → online engagement) was significant ($R^2$ = .79, F = 189.28, p < .001), with a significant serial indirect effect (b = 1.97, 95% CI [0.91, 3.09]) and non-significant direct effect (b = 0.26, p = .70), supporting full mediation (Table 12).

*Model 2* (disclosure → transparency → source credibility → purchase intention) was significant ($R^2$ = .78, F = 180.27, p < .001), with a significant indirect effect (b = 1.31, 95% CI [0.60, 2.03]) and non-significant direct effect (b = 0.22, p = .63), confirming full mediation (Table 13).

*Model 3* (disclosure → transparency → information credibility → online engagement) explained 92% of engagement variance (F = 563.40, p < .001), with a significant indirect effect (b = 2.53, 95% CI [1.42, 3.68]) and non-significant direct effect (b = −0.80, p = .06) (Table 14).

*Model 4* (disclosure → transparency → information credibility → purchase intention) accounted for 91% of variance (F = 513.86, p < .001), with a significant indirect effect (b = 1.69, 95% CI [0.94, 2.48]) and non-significant direct effect (b = −0.51, p = .09) (Table 15).

The high explanatory power of Models 3 and 4 ($R^2$ = .92 for online engagement and $R^2$ = .91 for purchase intention) reflects the strong conceptual relationship between credibility perceptions and customer responses in influencer marketing contexts, when sponsored information is perceived as accurate and trustworthy, audiences are more likely to engage and consider product adoption (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Martínez-López et al., 2020). Robustness checks confirmed no significant multicollinearity (all VIF values < 5, tolerance > 0.20) and no substantial common method bias (Harman's single-factor test < 50% variance explained), with the between-subjects experimental design further reducing the likelihood of method-driven effects. Compensation nature showed slight negative effects on both credibility dimensions (p = .005) and a slight positive

Table 12

**Model 1 – Mediation through Transparency and Source Credibility (DV: Online Engagement)**

| Path | Effect (b) | SE | t | p | 95% CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency | 9.29 | 0.64 | 14.47 | <.001 | [8.02, 10.55] |
| Transparency → Source Credibility | 0.31 | 0.09 | 3.50 | .001 | [0.14, 0.49] |
| Source Credibility → Online Engagement | 0.68 | 0.04 | 18.30 | <.001 | [0.61, 0.75] |
| Direct Effect (Disclosure Type → Online Engagement) | 0.26 | 0.67 | 0.39 | .70 | [–1.06, 1.58] |
| Serial Indirect Effect (X → M1 → M2 → Y) | 1.97 | 0.55 | – | – | [0.91, 3.09] |
| Model $R^2$ (Online Engagement) | .79 | | | | |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 13

**Model 2 – Mediation through Transparency and Source Credibility (DV: Purchase Intention)**

| Path | Effect (b) | SE | t | p | 95% CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency | 9.29 | 0.64 | 14.47 | < .001 | [8.02, 10.55] |
| Transparency → Source Credibility | 0.31 | 0.09 | 3.50 | .001 | [0.14, 0.49] |
| Source Credibility → Purchase Intention | 0.45 | 0.03 | 17.57 | < .001 | [0.40, 0.50] |
| Direct Effect (Disclosure Type → Purchase Intention) | 0.22 | 0.46 | 0.48 | .63 | [–0.69, 1.14] |
| Serial Indirect Effect (X → M1 → M2 → Y) | 1.31 | 0.36 | – | – | [0.60, 2.03] |
| Model $R^2$ (Purchase Intention) | .78 | | | | |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 14

**Model 3 – Mediation through Transparency and Information Credibility (DV: Online Engagement)**

| Path | Effect (b) | SE | t | p | 95% CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency | 9.29 | 0.64 | 14.47 | < .001 | [8.02, 10.55] |
| Transparency → Information Credibility | 0.23 | 0.06 | 3.83 | < .001 | [0.11, 0.35] |
| Information Credibility → Online Engagement | 1.19 | 0.03 | 34.26 | < .001 | [1.12, 1.26] |
| Direct Effect (Disclosure Type → Online Engagement) | –0.80 | 0.42 | –1.90 | .059 | [–1.63, 0.03] |
| Serial Indirect Effect (X → M1 → M2 → Y) | 2.53 | 0.58 | – | – | [1.42, 3.68] |
| Model $R^2$ (Online Engagement) | .92 | | | | |

*Source: own elaboration*

Table 15

**Model 4 – Mediation through Transparency and Information Credibility (DV: Purchase Intention)**

| Path | Effect (b) | SE | t | p | 95% CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency | 9.29 | 0.64 | 14.47 | < .001 | [8.02, 10.55] |
| Transparency → Information Credibility | 0.23 | 0.06 | 3.83 | < .001 | [0.11, 0.35] |
| Information Credibility → Purchase Intention | 0.80 | 0.02 | 32.38 | < .001 | [0.75, 0.84] |
| Direct Effect (Disclosure Type → Purchase Intention) | –0.51 | 0.30 | –1.70 | .091 | [–1.10, 0.08] |
| Serial Indirect Effect (X → M1 → M2 → Y) | 1.69 | 0.39 | – | – | [0.94, 2.48] |
| Model $R^2$ (Purchase Intention) | .91 | | | | |

*Source: own elaboration*

impact on purchase intention (b = 0.74, p = .012), but did not strongly predict transparency (p > .18), leaving primary mediation patterns unaffected.

## Results Summary

Table 16 summarizes all hypothesis and mediation analysis results, presenting direct effects between constructs and indirect mediation paths tested using PROCESS Model 6, illustrating how perceived sponsorship transparency operates as the central mediating mechanism linking sponsorship disclosure format to credibility evaluations and subsequent customer responses.

with prior studies (Boerman et al., 2017; Carr & Hayes, 2014; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020; Evans et al., 2017; Kay et al., 2020; Wojdynski et al., 2018). Posts with clear hashtags like "#ad," "#sponsored," or Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag are perceived as more transparent than undisclosed posts (Boerman & Müller, 2022), while abbreviated tags such as "#sp" were no more effective than no disclosure, demonstrating that ambiguous indicators fail to meet transparency expectations.

The findings highlight a distinction between hashtag and platform-integrated disclosure formats. While hashtag disclosures rely on influencer-generated signals, platform

Table 16

**Results Summary**

| Hypothesis | Relationship Tested | Direct Effect | Mediation Path (PROCESS Model 6) | Indirect Effect Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Sponsorship Disclosure Format X Compensation Nature→ Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Not Supported | – | – |
| H1a | Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Supported | – | – |
| H1b | Influencer Compensation Nature → Perceived Sponsorship Transparency | Not Supported | – | – |
| H2 | Perceived Sponsorship Transparency → Source Credibility | Supported | Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency → Source Credibility → Outcome | Supported (Full Mediation in Models 1 & 2) |
| H3 | Perceived Sponsorship Transparency → Information Credibility | Supported | Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency → Information Credibility → Outcome | Supported (Full Mediation in Models 3 & 4) |
| H4a | Source Credibility → Online Engagement | Supported | Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency → Source Credibility → online Engagement | Supported (Full Serial Mediation) |
| H4b | Source Credibility → Purchase Intention | Supported | Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency → Source Credibility → Purchase Intention | Supported (Full Serial Mediation) |
| H5a | Information Credibility → Online Engagement | Supported | Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency → Information Credibility → Online Engagement | Supported (Full Serial Mediation) |
| H5b | Information Credibility → Purchase Intention | Supported | Sponsorship Disclosure Format → Transparency → Information Credibility → Purchase Intention | Supported (Full Serial Mediation) |

*Source: own elaboration*

## Discussion

Results confirm that sponsorship disclosure format differentially influences perceived sponsorship transparency while compensation nature does not, consistent

disclosures represent standardized, system-supported cues functioning as institutional signals endorsed by the platform. This extends the Persuasion Knowledge Model beyond individual-level cues to include platform-level signals, and extends Communication Transparency Theory

by showing that perceived sponsorship transparency is shaped not only by influencer behavior but also by platform design.

Higher perceived sponsorship transparency strengthened both source and information credibility (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019), which in turn positively influenced online engagement and purchase intention (Lou et al., 2021; Martínez-López et al., 2020). Serial mediation analyses showed that perceived sponsorship transparency and credibility mediated disclosure format's influence on outcomes; direct effects were non-significant, indicating full mediation and confirming that transparency shapes credibility rather than directly triggering behavior.

The study contributes by establishing perceived sponsorship transparency as a key psychological intermediary linking disclosure format to credibility and outcomes. The findings extend PKM by showing that disclosure-triggered persuasion knowledge does not necessarily generate resistance; when perceived as open and sincere, it enhances credibility, reframing persuasive intent as relational honesty. Communication Transparency Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory are reinforced by demonstrating that transparent communication strengthens trust driving credibility and behavior. Platform-integrated disclosures function as institutional transparency signals, and the serial mediation pathway positions perceived sponsorship transparency as a layered evaluative process shaped by influencer behavior, message content, and platform design.

From a practical perspective, influencers and brands should adopt explicit, standardized disclosure formats using platform tools such as Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag to reduce skepticism, promote engagement, and foster trust.

The study relied on non-probability snowball sampling, limiting representativeness and introducing homogeneity bias. Approximately 21% of respondents identified as influencers, which may have influenced responses due to higher persuasion knowledge. Future research should examine whether respondent type moderates perceived sponsorship transparency. The use of a fictitious influencer strengthened internal validity but reduced ecological validity, as real-world contexts involve established trust and brand equity. The study also examined only two compensation forms and primarily Instagram users aged 18–39, limiting generalizability.

Stepwise regression was retained because construct dimensions are conceptually parallel rather than hierarchical, though results should be interpreted as indicative rather than causal. While CFA would ideally validate the three-dimensional transparency structure, exploratory factor analysis showed strong adequacy (KMO = 0.893, $p < .001$), high explained variance (87.4%), and satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = 0.779–0.888$), though the absence of CFA remains a limitation.

Future research could examine transparency across platforms such as YouTube or TikTok (De Jans et al., 2018), explore moderators like authenticity and skepticism (Boerman & Müller, 2022), and use longitudinal and probability-based designs. Studies using real influencer–brand collaborations and broader compensation structures would improve ecological validity and generalizability.

## Conclusion

This study examined perceived sponsorship transparency in influencer marketing among Instagram micro-influencers. Sponsorship disclosure format influences perceived transparency, with explicit disclosures increasing transparency while implicit or absent disclosures do not; compensation nature had no significant effect. Perceived sponsorship transparency positively influenced source and information credibility, which in turn increased engagement and purchase intention.

Serial mediation confirmed that disclosure format influences outcomes through transparency and credibility, establishing perceived sponsorship transparency as the key mechanism. Explicit disclosures combined with Instagram's "Paid Partnership" tag produced the strongest transparency perceptions, while implicit disclosures performed similarly to no disclosure. Source credibility emerged as a stronger mediator, indicating that audiences evaluate the influencer before the message, and that transparency is an active evaluative stage.

Theoretically, the findings extend PKM by showing that transparent disclosure reframes persuasive intent as relational honesty rather than generating resistance, and support Communication Transparency and Parasocial Interaction theories by confirming that openness reinforces trust. Practically, perceived sponsorship transparency serves as a strategic tool: explicit disclosures enhance credibility while preserving relationships and supporting ethical, compliant marketing.

Future research should examine perceived sponsorship transparency effects across influencer tiers, platforms, and sponsorship formats, consider the role of brand life cycle, and explore partnership duration, behavioral data, and longitudinal designs to validate findings across broader influencer marketing contexts. Ultimately, perceived sponsorship transparency represents a sustainable pathway toward both ethical and effective influencer marketing, demonstrating that openness and persuasion can coexist rather than conflict.

## References

Aldlimi, T., Priporas, C., & Chang, S. (2025). Engagement in influencer marketing: A systematic review of key drivers, behaviors, and future research directions. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 24*(3), 1541-1566. https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2485

Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Guidry Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research, 117,* 557-569. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008

Baghel, D. (2023). The role of influencer authenticity and brand trust in shaping consumer behavior: Strategies

to engage Generation Z. ShodhKosh: *Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 4*(1), 1259-1271. https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.3327

Balaban, D.C., Szambolics, J., & Chirică, M. (2022). Parasocial relations and social media influencers' persuasive power: Exploring the moderating role of product involvement. *Acta Psychologica, 230,* 103731. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103731

Boerman, S.C. (2020). The effects of the standardized Instagram disclosure for micro- and meso-influencers. *Computers in Human Behavior, 103,* 199-207. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.09.015

Boerman, S.C., & Müller, C.M. (2022). Understanding which cues people use to identify influencer marketing on Instagram: An eye-tracking study and experiment. *International Journal of Advertising, 41*(1), 6-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1986256

Boerman, S.C., Willemsen, L.M., & van der Aa, E.P. (2017). "This post is sponsored": Effects of sponsorship disclosure on persuasion knowledge and electronic word of mouth in the context of Facebook. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 38,* 82-92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2016.12.002

Breves, P., Amrehn, J., Heidenreich, A., Liebers, N., & Schramm, H. (2021). Blind trust? The importance and interplay of parasocial relationships and advertising disclosures in explaining influencers' persuasive effects on their followers. *International Journal of Advertising, 40*(7), 1209-1229. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1881237

Bu, Y., Parkinson, J., & Thaichon, P. (2022). Influencer marketing: Sponsorship disclosure and value co-creation behaviour. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 40*(7), 854–870. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2021-0310

Campbell, C., & Farrell, J.R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. *Business Horizons, 63*(4), 469-479. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003

Cao, Z., & Belo, R. (2024). Effects of explicit sponsorship disclosure on user engagement in social media influencer marketing. *MIS Quarterly, 48*(1), 375-392. https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2023/17944

Carpenter, C.C., & Bonin II, M. (2021). To win friends and influence people: Regulation and enforcement of influencer marketing after ten years of the Endorsement Guides. *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law, 23*(2), 253-312. https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/jetlaw/vol23/iss2/1

Carr, C.T., & Hayes, R.A. (2014). The effect of disclosure of third-party influence on an opinion leader's credibility and electronic word of mouth in two-step flow. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 14*(1), 38-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2014.909296

Chen, J., Zhang, Y., Cai, H., Liu, L., Liao, M., & Fang, J. (2024). A comprehensive overview of micro-influencer marketing: Decoding the current landscape, impacts, and trends. *Behavioral Sciences, 14*(3), 243. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14030243

Conde, R., & Casais, B. (2023). Micro, macro and mega-influencers on Instagram: The power of persuasion via the parasocial relationship. *Journal of Business Research, 158,* 113708. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113708

Dabholkar, P.A., & Sheng, X. (2012). Consumer participation in using online recommendation agents: Effects on satisfaction, trust, and purchase intentions. *The Service Industries Journal, 32*(9), 1433-1449. https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2011.624596

De Cicco, R., Iacobucci, S., & Pagliaro, S. (2021). The effect of influencer-product fit on advertising recognition and the role of an enhanced disclosure in increasing sponsorship transparency. *International Journal of Advertising, 40*(5), 733-759. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1801198

De Jans, S., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2018). How an advertising disclosure alerts young adolescents to sponsored vlogs: The moderating role of a peer-based advertising literacy intervention through an informational vlog. *Journal of Advertising, 47*(4), 309-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2018.1539363

Demand Sage. (2026). *Instagram statistics 2026: How many people use Instagram?* Demand Sage. https://www.demandsage.com/instagram-statistics/

De Veirman, M., & Hudders, L. (2020). Disclosing sponsored Instagram posts: The role of material connection with the brand and message-sidedness when disclosing covert advertising. *International Journal of Advertising, 39*(1), 94-130. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1575108

Eisend, M., van Reijmersdal, E.A., Boerman, S.C., & Tarrahi, F. (2020). A meta-analysis of the effects of disclosing sponsored content. *Journal of Advertising, 49*(3), 344-366. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1765909

Eisend, M., & Tarrahi, F. (2022). Persuasion knowledge in the marketplace: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 32*(1), 3-22. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1258

European Parliament. (2025). *Report on the Protection of Minors Online*, A10-0213/2025. European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2025-0213_EN.html

Evans, N.J., Phua, J., Lim, J., & Jun, H. (2017). Disclosing Instagram influencer advertising: The effects of disclosure language on advertising recognition, attitudes, and behavioural intent. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 17*(2), 138-149. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2017.1366885

Evans, N.J., Wojdynski, B.W., & Hoy, M.G. (2019). Sponsorship transparency as a mediator of negative effects of covert ad recognition. *International Journal of Advertising, 38*(3), 364-382. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2018.1474998

Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1994). The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research, 21*(1), 1-31. https://doi.org/10.1086/209380

Giuffredi-Kähr, A., Petrova, A., & Malär, L. (2022). Sponsorship disclosure of influencers: A curse or a blessing? *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 57*(1), 18-34. https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968221075686

Hayes, A.F. (2022). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press. https://www.guilford.com/books/Introduction-to-Mediation-Moderation-and-Conditional-Process-Analysis/Andrew-Hayes/9781462549030

Hernán, M.A., & Robins, J.M. (2020). *Causal inference: What if.* Chapman & Hall/CRC. https://www.miguelhernan.org/whatifbook/

Horton, D., & Wohl, R.R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry, 19*(3), 215–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049

Hovland, C.I., Janis, I.L., & Kelley, H.H. (1954). Communication and persuasion. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 18*(2), 152. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0053111

Influencer Marketing Hub. (2025). *Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report 2025.* https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/

Jamal, F.N., Othman, N.A., Saleh, R.C., Nurhanay, A.H., & Rohmah, W. (2021). Evaluating information credibility toward green marketing in Indonesia. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business, 8*(2), 427-438. https://doi.org/10.13106/JAFEB.2021.VOL8.NO2.0427

Jhawar, V., Varshney, S., & Kumar, A. (2025). How does advertising disclosure on social media impact influencer avoidance, influencer switching and brand avoidance? *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 42*(1), 24-36. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-11-2023-6426

Jin, S.V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2019). Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. Marketing *Intelligence & Planning, 37*(5), 567-579. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2018-0375

Johnson, T.J., & Kaye, B.K. (2015). Reasons to believe: Influence of credibility on motivations for using social networking sites. *Computers in Human Behavior, 50,* 544-555. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.04.002

Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: The impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. *Journal of Marketing Management, 36*(3-4), 248-278. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1718740

Karagür, Z., Becker, J.M., Klein, K., & Edeling, A. (2022). How, why, and when disclosure type matters for influencer marketing. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 39,* 313-335. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2021.09.006

Lee, S.S., Vollmer, B.T., Yue, C.A., & Johnson, B.K. (2021). Impartial endorsements: Influencer and celebrity declarations of non-sponsorship and honesty. *Computers in Human Behavior, 122,* 106858. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106858

Liu, X., & Zheng, X. (2024). The persuasive power of social media influencers in brand credibility and purchase intention. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 11,* 15. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02512-1

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 19*(1), 58-73. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501

Lou, C., Ma, W., & Feng, Y. (2021). A sponsorship disclosure is not enough? How advertising literacy intervention affects consumer reactions to sponsored influencer posts. *Journal of Promotion Management, 27*(2), 278-305. https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2020.1829771

Martínez-López, F.J., Anaya-Sánchez, R., Esteban-Millat, I., Torrez-Meruvia, H., D'Alessandro, S., & Miles, M. (2020). Influencer marketing: Brand control, commercial orientation and post credibility. *Journal of Marketing Management, 36*(17-18), 1805-1831. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1806906

Men, L.R., Ping, H., & Yue, C.A. (2020). Examining the effects of organizational transparency on employee–organization relationships: The mediating role of trust. *Public Relations Review, 46*(2), 101880. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101880

Metzger, M.J., & Flanagin, A.J. (2013). Credibility and trust of information in online environments: The use of cognitive heuristics. *Journal of Pragmatics, 59,* 210-220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.07.012

Munnukka, J., Uusitalo, O., & Toivonen, H. (2016). Credibility of a peer endorser and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 33*(3), 182-192. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-11-2014-1221

Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising, 19*(3), 39-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191

Ou, M., & Ho, S.S. (2024). Factors associated with information credibility perceptions: A meta-analysis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 101*(2), 346-372. https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990231222556

Petty, R.E., & Cacioppo, J.T. (1986). Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change. Springer-Verlag. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-4964-1

Rawlins, B.L. (2008). Measuring the relationship between organizational transparency and employee trust. *Public Relations Journal, 2*(2), 1-21. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/885/

Rubin, A.M., Perse, E.M., & Powell, R.A. (1985). Loneliness, parasocial interaction, and local television news viewing. *Human Communication Research, 12*(2), 155-180. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1985.tb00071.x

Sárközi, D., & Szabó, Z. (2024). Evaluating the effectiveness of differentiated branding strategies for sustainable products utilizing recycled plastics in Hungary. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Business and Economics, 12*(2), 109-135. https://scientificia.com/index.php/JEBE/article/view/2313731

Schouten, A.P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. micro-influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of source credibility and perceived authenticity. *International Journal of Advertising, 39*(2), 258-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898

Sheng, J., Lee, Y.H., & Lan, H. (2023). Parasocial relationships with micro-influencers: Do sponsorship disclosure and electronic word-of-mouth disrupt? *Internet Research, 34*(3), 849-867. https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-12-2021-0903

Statista. (2026). *Global influencer marketing platform market size* (Stat. No. 1036560). Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1036560/global-influencer-marketing-platform-market-size/

Szabó, Z., Komáromi Gergely, A., & Széles, Z. (2014). The role of event marketing in case of the Buda Castle Wine Festival. In *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference of the Academy of Wine Business Research* (pp. 883–894). https://m2.mtmt.hu/gui2/?mode=browse&params=publication%3B2790336

Van Reijmersdal, E.A., Fransen, M.L., van Noort, G., Opree, S.J., Vandeberg, L., Reusch, S., van Lieshout, F., & Boerman, S.C. (2016). Effects of disclosing sponsored content in blogs: How the use of resistance strategies mediates effects on persuasion. *American Behavioral Scientist, 60*(12), 1458-1474. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216660141

Van Reijmersdal, E.A., Brussee, E., Evans, N.J., & Wojdynski, B.W. (2023). Disclosure-driven recognition of native advertising: A test of two competing mechanisms. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 23*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2022.2146991

Van Reijmersdal, E.A., Walet, M., & Gudmundsdóttir, A. (2024). Influencer marketing: Explaining the effects of influencer self-presentation strategies on brand responses through source credibility. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 42*(7), 1214-1233. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-03-2023-0125

Wojdynski, B.W., & Evans, N.J. (2016). Going native: Effects of disclosure position and language on the recognition and evaluation of online native advertising. *Journal of Advertising, 45*(2), 157-168. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2015.1115380

Wojdynski, B.W., Evans, N.J., & Hoy, M. G. (2018). Measuring sponsorship transparency in the age of native advertising. *Journal of Consumer Affairs, 52*(1), 115-137. https://doi.org/10.1111/joca.12144

Woodroof, P.J., Howie, K.M., Syrdal, H.A., & VanMeter, R. (2020). What's done in the dark will be brought to the light: Effects of influencer transparency on product efficacy and purchase intentions. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 29*(5), 675-688. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-05-2019-2362

Xiao, M., Wang, R., & Chan-Olmsted, S. (2018). Factors affecting YouTube influencer marketing credibility: A heuristic-systematic model. *Journal of Media Business Studies, 15*(3), 188-213. https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2018.1501146

Xie, Q., & Feng, Y. (2023). How to strategically disclose sponsored content on Instagram? The synergy effects of two types of sponsorship disclosures in influencer marketing. *International Journal of Advertising, 42*(2), 317-343. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2071393

Yin, C., Sun, Y., Fang, Y., & Lim, K. (2018). Exploring the dual role of cognitive heuristics and the moderating effect of gender in microblog information credibility evaluation. *Information Technology & People, 31*(3), 741-769. https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-12-2016-0300

Zhang, Y., & Szabó, Z. (2024). Digital transformation in the tourism industry: A comparative literature review. *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences, 72*(1), 166-179. http://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/72/20240667