

How Influencers Shape Purchase Intentions for New Energy Vehicles: A Trust Path Analysis Based on Source Credibility Theory

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Abstract

The rapid development of China's new energy vehicle industry has not been matched by equivalent growth in consumer adoption, indicating the importance of understanding demand side determinants of purchase intention. This study examines how social media influencers affect consumers' purchase intention toward new energy vehicles by integrating the Stimulus Organism Response framework with Source Credibility Theory. Based on survey data collected from potential new energy vehicle consumers in Beijing and Shanghai, structural equation modeling was employed to test the relationships among influencer expertise, perceived information quality, trust in the influencer, and purchase intention. The results show that influencer expertise does not have a significant direct effect on perceived information quality or purchase intention. In contrast, perceived information quality significantly enhances trust in the influencer, and trust emerges as the strongest predictor of new energy vehicle purchase intention. These findings suggest that consumers rely more on the quality of information and the trustworthiness of influencers than on perceived expertise

alone when evaluating high involvement and high uncertainty products. This study contributes to the literature by refining the application of Source Credibility Theory in the context of sustainable technology adoption and by highlighting the central role of trust in influencer driven persuasion. The findings also offer practical guidance for new energy vehicle marketers by emphasizing the importance of high quality informational content and long term trust building strategies.

Keywords: Influencer Expertise, Perceived Information Quality, Trust in Influencer, New Energy Vehicles, Purchase Intention

Introduction

China's new energy vehicle (NEV) industry has grown rapidly over the past decade, supported by government incentives, technological innovation, and rising environmental awareness (Tian et al., 2024). Despite this progress, consumer adoption remains below policy expectations. Although NEV sales have increased, ownership penetration reached only 8.9% by 2024, far below the national target of 30% (CAAM, 2024). This persistent gap indicates that consumer hesitation, rather than industrial capacity, has become a primary barrier to large scale NEV adoption. Prior studies attribute this hesitation to concerns about driving range, battery reliability, charging infrastructure, brand credibility, and long term technological uncertainty (Wang & Tian, 2023). Because NEV involve high perceived risk and complex evaluation criteria, consumers often face difficulty assessing functional and technological attributes independently, which increases their reliance on trusted information intermediaries.

In this context, social media influencers have emerged as influential actors in shaping consumer decision making for high involvement products. Influencers often function as accessible information sources who simplify technical details, interpret product performance, and share usage experiences in ways that traditional advertising cannot fully replicate (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer domain knowledge in areas such as automotive technology or sustainability can strengthen the perceived relevance and credibility of their content (Imas Maesaroh et al., 2024). When influencers are perceived as knowledgeable, audiences may be more likely to evaluate their content as accurate, reliable, and useful, which are central components of perceived information quality and are important for reducing uncertainty in NEV related decisions (Ariesty & Sari, 2021).

Although prior research suggests that influencer expertise can shape consumer intention through trust, existing studies often conceptualize trust primarily as brand trust or advertising trust, leaving trust in the influencer underexamined (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). In addition, while perceived information quality has been linked to consumer trust across digital contexts, the literature has rarely examined this mechanism in an integrated manner within the NEV market, where technological uncertainty is high and consumers depend heavily on reliable information to reduce perceived risk. Consequently, a clearer explanation is needed regarding how influencer related cues translate into trust in the influencer and how such trust subsequently influences NEV purchase intention.

Addressing these gaps, this study proposes and tests a focused model explaining how influencer expertise relates to NEV purchase intention through perceived information quality and trust in the influencer. Drawing on the Stimulus Organism Response framework

(Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990), influencer expertise is conceptualized as a stimulus that may shape consumers' cognitive evaluation of information quality and their trust toward the influencer, which ultimately drives purchase intention. By clarifying the roles of perceived information quality and trust in the influencer, this research contributes to influencer marketing and sustainable mobility literature and provides practical insights for improving influencer based communication strategies in the NEV adoption context.

Literature Review

NEV Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a foundational concept in consumer behavior research, traditionally defined as an individual's psychological predisposition or deliberate plan to engage in a purchase (Howard & Sheth, 1969). With the Theory of Reasoned Action, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) reframed it as a subjective probability of performing a behavior, making the construct more measurable. Later work expanded the concept to include cognitive evaluations, value assessments, and situational factors, as reflected in Monroe and Krishnan's (1985) value framework and Dodds et al.'s (1991) multidimensional perspective. Contemporary research emphasizes that purchase intention integrates both rational assessments and affective responses (Spears & Singh, 2004; San Martín & Herrero, 2012). Within the NEV context, consumers form purchase intentions by assessing technological features, environmental benefits, and perceived innovation value (Jiang et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). This intention is shaped by major antecedents, including environmental concern (Wang & Tian, 2023), economic incentives (Bai & Tan, 2021), technological reliability (He et al., 2020), social influence (Zhou et al., 2022), and regional conditions such as climate and terrain (Papa et al., 2022), all of which collectively shape readiness to adopt NEV.

Despite technological improvements and policy support, consumers still experience uncertainty about NEV range, charging availability, long-term reliability, and brand credibility, which dampens purchase intention (Lu & Cai, 2023). These persistent concerns highlight the importance of credible communicators who can simplify complex information and build confidence. Social media influencers have emerged as influential opinion leaders capable of shaping perceptions, reducing ambiguity, and strengthening consumer trust (Saltos-Cruz et al., 2022). Their product demonstrations, comparisons, and authentic narratives make them particularly effective in high-involvement categories such as NEV. Prior studies show that influencer credibility, communication quality, and authenticity significantly affect consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Alvalin & Sugiarto, 2024). Given the reliance on trusted intermediaries when evaluating complex technologies, examining how influencer expertise, perceived information quality, and trust shape NEV purchase intention is essential. Accordingly, influencer marketing is positioned as a key social influence mechanism for understanding consumer of NEV purchase intention.

Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how characteristics of a communicator influence message evaluation and behavioral responses (Vrontis et al., 2021). The theory highlights three core dimensions, expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, which jointly determine source persuasiveness (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). Among these, expertise is particularly

influential, reflecting perceptions of a communicator's knowledge, experience, and analytical capability within a specific domain. Consumers tend to rely on heuristic processing when they lack the ability or motivation to verify message accuracy, using perceived expertise as a shortcut to evaluate information quality (Chaiken, 1980). Prior research demonstrates that expertise significantly strengthens message acceptance, improves attitude formation, and encourages behavioral intention (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Till & Busler, 2000). In digital settings, influencers often build expertise through consistent content creation rather than celebrity status, and such perceived domain competence has been shown to enhance followers' product attitudes and purchase intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Accordingly, expertise serves as a central determinant of perceived information value and persuasive effectiveness in influencer-driven communication.

Trustworthiness represents the extent to which a communicator is perceived as honest, unbiased, and motivated by genuine intentions (Hovland et al., 1953; McCroskey & Teven, 1999). While expertise concerns the accuracy of information, trustworthiness reflects audience judgments about the communicator's moral character and transparency. In the social media environment, where consumers increasingly value authenticity, influencer trustworthiness has become a critical predictor of message acceptance and purchase intention (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Perceived information quality also plays an essential role in the persuasion process, capturing assessments of accuracy, completeness, and relevance (Shah et al., 2023). High-quality information signals both expertise and integrity, thereby enhancing trust in the communicator (Filieri, 2015; Bai et al., 2024). For high-involvement decisions such as NEV purchases, trust helps reduce uncertainty and perceived risk (Siegrist, 2019). Consequently, within Source Credibility Theory, expertise and information quality jointly foster trust, which ultimately shapes consumers' behavioral intentions in influencer marketing contexts.

SOR

This study investigates how influencer expertise shapes consumers' intentions to purchase new energy vehicles (NEV), emphasizing the psychological mechanisms that translate expertise into trust and ultimately purchasing decisions. While traditional behavioral models such as TRA, TPB, TAM, UTAUT2, and NAM have been widely applied to NEV adoption, they offer limited explanatory power for the relational, affective, and trust-based mechanisms embedded in influencer–follower interactions (Rezvani et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2017; Pang et al., 2023). These frameworks primarily emphasize attitudes, perceived behavioral control, or technological evaluations, but they provide limited explanation of information related and trust based mechanisms such as perceived information quality and source based trust. To address these limitations, this study adopts the SOR theory proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which offers a flexible analytical structure for explaining how external stimuli such as influencer expertise are translated into internal cognitive evaluations that ultimately shape behavioral intentions.

Although the SOR framework offers a useful lens for explaining how external stimuli influence internal evaluations and behavioral responses, its broad structure benefits from theoretical refinement. Therefore, this study integrates Source Credibility Theory to enhance the explanatory power of the SOR framework. Source Credibility Theory emphasizes the role of expertise in shaping individuals' evaluations of information quality and trust toward the

information source (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990). In the context of influencer marketing, influencer expertise serves as a critical cue that influences consumers' cognitive assessments and trust formation, thereby affecting subsequent behavioral intentions.

Building on these theoretical foundations, this study combines Source Credibility Theory with the SOR framework to develop a comprehensive research model explaining how influencer expertise influences consumers' intentions to purchase new energy vehicles. As illustrated in Figure 1, influencer expertise is conceptualized as the primary stimulus that triggers consumers' internal evaluations, namely perceived information quality and trust in the influencer. These organismic states represent the key cognitive mechanisms through which influencer-related cues are processed. Trust in the influencer ultimately functions as the central psychological driver of NEV purchase intention, corresponding to the response stage of the SOR framework. In addition, the model incorporates a direct effect of influencer expertise on NEV purchase intention, capturing the possibility of expertise-driven persuasion beyond mediated pathways. Together, the proposed model provides a theoretically grounded explanation of how influencer expertise shapes NEV purchase intentions and forms the basis for the hypotheses developed in the following section.

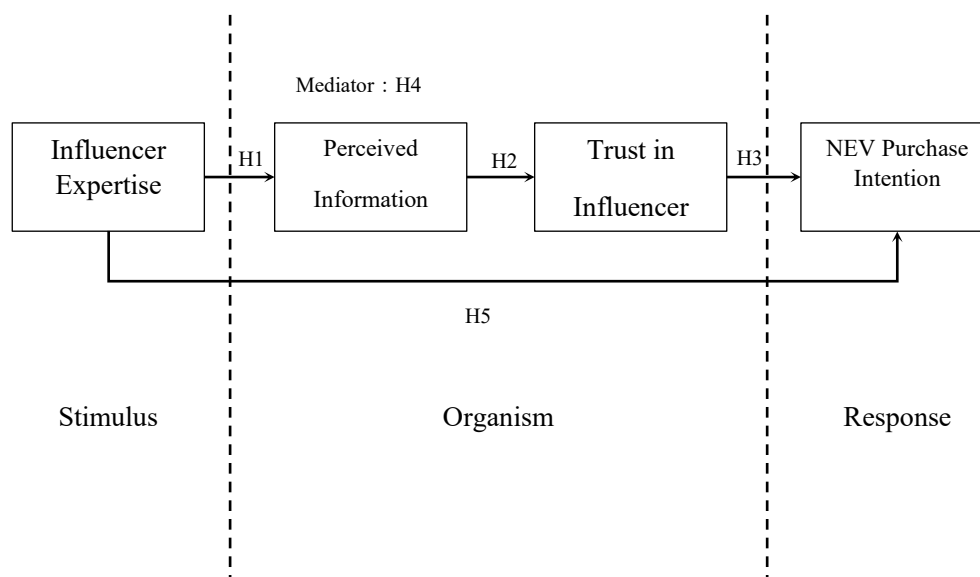


Figure 1. Research model

Research Models and Hypotheses, Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Influencer expertise functions as a central component of credibility and signals the influencer's capability to provide accurate and meaningful information. Source Credibility Theory argues that individuals rely heavily on a communicator's perceived competence when evaluating message validity (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990). When audiences believe that an influencer possesses substantial domain knowledge such as familiarity with NEV technology, performance, and maintenance they are more inclined to interpret the information presented as reliable and of superior quality. Prior studies support this logic: users tend to judge content as more accurate and trustworthy when it originates from highly knowledgeable sources (Imas Maesaroh et al., 2024). Similarly, expertise has been shown to enhance perceptions of informational clarity and comprehensiveness in other professional settings (Song, 2021). In high-involvement decisions such as NEV evaluation, consumers often

lack technical understanding and therefore depend on credible influencers to reduce uncertainty. As a result, influencers who demonstrate strong expertise are more likely to be associated with higher quality information assessments.

H1: There is a positive relationship between influencer expertise and perceived information quality.

Perceived information quality reflects the degree to which consumers consider the content shared by influencers to be accurate, relevant, complete, and dependable. In digital environments characterized by information overload and varying message credibility, consumers frequently rely on information quality as a heuristic cue to evaluate the trustworthiness of the source. Source Credibility Theory posits that high-quality messages enhance the perceived reliability of the communicator (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990). Empirical findings provide further support: Zhao et al. (2020) showed that higher perceived information quality significantly increases trust in online reviews, while Ariesty and Sari (2021) found a similar effect in sharing-economy contexts. When influencers consistently deliver clear and well-organized information, followers are more likely to view them as sincere and dependable. This perception becomes particularly important for complex, high-risk products such as NEV, where consumers require credible guidance. Therefore, when followers judge the information provided by an influencer as high quality, they are more inclined to trust the influencer's intentions and recommendations.

H2: There is a positive relationship between perceived information quality and trust in influencer.

Trust in influencer captures the extent to which followers believe that an influencer is honest, reliable, and acts with integrity. In high-involvement and high-uncertainty purchase situations such as evaluating new energy vehicles trust plays a pivotal role in guiding consumer decision-making (Niemand et al., 2020). NEV adoption involves concerns related to battery life, charging infrastructure, and long-term performance risks (Zhang et al., 2018), making consumers more dependent on credible external opinions. When an influencer is perceived as trustworthy, consumers are more willing to accept their evaluations, perceive lower risk, and consider their recommendations as legitimate (Chen & Yang, 2023). This mechanism aligns with Social Proof Theory, which suggests that trusted communicators serve as behavioral role models, reducing ambiguity and reinforcing decision confidence (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022). Evidence from multiple markets further indicates that trust in influencers reliably predicts purchase intention across product categories (Gümüş & Duyar, 2024). Therefore, trust in influencers is expected to positively influence NEV purchase intention.

H3: There is a positive relationship between trust in influencer and NEV purchase intention.

Perceived information quality may serve as a critical cognitive mechanism through which influencer expertise shapes trust in the influencer. Source Credibility Theory identifies expertise as a primary determinant of message acceptance (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990), suggesting that experts are assumed to deliver accurate and high-quality information. Prior studies confirm that expertise improves judgments of informational accuracy and completeness (Song, 2021). In turn, high-quality information fosters trust because audiences associate clarity, relevance, and accuracy with communicator reliability (Ariesty & Sari, 2021). For high-involvement decisions such as NEV evaluations, this process becomes even more

pronounced, as consumers require valid information to reduce uncertainty and avoid perceived risks. Thus, expertise may first enhance perceived information quality, which subsequently increases trust in the influencer. This aligns with established persuasion models suggesting that message-based judgments mediate the effect of credibility cues on trust formation.

H4: Perceived information quality mediates the relationship between influencer expertise and trust in influencer.

Influencer expertise may not only shape information evaluations but also directly affect consumers' willingness to engage in high-stakes purchases such as NEV adoption. Expertise signals that an influencer possesses accurate knowledge and sufficient decision-making competence, thereby reducing perceived uncertainty and increasing confidence in product-related recommendations (Ohanian, 1990). Prior studies indicate that expertise contributes to stronger persuasion effects, particularly in contexts where consumers lack technical understanding or face complex product information (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). For NEV which involve evaluations of charging systems, energy efficiency, and long-term reliability expert insights help consumers navigate informational ambiguity and feel more secure in their judgments. As informational risk decreases, consumers become more open to considering purchase options. Thus, influencers with higher expertise may directly motivate stronger NEV purchase intentions, even beyond indirect effects mediated through trust or information quality.

H5: There is a positive relationship between influencer expertise and NEV purchase intention.

Research Methodology

This study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method because no comprehensive sampling frame exists for Chinese consumers who intend to purchase or are considering purchasing a NEV. purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that respondents were directly relevant to the research objectives. Participants were required to meet two criteria: (1) they must have a future intention to purchase an NEV or be actively evaluating NEVs, and (2) they must follow or have interacted with social media influencers who discuss or promote NEV-related content. Data were collected on-site in Beijing and Shanghai among visitors at NEV exhibitions, targeting consumers aged 18–60 who are active social media users and capable of making autonomous purchasing decisions. Screening questions were used to confirm eligibility, and only individuals who had recently been exposed to NEV-related influencer content were invited to complete the full questionnaire. A total of 475 valid responses were obtained, exceeding recommended minimum sample size standards and providing adequate statistical power for subsequent structural equation modeling analyses. All measurement scales used in this study were adapted from established literature to ensure reliability and content validity. NEV purchase intention items were adapted from Jiang et al. (2024) and Wang et al. (2024). Influencer expertise items were drawn from Masuda et al. (2022) and Noura and Boukamcha (2023). Perceived information quality was measured using items adapted from Shah et al. (2023) and Jiang et al. (2021). Finally, trust in influencer was assessed using items from Venciute et al. (2023) and Guo et al. (2021). All variables were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), ensuring consistency across constructs.

Data Analysis

To evaluate the reliability and validity of the reflective constructs, a series of measurement model assessments were conducted, including factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the HTMT ratio.

Table 1 presents the results for internal consistency and convergent validity. All constructs demonstrate satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.852 to 0.891 and composite reliability values between 0.85 and 0.917, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Factor loadings for most items are above 0.70, with a few slightly lower loadings retained due to theoretical relevance and acceptable CR and AVE values. The AVE values for all constructs range from 0.595 to 0.693, surpassing the minimum requirement of 0.50 and indicating adequate convergent validity.

Table 1

Measurement model assessment

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Influencer Expertise	IE1	0.987	0.861	0.85	0.595
	IE2	0.601			
	IE3	0.788			
	IE4	0.651			
NEV Purchase Intention	NPI1	0.872	0.852	0.9	0.693
	NPI2	0.793			
	NPI3	0.836			
	NPI4	0.826			
Perceived Information Quality	PIQ1	0.83	0.891	0.917	0.647
	PIQ2	0.757			
	PIQ3	0.839			
	PIQ4	0.788			
	PIQ5	0.809			
	PIQ6	0.8			
Trust in Influencer	TII1	0.786	0.883	0.911	0.632
	TII2	0.793			
	TII3	0.804			
	TII4	0.755			
	TII5	0.805			
	TII6	0.825			
	TII1	0.786			

Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the HTMT criterion and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The HTMT approach proposed by Henseler et al. (2015) recommends a conservative threshold of 0.85, and all values in this study fall below this cut-off, supporting discriminant validity among the constructs. The Fornell–Larcker results (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) further confirm discriminant validity, as the square root of each construct's AVE exceeds its inter-

construct correlations. Together, these results indicate that each construct is empirically distinct and measures a unique aspect of the research model.

Overall, the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, consistent with established guidelines for CR and AVE (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2009), supporting the suitability of the constructs for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 2

Discriminant Validity via HTMT criterion

	IE	NPI	PIQ	TII
IE				
NPI	0.448			
PIQ	0.046	0.401		
TII	0.716	0.711	0.424	

Table 3

Discriminant Validity via Fornell and Larcker Criterion

	IE	NPI	PIQ	TII
IE	0.771			
NPI	0.351	0.832		
PIQ	0.059	0.350	0.804	
TII	0.576	0.617	0.381	0.795

Table 4 presents the results of the structural model and shows partial support for the proposed hypotheses. Perceived information quality has a significant and positive effect on trust in the influencer (H2: $\beta = 0.381$, $t = 10.103$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.170$), and trust in the influencer, in turn, strongly predicts NEV purchase intention (H3: $\beta = 0.617$, $t = 13.435$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.377$). The percentile confidence intervals for both relationships are entirely above zero, indicating that these effects are robust and reliable. In contrast, influencer expertise does not have a significant direct effect on perceived information quality (H1: $\beta = 0.025$, $t = 0.541$, $p = 0.294$, $f^2 = 0.001$) or on NEV purchase intention (H5: $\beta = 0.000$, $t = 0.003$, $p = 0.499$, $f^2 = 0.000$). Moreover, the indirect effect of influencer expertise on trust in the influencer via perceived information quality is also not significant (H4: $\beta = 0.009$, $t = 0.516$, $p = 0.303$). Overall, these findings indicate that influencer expertise alone does not meaningfully shape consumers' cognitive evaluations or purchase intentions; instead, perceived information quality and the resulting trust in the influencer play a central role in driving NEV purchase decisions.

Table 4

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	PCI LL	PCI UL	f^2	Decision
H1	IE→PIQ	0.025	0.046	0.541	0.294	-0.047	0.102	0.001	Not Supported
H2	PIQ→TII	0.381	0.038	10.103	0	0.322	0.445	0.170	Supported
H3	TII→NPI	0.617	0.046	13.435	0	0.543	0.693	0.377	Supported
H4	IE→PIQ→TII	0.009	0.018	0.516	0.303	-0.017	0.043		Not Supported
H5	IE→NPI	0	0.052	0.003	0.499	-0.084	0.089	0.000	Not Supported

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated how social media influencers affect consumers' purchase intention toward new energy vehicles in China by integrating the SOR framework with Source Credibility Theory. Using survey data collected from potential new energy vehicle consumers in Beijing and Shanghai and analyzing the data through structural equation modeling, the study examined the roles of influencer expertise, perceived information quality, and trust in the influencer in shaping purchase intention. The findings offer several important theoretical insights and practical implications, particularly by clarifying which influence mechanisms are effective and which are ineffective in a high involvement and high uncertainty product context.

Theoretical Implications

One of the most important findings of this study is that influencer expertise does not have a significant direct effect on either perceived information quality or NEV purchase intention. This result challenges the traditional assumption within Source Credibility Theory that expertise automatically enhances message effectiveness. In the context of new energy vehicles, which involve complex technologies and long term usage risks, consumers appear to adopt a more cautious and evaluative approach. Rather than relying on an influencer's perceived professional knowledge alone, consumers focus on the substantive characteristics of the information itself. This suggests that expertise functions as a weak or indirect signal in this context and must be supported by concrete and verifiable information to become persuasive.

In contrast, perceived information quality plays a central role in the formation of trust in the influencer. The results show that when consumers perceive influencer generated content as accurate, comprehensive, and relevant, they are more likely to regard the influencer as honest and reliable. This finding supports the cognitive evaluation mechanism proposed by the SOR framework, in which internal judgments mediate the effect of external stimuli on behavioral outcomes. In high involvement purchase decisions such as NEV adoption, high

quality information reduces uncertainty and facilitates trust formation, thereby strengthening the persuasive impact of influencer communication.

Furthermore, trust in the influencer emerges as the strongest predictor of NEV purchase intention. The substantial effect size associated with this relationship highlights the importance of interpersonal trust in guiding consumer behavior under conditions of perceived risk. When consumers trust an influencer, they are more willing to accept product recommendations, perceive lower decision related uncertainty, and develop stronger intentions to purchase new energy vehicles. This finding confirms that trust serves as the key psychological mechanism translating information evaluation into behavioral intention and reinforces the relevance of trust based models in sustainable technology adoption research.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for new energy vehicle manufacturers and marketing practitioners who rely on influencer based communication strategies.

First, firms should reconsider the emphasis placed on influencer expertise when designing influencer marketing campaigns. Although technical knowledge and professional background are commonly used as selection criteria, the results indicate that expertise alone does not significantly enhance consumers' perceived information quality or purchase intention. Therefore, marketers should move beyond credential focused evaluations and instead assess an influencer's ability to communicate complex NEV related information in a clear, structured, and consumer oriented manner. Influencers who can translate technical specifications into practical usage insights are more likely to generate persuasive content that resonates with potential buyers.

Second, marketers should prioritize the development and dissemination of high quality informational content as a core strategic objective. The strong relationship between perceived information quality and trust suggests that content accuracy, completeness, and relevance are essential for building consumer confidence. Influencers should be encouraged to provide detailed explanations of vehicle performance, charging convenience, cost considerations, and real world usage experiences. By consistently delivering informative and transparent content, influencers can reduce consumer uncertainty and foster a sense of reliability, which is particularly important in the adoption of new energy vehicles.

Third, the dominant role of trust in driving NEV purchase intention highlights the importance of long term relationship building between brands, influencers, and audiences. Rather than relying on short term promotional collaborations, firms should invest in sustained influencer partnerships that allow trust to develop gradually over time. Consistent messaging, repeated exposure, and perceived sincerity contribute to the accumulation of trust, which ultimately enhances the effectiveness of influencer recommendations. This long term orientation is especially critical in the NEV market, where purchase decisions involve significant financial and functional considerations.

Conclusion

This study provides a refined understanding of how social media influencers influence consumer purchase intention toward new energy vehicles in China. The empirical findings demonstrate that influencer expertise alone is insufficient to shape consumers' cognitive evaluations or behavioral intentions. Instead, perceived information quality and trust in the influencer constitute the central psychological mechanisms driving NEV purchase intention. By integrating the Stimulus Organism Response framework with Source Credibility Theory, the study offers a context sensitive explanation of influencer effectiveness in high involvement technology markets. Overall, the research contributes to the literature by challenging linear credibility based persuasion assumptions, emphasizing the primacy of trust, and offering practical guidance for more effective influencer marketing strategies in the new energy vehicle industry. Future research may extend this model by incorporating additional contextual factors or longitudinal designs to further explore the dynamics of trust formation and sustainable technology adoption.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of purposive sampling and data collection in Beijing and Shanghai limits the generalisability of the findings, and future research should include more diverse regions to improve external validity. Second, the cross sectional research design restricts causal inference, and longitudinal or experimental approaches are recommended to capture the dynamic development of trust and information processing. Third, this study examined purchase intention rather than actual purchasing behaviour, and future studies should incorporate behavioural data to better assess real world adoption of new energy vehicles.

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