

## Digital charisma, cultural frames, and purchase intentions: Mediating role of attractiveness and moderation by self-concept



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### ABSTRACT

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The study examines how digital charisma and cultural frames shape female consumers' purchase intentions in the Chinese digital marketplace, focusing on the mediating role of perceived attractiveness and the moderating role of consumer self-concept. It aims to provide an advanced understanding of how psychological and cultural mechanisms interact in digital persuasion. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was adopted, and data were collected from 312 female consumers in China through a structured questionnaire. The scales for all constructs were adapted from prior research. Structural equation modeling (SmartPLS) was employed to examine the measurement and structural models, including direct, mediating, and moderating effects. The model demonstrated strong explanatory power, with  $R^2 = 0.684$  for perceived attractiveness and  $R^2 = 0.739$  for purchase intention, supported by satisfactory predictive relevance ( $Q^2$  values of 0.733 and 0.680, respectively). Findings reveal that digital charisma and cultural frames significantly influence perceived attractiveness, which in turn mediates their impact on purchase intentions. Furthermore, consumer self-concept strengthens the attractiveness–purchase intention relationship when influencer image aligns closely with consumer identity. This study integrates digital charisma, cultural frames, and psychological constructs into a unified framework, emphasizing the strategic importance of cultural resonance and self-concept alignment in digital marketing.

**Contribution/ Originality:** The paper's primary contribution is finding that digital charisma and cultural frames jointly influence purchase intentions through perceived attractiveness, with consumer self-concept strengthening this effect, offering an integrative, identity-based framework for understanding digital persuasion in the Chinese female consumer market, which is an approach not previously examined.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenal rate at which the Chinese consumer markets are being digitized over the last few years has changed how individuals interact directly with brands, influencers, and products in the online arena. With the diffusion of social media networks, such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin, Chinese consumers, particularly women, have resorted to the efforts of digital influencers, individuals who implement charisma-driven communication strategies to gain attention and establish emotional bonds [1]. The new dimension of digital marketing in China, where technological innovation is rooted in the convergence of cultures and values to shape consumer behavior, has been generated by the emergence of virtual influencers, which are computer-generated personalities designed to mimic human interactions, as opposed to traditional celebrity endorsement [2]. These online influencers also have

specific characteristics of online charisma that include social presence, likeliness, and expressiveness of feelings, which render them enjoyable and trustworthy product advocates [3]. The digital persuasion/Chinese culture exchange rates, such as collectivist values and traditional and modern standards of beauty, local and global orientations, make consumer decision-making quite complex within the Chinese cultural framework [4]. Being a large proportion of active online consumers in China, female consumers are not only influenced by such charismatic virtual personalities but also perceive their attractiveness and credibility based on culturally embedded perspectives, which makes this a highly relevant research area to understand the effectiveness of digital marketing in the Chinese market [5].

Empirical research of the past states that digital charisma is very beneficial in consumer engagement and consumer purchasing behavior by intensifying perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness of influencers [6]. As an example, the studies of the East Asian context of influencer marketing have established that social presence and expressiveness of emotions are factors that contribute to an increase in the level of parasocial relationships, which consequently lead to higher consumer loyalty and a greater desire to buy promoted products [7, 8]. It is also confirmed by studies that relatability enables authenticity, which is especially appreciated by younger female consumers who seek a connection with the influencer on an emotional plane before making the purchase decision [9]. Moreover, attractiveness was proven to be an empirically validated mediating process between the source traits and consumer reactions, as consumers tend to correlate attractiveness with credibility and brand value [10]. There is also literature on cultural frames being critical moderators, with collectivist orientations enhancing the attraction of those influencers who focus on community and relational harmony, and individualist orientations reinforcing the impact of influencers who are unique and independent [11]. In the same vein, perceptions of beauty have also been previously demonstrated to impact the reactions of female consumers, with conventional notions of beauty conditioning attractiveness in a different manner than contemporary or globalized views [12]. All these findings indicate that the digital charisma, cultural frames, and attractiveness are interdependent variables that influence consumer purchase intentions, although the mechanisms are not thoroughly studied within the culturally dynamic environment of China [3].

Although there is an increasing body of literature, there are still a number of research gaps that warrant further investigation into the impact of digital charisma and cultural frames on the purchase intentions of female consumers in China [13]. To start with, the vast majority of the current literature has largely concentrated on human influencers, so the new phenomenon of virtual influencers has been relatively under-researched, despite their growing popularity in Chinese online marketing [14]. While prior studies have confirmed that charisma enhances attractiveness and purchase behaviors, little is known about how charisma manifests in non-human, digitally generated personalities and whether its persuasive effects operate in similar or different ways compared to human influencers. Second, although cultural frames have been acknowledged as moderators of consumer behavior, most empirical work treats them as background variables rather than central explanatory mechanisms. As a result, there is limited understanding of how cultural orientations such as collectivism versus individualism, or local versus global preferences, directly shape perceptions of attractiveness and how these perceptions ultimately translate into purchase intentions [15]. Third, much of the existing scholarship has examined Western or global contexts, offering limited insight into the uniquely Chinese cultural landscape, particularly the interplay between traditional and modern beauty ideals when evaluating virtual influencers [16]. Fourth, while attractiveness is frequently studied as an outcome of influencer characteristics, far fewer studies have positioned perceived attractiveness as a mediating mechanism linking digital charisma and cultural frames to purchase intention. This limits understanding of its central role in the persuasion process [17]. Finally, the moderating role of consumer self-concept has received minimal empirical attention, despite theories of self-congruity suggesting that identity alignment strongly shapes consumer responses [18]. These gaps indicate the need for an integrated model that examines how digital charisma and cultural frames influence purchase intention through perceived attractiveness, while accounting for the moderating effect of self-concept, especially within the culturally nuanced Chinese market.

The research model that is proposed is based on two major perspectives of theory: the Source Credibility Model and Self-Congruity Theory. According to the Source Credibility Model, consumer attitudes and behavior are determined by source qualities, which are attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. This explains why influencers who have digital charisma are effective in increasing purchase intentions through attractiveness [19]. Virtual influencers who display these traits of credibility-enhancing qualities through relatability, emotional expressiveness, and social presence do the same in the Chinese digital marketplace, which further enhances their persuasive power [10]. Self-Congruity Theory also supports the use of the consumer self-concept as a moderator, which states that the more consumers can perceive a match between their actual or ideal self-image with that of an endorser, the greater the effects of persuasion are enhanced [20]. The cross-cultural consumer behavior studies also provide significant theoretical support for cultural frames, as these studies emphasize the value of collectivism, individualism, and localized or global orientations as determinants of attractiveness evaluations and subsequent decision-making [21]. Combined, these theories form a strong basis for a hypothesis that digital charisma and cultural frames can affect the purchase intention of female consumers indirectly through perceived attractiveness, and the magnitude of that association may vary depending on the alignment of self-concept. Based on this, the research questions of the proposed study include exploring the effects of digital charisma of virtual influencers on perceived attractiveness, the effect of cultural frames on perceived attractiveness, the role of attractiveness in mediating the relationship between the antecedents and purchase intention, and the role of consumers' self-concept in moderating the relationship between the antecedents and purchase intention in the Chinese context.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Digital Charisma and Purchase Intention

Digital charisma can be defined as the combination of interpersonal and communication traits that allow virtual influencers to feel magnetic and compelling in their online communication. It includes aspects such as social presence (creating a feeling of proximity and interactivity) [13] relatability (the ability to associate the experiences of influencers with those of the consumer) [1] emotional expressiveness (infusing a sense of warmth and authenticity in online interaction) [2] and style of communication (the tone, clarity, and persuasiveness of communicative practices of influencers). Attractiveness in this sense encompasses, among other things, perceived attractiveness, authenticity, and overall likeability of the influencer, much more than mere physical attractiveness [12]. Empirical research indicates that social presence positively influences perceptions of attractiveness to a significant degree since it reduces psychological distance between the influencers and audiences [22]. Similarly, there is also a positive relationship between relatability, credibility, and likability, which in turn leads to increased perceptions of attractiveness [23]. Nonetheless, expressiveness in the digital realm will foster empathetic communication, which will make virtual influencers more attractive, and communication style was also found to enhance attractiveness by exuding confidence and charisma [3].

Resting on these findings, it is possible to say that the digital charisma of virtual influencers directly supports the perceived attractiveness. Increased social presence results in the creation of a closer attachment to the influencer by the audience, which is translated into increased attraction [24]. This is also enhanced by relatability, which allows consumers to recognize some of themselves in the story of the influencer, thereby increasing liking and admiration. The integrity of emotion is also a crucial element, as virtual influencers with a warm attitude and emotional connection are perceived to be more genuine and, therefore, more appealing [11]. Additionally, the aspect of communication style also serves as a persuasive technique that structures the entire presentation of the person, making it such that they are interesting and credible.

*H: Digital charisma of virtual influencers positively influences perceived attractiveness.*

## 2.2. Cultural Frames and Purchase Intention

Cultural frames are the interpretive frameworks under which consumers assess and respond to mediated communication. The concepts of individualism and collectivism influence perceptions of attractiveness among consumers, with emphasis placed either on self-expression and autonomy or on group belonging and harmony [4]. On the same note, traditions of culture and beauty vary in different societies: whereas contemporary ideals focus on innovation, originality, and globalization, older ideals of beauty may focus on modesty, conformity, and culturally specific notions [5]. Moreover, the local versus global culture orientation has an impact on the sense of familiarity and cultural authenticity versus the qualities of cosmopolitanism and global fame among consumers [25]. The empirical evidence reveals that collectivist cultures, on the one hand, are more likely to value influencers representing the values of the community and harmony, and individualist cultures, on the other hand, consider the features of distinctiveness and self-confidence [26]. The study of beauty perceptions also establishes that traditional cultural settings favor influencers who are close to established standards, and contemporary settings praise influencers who break the rules and adhere to global trends in fashion and beauty.

In light of these results, the culture frame is likely to play a major role in influencing the attractiveness of virtual influencers among female consumers. Projected relational warmth and community identity are more likely to be viewed as attractive in collectivist situations since influencers conform to common values [27]. On the other hand, attractiveness is enhanced in individualist cultures when influencers are independent and express themselves. The traditional cultural frames support attractiveness by conforming to local beauty ideals, whereas the modern frames support attractiveness by novelty and progressive aesthetics [28].

*H<sub>2</sub>: Cultural frames influence the perceived attractiveness of virtual influencers.*

## 2.3. Perceived Attractiveness as Mediator

Perceived attractiveness refers to the extent to which viewers rate an influencer as attractive, genuine, and socially desirable, sometimes beyond physical attractiveness, and includes charm, style, and personality [29]. Empirical studies have consistently shown that the digital charisma of influencers enhances consumer reactions, particularly regarding how attractiveness influences consumer behavior and behavioral intentions. For example, the literature indicates that audiences exposed to influencers who exhibit high levels of social presence and active communication styles perceive greater attractiveness, which positively impacts their consumer intentions to purchase the products being endorsed [8]. Likewise, emotional expressiveness and relatability increase admiration and liking, which support attractiveness and develop consumer attitudes [30]. Along consumer psychology lines, attractiveness has been discovered to mediate between persuasive communication and buying behavior since it improves trust and credibility perception [23].

Based on this evidence, one can argue that the persuasive nature of digital charisma is not directly related to purchase intention but instead operates through perceived attractiveness [28]. Influencers seem relatable, expressive, and socially present, which are evaluated as being more attractive, and this attractiveness is what drives consumers to involve themselves in the purchasing decision-making process [25]. The persuasive impact of attractiveness, which is the emotional appeal, will make the endorsement attractive and thus ensure that the charisma of virtual influencers translates into consumer action [3]. Therefore, the association between digital charisma and purchase intention is supposed to be mediated by perceived attractiveness.

*H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived attractiveness mediates the relationship between digital charisma and purchase intention.*

Past research has indicated that cultural frames play an important role in influencing attractiveness judgments by consumers, and these judgments, in turn, lead to purchase behavior [16]. For example, a study concludes that collectivist audiences better perceive that influencers emphasize communal values, which enhances their purchase intention, whereas individualist audiences prefer to think that influencers promote independence and uniqueness, with attractiveness serving as the mediator between the two [31]. In a similar perspective, research on the beauty standard

indicates that adherence to the conventional ideals in conservative cultures increases attractiveness and consequently influences consumer purchasing behavior, whereas in contemporary times, attractiveness is enhanced and encourages consumer purchases through conformity to progressive or global aesthetics [9, 22, 32, 33]. These results support the understanding that cultural frames have an indirect influence through their indirect effects on perceptions of attractiveness and do not dictate consumer behaviors.

Hence, perceived attractiveness will probably mediate the relationship between cultural frames and purchase intention [10]. Perception of attractiveness of the image of the influencer is elevated when cultural orientations are congruent with the image, and that attractiveness is then sufficient to trigger consumer intentions to proceed with the purchase [23]. For example, traditional cultural frames may strengthen attractiveness when influencers embody modest or locally valued traits, leading to stronger purchase motivations, while global cultural frames enhance attractiveness when influencers project cosmopolitan styles that resonate with aspirational consumption [34]. In both cases, attractiveness becomes the critical psychological link through which cultural frames are translated into consumer purchase intentions, supporting the hypothesized mediation effect.

*H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived attractiveness mediates the relationship between cultural frames and purchase intention.*

#### 2.4. Consumer Self-concept as Moderator

Consumer self-concept refers to the perception individuals hold about themselves, including their actual self, ideal self, and social self, which collectively guide their attitudes and behaviors in consumption contexts [11]. Empirical evidence suggests that consumers are more likely to be influenced by sources that align with their self-concept, as such congruence enhances identification and reinforces purchasing motivation [17]. For instance, when the attractiveness of an influencer matches consumers' self-image or aspirational identity, the perceived attractiveness exerts a stronger effect on their intention to purchase [6]. It is also proven in earlier research that self-concept has a moderating effect on consumer decision-making by defining when persuasive information, such as attractiveness, is internalized as personally relevant [4, 34, 35]. The degree to which the attractiveness of influencers connects with the real or desired self of a consumer plays a key role in shaping purchase intention in the online space [36].

Based on this, one can suggest that perceived attractiveness and purchase intention are not always associated with perceived attractiveness in all consumers but depend on their self-concept [22]. Consumers who have a high level of self-congruence with the attractiveness of an influencer are more likely to transfer admiration into buying behavior because the influencer represents a symbolic extension of their identity [37]. On the other hand, low congruence between self-concept and attractiveness results in a low influence of attractiveness on purchase intention because consumers do not internalize the persuasive message [10]. This shows that self-concept is a boundary condition that either neutralizes or magnifies the effect of attractiveness on consumer behavior [38]. Thus, it is assumed that consumer self-concept will moderate the relationship between perceived attractiveness and purchase intention, where purchase intentions are high in the case of congruency and low in the case of incongruence.

*H<sub>4</sub>: Consumer self-concept moderates the relationship between perceived attractiveness and purchase intention.*

#### 2.5. Theoretical Framework Supporting the Research

The theoretical foundation of this study can be explained through the lens of the Source Credibility Model and Self-Congruity Theory, which together provide a robust explanation of how digital charisma, cultural frames, attractiveness, and self-concept interact to shape consumer purchase intentions. The Source Credibility Model posits that source characteristics such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise significantly influence consumer attitudes and behaviors [19]. In the digital context, virtual influencers embody charisma through social presence, relatability, emotional expressiveness, and communication style, which enhance perceived attractiveness and, in turn, motivate purchasing decisions. Cultural frames also help to contextualize these appraisals by establishing the criteria according to which attractiveness should be considered, since collectivist or traditional cultures might consider

various qualities more important than individualist or modern cultures [21]. The mediating role of attractiveness is consistent with persuasion theories, which propose that attractiveness is one of the key heuristics consumers use in their evaluations of a brand, and the moderating role of self-concept is aligned with Self-Congruity Theory, which holds that customers tend to adopt behaviors in which a brand or influencer aligns with their real or desired self-image [20]. A combination of those theoretical lenses can be used to describe the effect of digital charisma and cultural frames on purchase intention via attractiveness, where the power of the connection is determined by self-concept. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual map of the study, showing how the direct, mediating, and moderating relationships are hypothesized to contribute collectively to the decision-making process of purchase intentions among female consumers in the digital influencer scenario.

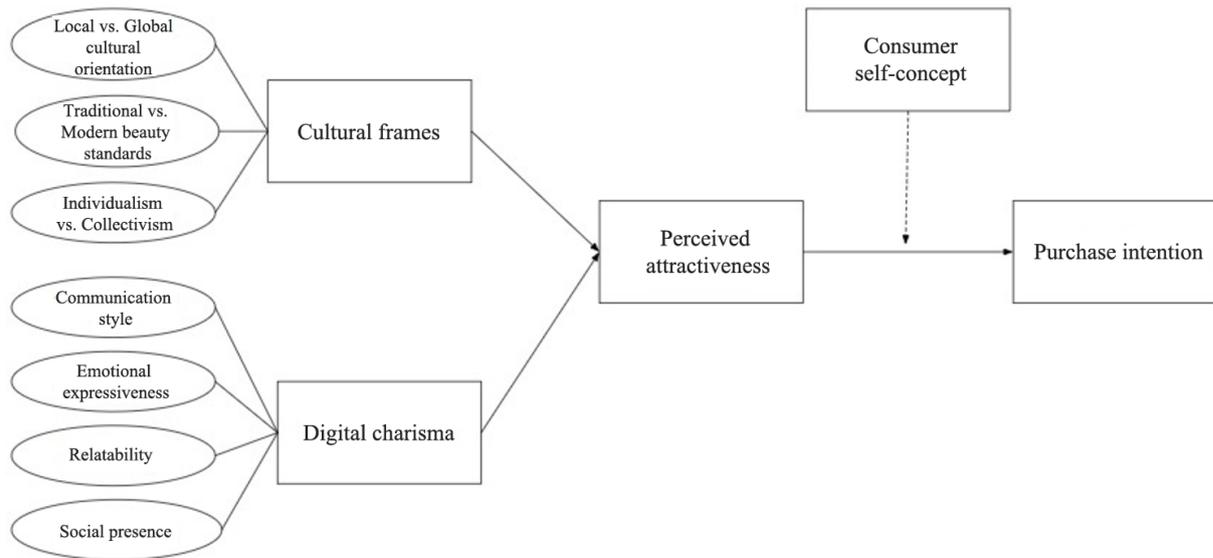


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study design used in the current study was quantitative in nature because it involved the application of a structured survey research method to examine the association between digital charisma, cultural frames, perceived attractiveness, consumer self-concept, and purchase intentions. The design selected was that of cross-sectional since it enabled data collection at one point in time and was feasible to determine the hypothesized associations efficiently. The design was suitable considering that the purpose of the study was to test the conceptual framework empirically by using statistical modeling and testing the mediating and moderating effects embedded within the model. The study used a quantitative design in the form of a survey to guarantee the production of standardized answers, which can be analyzed with high precision using sophisticated statistical methods, thereby increasing the validity of results.

The study participants included female customers in China who are avid users of virtual influencers on online platforms such as WeChat, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu. These individuals constitute a significant portion of the online market, as they tend to be more influenced by culture, charisma, and beauty in shaping their buying behavior. A total of 312 respondents were obtained, which is considered sufficient to conduct a structural equation modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS because this sample size exceeds the minimum recommended for models with many latent variables and complex path structures. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to specifically target female consumers with prior interaction or exposure to virtual influencers. Screening questions were included to ensure respondents met this criterion, thereby enhancing the contextual relevance of the data.

The data were collected in 2025 using a structured questionnaire comprising previously validated scales adapted from prior studies. The validity of each construct was obtained through multiple items to ensure reliability and to reflect the complexity of variables, including digital charisma, cultural frames, attractiveness, self-concept, and

purchase intention. The ratings were conducted using a 5-point Likert scale to measure the strength of respondents' attitudes and perceptions. The survey was distributed digitally via the internet to reach the largest possible number of female consumers who are digitally active. Screening questions were incorporated to ensure participants had been exposed to virtual influencers, thereby ensuring the relevance of the data obtained. The response rate was satisfactory, and the final dataset consisted of 312 usable responses after excluding incomplete or invalid responses.

Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was ensured, and informed consent was collected digitally. Respondents were informed that the data would be used solely for academic purposes.

The analysis of data was conducted using a popular tool for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), SmartPLS. This approach was selected because it is suitable for analyzing complex models that include mediating and moderating relationships, and it can handle relatively small to medium sample sizes. The analysis was performed in two stages: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment. The measurement model involved evaluating the reliability and validity of the constructs using indicators such as Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and measures of discriminant validity. Path coefficients were tested during the structural model stage to examine hypothesized relationships, with bootstrapping methods employed to assess significance levels. This process also included testing the mediation effects of perceived attractiveness and the moderation effects of consumer self-concept. The application of SmartPLS enabled the research to provide strong statistical support for the hypothesis framework and to capture both direct and indirect effects among the constructs.

#### 4. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results of the reliability and validity analysis for all constructs used in the study, confirming that each variable meets the recommended thresholds for internal consistency and convergent validity. All constructs have alpha values higher than 0.70, indicating a good level of internal reliability. The highest alpha values were achieved by the cultural frames (0.911), consumer self-concept (0.888), digital charisma (0.919), perceived attractiveness (0.803), and purchase intention (0.882). Additionally, the composite reliability (CR) values for all variables exceed 0.85, representing satisfactory overall construct reliability. The mean values of the average variance extracted (AVE) surpass the acceptable minimum of 0.50, confirming that each construct explains over half of the variance in its indicators, thereby establishing convergent validity. Outer loadings of all items are acceptable, with the majority exceeding 0.70, indicating that the indicators are highly dependent on the underlying latent constructs. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the measurement model possesses excellent psychometric characteristics and is well-grounded for further analysis of the structural model.

**Table 1.** Variable's reliability and validity.

Variables	Items	Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Cultural frames	CF1	0.835	0.911	0.933	0.737
	CF2	0.858			
	CF3	0.862			
	CF4	0.849			
	CF5	0.887			
Consumer self-concept	CSC1	0.785	0.888	0.918	0.691
	CSC2	0.800			
	CSC3	0.856			
	CSC4	0.850			
	CSC5	0.861			
Digital charisma	DC1	0.881	0.919	0.939	0.756
	DC2	0.845			
	DC3	0.904			
	DC4	0.827			
	DC5	0.887			

Variables	Items	Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Perceived attractiveness	PA1	0.862	0.803	0.865	0.566
	PA2	0.753			
	PA3	0.837			
	PA4	0.610			
	PA5	0.669			
Purchase intention	PI1	0.871	0.882	0.914	0.680
	PI2	0.836			
	PI3	0.854			
	PI4	0.789			
	PI5	0.768			

Figure 2 indicates the estimated structural model, which was built in SmartPLS, reflects the proposed relationships between digital charisma and cultural frame, perceived attractiveness, and consumer self-concept with purchase intention. The figure shows both the direct and indirect paths visually, as well as the mediating effects of perceived attractiveness and the moderating effect of consumer self-concept. Path coefficients indicate the strength of relationships, and arrows depict the direction of influence. The model demonstrates that perceived attractiveness mediates the relationships between digital charisma and cultural frames and purchase intention, with purchase intention depending on perceived attractiveness. Additionally, consumer self-concept moderates the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention, highlighting the complex interactions between psychological and cultural variables in consumer behavior.

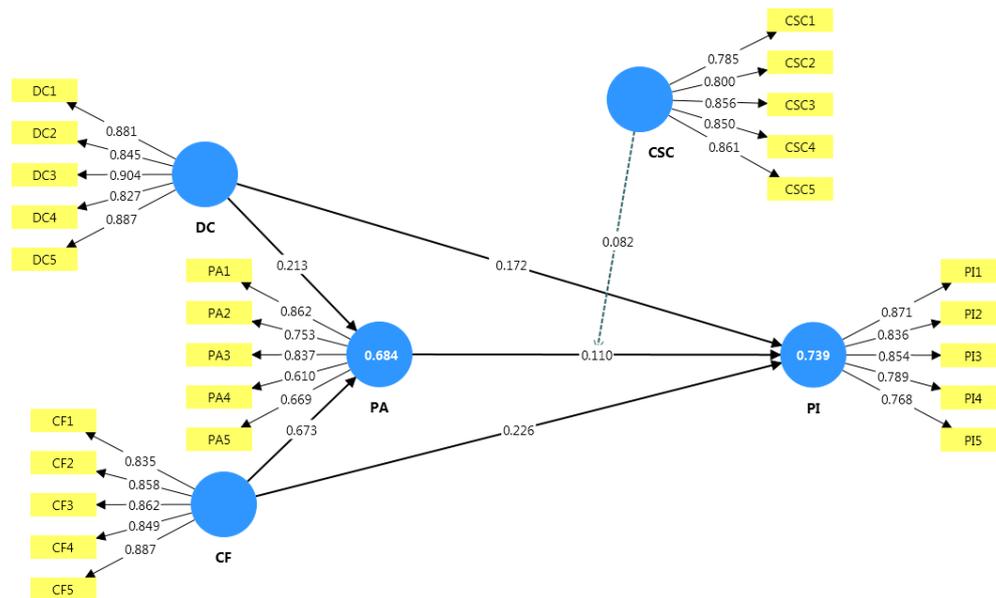


Figure 2. Estimated model.

Table 2 is the result of the discriminant test of validity based on the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), which is used to determine the uniqueness of the constructs in the model. Each of the HTMT values is lower than the suggested cutoff of 0.90, which proves that the constructs are empirically different from each other. The greatest value of HTMT is perceived attractiveness and purchase intention (0.860), yet it is quite acceptable according to the generally accepted limits, indicating that a strong and definite relationship exists between the two constructs [39]. The other correlations, such as the correlation between digital charisma and cultural frame (0.814) and consumer self-concept and perceived attractiveness (0.817), are moderate but sufficient to discriminate the variables. These findings prove that all the constructs are used to measure different conceptual areas; thus, it is not necessary to worry about the existence of multicollinearity, and it is possible to interpret the relationships in the structural model with a high level of confidence.

Table 2. Discriminant validity (HTMT).

Construct	CF	CSC	DC	PA	PI
Cultural frames					
Consumer self-concept	0.698				
Digital charisma	0.814	0.754			
Perceived attractiveness	0.768	0.817	0.798		
Purchase intention	0.718	0.790	0.702	0.860	

The R-squared value of 0.684 for perceived attractiveness and 0.739 for purchase intention, as indicated in Table 3, reflects a good explanatory ability of the structural model. This implies that perceived attractiveness and purchase intention have predictors that account for 68.4 percent and 73.9 percent of the variance, respectively. The stability of the model is supported by the adjusted R-squared (0.679 and 0.737), which shows a slight variation from the unadjusted R-squared. The high predictive relevance is further evidenced by the Q<sup>2</sup> predict values of 0.733 and 0.680, which are very high, indicating the model's strong forecasting capacity. Additionally, the values of RMSE and MAE are within acceptable levels, implying good prediction accuracy and minimal residual errors [40]. Taken together, the findings in Table 3 affirm that the model has a good goodness of fit and predictability, which is enough to prove that it is an excellent model to test and interpret a hypothesis.

Table 3. R-squared statistics: model goodness-of-fit statistics.

Construct	R-square	R-square adjusted	Q <sup>2</sup> predict	RMSE	MAE
Perceived attractiveness	0.684	0.679	0.733	0.521	0.374
Purchase intention	0.739	0.737	0.680	0.571	0.417

The ultimate structural model presented in Figure 3 illustrates the estimated path coefficients among the variables of study to test the hypothesis. The figure illustrates both direct and indirect relationships, highlighting the mediating and moderating relationships suggested in the research model. The visual presentation demonstrates the positive roles of digital charisma and cultural frames in perceived attractiveness and purchase intention, as well as the mediating role of attractiveness in converting effects into behavioral intentions. The moderating effect of consumer self-concept is also indicated, showing that consumer identity congruence enhances the correlation between perceived attractiveness and purchase intent. Overall, the model provides an effective graphical representation of the complex web of interactions that underpin consumer decision-making in digital environments.

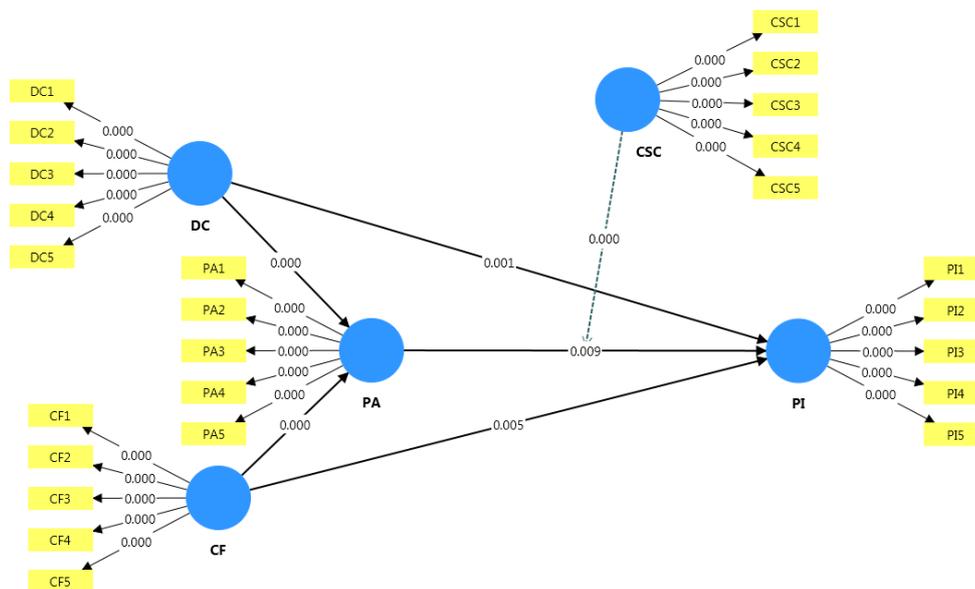


Figure 3. Structural model for path analysis.

Table 4 presents the results of the path analysis conducted using SmartPLS, confirming the acceptance of all hypothesized relationships. The path from digital charisma to purchase intention shows a significant positive effect ( $\beta = 0.172$ ,  $t = 2.544$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), indicating that influencer charisma directly enhances consumers' likelihood of purchasing. Similarly, cultural frames exhibit a significant positive relationship with purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.226$ ,  $t = 2.560$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), suggesting that cultural alignment influences purchasing behavior. The mediating effects of perceived attractiveness are also supported, with digital charisma influencing purchase intention through attractiveness ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $t = 2.279$ ,  $p = 0.048$ ) and cultural frames showing a similar mediated relationship ( $\beta = 0.074$ ,  $t = 1.853$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). Additionally, the moderating role of consumer self-concept is significant ( $\beta = 0.082$ ,  $t = 3.387$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), confirming that self-concept strengthens the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention. These results collectively validate the conceptual framework, demonstrating that both psychological and cultural mechanisms significantly shape female consumers' digital purchasing behaviors.

**Table 4.** Path analysis.

Hypothesis	Beta value	t value	p value
DC -> PI	0.172	2.544	0.013
CF -> PI	0.226	2.560	0.005
DC -> PA -> PI	0.023	2.279	0.048
CF -> PA -> PI	0.074	1.853	0.003
CSC x PA -> PI	0.082	3.387	0.000

## 5. DISCUSSION

It argues this by taking the initial step towards accepting the reality that the rate at which digital marketing changes is taking place in China has altered the manner in which female consumers interact with brands, products, and influencers within the virtual environment. The results of the current research provide insight into the complex interaction of digital charisma, cultural frames, and consumer psychology that determine purchase intentions. The modern digital environment thrives on the ideas of immersion and brand indicators of authenticity on the surface of the symbolic meaning, which is not based on the intimidation of shallow persuasion as compared to the outdated advertisement that usually depended on the appeal to the products as a mere instrument [13]. At that, virtual influencers have not only become marketing instruments but also bearers of charisma and cultural popularity, capable of creating very personal relations with customers.

The results of the paper support the first hypothesis by showing that online charisma of online influencers increases their perceived attractiveness to a substantial extent. It is consistent with previous studies indicating the importance of social presence, relatability, emotional expressiveness, and the communication style applied as determinants of the development of audience perception [24]. The fact that virtual influencers can convey charisma to the Chinese online marketplace, which is increasingly oriented towards highly immersive and interactive online experiences, is well-received by the requirements of female consumers who probably require their mediated experiences to be authentic, warm, and personal [8]. These findings indicate that the charisma-associated attributes not only mitigate the inhumanity of virtual influencers, but they can also make them more attractive to an extent that is equal to or greater than that of human influencers. This serves to reinforce the persuasive nature of the idea of digital charisma as a strategic design aspect of virtual influencer marketing. Not merely that, but it also expands upon the theories of source credibility that have been previously established to demonstrate how attractiveness could be achieved through communicative and relational cues that provoke an emotive reaction in consumers [19].

The findings also provide substantial support for the second hypothesis, which suggests that cultural frames influence the perceived attractiveness of virtual influencers. The discovery confirms that attractiveness is not universal but is mediated through cultural orientations, beauty ideals, and identity frames, which shape consumer perceptions [21]. In the Chinese environment, where collectivist and traditional ideals of beauty are paralleled by

increasing modern and global forces, attractiveness is a very context-specific perception as young Chinese women consider virtual influencers through a multicultural prism. Acceptance of H2 highlights the fact that collectivist audiences will find influencers who stress harmony, modesty, and community to be more appealing, whereas consumers who are more individualistic or modern-oriented will be more attracted to influencers who reflect or represent independence, novelty, and global flavor [41]. The result of the conducted study adds to the existing literature by illustrating that cultural frames are a decisive factor to consider when it comes to perceptions of attractiveness, even with the use of non-human cues, consequently extending the depth of the cultural studies examination to the virtual personality.

The study findings also support the mediating significance of perceived attractiveness in the digital charisma-purchase intention relationship, which provides significant knowledge acknowledging the process of consumer persuasion in the Chinese online market. Whereas authors of previous works have recognized the direct impact of digital charisma on consumer intentions [11], the current research indicates that digital charisma as a factor cannot produce the desired effect on female consumer intentions without perceived attractiveness. What this mediating role means is that consumers do not respond to the surface qualities of influencer communication, including social presence, relatability, emotional expressiveness, and communication style, but attempt to process these qualities in the light of attractiveness, which ultimately translates into their decision to purchase. This finding is consistent with signaling theory, according to which attractiveness is a heuristic indicator that complements persuasive indicators of charisma and leads to consumer trust and desirability [42]. The practical facts of the Chinese market, where the internet influence has taken control of online consumption behavior, i.e., social media and virtual influencers, create the need to design influencer messages so that they contribute to the creation of charisma in influencing purchase motives.

In the same vein, the mediation of perceived attractiveness in the relationship between cultural frames and purchase intention illustrates the power of cultural resonance in shaping consumer behavior. Although frames such as collectivism, traditional and modern beauty standards, and local and global cultural orientations directly impact perceptions of influencers, the current findings indicate that they only influence purchase intention when moderated by attractiveness [30]. This supports the theory of cultural dimensions and the theory of social identity proposed by Hofstede, which suggests that cultural congruence fosters a sense of in-group belonging, thereby enhancing perceived attractiveness and influencing consumer behavior [21]. To Chinese female consumers, who frequently have to negotiate between traditional cultural norms and contemporary globalized beauty standards, attractiveness serves as a mediator that converts cultural conformity into buying behavior [22]. Through empirical validation of this mediation, this study contributes to the body of cross-cultural marketing literature by demonstrating that attractiveness is not only a universal standard but also a culturally determined construct that mediates the influence of cultural cues on consumer judgments in online contexts.

In addition, consumer self-concept as a moderator between perceived attractiveness and an intention to purchase offers a deeper insight into individual differences in online consumer behavior [9]. The findings show that when female consumers experience a higher congruence between their self-conception and the image of the virtual influencer, then perceptions of attractiveness are more likely to influence actual purchase intentions. This aligns with the self-congruency theory, which postulates that consumers are more inclined to like and buy products that complement or augment their self-identity [20]. To Chinese consumers whose self-concept is frequently influenced by collectivist social norms as well as growing individualist desires in the contemporary consumer culture, this moderation effect underscores the delicate equilibrium of self-identity and the externality of attractiveness cues.

To sum up, the confirmation of all hypotheses put forth gives a consistent model, which relates to digital charisma, cultural frames, perceived attractiveness, and consumer self-concept in explaining purchase intentions in female consumers. Not only do the results confirm the mediating position of attractiveness, but they also show the boundary conditions within which this construct is operating, including that it relies on the alignment of self-

concepts. The study provides both theoretical and practical contributions by incorporating theoretical approaches, such as signalling theory, self-congruity theory, and cultural framing.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

The real-life implications of the research also have certain useful lessons to offer, which marketers and companies that plan to use digital influencers as often as possible in the Chinese market can adopt. The results indicate the importance of the development of digital charisma using the following characteristics: social presence, relatability, emotional expressiveness, and the style of communication that may make virtual figures even more attractive and, thus, may provoke the rise of purchase motivation among female customers. In its application to practitioners, it implies that the design of influence cannot be limited to aesthetics; yet, it must also incorporate personality-based and interactive design elements that allow building emotional appeal and trust. Also, the power of cultural frames demonstrates that brands must tailor influencer campaigns in a way that appeals to the values of consumers, whether these values be collectivist, traditional ideals of beauty, or other recently developed and globally inspired values and aspirations. The element of attractiveness is not created as an independent variable but as a reaction to the echo of cultural stimuli; this means that the localization concept is very important to market practice. Based on the findings, marketers and managers should design digital influencer campaigns that go beyond mere aesthetic appeal or charisma. Strategies should integrate culturally relevant messaging and align influencer personas with the target audience's self-concept to enhance engagement and purchase intention. Moreover, the modulating influence of the self-concept implies that campaigns should be personalized to demonstrate the identity change of the female consumer and ensure that virtual influencers provide images that can be associated with and aspired to by the audience of virtual influencers. These aspects could assist businesses in establishing a psychological connection between consumers and influencers in a more integrated manner, which predisposes the brand to be more dedicated to the consumers and, as a result, affects buying patterns in competitive digital economies. The theoretical implications of the study are that it has the potential to generalize and revise existing paradigms of digital persuasion, psychic consumerism, and cultural impact. The theory has been enriched through the research in that it has revealed that digital charisma and cultural frames do not directly influence purchase intentions but instead indirectly influence purchase intentions through the mediator role played by perceived attractiveness. This demonstrates the significance of attractiveness as one of the main psychological processes that match the characteristics of external stimuli with the inner consumer ratings. These findings also indicate that the role of attractiveness is not isolated; the influence of attractiveness on purchase intentions is affected by the similarity of the projected image of the influencer with the self-concept of the consumer, thus complementing the concept of self-congruity in online consumer behavior. Additionally, another significant cultural dimension to the model is that cultural frames introduce a critical theoretical dimension whereby global and local cultural orientations, traditional and modern beauty conventions, affect consumer perception in context-specific manners. The research fills the gap between psychological mediators and cultural entities, thereby providing a more balanced theoretical explanation concerning the operation of digital influence in both traditionally and globally oriented markets. It is an integrative paradigm that contributes to the overall scholarly discussion of influencer marketing, consumer decision-making, and cultural psychology, offering a structure that can be justified and applied across different cultural and technological backgrounds.

### 6.1. Limitations and Future Directions

Even with the insights mentioned, this study has not been without limitations that leave room for further research. It has limitations, such as only targeting female consumers in the Chinese online market; hence, the relevance of findings to other groups of people or in other cultural contexts. Future studies can be employed to include male consumers, older age groups, or cross-national samples to apply the model and test cultural differences on a more pervasive scale. Another weakness is that self-reported measures are convenient for measuring consumer

perceptions, but may be vulnerable to biased assumptions like social desirability or exaggerating purchasing intentions. Future research may require the use of experimental measures, behavioral observation, or longitudinal analysis to obtain more objective data on consumer responses over time. Moreover, the authors focused mainly on digital charisma, cultural frames, attractiveness, and self-concept, whereas other potentially influential variables, such as trust, authenticity, or technology features of virtual influencers, were not considered. Future studies could extend the conceptual model to explore the interaction of these variables with charisma and culture to influence purchase behavior. Lastly, due to the dynamism of digital marketing and technology, the dynamics revealed here can change rapidly; further research should explore how new technologies such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and immersive platforms alter perceptions of virtual influencers and whether the mediating impact of attractiveness and the moderating impact of self-concept will remain constant in these changing conditions.

## 7. CONCLUSION

To summarize, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how digital charisma and cultural frames influence purchase intentions among female consumers in China, with perceived attractiveness serving as a central psychological mechanism and consumer self-concept acting as a boundary condition. The findings demonstrate that charisma and cultural cues influence intentions not only directly but also indirectly through attractiveness, particularly when consumers perceive a strong identity alignment with virtual influencers. The study advances the literature by integrating cultural, psychological, and technological perspectives into a unified framework, offering a more nuanced explanation of how consumers evaluate and respond to virtual influencers. Practically, the results highlight the need for marketers to move beyond surface-level aesthetics and develop strategies that incorporate cultural resonance and self-concept congruence to foster deeper, long-term consumer engagement. This integrated perspective lays a foundation for future research exploring diverse cultures, influencer types, and consumer segments within the rapidly evolving digital marketplace.

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**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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