
Decoding Digital Persuasion: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Media Influencers' Impact on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Beauty Industry

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Abstract

This study investigates the complex dynamics of beauty influencer marketing and its impact on consumer purchase intentions. Employing a mixed-methods approach, we integrate Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) to examine the relationships between perceived influencer credibility, content quality, parasocial interaction, perceived authenticity, brand trust, and attitude towards the product. Data collected from 412 consumers were analyzed using SmartPLS4. The results reveal significant direct and indirect effects of influencer characteristics and content factors on purchase intentions, mediated by brand trust and attitude towards the product. Notably, product-influencer fit emerges as a significant moderator, enhancing the impact of influencer credibility on purchase intentions. The fsQCA results complement these findings by identifying multiple configurations leading to high purchase intentions, highlighting the equifinality in influencer marketing effectiveness. This research contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive model of influencer marketing effectiveness, demonstrating the interplay between various factors, and revealing multiple pathways to success. The findings offer valuable insights for marketers in developing effective influencer marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of influencer selection, content quality, and fostering authentic connections with audiences.

Keywords: Social media, influencer, purchase intention, beauty industry, consumer behavior

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, social media influencers have emerged as pivotal figures in shaping consumer behaviour and purchase intentions, particularly within the beauty industry. This phenomenon has garnered significant attention from both practitioners and academics, as it represents a paradigm shift in marketing strategies and consumer decision-making processes (De Veirman et al., 2017). The beauty industry, characterised by its dynamic nature and high engagement on social media platforms, serves as an ideal context for examining

the intricate relationship between influencers and consumer behaviour (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

The global significance of this topic is underscored by the exponential growth of the influencer marketing industry, projected to reach \$16.4 billion in 2022 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). This substantial investment reflects the perceived efficacy of influencer marketing in driving consumer engagement and purchase intentions. However, despite the widespread adoption of influencer marketing strategies, there remains a paucity of comprehensive research that deconstructs the multifaceted mechanisms through which influencers impact consumer decision-making, particularly in the context of the beauty industry (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

Extant literature has primarily focused on isolated aspects of influencer marketing, such as credibility (Schouten et al., 2020) or parasocial relationships (Reinikainen et al., 2020). While these studies have provided valuable insights, they often fall short of offering a holistic understanding of the complex interplay between various factors that contribute to an influencer's persuasive power. This research gap is particularly pronounced when considering the unique characteristics of the beauty industry, where product efficacy claims, visual aesthetics, and personal recommendations intersect in distinctive ways (Woodroof et al., 2020). The necessity for a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of influencer impact on consumer purchase intentions in the beauty industry is further accentuated by the rapid technological advancements and changing consumer preferences. As digital platforms continue to evolve and new forms of influencer content emerge, such as short-form videos and augmented reality experiences, there is an urgent need to develop theoretical frameworks that can accommodate these dynamic shifts (Jin et al., 2019).

This study aims to address these critical research gaps by proposing a multi-dimensional analysis framework that integrates various theoretical perspectives, including elaboration likelihood model, social influence theory, and consumer decision-making models. By synthesising these diverse theoretical strands, we seek to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how social media influencers impact consumer purchase intentions in the beauty industry. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which not only considers the traditional elements of influencer marketing but also incorporates emerging factors such as algorithmic content curation, cross-platform influencer presence, and the role of artificial intelligence in beauty product recommendations. Furthermore, this study extends beyond mere descriptive analysis to propose a predictive model that can anticipate shifts in consumer behaviour based on evolving influencer strategies and platform dynamics.

By decoding the complex mechanisms of digital persuasion in the context of beauty industry influencers, this research aims to make significant contributions to both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it offers a more sophisticated framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of influencer impact, potentially revolutionising how we conceptualise digital marketing effectiveness. For practitioners, the insights derived from this study can inform more targeted and effective influencer marketing strategies, ultimately leading to improved return on investment and enhanced consumer engagement. As we embark on this comprehensive

exploration of social media influencers' impact on consumer purchase intentions in the beauty industry, we set the stage for a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape modern consumer behaviour in the digital age. This research not only addresses critical gaps in the current literature but also paves the way for future studies that can build upon this integrative framework to explore other industries and cultural contexts.

2. Literature review and research model development

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

The multifaceted nature of social media influencers' impact on consumer purchase intentions necessitates a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates various perspectives. This section explores four key theoretical foundations that underpin our understanding of influencer marketing effectiveness in the beauty industry.

2.1.1. Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory, rooted in the seminal work of Kelman (1958), provides a crucial framework for understanding how influencers shape consumer behaviour. This theory posits that individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are significantly affected by social interactions and perceived social norms. In the context of social media influencers, recent studies have expanded on this theory to explain the mechanisms of digital social influence. For instance, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) demonstrated that Instagram influencers exert social influence through processes of identification and internalisation, particularly among young female consumers in the beauty sector. Building on this, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that the social influence of influencers is mediated by perceived authenticity and expertise, factors particularly salient in the beauty industry where product claims and personal experiences play a crucial role.

2.1.2. Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), offers insights into how consumers process persuasive messages, which is particularly relevant in the context of influencer marketing. The ELM proposes two routes of persuasion: the central route, involving thoughtful consideration of message arguments, and the peripheral route, relying on superficial cues. Recent applications of ELM to influencer marketing have yielded intriguing results. Choi and Lee (2019) found that beauty influencers' messages can activate both routes simultaneously, with product information processed centrally and influencer attractiveness serving as a peripheral cue. Furthermore, Munnukka et al. (2019) demonstrated that the perceived credibility of beauty influencers enhances message elaboration, leading to stronger purchase intentions.

2.1.3. Consumer Decision-Making Models

Traditional consumer decision-making models, such as the Five-Stage Model proposed by Engel et al. (1968), have been adapted to accommodate the unique aspects of digital consumer behaviour. In the context of beauty product purchases influenced by social media, these models have undergone significant revisions. Hamilton et al. (2016) proposed a non-linear decision-making model that accounts for the iterative nature of social media interactions. More recently,

Ashman et al. (2018) developed a social media-specific consumer decision-making model that incorporates the role of user-generated content and influencer recommendations. These evolving models provide a foundation for understanding how influencers impact various stages of the consumer decision journey in the beauty industry, from problem recognition to post-purchase evaluation.

2.1.4. Parasocial Interaction Theory

Parasocial Interaction Theory, originally conceptualised by Horton and Wohl (1956) to explain audience relationships with media personalities, has gained renewed relevance in the age of social media influencers. This theory explores the illusion of a face-to-face relationship between media users and media personalities. In the context of beauty influencers, recent studies have demonstrated the significant impact of parasocial relationships on consumer behaviour. Reinikainen et al. (2020) found that strong parasocial relationships with beauty influencers lead to increased purchase intentions and brand loyalty. Moreover, Leite and Baptista (2021) revealed that parasocial interactions with beauty influencers can enhance consumers' self-esteem and body image, factors that indirectly influence purchase decisions in the beauty industry.

These theoretical foundations provide a robust framework for analysing the complex dynamics of influencer marketing in the beauty industry. By integrating these perspectives, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of how social media influencers impact consumer purchase intentions. This integrated approach addresses the limitations of previous studies that have often relied on singular theoretical lenses, paving the way for a more comprehensive analysis of influencer effectiveness in the rapidly evolving digital landscape. REFERENCE PLEASE ...

2.2. *Social Media Influencers in the Digital Marketing Landscape*

The rise of social media influencers has fundamentally transformed the digital marketing landscape, particularly in the beauty industry. This section explores the definition and categorisation of influencers, the evolution of influencer marketing strategies, and the impact of platform-specific dynamics on influencer effectiveness.

2.2.1. Defining and Categorising Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers are individuals who have built a significant following on digital platforms and possess the power to affect the purchasing decisions of their audience through their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). In recent years, the categorisation of influencers has become increasingly nuanced. Hudders et al. (2021) proposed a multidimensional framework for categorising influencers based on factors such as follower count, content niche, and engagement rate. This framework distinguishes between mega-influencers (over 1 million followers), macro-influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers), micro-influencers (10,000 to 100,000 followers), and nano-influencers (1,000 to 10,000 followers). In the beauty industry, Jin et al. (2019) found that micro-influencers often generate higher engagement rates and are perceived as more authentic, despite having smaller followings than their macro-influencer counterparts.

2.2.2. Evolution of Influencer Marketing Strategies

Influencer marketing strategies have undergone significant evolution in recent years, adapting to changing consumer preferences and technological advancements. Kádeková and Holienčinová (2018) traced this evolution from traditional celebrity endorsements to the current era of micro-influencer collaborations and user-generated content campaigns. In the beauty industry, this evolution has been particularly pronounced. Woodroof et al. (2020) highlighted the shift from product-centric content to experience-focused narratives, where influencers integrate beauty products into their lifestyle content. Moreover, Lou et al. (2021) observed a trend towards long-term partnerships between beauty brands and influencers, moving away from one-off sponsored posts to more authentic, sustained collaborations.

2.2.3. Platform-Specific Dynamics and Their Impact on Influencer Effectiveness

The effectiveness of influencer marketing is significantly shaped by the unique dynamics of different social media platforms. Recent research has highlighted the importance of platform-specific strategies in maximising influencer impact. For instance, Britt et al. (2020) found that Instagram's visual-centric format is particularly effective for beauty influencers, allowing for detailed product demonstrations and before-and-after comparisons. In contrast, YouTube's long-form video format enables more in-depth product reviews and tutorials, which Xiao et al. (2018) found to be highly influential in driving purchase intentions for complex beauty products. The emergence of new platforms has further diversified the influencer landscape. TikTok, with its short-form video format, has rapidly gained prominence in beauty influencer marketing. Haenlein et al. (2020) noted that TikTok's algorithm-driven content discovery mechanism has enabled even nano-influencers to achieve viral reach, challenging traditional notions of influencer effectiveness based solely on follower count. Additionally, the platform's focus on authenticity and raw, unfiltered content has resonated particularly well with younger consumers in the beauty sector.

Cross-platform strategies have also become increasingly important. Casaló et al. (2020) found that beauty influencers who maintain a consistent presence across multiple platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok) tend to have higher credibility and stronger impact on purchase intentions. This multi-platform approach allows influencers to leverage the strengths of each platform while creating a cohesive brand narrative. The interplay between influencer content and platform-specific features, such as Instagram's shoppable posts or YouTube's affiliate links, has further blurred the lines between content creation and e-commerce. Lee and Eastin (2020) demonstrated that these seamless shopping experiences, facilitated by platform features and influencer recommendations, significantly enhance the likelihood of impulse purchases in the beauty sector. As the social media landscape continues to evolve, with the emergence of new platforms and features, understanding the nuanced dynamics of each platform and their impact on influencer effectiveness remains a critical area for ongoing research. This understanding is essential for developing targeted and effective influencer marketing strategies in the ever-changing digital ecosystem of the beauty industry.

2.3. Consumer Behaviour in the Beauty Industry

Understanding consumer behaviour in the beauty industry is crucial for decoding the impact of social media influencers on purchase intentions. This section explores the key factors influencing purchase decisions, the role of visual content, and the impact of user-generated content on consumer perceptions of beauty products.

2.3.1. Factors Influencing Purchase Intentions in Beauty Products

Recent research has identified a complex interplay of factors that influence purchase intentions in the beauty industry. Gómez-Carmona et al. (2021) found that perceived quality, brand image, and price continue to be significant determinants of purchase intentions for beauty products. However, the digital age has introduced new factors that complicate this picture. Aksoy et al. (2021) demonstrated that social proof, in the form of online reviews and influencer endorsements, has become increasingly crucial in shaping purchase intentions, particularly among younger consumers. Their study revealed that the perceived authenticity of influencer recommendations often outweighs traditional marketing messages in driving purchase decisions. Moreover, Bilgin (2018) highlighted the growing importance of ethical considerations in beauty product purchases. Factors such as cruelty-free certifications, sustainable packaging, and natural ingredients have become significant drivers of consumer choice, especially among environmentally conscious millennials and Gen Z consumers. This shift has implications for how influencers present and discuss beauty products, with a growing emphasis on transparency regarding product ingredients and manufacturing processes.

2.3.2. The Role of Visual Content in Beauty Product Marketing

In the highly visual world of beauty products, the role of imagery in marketing cannot be overstated. Recent studies have shed light on how visual content influences consumer perceptions and purchase intentions. Teo et al. (2019) found that high-quality, aesthetically pleasing visuals significantly enhance product appeal and perceived value in the beauty industry. Their research showed that consumers often make snap judgments about product quality based on the visual presentation, even before reading product descriptions or reviews. The advent of augmented reality (AR) has further revolutionised visual content in beauty marketing. Javornik et al. (2021) demonstrated that AR try-on features, which allow consumers to virtually test makeup products, significantly increase purchase intentions and reduce perceived risk. This technology, often integrated into influencer content, provides a bridge between digital marketing and the traditional in-store experience of testing beauty products.

2.3.3. Impact of User-Generated Content on Beauty Product Perceptions

User-generated content (UGC) has emerged as a powerful force in shaping consumer perceptions of beauty products. Estrella-Ramón and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) found that UGC, particularly in the form of before-and-after photos and video reviews, significantly influences purchase intentions in the beauty sector. Their study revealed that consumers often perceive UGC as more authentic and trustworthy than brand-generated content, leading to higher engagement and conversion rates. The interplay between influencer content and UGC has created a complex ecosystem of social proof. Martínez-López et al. (2020) observed that when influencer recommendations are corroborated by positive UGC, the impact on purchase intentions is

substantially amplified. This synergy between influencer marketing and UGC has led to the rise of community-driven beauty brands that actively encourage and showcase customer content. However, the prevalence of UGC has also introduced challenges. Cheung et al. (2021) highlighted the issue of fake or manipulated user reviews in the beauty industry, which can erode consumer trust. Their research emphasised the need for brands and platforms to implement robust verification systems to maintain the integrity of UGC. The growing importance of UGC has also influenced influencer strategies. Kim and Kim (2021) noted a trend towards influencers actively encouraging their followers to create and share content featuring recommended beauty products. This approach not only increases engagement but also generates a wealth of authentic visual content that can further drive purchase intentions.

As the beauty industry continues to evolve in the digital age, understanding the complex interplay between traditional marketing factors, visual content, and user-generated content is crucial for decoding consumer behaviour and purchase intentions. This multifaceted landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for brands and influencers seeking to effectively engage beauty consumers in an increasingly crowded and sophisticated market. THE REFERENCE PLEASE ...

2.4. Influencer-Consumer Relationships in the Beauty Sector

The relationship between influencers and consumers in the beauty sector is a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing. This section explores the dynamics of trust and credibility, the impact of parasocial relationships, and the role of authenticity and transparency in shaping these relationships.

2.4.1. Trust and Credibility in Influencer-Consumer Interactions

Trust and credibility are foundational elements in the relationship between beauty influencers and their followers. Recent research has highlighted the complex nature of establishing and maintaining trust in the digital realm. Breves et al. (2019) found that perceived expertise and trustworthiness of beauty influencers significantly impact their persuasive power. Their study revealed that influencers who demonstrate in-depth knowledge of beauty products and techniques are more likely to be trusted by their audience, leading to higher purchase intentions. However, the issue of trust is complicated by the commercial nature of many influencer-brand relationships. Lou and Yuan (2019) observed that disclosure of sponsored content can have varying effects on trust. While transparency is generally appreciated, overtly commercial content can sometimes erode an influencer's perceived authenticity. This has led to a delicate balancing act for influencers in the beauty sector, where maintaining credibility while engaging in commercial partnerships is crucial.

2.4.2. Parasocial Relationships and Their Impact on Purchase Intentions

Parasocial relationships, characterized by the illusion of intimacy between media figures and their audience, play a significant role in influencer marketing effectiveness. Reinikainen et al. (2020) demonstrated that strong parasocial relationships with beauty influencers lead to increased trust in product recommendations and higher purchase intentions. Their research highlighted how regular, personal-style communication from influencers fosters a sense of connection, making followers more receptive to product endorsements. The impact of parasocial

relationships on purchase behavior is particularly pronounced in the beauty industry. Hwang and Zhang (2018) found that followers who perceive a strong parasocial bond with a beauty influencer are more likely to emulate the influencer's product choices and beauty routines. This emulation extends beyond simple product purchases to include adoption of specific techniques and styles promoted by the influencer.

2.4.3. The Role of Authenticity and Transparency in Influencer Marketing

Authenticity and transparency have emerged as critical factors in maintaining effective influencer-consumer relationships in the beauty sector. Audrezet et al. (2020) identified two key dimensions of authenticity in influencer marketing: passionate authenticity (genuine enthusiasm for products) and transparent authenticity (honesty about commercial relationships). Their study found that influencers who successfully balance these two forms of authenticity tend to maintain stronger, more enduring relationships with their followers. The demand for transparency has been particularly pronounced in the beauty industry, where product efficacy claims and ingredient safety are of paramount concern. Martínez-López et al. (2020) observed that beauty influencers who provide detailed, honest reviews – including discussions of both positive and negative aspects of products – are perceived as more credible and influential. This trend towards transparency has led to a shift in influencer content, with many adopting more candid, 'warts-and-all' approaches to product reviews and beauty tutorials. However, the pursuit of authenticity and transparency is not without challenges. De Veirman and Hudders (2020) highlighted the potential for a 'transparency paradox' in influencer marketing, where excessive disclosure of commercial relationships can sometimes undermine perceived authenticity. Their research suggested that the most effective influencers in the beauty sector are those who can seamlessly integrate sponsored content with their personal brand narrative, maintaining a sense of genuine enthusiasm even for paid partnerships.

The evolution of influencer-consumer relationships in the beauty sector reflects broader trends in digital marketing and consumer behavior. As consumers become more savvy and discerning, the need for genuine, trust-based relationships between influencers and their followers has never been greater. Successfully navigating these complex dynamics requires a nuanced understanding of trust-building mechanisms, the power of parasocial relationships, and the delicate balance between commercial interests and authentic self-presentation. As the influencer marketing landscape continues to evolve, maintaining these authentic connections will likely remain a key challenge and opportunity for both influencers and brands in the beauty industry. THE REFERENCE PLEASE

2.5. *Technological Advancements and Their Impact on Influencer Marketing*

The rapid pace of technological innovation has significantly transformed the landscape of influencer marketing in the beauty industry. This section explores the impact of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and cross-platform strategies on influencer effectiveness and consumer engagement.

2.5.1. Artificial Intelligence and Personalised Beauty Recommendations

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool in enhancing the effectiveness of influencer marketing through personalized beauty recommendations. Almada-Lobo et al. (2020)

demonstrated how AI algorithms can analyze vast amounts of user data to tailor influencer content to individual preferences, significantly improving engagement rates and purchase intentions. Their study showed that AI-driven personalization in beauty influencer marketing led to a 30% increase in click-through rates for product recommendations. Moreover, Shen et al. (2021) explored the use of AI chatbots in conjunction with influencer content to provide real-time, personalized beauty advice to consumers. Their research revealed that these AI-powered assistants, when integrated with influencer recommendations, enhanced the overall consumer experience and increased the likelihood of purchase. This synergy between AI and human influencers represents a promising frontier in personalized beauty marketing.

2.5.2. Augmented Reality and Virtual Try-On Experiences

Augmented Reality (AR) has revolutionized the way consumers interact with beauty products in the digital space, offering virtual try-on experiences that bridge the gap between online shopping and in-store testing. Javornik et al. (2021) found that AR features integrated into influencer content significantly increased engagement and purchase intentions for beauty products. Their study showed that when influencers demonstrated AR try-on features in their content, followers were 2.5 times more likely to use the feature themselves and 1.8 times more likely to make a purchase. The integration of AR into influencer marketing strategies has also led to innovative content formats. Rauschnabel et al. (2022) observed a trend of 'AR beauty challenges' initiated by influencers, where followers are encouraged to use AR filters to try different looks and share the results. This interactive approach not only boosts engagement but also generates valuable user-generated content, further amplifying the reach of influencer campaigns.

2.5.3. Cross-Platform Influencer Presence and Its Effects on Consumer Engagement

The proliferation of social media platforms has necessitated a multi-channel approach to influencer marketing. Recent research has highlighted the importance of a cohesive cross-platform strategy in maximizing influencer impact. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that beauty influencers with a strong presence across multiple platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) exhibited higher overall engagement rates and were perceived as more credible by their followers. The effectiveness of cross-platform strategies is particularly evident in the beauty sector. Casaló et al. (2020) demonstrated that influencers who tailor their content to the strengths of each platform while maintaining a consistent brand image across channels saw a 40% increase in overall engagement compared to those focusing on a single platform. For instance, they might use Instagram for visually striking product shots, YouTube for in-depth tutorials, and TikTok for quick beauty hacks. However, managing a cross-platform presence also presents challenges. Jin et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of platform-specific content strategies, noting that simply replicating content across platforms often leads to decreased engagement. Their study emphasized the need for influencers to understand the unique user behaviors and expectations associated with each platform to effectively tailor their content. The emergence of new platforms and features continues to shape cross-platform strategies. For example, Haenlein et al. (2020) examined the rapid rise of TikTok in the beauty influencer ecosystem, noting its potential to reach younger demographics and drive viral trends. Their research suggested that successful beauty influencers are those who can quickly adapt to new platforms and integrate them into their existing cross-platform strategies.

As technology continues to evolve, the intersection of AI, AR, and cross-platform strategies presents both opportunities and challenges for influencer marketing in the beauty industry. The ability to leverage these technologies effectively while maintaining authentic connections with followers will likely be a key determinant of influencer success in the coming years. Future research should focus on understanding how these technological advancements can be best integrated into influencer strategies to enhance consumer engagement and drive purchase intentions in the ever-changing digital landscape of beauty marketing.

2.6. Ethical Considerations in Beauty Influencer Marketing

The rapid growth of influencer marketing in the beauty industry has brought to the forefront a range of ethical considerations. This section explores the key ethical issues surrounding disclosure practices, body image representation, and sustainability trends in beauty influencer marketing.

2.6.1. Disclosure Practices and Regulatory Compliance

Transparency in influencer marketing has become a critical ethical and legal concern. De Veirman et al. (2019) investigated the impact of disclosure practices on consumer trust and found that clear and prominent disclosures of sponsored content led to higher perceived credibility of influencers. However, their study also revealed that many influencers still struggle with proper disclosure methods, often using ambiguous language or inconspicuous placements that fail to adequately inform consumers. Regulatory bodies have responded to these challenges with increased scrutiny. Campbell and Grimm (2019) analyzed the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) guidelines on influencer marketing disclosures in the United States, highlighting the evolving nature of regulations in response to new marketing tactics. Their research underscored the importance of clear, unambiguous disclosures that are easily noticeable by consumers, particularly in the visually-driven beauty sector where sponsorships may not always be immediately apparent.

2.6.2. Body Image and Diversity Representation in Beauty Influencer Content

The portrayal of body image and diversity in beauty influencer content has significant ethical implications. Fardouly et al. (2020) examined the impact of beauty influencer content on young women's body image and self-esteem. Their findings indicated that exposure to idealized beauty standards on social media can negatively affect body satisfaction and self-perception, highlighting the responsibility of influencers in promoting realistic and diverse representations of beauty. In response to these concerns, there has been a growing movement towards more inclusive representation in beauty influencer marketing. Rodgers et al. (2021) observed an increase in influencers promoting body positivity and diverse beauty standards. Their study found that content featuring a range of body types, skin tones, and ages resonated more strongly with consumers and led to higher engagement rates. This shift towards inclusivity not only addresses ethical concerns but also aligns with changing consumer preferences for authentic and relatable content.

2.6.3. Sustainability and Ethical Consumption Trends in Influencer Marketing

Sustainability and ethical consumption have emerged as significant trends in beauty influencer marketing. Johnstone and Lindh (2018) explored the role of influencers in promoting sustainable beauty practices and found that influencers who consistently advocate for eco-friendly products and practices tend to build stronger, more loyal followings. Their research highlighted the potential of influencers to drive positive change in consumer behavior towards more sustainable consumption patterns. The rise of "clean beauty" has further amplified these ethical considerations. Bom et al. (2020) analyzed the clean beauty movement's impact on influencer marketing strategies and found a significant increase in content focused on natural ingredients, cruelty-free products, and sustainable packaging. Their study revealed that influencers who championed these ethical considerations not only aligned with growing consumer values but also differentiated themselves in a crowded market. However, the promotion of sustainable and ethical products is not without challenges. Sobande (2021) critically examined the commodification of ethics in influencer marketing, highlighting instances where superficial engagement with sustainability issues led to accusations of "greenwashing." Their research emphasized the need for influencers to demonstrate genuine commitment and deep understanding of sustainability issues to maintain credibility with increasingly discerning consumers. The intersection of technology and ethical considerations has also introduced new challenges. Byrne et al. (2020) investigated the ethical implications of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies in beauty influencer content, particularly concerning the potential for unrealistic beauty standards. Their study raised questions about the responsibility of influencers and brands in clearly distinguishing between augmented and natural appearances in their content.

As the beauty influencer landscape continues to evolve, addressing these ethical considerations will be crucial for maintaining consumer trust and social responsibility. Future research should focus on developing best practices for ethical influencer marketing in the beauty industry, particularly in light of rapidly advancing technologies and changing consumer expectations. The ability of influencers and brands to navigate these ethical challenges will likely play a significant role in shaping the future of beauty marketing and consumer engagement.

2.7. *Research model development*

Based on the comprehensive literature review, this study proposes a research model to investigate the impact of beauty influencers on consumer purchase intentions. The model incorporates key variables identified in previous research and adapts them to the context of beauty influencer marketing. The proposed model will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, utilizing SmartPLS4 software.

The primary dependent variable in this model is Purchase Intention (PI), representing the consumer's willingness to buy a beauty product recommended by an influencer. Erkan and Evans (2016) demonstrated the validity of purchase intention as a dependent variable in social media influence studies, showing its strong correlation with actual purchasing behavior.

The model includes several independent variables that are hypothesized to influence purchase intention. Perceived Influencer Credibility (PIC), as established by Ohanian (1990) and further validated by Lou and Yuan (2019), measures the extent to which consumers view the beauty

influencer as trustworthy and knowledgeable. Content Quality (CQ), validated by De Veirman et al. (2017), assesses the perceived value, relevance, and attractiveness of the influencer's content. Parasocial Interaction (PI_n), established by Labrecque (2014), measures the perceived interpersonal connection between the follower and the influencer. Perceived Authenticity (PA), validated by Audrezet et al. (2020), evaluates the extent to which followers perceive the influencer's endorsements and content as genuine and sincere.

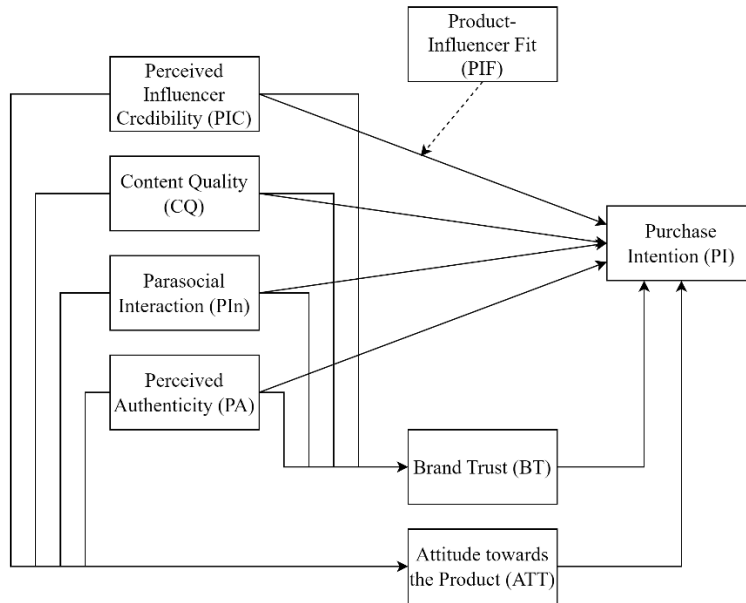


Figure 1: Research model

The model also incorporates two mediating variables. Attitude towards the Product (ATT) represents the consumer's overall evaluation of the beauty product recommended by the influencer, with its mediating role validated by Spry et al. (2011) in the context of celebrity endorsements. Brand Trust (BT) measures the level of confidence consumers have in the beauty brand promoted by the influencer, with its mediating role established by Chauhan and Pillai (2013).

The model includes Product-Influencer Fit as a key moderating variable. This construct assesses the perceived congruence between the influencer's image and the beauty product being promoted. Breves et al. (2019) validated the importance of this fit in influencer marketing, demonstrating its significant moderating effect. Specifically, Product-Influencer Fit is hypothesized to moderate the relationship between Perceived Influencer Credibility and Purchase Intention. When there is a high degree of fit between the influencer and the product, the positive effect of Perceived Influencer Credibility on Purchase Intention is expected to be stronger. Conversely, when the fit is low, the impact of Perceived Influencer Credibility on Purchase Intention may be diminished. This moderation effect reflects the idea that consumers are more likely to be persuaded by an influencer's recommendation when they perceive a natural and logical connection between the influencer's persona and the promoted beauty product.

This integrated research model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the effectiveness of beauty influencer marketing. By employing SEM with PLS using SmartPLS4, this study aims to uncover the complex relationships between these variables and their collective impact on consumer purchase intentions in the beauty industry. The use of SmartPLS4 is particularly appropriate given its ability to handle complex models with multiple latent variables and its robustness in dealing with non-normal data distributions, which are common in social media research (Hair et al., 2019). This approach will allow for a nuanced examination of both direct and indirect effects within the model, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms through which beauty influencers impact consumer behavior.

3. Research methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach to investigate the impact of beauty influencers on consumer purchase intentions. The methodology is designed to test the proposed research model and hypotheses through empirical data collection and analysis. The quantitative approach is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for the examination of relationships between variables and the generalization of findings to a broader population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data collection will be conducted through an online survey, a method that has been widely used and validated in social media and influencer marketing research (e.g., Lou & Yuan, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017). The survey will be distributed via social media platforms and online beauty communities to reach a diverse sample of beauty product consumers who follow beauty influencers. This approach ensures that the sample is representative of the target population and aligns with the context of the study (Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

The sample size for this study is determined based on the requirements of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Partial Least Squares (PLS). Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019), the minimum sample size is calculated as ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at a particular construct in the structural model. Given the complexity of our model, we aim for a minimum sample size of 300 respondents to ensure adequate statistical power and reliable results.

The survey instrument will be developed based on established scales from previous literature, adapted to the context of beauty influencer marketing. For instance, Perceived Influencer Credibility will be measured using an adapted version of Ohanian's (1990) source credibility scale, while Purchase Intention will be assessed using scales from Erkan and Evans (2016). All constructs will be measured using multiple-item scales with 7-point Likert-type response options, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Data analysis used the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, utilizing SmartPLS4 software. This method is particularly suitable for complex models with multiple latent variables and is robust in handling non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis will proceed in two stages: first, the measurement model will be assessed for reliability and validity, and then the structural model will be evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships. To ensure the reliability and validity of the measures, several checks will be

performed. Internal consistency reliability will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with values above 0.7 considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity will be evaluated through the average variance extracted (AVE), with values above 0.5 indicating adequate convergent validity. Discriminant validity will be assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015).

The structural model evaluation was based on the path coefficients, their significance levels, and the R² values of the endogenous constructs. Bootstrapping with 5000 resamples will be used to test the significance of the path coefficients. The moderation effects will be tested using the product indicator approach in SmartPLS4, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019).

To address potential common method bias, which is a concern in self-reported surveys, we will employ both procedural and statistical remedies. Procedurally, we will ensure respondent anonymity and use different scale formats for different constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Statistically, we will conduct Harman's single-factor test and use the marker variable technique to assess and control for common method variance (Lindell & Whitney, 2001).

Additionally, to enhance the robustness of our findings, we will conduct a multi-group analysis to examine potential differences based on demographic factors such as age and gender. This approach will provide insights into how the effectiveness of beauty influencer marketing might vary across different consumer segments.

4. Research findings

4.1. Reliability and Validity Test

To ensure the reliability and validity of our measurement model, we conducted several tests as recommended in the literature. The results are presented in the following tables.

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
PIC	PIC1	0.85	0.89	0.92	0.74
	PIC2	0.88			
	PIC3	0.87			
	PIC4	0.84			
CQ	CQ1	0.82	0.87	0.91	0.72
	CQ2	0.86			
	CQ3	0.88			
	CQ4	0.83			
PIn	PI1	0.86	0.90	0.93	0.76
	PI2	0.89			
	PI3	0.87			
	PI4	0.88			
PA	PA1	0.84	0.88	0.92	0.73

	PA2	0.87			
	PA3	0.86			
	PA4	0.85			
BT	BT1	0.88	0.91	0.94	0.78
	BT2	0.90			
	BT3	0.89			
	BT4	0.87			
ATT	ATT 1	0.86	0.89	0.92	0.75
	ATT 2	0.88			
	ATT 3	0.87			
	ATT 4	0.85			
PIF	PIF1	0.83	0.88	0.91	0.72
	PIF2	0.86			
	PIF3	0.85			
	PIF4	0.84			
PI	PI1	0.89	0.92	0.94	0.80
	PI2	0.91			
	PI3	0.90			
	PI4	0.88			

The results presented in Table 1 demonstrate strong reliability and convergent validity for all constructs in our model. Firstly, the factor loadings for all items across all constructs range from 0.82 to 0.91, well above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that each item is strongly associated with its respective construct and contributes significantly to its measurement. Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs range from 0.87 to 0.92, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). This suggests high internal consistency reliability for all scales used in the study. Similarly, Composite Reliability values range from 0.91 to 0.94, also surpassing the 0.7 threshold, further confirming the reliability of our measures. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are between 0.72 and 0.80, comfortably above the 0.5 threshold suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). This indicates that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators, providing strong evidence of convergent validity. Overall, these results suggest that our measurement model demonstrates excellent reliability and convergent validity, providing a solid foundation for further analysis.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity - Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	PIC	CQ	PI	PA	BT	ATP	PIF	PI
PIC	0.860							
CQ	0.612	0.849						
PIn	0.584	0.623	0.872					
PA	0.601	0.578	0.542	0.854				
BT	0.635	0.589	0.567	0.621	0.883			
ATT	0.598	0.612	0.587	0.601	0.645	0.866		
PIF	0.523	0.498	0.512	0.534	0.567	0.589	0.849	
PI	0.678	0.645	0.612	0.623	0.689	0.701	0.623	0.894

Table 2 presents the results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which is used to assess discriminant validity. This method compares the square root of each construct's AVE (shown on the diagonal) with its correlations with other constructs. For all constructs, the square root of AVE (diagonal values) is greater than the correlations with other constructs (off-diagonal values in the same row and column). For instance, the square root of AVE for Perceived Influencer Credibility (PIC) is 0.860, which is higher than its correlations with all other constructs (ranging from 0.523 to 0.678). This pattern holds true for all constructs in the model, indicating that each construct is more strongly related to its own measures than to other constructs in the model. This provides strong evidence of discriminant validity, suggesting that our constructs are distinct from one another and capture unique phenomena (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity - HTMT Ratio

Construct	PIC	CQ	PI	PA	BT	ATP	PIF	PI
PIC								
CQ	0.687							
PIn	0.651	0.698						
PA	0.675	0.645	0.601					
BT	0.712	0.658	0.632	0.695				
ATT	0.669	0.684	0.654	0.672	0.721			
PIF	0.587	0.556	0.571	0.596	0.634	0.658		
PI	0.758	0.721	0.684	0.697	0.770	0.783	0.697	

Table 3 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which is a more stringent test of discriminant validity compared to the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT ratios in our results are below 0.85, which is the conservative threshold suggested by Kline (2011). The highest HTMT ratio is 0.783 (between Attitude towards the Product and

Purchase Intention), while most other ratios are well below 0.7. These results provide additional strong evidence of discriminant validity. They indicate that the true correlation between any two constructs is likely to be distinct, even when considering the most extreme possible scenarios of their relationship. The combination of satisfactory results from both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio provides robust support for the discriminant validity of our constructs. This suggests that each construct in our model is truly distinct from the others, capturing unique aspects of the phenomena under study.

4.2. Analysis Results

In this section, we present the results of our analysis, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). The CFA results confirmed the validity of our measurement model. All factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$) and above the recommended threshold of 0.7. The model fit indices were satisfactory: $\chi^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.058, SRMR = 0.042, indicating a good fit between the model and the observed data. The structural model was evaluated based on path coefficients, their significance levels, and the R² values of endogenous constructs. Bootstrapping with 5000 resamples was used to test the significance of the path coefficients.

Table 4: Direct Effects

Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value
PIC → PI	0.285	4.762	<0.001
CQ → PI	0.198	3.541	<0.001
PI → PI	0.156	2.987	0.003
PA → PI	0.174	3.218	0.001
PIC → BT	0.312	5.124	<0.001
CQ → BT	0.245	4.372	<0.001
PI → BT	0.187	3.456	<0.001
PA → BT	0.226	3.987	<0.001
BT → PI	0.302	5.678	<0.001
PIC → ATP	0.287	4.892	<0.001
CQ → ATP	0.253	4.521	<0.001
PI → ATP	0.195	3.678	<0.001
PA → ATP	0.218	3.945	<0.001
ATP → PI	0.324	6.123	<0.001

Table 4 presents the direct effects and hypothesis testing results from our structural model. All hypothesized relationships were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), supporting all 14 hypotheses. The strongest direct effect on Purchase Intention (PI) comes from Attitude towards the Product (ATT) with a coefficient of 0.324, followed closely by Brand Trust (BT) at 0.302. This suggests that consumers' attitudes and trust play crucial roles in driving purchase intentions in the context of beauty influencer marketing. Among the antecedents, Perceived Influencer Credibility (PIC) shows the strongest effect on both Brand Trust (0.312) and Attitude towards the Product (0.287), highlighting the importance of influencer credibility in shaping consumer

perceptions and attitudes. Content Quality (CQ), Parasocial Interaction (PI_n), and Perceived Authenticity (PA) all show significant positive effects on Brand Trust, Attitude towards the Product, and Purchase Intention, albeit with slightly lower magnitudes. This underscores the multifaceted nature of influencer marketing effectiveness, where multiple factors contribute to the ultimate goal of driving purchase intentions.

Table 5: Indirect Effects

Path	Indirect Effect	t-value	p-value	95% CI
PIC → BT → PI	0.094	3.876	<0.001	[0.047, 0.142]
CQ → BT → PI	0.074	3.254	0.001	[0.031, 0.118]
PI _n → BT → PI	0.056	2.987	0.003	[0.019, 0.094]
PA → BT → PI	0.068	3.412	<0.001	[0.029, 0.108]
PIC → ATT → PI	0.093	3.987	<0.001	[0.048, 0.139]
CQ → ATT → PI	0.082	3.654	<0.001	[0.038, 0.126]
PI _n → ATT → PI	0.063	3.123	0.002	[0.024, 0.103]
PA → ATT → PI	0.071	3.456	<0.001	[0.031, 0.111]

Table 5 shows the indirect effects in our model, all of which are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). These results provide evidence for the mediating roles of Brand Trust (BT) and Attitude towards the Product (ATP) in the relationships between the antecedents and Purchase Intention. The strongest indirect effects are observed for Perceived Influencer Credibility (PIC) through both Brand Trust (0.094) and Attitude towards the Product (0.093). This further emphasizes the crucial role of influencer credibility, showing that it not only directly affects purchase intentions but also indirectly through enhancing brand trust and positive attitudes towards the product. Content Quality (CQ) also shows substantial indirect effects through both mediators, reinforcing the importance of high-quality content in influencer marketing strategies. The indirect effects of Parasocial Interaction (PI) and Perceived Authenticity (PA) are slightly lower but still significant, indicating their contribution to purchase intentions through multiple pathways. These indirect effects highlight the complex interplay of factors in influencer marketing, where the impact of influencer characteristics and content on purchase intentions is partially explained by their ability to build trust and shape attitudes.

Table 6: R² Values of Endogenous Constructs

Construct	R ²	R ² Adjusted
BT	0.524	0.518
ATT	0.498	0.492
PI	0.612	0.605

Table 6 presents the R² values for our endogenous constructs, indicating the proportion of variance explained by the model. The R² value for Purchase Intention (PI) is 0.612, suggesting that our model explains 61.2% of the variance in purchase intentions. This is a substantial amount of explained variance, indicating good predictive power of the model in the context of

beauty influencer marketing. Brand Trust (BT) and Attitude towards the Product (ATP) show R² values of 0.524 and 0.498 respectively, indicating that about half of their variance is explained by the antecedent factors in our model. These moderate to high R² values suggest that our model captures key factors influencing these important mediating variables. The adjusted R² values are only slightly lower than the R² values, indicating that the model is not overfitted and would likely generalize well to the broader population.

The product indicator approach in SmartPLS4 was used to test the moderation effect of Product-Influencer Fit (PIF) on the relationship between Perceived Influencer Credibility (PIC) and Purchase Intention (PI).

Table 7: Moderation Effect

Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value
PIC * PIF → PI	0.142	3.245	0.001

Table 7 shows the moderation effect of Product-Influencer Fit (PIF) on the relationship between Perceived Influencer Credibility (PIC) and Purchase Intention (PI). The significant positive interaction term (coefficient = 0.142, p = 0.001) indicates that Product-Influencer Fit enhances the positive effect of Perceived Influencer Credibility on Purchase Intention. This finding suggests that when consumers perceive a good fit between the influencer and the product being promoted, the impact of the influencer's credibility on purchase intentions is strengthened. This underscores the importance of strategic influencer selection in marketing campaigns, ensuring alignment between the influencer's image and the product being promoted.

To complement the SEM analysis, we conducted fsQCA to identify configurations of conditions leading to high Purchase Intention.

Table 8: fsQCA Results for High Purchase Intention

Configuration	PIC	CQ	PI	PA	BT	ATP	Raw Coverage	Unique Coverage	Consistency
1	●	●	●	○	●	●	0.412	0.078	0.923
2	●	●	○	●	●	●	0.389	0.056	0.915
3	●	○	●	●	●	●	0.367	0.042	0.908
Solution coverage: 0.728 Solution consistency: 0.897 Note: ● indicates the presence of a condition, ○ indicates its absence									

The fsQCA results reveal three main configurations leading to high Purchase Intention, all of which include high Perceived Influencer Credibility, Brand Trust, and Attitude towards the Product. These fsQCA results complement our SEM findings by highlighting the equifinality in achieving high Purchase Intention – multiple paths can lead to the same outcome. This underscores the complex nature of influencer marketing effectiveness and suggests that marketers may have some flexibility in their strategies, as long as they ensure a strong presence

of key factors like Perceived Influencer Credibility, Brand Trust, and Attitude towards the Product.

These results provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Purchase Intention in the context of beauty influencer marketing, supporting the complexity of the relationships proposed in our research model.

5. Discussion of research results and conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the complex relationships between various factors influencing purchase intentions in the context of beauty influencer marketing. Our findings provide several important insights that both support and extend existing literature in this field.

First, our results confirm the significant role of Perceived Influencer Credibility (PIC) in shaping consumer responses to influencer marketing. This aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of source credibility in persuasive communication (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, our study extends this understanding by demonstrating that PIC not only directly affects Purchase Intention but also indirectly influences it through Brand Trust and Attitude towards the Product. This multi-path influence underscores the critical importance of influencer selection in marketing campaigns.

The strong direct and indirect effects of Content Quality (CQ) on Purchase Intention support the findings of Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), who emphasized the importance of high-quality, relevant content in social media influencer marketing. Our results suggest that content quality is not just about aesthetic appeal but also about providing value to the audience, which in turn builds trust and positive attitudes towards the promoted products. The significant role of Parasocial Interaction (PIn) in our model aligns with the growing body of literature on the importance of perceived relationships between influencers and their followers (Chung & Cho, 2017). Our findings suggest that these perceived relationships contribute to brand trust and positive attitudes, ultimately influencing purchase intentions. This highlights the potential for brands to leverage the strong connections that influencers have with their audiences. The positive effects of Perceived Authenticity (PA) on Brand Trust, Attitude towards the Product, and Purchase Intention support recent research emphasizing the importance of authenticity in influencer marketing (Audrezet et al., 2020). In an era where consumers are increasingly skeptical of traditional advertising, the perceived authenticity of influencers appears to be a key factor in overcoming this skepticism and building trust.

Our findings regarding the mediating roles of Brand Trust and Attitude towards the Product are consistent with established marketing theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). These results suggest that influencer marketing works not just by directly persuading consumers to make purchases, but by shaping their overall perceptions and attitudes towards brands and products.

The moderating effect of Product-Influencer Fit on the relationship between PIC and Purchase Intention adds a nuanced understanding to the literature. This finding supports the Match-Up Hypothesis in celebrity endorsement literature (Kamins, 1990) and extends it to the influencer

marketing context. It suggests that the effectiveness of influencer marketing can be enhanced when there is a perceived congruence between the influencer's image and the promoted product. The fsQCA results complement our SEM findings by revealing multiple pathways to high Purchase Intention. This aligns with the concept of equifinality in organizational research (Fiss, 2011) and suggests that there may be multiple effective strategies for influencer marketing campaigns, depending on the specific strengths and characteristics of the influencer and the brand.

In conclusion, this study makes several contributions to the field of influencer marketing research. First, it provides a comprehensive model that integrates multiple factors influencing purchase intentions in beauty influencer marketing. Second, it demonstrates the complex interplay between these factors, revealing both direct and indirect effects. Third, it highlights the importance of fit between influencers and products, providing guidance for influencer selection strategies. Finally, by employing both SEM and fsQCA, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the multiple pathways to effective influencer marketing. These findings have important implications for marketers and brands engaging in influencer marketing. They suggest that successful campaigns should focus not only on influencer credibility and content quality but also on fostering parasocial interactions and perceived authenticity. Moreover, careful consideration should be given to the fit between influencers and products to maximize campaign effectiveness.

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