

The Effect of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on Consumers' Purchase Intention

Pei Xuan Lee¹, Jasmine A.L. Yeap^{1*}, Say Keat Ooi², Chao Li¹

¹ School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

² Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: jasmineyeap810@gmail.com

Received: 28 July 2023 | Accepted: 10 September 2023 | Published: 30 September 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ijbtm.2023.5.3.36>

Abstract: *Social media has led to the emergence of Social Media Influencers (SMIs), a group of influential individuals who hold significant sway over consumer behaviours and play a crucial role in shaping their decision-making. Understanding how SMIs convey their messages to endorsed brands and influence positive behavioural intentions among consumers is essential. This study addresses this research gap by investigating the impact SMIs' trustworthiness and para-social relationship on consumers' purchase intentions, considering attributes such as expertise, physical attractiveness, authenticity, attitude homophily, and social attractiveness. Data was collected from social media users through self-administered online surveys, resulting in 179 valid responses, which were analysed using SPSS. The findings reveal that SMIs' expertise, physical attractiveness, authenticity, and attitude homophily are critical factors in determining their trustworthiness. Additionally, attitude homophily and social attractiveness of SMIs are important predictors of para-social relationships. Furthermore, a strong para-social relationship between influencers and their followers positively influences consumers' purchase intentions. This research contributes to the literature on SMIs by identifying the antecedents of SMIs' trustworthiness and para-social relationships, and by examining their influence on followers' purchase intentions.*

Keywords: Social media influencer (SMI), purchase intention, influencer marketing

1. Introduction

In recent years, online social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram have gained significant interest among marketers (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Marketers recognize the potential of these platforms in reaching a wide audience and utilize them to disseminate product-related information (Koay et al., 2020). User-generated content, where social media users share their opinions about brands and products, has become more popular and effective than professionally produced advertisements (Welbourne & Grant, 2016). Some social media users with specific interests and expertise have become social media influencers (SMIs) for brands, leveraging their influence to promote products (Jin et al., 2019). SMIs create personalized channels to share engaging and up-to-date product-related content and engage with their followers (Cheung et al., 2021). They can also establish global social networks and communities (Torres et al., 2019).

The rise of SMIs has revolutionized marketing, leading to collaborations between brands and influencers to endorse products. Over 75% of marketers currently utilize SMIs for product

promotion, and more than 65% of global brands intend to increase their budget for SMIs marketing, with projected spending estimated to reach US\$373 million by 2027 (Hughes et al., 2019; Ki et al., 2020). Scholars have also focused on exploring the impact of SMI marketing on companies' financial performance and how influencers convey messages to the brands they endorse (Ki et al., 2020). Research indicates that SMIs' credibility influences consumers' intentions to engage, and their trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise significantly affect consumers' brand perceptions and behavioral intentions (Koay et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). SMIs' credibility is positively correlated with consumers' brand attitude (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). However, more information is needed to understand the effectiveness of SMIs in persuading audiences.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the persuasive cues associated with SMIs and their effects on attitudes resulting from influence attempts. The research focuses on SMIs from Instagram, Facebook, Xiaohongshu, and WhatsApp due to the widespread adoption of influencer marketing. This study examines the interplay between SMI characteristics like trustworthiness, para-social relationship, attractiveness, expertise, authenticity, and attitude homophily, and their collective influence on purchase intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

Social media influencers (SMIs) are individuals in niche areas of social media with substantial popularity and substantial follower base. They possess the ability to persuade their followers during the decision-making process (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In the traditional sense, celebrity endorsement involves well-known figures from sports, music, or movies before engaging in advertising ventures after achieving recognition and success (Kamins et al., 1989). Before, SMIs were seen as distinct from traditional celebrities, gaining popularity solely through their social media presence from traditional celebrities (Khamis et al., 2017). However, the line between SMIs and traditional celebrities is now blurred, with individuals concurrently embodying both roles, garnering millions of followers who engage with their posts. The category of SMIs encompasses bloggers, traditional celebrities, to online entrepreneurs, all of whom share information related to products, health, and lifestyles on various social media sites (Zhou et al., 2021).

Social media platform users can communicate with both SMIs and other users through interactive features, leading to increased engagement and conversion rates for advertising posts (Jin et al., 2019; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021). SMIs distribute brand updates, share engaging content, and interact with consumers on social media sites, reinforcing and enhancing consumers' brand attitudes (Jin & Ryu, 2020). Their interactive content stimulates consumers' brand knowledge and contributes to positive brand perceptions (Torres et al., 2019). Consequently, SMIs are widely recognized influential factors that foster consumer behavioral outcomes (Hughes et al., 2019; Jin et al., 2019; Jin & Ryu, 2020; Torres et al., 2019).

2.2 Source Credibility Model

In celebrity endorsement, credibility significantly impacts the marketing message's effectiveness, influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors (Herbig & Milewicz, 1995; Roy Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020). This analysis focuses on the Source Credibility Model, initially formulated by Hovland and Weiss (1951) and reinforced by Ohanian (1990).

Source Credibility refers to favorable qualities possessed by a communicator, influencing how the receiver accepts their message (Ohanian, 1990). The model emphasizes the direct influence of an endorser's perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise on endorsement effectiveness (Ohanian, 1990; Roy Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977). While previous research applied this model to screen celebrities, recent studies extended it to explore social media influencers' credibility in influencing consumer behaviors (Pick, 2021; Saima & Khan, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020).

For SMIs, trustworthiness relates to followers' belief in their reliability, including perceptions of honesty, dependability, sincerity, and reliability (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Attractiveness refers to how followers perceive SMIs in terms of elegance, sexiness, and beauty (Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019). Expertise in this context is the extent to which followers view the SMIs as experienced, knowledgeable, qualified, and dependable (Ki et al., 2020). These three dimensions are instrumental in predicting the effectiveness of messages communicated by various sources.

2.3 Research Framework and Development of Hypotheses

2.3.1 Expertise

In influencer marketing, perceived expertise holds significant importance, as consumers highly value influencers with specialized knowledge or experiences. Expertise in a specific domain indicates an individual's depth of knowledge and proficiency in that subject (Wu et al., 2020). Celebrities' perceived expertise positively correlates with consumers' purchase intention and behavior (AlFarraj et al., 2021). On social media, consumers are more inclined to buy products endorsed by SMIs with specific knowledge and experience about those products (Weismueller et al., 2020). Similarly, consumers find online reviews authored by credible and experienced reviewers more useful, impacting their purchasing decisions for the reviewed products (Filieri et al., 2018; Weismueller et al., 2020). Existing literature indicates that expertise has a significant influence on consumer behavior (AlFarraj et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2017; Chung & Cho, 2017; Koay et al., 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Moreover, followers are inclined to form a positive para-social relationships with SMIs who are perceived as experts in their respective areas (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Expertise has a significant positive influence on the trustworthiness of SMIs.

2.3.2 Physical Attractiveness

The source attractiveness model (McCracken, 1989) emphasizes that the effectiveness of a message relies on the source's familiarity, likability, similarity, and physical attractiveness to the recipients. Physical attractiveness refers to the subjective perception of an individual's aesthetic appeal (Ahearne et al., 1999) and is commonly assessed through their physical attributes (Ćivre et al., 2013), which holds a significant role in interpersonal interactions and decision-making processes (Fisher & Ma, 2014; Wan & Wyer, 2015). Research by Langlois et al. (2000) suggests that individuals with physical attractiveness are often seen to possess positive personality traits. Studies by Chaker et al. (2019) and Choi et al. (2020) provide evidence that customers value services provided by professionals who exhibit physical attractiveness, fostering an emotional bond and perceptions of credibility. In the context of social media influencer marketing, a similar pattern emerges, where customers ascribe greater credibility and trustworthiness to physically attractive influencers, elevating the perceived value of their recommendations. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Physical attractiveness has a significant positive influence on the trustworthiness of SMIs.

2.3.3 Authenticity

Matthews et al. (2020) found that frontline service employees' authenticity can enhance purchase intentions for service brands striving to establish themselves as highly authentic. This can be achieved by building trust and improving service quality. Slepian and Carr (2019) revealed that individuals displaying varied facial expressions of emotion are perceived as more authentic, leading to positive social impressions and increased trustworthiness evaluations. "Authenticity labor" involves deliberate presentations as genuine, including behaviors like displaying enthusiasm for work and sharing personal information selectively (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Long & Wilhoit, 2018). Russell and Rasolofoarison (2017) discovered that celebrities endorsing products genuinely, with an actual association to the product, are seen as more credible, enhancing consumer perceptions and purchase intentions significantly. Based on these findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Authenticity has a significant positive influence on the trustworthiness of SMIs.

2.3.4 Attitude Homophily

Homophily is considered a significant factor in the context of source characteristics (Ladhari et al., 2020). It refers to the extent to which an individual's traits are similar to those of others (Pezzuti et al., 2018). Some scholars use homophily and similarity interchangeably (Ladhari et al., 2020). While homophily was initially used in communication research, it has more recently been adopted in marketing research concerning social and virtual spaces (Ladhari et al., 2020). Homophily's impact on purchase intentions in influencer marketing has been primarily explored through influencer-follower relationships, para-social interactions, brand value, and brand awareness (Ladhari et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Sokolova and Kefi (2020)'s study argues that attitude homophily has a positive correlation with influencer marketing. However, research on the relationship between homophily and the cocreation of online experience value is limited (Lam et al., 2020). Similarly, the effect of homophily on follower behavior remains largely explored. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: Attitude homophily has a significant positive influence on trustworthiness of SMIs.

H5: Attitude homophily has a significant positive influence on para-social relationship.

2.3.5 Social Attractiveness

Social attractiveness refers to the likelihood of befriending or selecting a media figure as a social or work partner. Like physical attractiveness, social attractiveness has also been found to predict para-social relationships in the traditional media context (Hoffner & Bond, 2022; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) extensively investigated the link between para-social interaction and social attractiveness, with a particular emphasis on fashion and beauty influencers who are active on YouTube and Instagram platforms. Therefore, the following hypothesis is stated as below:

H6: Social attractiveness has a significant positive influence on the para-social relationship.

2.3.6 Trustworthiness

The perceived trustworthiness of SMIs significantly impacts consumers' behavioral intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). When an SMI is seen as trustworthy, followers tend to find the information provided by the SMI regarding product endorsements credible (Cheung et al., 2008). Additionally, SMIs who consistently share information content foster emotional attachment with their followers, positively influencing them to adopt the recommended products or brands (Ki et al., 2020). Brands associated with endorsers perceived as trustworthy

exhibit higher levels of brand credibility and brand attitude, leading to increased purchase intentions (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that SMIs perceived as trustworthy will be more persuasive in their endorsements, resulting in higher purchase intentions. Purchase intention in this study reflects followers' willingness to purchase products endorsed by SMIs. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is:

H7: Trustworthiness has a significant positive influence on customers' purchase intention.

2.3.7 Para-social Relationship

SMIs' posts and recommendations have a substantial impact on followers' behavioral intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Media psychology literature indicates that para-social relationships positively influence followers' behavior (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Consequently, existing research demonstrates the significant role para-social relationships play in the influencer marketing process. The utilization of storytelling posts to share personal experiences with using products can amplify the effects of both opinion leadership and para-social relationships on followers' purchasing decisions (Farivar et al., 2021). Influencers should focus on strengthening para-social relationships to enhance marketing campaigns' effectiveness. Consequently, understanding the relative importance of para-social relationships alongside post characteristics is crucial for maximizing the potential influence of social media influencers. Therefore, the next hypothesis can be defined as follows:

H8: Para-social relationship between the influencer and the followers has a significant positive influence on consumer's purchase intention.

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized relationships for this study (i.e. research model) in a graphical format.

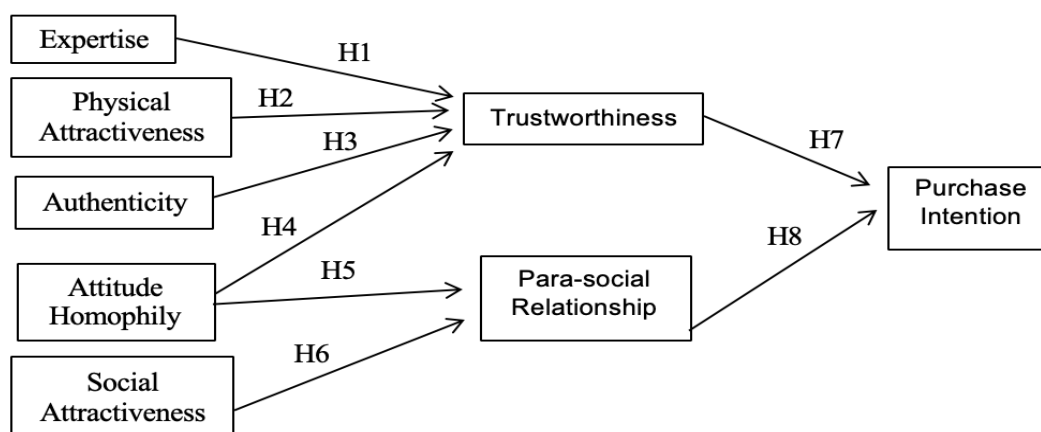


Figure 1: Research model

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Data Collection Procedures

A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing self-administered online surveys for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A focused on gathering respondents' demographic information, while Section B comprised items to measure expertise, physical attractiveness, trustworthiness, para-social relationship, and purchase intention, using five and seven-point Likert scales. A cover page was included at the beginning of the questionnaire, explaining the study's purpose, and respondents were assured that their information would remain confidential and not be shared with external parties. This study

targeted social media users as its population. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling method, with two specific criteria guiding the sampling process. First, they must be social media platform users. Second, they must follow at least one SMI who regularly endorses products and/or brands on their social media account. Furthermore, respondents were asked to provide the name of the SMI, which would serve as a reference point for answering subsequent questions in the questionnaire. By applying these two criteria, the researchers aimed to ensure that the respondents possessed adequate and relevant knowledge to actively participate in this research.

A total of 179 valid responses have been received by using Google Forms. Out of the 179 respondents, 141 were female and 38 were male. The majority age group was between 19 years age to 28 years of age (84.9%). Also, most of the respondents (70.4%) held a bachelor’s degree.

3.2 Measures

Expertise was assessed using two items adopted from Gomes et al. (2022) with 7-Likert scales. Physical attractiveness was measured by two items scale using a modified version of Sokolova and Kefi (2020) with a 7-Likert scale. Authenticity was measured using a three-item scale from Chu et al. (2022) with a 7-Likert scale. Trustworthiness was measured using a modified 7-Likert scale from Gomes et al. (2022) with two items. Attitude homophily and social attractiveness were assessed using a modified 5-Likert scale from Sokolova and Kefi (2020). The para-social relationship was assessed using the 5-Likert scale adopted by Gomes et al. (2022) with six items. Purchase intention was measured with two items adopted from Sokolova and Kefi (2020) by using a 7-Likert scale.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Reliability Analysis

To check the internal consistency of items, Cronbach’s Alpha was used to explain how closely a group of variables are related. A Cronbach’s Alpha value equal to or greater than 0.5 signifies an acceptable level of reliability (Sekaran & Bougie, 2003). In this study, the Cronbach’ Alpha for each variable is Expertise 0.885, Physical Attractiveness 0.849, Authenticity 0.867, Trustworthiness 0.672, Attitude Homophily 0.900, Social Attractiveness 0.775, Para-social Relationship 0.819, and Purchase Intention 0.840, which indicated that all variables contained data that could be relied upon for use in this research study.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis offers a straightforward overview of the research and its measurements, providing a summary of the study’s key statistics. It focuses on the central tendency of variables, and the results are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of descriptive statistics

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Expertise	5.9553	0.96012	-1.331	3.428
Physical Attractiveness	5.9274	1.11943	-1.380	2.555
Authenticity	5.8585	0.94998	-1.186	2.868
Trustworthiness	5.7849	0.98719	-1.020	2.165
Attitude Homophily	3.5517	0.90825	-0.331	-0.430
Social Attractiveness	3.8212	0.88139	-0.787	0.328
Para-social Relationship	3.9687	0.72292	-0.773	0.621
Purchase Intention	5.2123	1.38396	-0.812	0.394

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The results in Table 2 correlation analysis shows positive relationships among variables. At 0.01 significance level, expertise correlates positively with other factors, strongest with authenticity (0.616**), weakest with attitude homophily (0.252**). Notably, social attractiveness and para-social relationship have the highest correlation (0.705**), while expertise and attitude homophily have the lowest (0.252**).

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients of the Study Variables

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Expertise	1							
2. Physical Attractiveness	.410**	1						
3. Authenticity	.610**	.468**	1					
4. Trustworthiness	.616**	.492**	.654**	1				
5. Attitude Homophily	.252**	.294**	.349**	.367**	1			
6. Social Attractiveness	.314**	.341**	.454**	.404**	.630**	1		
7. Para-social Relationship	.457**	.332**	.550**	.531**	.593**	.705**	1	
8. Purchase Intention	.321**	.437**	.425**	.396**	.506**	.470**	.549**	1

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis forecast the relationship between independent and dependent variables, anticipating the value of the dependent variable based on the independent variable. Three multiple regression analyses were carried out to test this study's hypotheses. Prior to the interpretation of the multiple regression analysis results, the results were checked to ascertain if all the assumptions underlying multiple regression analyses were fulfilled. There were no major violations to the assumptions regarding normality, normality of error terms, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, autocorrelation and outliers.

Regression analysis results are presented in Table 3. Multi-regression analysis 1 concerns the independent variables of Expertise, Physical Attractiveness, Authenticity, Attitude Homophily and dependent variable Trustworthiness. The R^2 is 0.563, explaining 56.3% of variation in Trustworthiness. All the four independent variables were found to have a significant and positive effect on Trustworthiness - Expertise ($\beta= 0.315$, t -value=4.891), Physical Attractiveness ($\beta= 0.177$, t -value=3.041), Authenticity ($\beta= 0.352$, t -value=5.188), and Attitude Homophily ($\beta= 0.114$, t -value=2.088). Therefore, H1 to H4 are supported.

For the multi-regression analysis 2, Attitude Homophily and Social Attractiveness are independent variables while Para-social Relationship is the dependent variable. The R^2 is 0.607, indicating 60.07% of variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables. Both Attitude Homophily ($\beta= 0.286$, t -value=4.775) and Social Attractiveness ($\beta= 0.573$, t -value=9.546) were found to have a significant and positive impact on Para-social Relationship. Therefore, H5 and H6 are supported.

In multi-regression analysis 3, Trustworthiness and Para-social Relationship are independent variables while Purchase Intention is the dependent variable. The R^2 is 0.471, explaining 41.7% of the variance in the dependent variable. Para-social Relationship was found to have a significant and positive effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta= 0.582$, t -value=8.274). However, Trustworthiness was not found to have any effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta= 0.104$, t -value=1.478). For this reason, H7 is not supported and H8 is supported.

Table 3: Results of the Multi-Regression Analysis

Hypotheses	Construct	Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	VIF	Decisions
Multi-regression analysis 1 (Dependent variable: Trustworthiness)							
H1	Expertise	0.315	0.066	4.891	0.000	1.638	Supported
H2	Physical Attractiveness	0.177	0.051	3.041	0.003	1.348	Supported
H3	Authenticity	0.352	0.07	5.188	0.000	1.818	Supported
H4	Attitude Homophily	0.114	0.059	2.088	0.038	1.17	Supported
Multi-regression analysis 2 (Dependent variable: Para-social relationship)							
H5	Attitude Homophily	0.286	0.047	4.775	0.000	1.567	Supported
H6	Social Attractiveness	0.573	0.047	9.546	0.000	1.567	Supported
Multi-regression analysis 3 (Dependent variable: Purchase intention)							
H7	Trustworthiness	0.104	0.091	1.478	0.141	1.449	Not Supported
H8	Para-social Relationship	0.582	0.128	8.274	0.000	1.449	Supported

5. Discussion and Implications

The current study has unveiled that among the four independent variables analyzed to ascertain their correlation with trustworthiness, authenticity demonstrated the most substantial impact on trustworthiness. The outcomes revealed that participants attributed higher levels of trustworthiness to individuals exhibiting genuine behavior. This discovery resonates with earlier studies underscoring authenticity's importance in fostering trust. In a study by Lee and Eastin (2021), authenticity in SMIs was conceptualized through five factors: possessing a warm personality, engaging in genuine endorsement activities, disclosing personal life matters, demonstrating expertise, and exhibiting distinctiveness. This corresponds to Eastin's finding that high-sincerity influencers garner more favorable attitudes compared to low-sincerity influencers (Lee & Eastin, 2021). The alignment between authenticity and trustworthiness echoes the research of Audrezet et al. (2020) which argued inauthentic branding practices undermine SMIs' trustworthiness. Conversely, adept brand endorsements offer multiple benefits, motivating consumers to follow SMIs and explore their product recommendations.

Furthermore, expertise has emerged as a noteworthy predictor of trustworthiness, although its impact is relatively less pronounced compared to authenticity. This indicates that expertise contributes to the perception of trustworthiness when individuals exhibit competence in specific domains. These findings align with existing literature that underscores the pivotal role of competence and knowledge in establishing trust. Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated in their study that influencer expertise increased brand awareness among followers exposed to influencers and equips them with the competence to effectively endorse particular brands, as highlighted by Koay et al. (2022), Weismueller et al. (2020), and Thomas and Johnson (2017). A positive relationship was observed between physical attractiveness, attitude homophily, and trustworthiness. Prior research (Onu et al., 2019) noted the sway of celebrities' physical attractiveness on consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. Employing physically attractive endorsers shapes the perceived trustworthiness of celebrities, positively influencing purchase intentions. Attitude homophily's role in trust establishment extends interpersonal relationship findings (Liu et al., 2018) to social commerce marketing, wherein individuals sharing preferences identify as part of a specific group and disseminate brand-related information in brand communities (Phua et al., 2017).

In addition, positive relationship exist between para-social relationships and attitude homophily, as well as social attractiveness. Shared attitudes and beliefs foster connections with influencers, with similar attractiveness positively linked to para-social relationships, consistent

with the research of Sokolova and Kefi (2020). Additionally, para-social relationships positively relate to purchase intentions, aligning with the mukbang study of Song et al. (2023), indicating their favorable impact. Notably, this study differs from the literature by not confirming a direct positive link between trustworthiness and purchase intention. This suggests followers prioritize emotional connection over perceived trustworthiness, emphasizing the para-social relationships' role. This discrepancy might stem from the trustworthiness questionnaire's limitations compared to the para-social relationship questionnaire, which captures emotional attachment and identification. This oversight underscores emotional connection's significance in influencing purchase intentions beyond trustworthiness considerations.

As consumers increasingly invest more time on social media platforms, organizations are directing their attention toward SMI marketing. Many entities choose to collaborate with SMIs due to their substantial follower base and specialized expertise in specific niches. The research findings indicate that businesses should meticulously consider factors such as expertise, authenticity, attitude homophily, physical, and social attractiveness, trustworthiness, and para-social relationships when selecting influencers for partnerships. Evaluating these attributes aids in identifying influencers aligned with the brand's identity, value, and target audience, thereby enhancing the potential positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

It is vital to note that the suitability of highly influential SMIs may be compromised, especially when the influencer's proficiency in the organization's sector or credibility is deficient. The process of choosing suitable SMIs that resonate with the brand's ethos and product offerings is of paramount importance. Neglecting this consideration could lead to a failure in eliciting an elevated purchase intent, a point highlighted by Lou and Yuan (2019). Ideally, the SMI should be perceived as trustworthy, attractive, and knowledgeable in the brand's specific domain. However, SMIs must exercise caution when endorsing brands outside their expertise to avoid damaging their image and reputation.

Utilizing the physical and social appeal of influencers has the potential to heighten the inclination for purchase. Influencers possessing appealing physical attributes and a robust social presence can tactically magnify the allure of products. Furthermore, the cultivation of para-social relationships involving corporations, influencers, and audiences assumes pivotal importance. Genuine interactions, prompt responsiveness, and content that resonates contribute to fostering more robust connections. Companies can contribute to fostering genuine engagement by providing influencers with the requisite resources and guidance.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intention, confirming seven hypotheses. The findings demonstrate that SMIs wield significant influence over consumer purchasing decisions in the digital era. Consumers perceive influencers as reliable sources due to attributes such as expertise, physical attractiveness, social appeal, and authenticity, which contribute to their effectiveness in driving purchase intention. This study underscores the importance of carefully selecting influencers to align with the target audience and desired qualities for optimal influencer marketing campaigns. Moreover, prioritizing authenticity and fostering genuine connections with the audience can strengthen para-social relationships and enhance purchase intentions. Overall, this study highlights the substantial influence of social media influencers on consumers' purchasing decisions, offering valuable insights for effective influencer marketing in the digital age.

This study presents intriguing findings but has several limitations that inform future research. As this study is cross-sectional, the study's duration and data collection timeframe may limit capturing long-term effects on consumer intent and the dynamic nature of influencer marketing and preferences over time. Thus, future research works can embark on collecting longitudinal data as it will provide deeper insights via causality determination. Differentiating between non-celebrity and celebrity influencers was not covered in this study and may be undertaken for future research efforts. Other variables like personal values and cultural factors were also not covered in this study and can be considered in future investigations.

References

- Ahearne, M., Gruen, T. W., & Jarvis, C. B. (1999). If looks could sell: Moderation and mediation of the attractiveness effect on salesperson performance. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 16(4), 269-284. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-8116\(99\)00014-2](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-8116(99)00014-2)
- AlFarraj, O., Alalwan, A. A., Obeidat, Z. M., Baabdullah, A., Aldmour, R., & Al-Haddad, S. (2021). Examining the impact of influencers' credibility dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise on the purchase intention in the aesthetic dermatology industry. *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 31(3), 355-374. <https://doi.org/10.1108/RIBS-07-2020-0089>
- Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Guidry Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 557-569. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008>
- Balabanis, G., & Chatzopoulou, E. (2019). Under the influence of a blogger: The role of information-seeking goals and issue involvement. *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(4), 342-353. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21182>
- Chaker, N. N., Walker, D., Nowlin, E. L., & Anaza, N. A. (2019). When and how does sales manager physical attractiveness impact credibility: A test of two competing hypotheses. *Journal of Business Research*, 105, 98-108. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.08.004>
- Chen, A., Lu, Y., & Wang, B. (2017). Customers' purchase decision-making process in social commerce: A social learning perspective. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(6), 627-638. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2017.05.001>
- Cheung, C. M. K., Lee, M. K. O., & Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth. *Internet Research*, 18(3), 229-247. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10662240810883290>
- Cheung, M. L., Pires, G. D., Rosenberger Iii, P. J., & De Oliveira, M. J. (2021). Driving COBRAs: the power of social media marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 39(3), 361-376. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-11-2019-0583>
- Choi, H. C., Huang, S., Choi, H., & Chang, H. (2020). The effect of flight attendants' physical attractiveness on satisfaction, positive emotion, perceived value, and behavioral intention. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 19-29. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.05.001>
- Chu, S.-C., Deng, T., & Mundel, J. (2022). The impact of personalization on viral behavior intentions on TikTok: The role of perceived creativity, authenticity, and need for uniqueness. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2022.2098364>
- Chung, S., & Cho, H. (2017). Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement [<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21001>].

- Psychology & Marketing*, 34(4), 481-495.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21001>
- Čivré, Ž., Knežević, M., Zabukovec Baruca, P., & Fabjan, D. (2013). Facial attractiveness and stereotypes of hotel guests: An experimental research. *Tourism Management*, 36, 57-65. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.11.004>
- De Veirman, M., & Hudders, L. (2020). Disclosing sponsored Instagram posts: the role of material connection with the brand and message-sidedness when disclosing covert advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(1), 94-130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1575108>
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). "Having it All" on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding Among Fashion Bloggers. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 2056305115604337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604337>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Kelly, G., Janssen, M., Rana, N. P., Slade, E. L., & Clement, M. (2018). Social Media: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 20(3), 419-423. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-018-9848-5>
- Farivar, S., Wang, F., & Yuan, Y. (2021). Opinion leadership vs. para-social relationship: Key factors in influencer marketing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59, 102371. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102371>
- Filieri, R., McLeay, F., Tsui, B., & Lin, Z. (2018). Consumer perceptions of information helpfulness and determinants of purchase intention in online consumer reviews of services. *Information & Management*, 55(8), 956-970. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2018.04.010>
- Fisher, R. J., & Ma, Y. (2014). The Price of Being Beautiful: Negative Effects of Attractiveness on Empathy for Children in Need. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(2), 436-450. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676967>
- Gomes, M. A., Marques, S., & Dias, Á. (2022). The impact of digital influencers' characteristics on purchase intention of fashion products. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 13(3), 187-204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2022.2039263>
- Herbig, P., & Milewicz, J. (1995). To be or not to be...credible that is. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 13(6), 24-33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02634509510094156>
- Hoffner, C. A., & Bond, B. J. (2022). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45, 101306. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306>
- Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15(4), 635-650. <https://doi.org/10.1086/266350>
- Hughes, C., Swaminathan, V., & Brooks, G. (2019). Driving Brand Engagement Through Online Social Influencers: An Empirical Investigation of Sponsored Blogging Campaigns. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(5), 78-96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242919854374>
- Hwang, K., & Zhang, Q. (2018). Influence of parasocial relationship between digital celebrities and their followers on followers' purchase and electronic word-of-mouth intentions, and persuasion knowledge. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 87, 155-173. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.029>
- Jin, S. V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2019). Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 37(5), 567-579. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2018-0375>
- Jin, S. V., & Ryu, E. (2020). "I'll buy what she's #wearing": The roles of envy toward and parasocial interaction with influencers in Instagram celebrity-based brand

- endorsement and social commerce. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, 102121. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102121>
- Kamins, M. A., Brand, M. J., Hoeke, S. A., & Moe, J. C. (1989). Two-Sided versus One-Sided Celebrity Endorsements: The Impact on Advertising Effectiveness and Credibility. *Journal of Advertising*, 18(2), 4-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1989.10673146>
- Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, ‘micro-celebrity’ and the rise of Social Media Influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191-208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292>
- Ki, C.-W., Cuevas, L. M., Chong, S. M., & Lim, H. (2020). Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results by fulfilling needs. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, 102133. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102133>
- Koay, K. Y., Cheung, M. L., Soh, P. C.-H., & Teoh, C. W. (2022). Social media influencer marketing: the moderating role of materialism. *European Business Review*, 34(2), 224-243. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-02-2021-0032>
- Koay, K. Y., Ong, D. L. T., Khoo, K. L., & Yeoh, H. J. (2020). Perceived social media marketing activities and consumer-based brand equity. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 33(1), 53-72. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-07-2019-0453>
- Ladhari, R., Massa, E., & Skandrani, H. (2020). YouTube vloggers’ popularity and influence: The roles of homophily, emotional attachment, and expertise. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54, 102027. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.102027>
- Lam, J. M. S., Ismail, H., & Lee, S. (2020). From desktop to destination: User-generated content platforms, co-created online experiences, destination image and satisfaction. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 18, 100490. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100490>
- Langlois, J., Kalakanis, L., Rubenstein, A., Larson, A., Hallam, M., & Smoot, M. (2000). Maxims or Myths of Beauty? A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 390-423. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.3.390>
- Lee, J. A., & Eastin, M. S. (2021). Perceived authenticity of social media influencers: scale development and validation. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 15(4), 822-841. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-12-2020-0253>
- Lee, J. E., & Watkins, B. (2016). YouTube vloggers' influence on consumer luxury brand perceptions and intentions. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5753-5760. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.171>
- Liu, Y., Luo, X., & Cao, Y. (2018). Investigating the influence of online interpersonal interaction on purchase intention based on stimulus-organism-reaction model. *Human-centric Computing and Information Sciences*, 8(1), 37. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13673-018-0159-0>
- Long, Z., & Wilhoit, E. D. (2018). Disciplined freedom, branded authenticity, and dependable independence: how tensions enact flexibility in lifestyle blogging careers. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 46(3), 368-387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2018.1467570>
- Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer Marketing: How Message Value and Credibility Affect Consumer Trust of Branded Content on Social Media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19(1), 58-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501>

- Matthews, L., Eilert, M., Carlson, L., & Gentry, J. (2020). When and how frontline service employee authenticity influences purchase intentions. *Journal of Business Research*, 114, 111-123. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.04.002>
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310-321. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2489512>
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191>
- Onu, C., Nwaulune, J., Adegbola, E., & Kelechi, N. G. (2019). The effect of celebrity physical attractiveness and trustworthiness on consumer purchase intentions: A study on Nigerian consumers. *Management Science Letters*, 9, 1965-1976.
- Pezzuti, T., Pierce, M. E., & Leonhardt, J. M. (2018). Does language homophily affect migrant consumers' service usage intentions? *Journal of Services Marketing*, 32(5), 581-591. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-07-2017-0252>
- Phua, J., Jin, S. V., & Kim, J. (2017). Gratifications of using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat to follow brands: The moderating effect of social comparison, trust, tie strength, and network homophily on brand identification, brand engagement, brand commitment, and membership intention. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(1), 412-424. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.06.004>
- Pick, M. (2021). Psychological ownership in social media influencer marketing. *European Business Review*, 33(1). <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-08-2019-0165>
- Reinikainen, H., Munnukka, J., Maity, D., & Luoma-aho, V. (2020). 'You really are a great big sister' – parasocial relationships, credibility, and the moderating role of audience comments in influencer marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(3-4), 279-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1708781>
- Roy Dholakia, R., & Sternthal, B. (1977). Highly Credible Sources: Persuasive Facilitators or Persuasive Liabilities? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 3(4), 223-232. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208671>
- Russell, C. A., & Rasolofoarison, D. (2017). Uncovering the power of natural endorsements: a comparison with celebrity-endorsed advertising and product placements. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 761-778. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348033>
- Saima, & Khan, M. A. (2021). Effect of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Purchase Intention and the Mediating Role of Credibility. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 27(4), 503-523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2020.1851847>
- Schimmelpfennig, C., & Hunt, J. B. (2020). Fifty years of celebrity endorser research: Support for a comprehensive celebrity endorsement strategy framework. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(3), 488-505. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21315>
- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2003). *Research Methods For Business, A Skill Building Approach*, John Willey & Sons. Inc. New York.
- Slepian, M. L., & Carr, E. W. (2019). Facial expressions of authenticity: Emotion variability increases judgments of trustworthiness and leadership. *Cognition*, 183, 82-98. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.10.009>
- Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101742. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011>

- Song, H. G., Kim, Y.-S., & Hwang, E. (2023). How Attitude and Para-Social Interaction Influence Purchase Intentions of Mukbang Users: A Mixed-Method Study. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(3), 214. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/13/3/214>
- Thomas, T., & Johnson, J. (2017). The Impact of Celebrity Expertise on Advertising Effectiveness: The Mediating Role of Celebrity Brand Fit. *Vision*, 21(4), 367-374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972262917733174>
- Torres, P., Augusto, M., & Matos, M. (2019). Antecedents and outcomes of digital influencer endorsement: An exploratory study. *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(12), 1267-1276. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21274>
- Wan, L. C., & Wyer, R. S., Jr. (2015). Consumer Reactions to Attractive Service Providers: Approach or Avoid? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(4), 578-595. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv044>
- Wang, S. W., & Scheinbaum, A. C. (2017). Enhancing Brand Credibility Via Celebrity Endorsement. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 58, 16 - 32.
- Weismueller, J., Harrigan, P., Wang, S., & Soutar, G. N. (2020). Influencer Endorsements: How Advertising Disclosure and Source Credibility Affect Consumer Purchase Intention on Social Media. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 28(4), 160-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2020.03.002>
- Welbourne, D. J., & Grant, W. J. (2016). Science communication on YouTube: Factors that affect channel and video popularity. *Public Understanding of Science*, 25(6), 706-718. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662515572068>
- Wiedmann, K.-P., & von Mettenheim, W. (2021). Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula? *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 30(5), 707-725. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2019-2442>
- Wu, I.-L., Chiu, M.-L., & Chen, K.-W. (2020). Defining the determinants of online impulse buying through a shopping process of integrating perceived risk, expectation-confirmation model, and flow theory issues. *International Journal of Information Management*, 52, 102099. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102099>
- Zhou, S., Barnes, L., McCormick, H., & Blazquez Cano, M. (2021). Social media influencers’ narrative strategies to create eWOM: A theoretical contribution. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102293. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102293>