

**The perceived impact of social media influencers on
consumer purchase intention in South Africa**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Management
in the field of Digital Business**

**in the
Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management
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DECLARATION

I, Judith Mantombi Mmolotsane, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgments. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Digital Business at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name: Judith Mantombi Mmolotsane

Signature:



Signed at Brackenhurst Alberton

On 28 February 2023

DEDICATION

To my late parents Selina Mmadineo Mashiya and Sheti Chapman Mashiya, who taught me the value of education and hard work. I was able to complete this journey because of the words of wisdom and encouragement you gave me when you were still alive. I am because you were.

To my husband, Lehlohonolo Mmolotsane, words fail me. Thank you for your support over the years. You motivated me on the days when I doubted my ability to succeed. Thank you.

To my daughters, Reabiloe Mmolotsane and my little Angel I never got to meet and 'Sunshine' mommy loves you to the moon and back.

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To the author and finisher of my faith, Jesus Christ whose promises are Yes and Amen. My faith in you Oh Lord carried me to this point.

To my supervisor, Dr Emmanuel Quaye, thank you for the guidance and words of encouragement throughout this journey.

Thank you to my sisters, family, friends, and classmates for supporting me and encouraging me along the journey.

Numbers 6:24-26

ABSTRACT

This research evaluates followers perception of social media influencers (SMIs) impact, effective characteristics SMIs may use to influence consumer purchase intention in South Africa, and if follower age has moderating impact on the informative quality and attractiveness of SMIs. This study used convenience sampling and an online survey. A sample of 186 responses was examined using Smart PLS to conduct Confirmatory factor analysis. The targeted population was active social media users in South Africa, active on at least one social media platform, and are followers of least one SMI. The most popular platforms for following SMIs are Instagram and Facebook. 80% of respondents use social media more than five times per week. The findings of this research supported that SMI informative quality, expertise, and attractiveness positively impact consumer purchase intention.. However, this was inconsistent with this study and their finding did not hold in the South African context. Findings show that the quality of the information and attractiveness are positively influenced by a followers' ages, especially for younger followers who have little to no life experience to draw upon when making a purchase. SMIs should be part of their digital marketing strategies to increase consumer awareness and market share retention.

Keywords: Influencer, purchase intention, SMI, social media

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION
eWOM	electronic Word of Mouth
MAU	Monthly Active Users
SMI	Social Media Influencer

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

Consumer purchasing choices are influenced by various information sources and consumer experiences available on social media. This information is used, as suggestions from other customers to make it easier to make purchasing choices through social media marketing (Hajli, 2014). Social media influencers (SMIs) have become important to social media marketing. However, they remain understudied in terms of how brands can manage SMIs as part of the marketing mix (Vanninen et al., 2022).

This research investigates the perceived impact of SMIs on the consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa. This study explores effective characteristics SMIs may use to influence consumer intention. In addition, the study explores the moderating impact of age on the informative quality and attractiveness of the SMIs.

1.2 Context of the study

Everyday lives include using social media to communicate, keep up to date with the latest news, or unwind with funny videos. For example, during the global lockdown pandemic periods, social media became a way in which people could feel less isolated and a way they could receive the latest news and updates (Bentz et al., 2021). Figure 1 indicates the available social media platforms worldwide and their respective monthly active users (MAUs). Facebook is in the number one position with over 2.9 million MAUs.

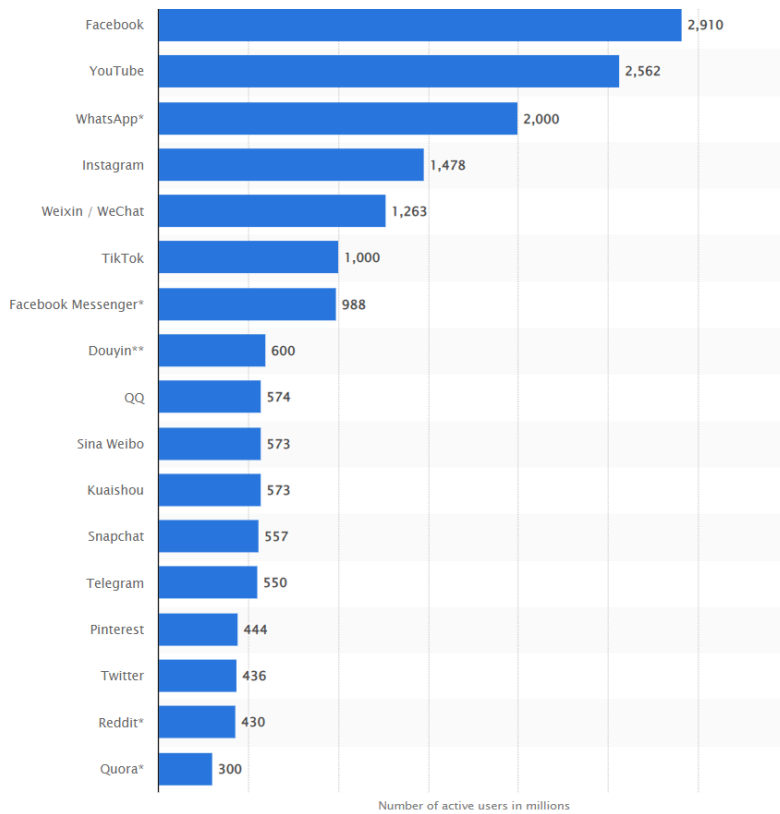
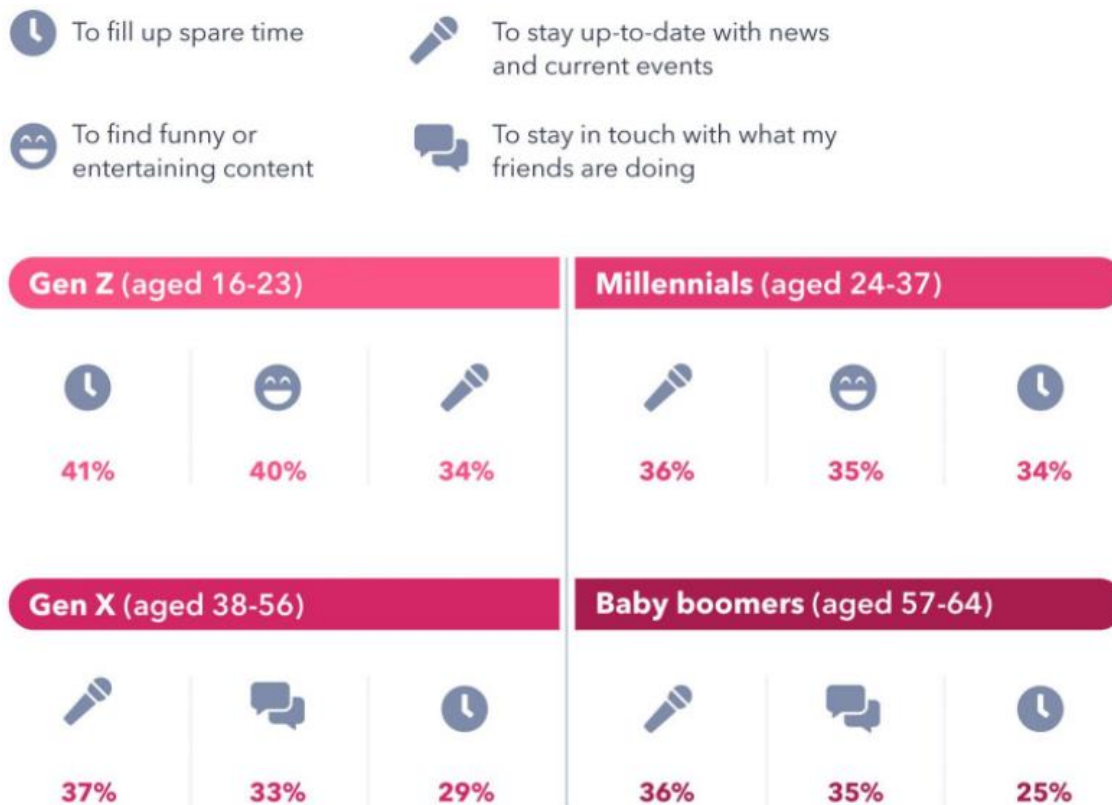


Figure 1: Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2022, ranked by the number of monthly active users (in millions) (Statista.com, 2022)

According to Trifonova (2020), various age groups use social media for various reasons. Figure 2 shows the top three of four reasons for social media use as a percentage of global internet users.



Question: What are your main reasons for using social media? Source: GlobalWebIndex Q1 2020
 Base: 143,232 internet users aged 16-64

Figure 2: Top three reasons for using social media (Trifonova, 2020)

As a result of the time spent on social media for various reasons by the various generations, a quarter (24%) of the consumers in 18 markets discovered brands on social media (Trifonova, 2020). No wonder brands see this as an opportunity to include social media in their marketing strategies to achieve brand objectives of penetrating the market and accessing hard-to-penetrate markets like teenagers, young adults, or special interest groups (Enke & Borchers, 2021). Brands collaborate with SMIs as a point of access to these stakeholders (Enke & Borchers, 2021).

This marketing method is called social media influencer marketing and is part of digital marketing. Lou and Yuan (2019) define SMIs as individuals who have many followers

on one or more social media networks and can impact these followers. In addition, SMIs are regarded as people with know-how in particular fields like travel, beauty, healthy lifestyles, and fashion (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) studied the influence of celebrities and SMIs on Instagram users, particularly among young women. Unlike celebrities or public figures, this study found that SMIs are seen among young women as more influential, credible, and relatable. Influence occurs by endorsing brands via photos, video posts, blogs, or tweets on their pages or profiles (Saima & Khan, 2021). Padia (2016) found that content produced by SMIs is accepted as more organic and authentic, with more impact on potential consumers than advertisements made by brands.

Several studies were conducted in India and the United States on the effect of SMI marketing on consumer purchase intention. However, there are few studies in the South African context. Therefore, this study investigates digital marketing, mainly SMI marketing, and whether SMI marketing impacts consumer purchase intention in South Africa.

1.3 Research problem

South Africa has over 32.7 million social network users, and it is predicted that by 2026, the number will have risen to 40.8 million (Statista.com, 2021). Therefore, there is an opportunity for an organisation to use these platforms to its advantage. Saima and Khan (2021) study in India's Delhi National Capital Region focused on SMI expertise, trustworthiness, likability, informative quality, and entertainment value. Saima and Khan (2021) show that influencer credibility is directly affected by influencer

trustworthiness and the information quality of their content while indirectly impacting consumer purchase intention.

Lou and Yuan (2019) study in the United States focused on influencer characteristics: information value, entertainment value, expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity. Lou and Yuan (2019) study on the informative value of SMI content found a positive effect on the consumer purchase intention of followers through influencer trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity.

In the South African context, limited studies exist that explore the characteristics of SMIs. This study aims to integrate these studies into the South African context to find characteristics that impact followers in South Africa.

Social media is a form of digital marketing that extends to SMI marketing, where organisations collaborate with SMIs to endorse their brands (Saima & Khan, 2021). According to Glucksman (2017), the influencers' number of followers, content likes, comments, shares, and hits on a blog can be measured using tracking technologies to measure success. Celebrity endorsement has become less popular as it is more expensive than influencer marketing. Influencer marketing also converts customers into lasting customers (Saima & Khan, 2021).

The source credibility model was coined in 1951 by Hovland and Weiss (1951) and explored again by Lou and Yuan (2019) and Saima and Khan (2021). This study tests the following characteristics to find which of these SMI characteristics are required to impact the consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa.

- Informative quality
- Expertise

- Trustworthiness
- Attractiveness
- Similarity.

The research by Saima and Khan (2021) in India explored the direct effect of influencers on consumer purchase intention caused by perceived influencer expertise, trustworthiness, likability, information quality, entertainment value, and credibility. The research by Lou and Yuan (2019) in the United States explored the effect of influencers on consumer purchase intention and brand awareness caused by influencer-produced content with informative value, entertainment value, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and likeness to followers.

This study aims to understand the characteristics that SMIs use to influence consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa.

1.4 Research question

This study aims to answer the following question:

Which attributes of social media influencers (SMIs) directly influence South African consumers' purchase intentions online and/or in-store?

1.5 Research objectives

This study aims to understand the perceived impact of SMIs on consumer purchase intention in South Africa.

The following objectives were explored:

1. To determine which characteristics SMIs use to influence consumer purchase intention and to understand how the characteristics work.
2. To investigate the moderating role of age on SMIs informative quality and attractiveness.

1.6 Significance of the study

In 2016, two thirds (59%) of marketers increased their influencer marketing budgets (Burgess, 2016). In 2017, SMIs were prominent in marketing, public relations, and lifestyle brands (Glucksman, 2017). It is evident that influencer marketing is shaping buying decisions and increasing customer retention (Padia, 2016). Influencer marketing performance is measurable through several analytical tools (Padia, 2016).

This research contributes to the literature on how SMIs impact consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa. The research evaluated if the influencer's informative quality, expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity influence consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa

Positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) increased customer retention by a third (37%) (Padia, 2016). Consumer purchase intention is proven to be influenced by the informative quality, expertise, and attractiveness of SMIs. SMI trustworthiness and similarity to followers have no significant impact on consumer purchase intention. Influencer-generated marketing increases the brand awareness of the consumer and the consumer purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). As a result, marketing managers can increase the return on investment by strategically selecting which SMI to use for marketing their brand.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

- This study is limited to active social media users in South Africa who are active on at least one of the social media platforms and follow at least one SMI.
- The research is limited to social media users in South Africa who are not regarded as SMIs.
- This research did not explore what an SMI is and what it takes to be a successful SMI.

1.8 Definition of terms

Social media	Dewing (2010) describes social media as a broad range of mobile-based and internet services that permits users to contribute to online exchanges and join online communities. In addition, social media allows for easy access and sharing of information in short in the form of videos, infographics, and photos (Bentz et al., 2021).
Social media influencer (SMI)	According to Lou and Yuan (2019), SMIs are online personalities known as 'regular people', who have many followers on one or more social media platforms. As a result, the SMIs influence followers. According to Enke and Borchers (2021), SMIs are relevant intermediaries that provide access to hard-to-reach stakeholders in organisations.
Influencer marketing	According to EASA (2018), influencer marketing is undertaken by an independent third party that endorses brands and shapes their audiences' attitudes through blogs, posts, and tweets on social media.

1.9 Assumptions

The following assumptions are made about this study.

- All survey respondents can answer the set of questions.
- Respondents answered all questions honestly, reflecting the true nature of their experience of SMIs on social media.

1.10 Chapter outline

The literature was reviewed in the following chapters and adopted in this research.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the perceived impact of SMIs on consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa. Then, two researches based on 1) a conceptual framework by Saima and Khan (2021) and 2) Lou and Yuan (2019) proposed model were used to investigate the characteristics that influence consumer purchase intention. Finally, the research approach and hypotheses were applied to the models that were investigated.

Chapter 3 discusses the research tools and data collection methods that fulfilled this study's research objectives.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the results of the survey on the characteristics SMIs use to influence consumer purchase intention.

Chapter 5 is an extensive analysis of results presented in Chapter 4 on survey participant demographics and hypothesis testing.

Chapter 6 presents conclusions on the analysis of the impact of SMIs on consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa, recommendations, and a proposal for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews prior research on the influence of SMIs on consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa. The literature review unpacked research on crucial characteristics that SMIs use to influence consumer purchase intention, to find a gap, and to provide further research opportunities.

The chapter begins by defining an SMI, the digital marketing landscape, and the characteristics used in SMI marketing that make it one of the leading forms of digital marketing strategies. Conceptual frameworks, theoretical frameworks, and models relevant to this study are reviewed.

2.2 Social media

2.2.1 *Social media influencers defined.*

Before looking at what an SMI is, this study explores the difference between traditional celebrities and SMIs. In Zeren and Gökdağlı (2020) studies, celebrities can be actors, singers, models, and athletes, among others, who are seen endorsing brands or products in traditional marketing communication mediums, such as television and magazines, among others. Celebrities are regarded as opinion leaders. Simultaneously, the growth in social media platforms and social media users resulted in the rise of SMIs. As the availability of traditional jobs is declining, becoming an SMI is becoming a reasonable goal for many (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). In 2021 in South Africa, the unemployment rate was at a third (35.3%) in the fourth quarter, the highest

since 2008 (TradingEconomics.com, 2022), making online influencing an attractive proposition

CELEBRITY	INFLUENCER
A celebrity is someone who is famous, especially in areas of entertainment such as films, sport, music, or writing	An influencer is a person who has the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by promoting or recommending them on social media
Become famous through traditional channels such as television and radio	Become famous through social media platforms
Gain social media following because people admire their talent and enjoy their work on traditional media	Gain their following in a particular niche by creating content relevant to that niche
May seem distant and aloof	Usually regular people and are relatable to the followers
Have a varied social media following, consisting of many age groups, income levels and geographic locations	Usually have a less varied following as they usually specialize in a niche
Usually have a massive following	Have a lesser following <small>Visit www.PEDIAA.com</small>

Figure 3: Primary distinctions between celebrities and influencers (Pediaa.com, 2020)

Figure 3 indicates the main differences between celebrities and SMIs. Celebrities and SMIs have in common that they are not born but produced (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). Freberg et al. (2011) describe an SMI as a third-party organisation that shapes a positive attitude about the organisation through content on social media platforms. Abidin (2015) explores the use of the parasocial relation theory coined by Horton and Richard Wohl (1956). The theory proposes that television and radio personalities produce one-sided interpersonal connections. Abidin (2015) describes the conversational structure of celebrities as being one-to-many, while influencers are one-to-many and one-to-one. Social media affords followers the impression of an intimate exchange with influencers, unlike the traditional celebrity and fan relationship.

The top 50 influencers are made up of more celebrities than influencers. Cristiano Ronaldo, a soccer superstar, is the most-followed person, with 500 million followers across social media platforms (Wallach, 2021). In South Africa, singer and businesswoman Boitumelo 'Boity' Thulo has the highest number of Instagram followers at 5.6 million (Ngage, 2022).

Abidin (2015) definition of SMI goes beyond introducing the commercial aspects between SMIs and clients. SMIs monetise followers by integrating advertorials into content. The working relationship formed between the SMIs and clients means that organisations now would include SMIs as part of their strategic communications rather than as an ontological feature (Enke & Borchers, 2021). According to Freeman (2010), individuals or groups who can or are affected by the organisational purpose are referred to as stakeholders. In the study by Enke and Borchers (2021), they argue that SMIs are secondary stakeholders that can influence primary stakeholders. Enke and

Borchers (2021) also find that SMIs can be primary stakeholders by using their social media content for the organisation.

As a result, Enke and Borchers (2021) propose that SMIs require some resources to contribute to the organisation's strategic communication. Strategic communication can be achieved by harnessing the seven external resources of SMIs to influence the primary stakeholders – the consumers (see Figure 4).

Input	Activities/Roles	Output	Outcome	Impact
content production competences	content creator	content	combination of input factors, actual activities, outputs and outtakes leads to higher effectiveness and efficiency on the outcome and impact level	
content distribution competences	multiplicator	reach		
interaction competences	moderator	interaction		
public persona	protagonist	personalization		
relevant number of relationships		relevant contacts		
relationship quality		peer effects (authenticity, credibility)		
ability to influence			influence	

Figure 4: SMIs function is strategic communication (Enke & Borchers, 2021)

2.2.2 Digital marketing

Marketing efforts that use electronic devices and the internet are defined as digital marketing. Digital tools used in digital marketing include search engines, social media, email, and business websites that connect to customers and prospective customers (Desai, 2019). This research concentrated on one of the tools, namely social media. Organisations use social media to leverage for marketing purposes to promote and increase brand awareness.

Figure 5 presents social media as the fourth most difficult digital marketing tactic.

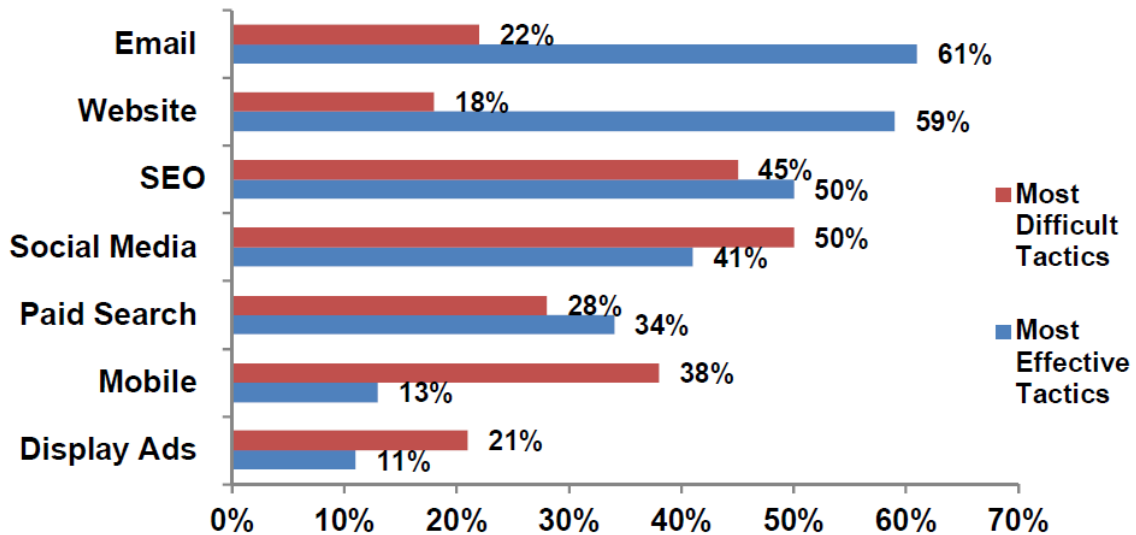


Figure 5: Internet marketing approaches (Bala & Verma, 2018)

2.3 Theory base for SMI impact

2.3.1 *Unified source credibility and source attractiveness model*

Seiler and Kucza (2017) reviewed numerous models to create a unified model. Some of the models reviewed were the source credibility model, source attractiveness model, and the match-up hypothesis. In their study, Seiler and Kucza (2017) tested traditional celebrities or expert testimonials on traditional media and found a positive impact on consumer purchase intention for attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. The researchers explored the direct and indirect impacts of credibility and congruency on attitudes and purchasing intent. Findings supported that all but one of the constructs (congruency) positively affects consumer purchase intention (Seiler & Kucza, 2017).

2.3.2 *SIMs effect on consumer purchase intention*

With new emerging technologies for digital marketing, more recent models are being proposed that study the impact on consumer purchase intention of SIMs as opposed to traditional celebrities. This research aims to contribute to SIM marketing knowledge using content similar to Saima and Khan (2021) and Lou and Yuan (2019) studies.

Saima and Khan (2021) investigated additional attributes: likability, information quality, and entertainment value. The study also investigated the role of credibility as a mediator between SIM characteristics and consumer purchase intention. This study was in line with Hovland's source credibility model from 1953. Saima and Khan (2021) found that influencer credibility impacts consumer purchase intention. However, their research findings on the influencer's expertise effect were inconsistent with previous studies. The Saima and Khan (2021) study results indicated that influencer expertise and likability were insignificant and did not influence consumer purchase intention, while quality of information, trustworthiness, and entertainment value were found to influence consumer purchase intention.

This study tested the negative impact of inconsistency in an influencer's expertise in the South African context.

2.3.3 *SIM effect on consumer trust*

Like previous studies, the informative value attribute influences consumer purchase intention. Followers trust influencers so much that they value their informative posts rather than the entertainment function of the content produced (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Lou and Yuan (2019) further found that followers are more inclined to follow influencers with whom they identify than influencers with perceived similarities.

As a result, this study builds on earlier research by testing constructs to understand the characteristics of SMIs that influence followers in South Africa. Lou and Yuan (2019) unusual finding that trustworthiness has a detrimental impact on brand awareness and consumer purchase intention deserves further research in the South African context.

2.4 Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

The literature research reveals limited knowledge of characteristics SMIs use to influence followers in South Africa. Therefore, this study proposes an integrated model using dominant constructs by previous researchers with age as a moderator of informative quality and attractiveness (see Figure 6).

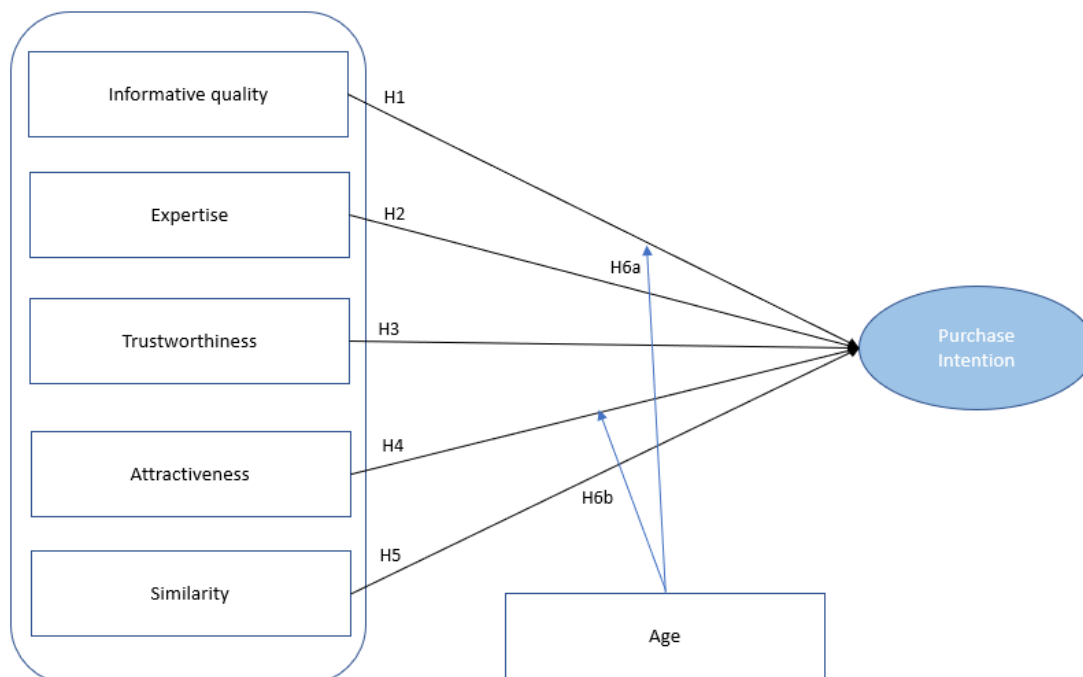


Figure 6: A research framework for characteristics SMIs use to influence followers in South Africa (Adapted from (Saima & Khan, 2021))

2.4.1 Informative quality

According to Chen and Tseng (2011), quality information should be timeous and provide adequate details, as this helps consumers with purchasing decisions. The better the quality of the content information, the higher the positive effect the content has on consumers and the perceived quality of the products (Jiang et al., 2021). Fisher et al. (2012) categorise information quality into four dimensions: intrinsic, contextual representational, and accessibility.

Social media platforms have made access to information quick and easy. Brand awareness is shaped by influencers' informative value (Saima & Khan, 2021). Schouten et al. (2020) found that participants in the study regarded vloggers as reliable information providers due to their perceived trustworthiness and similarity. Research by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that half of Instagram users were aged 18 to 30. Park et al. (2007) confirm that when high-quality information is shared about products, this dramatically influences purchase predictions. Thus, this study also tested age as a moderator on perceived trustworthiness and similarity. This study expected that high-quality content produced by SMIs rather than high-quality content produced by brands would increase consumer purchase intention. As a result, the following hypothesis emerged.

H1: Informative quality of SMIs content positively affects consumer purchase intention.

2.4.2 Expertise

Schouten et al. (2020) define expertise as endorsers who are perceived to have relevant knowledge, skills, or experience. In studies by Saima and Khan (2021),

expertise is the result of familiarity, understanding, and experience gained in a particular field. Therefore, influencers with perceived expertise could influence consumer purchase intention. Munnukka et al. (2016) studies indicated that the expertise of an influencer endorsing a beauty product that they have used is better suited as an endorsement than endorsements from influencers who have not used the product. The study in Pakistan by Syed and Raja (2014) found that celebrity expertise is a motivator for purchases due mainly to the celebrity being Pakistani and knowing the preferences of their fellow Pakistani people. Thus, this study expected that the more expert SMIs are, the greater the positivity towards brands, regardless of the SMIs dominant category. As a result, the following hypothesis emerged.

***H2:** The expertise of SMIs positively affects consumer purchase intention.*

2.4.3 Trustworthiness

According to Giffin (1967), the recipients' view of a source as sincere, truthful, or honest is trustworthiness. One of the main components of the source credibility model is trustworthiness (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In studies by Seiler and Kucza (2017), the trustworthiness of the endorsers is one of the constructs that companies and marketing practitioners are advised to monitor.

An independent variable positively like trustworthiness and credibility affects dependent variables such as consumer purchase intention (Seiler & Kucza, 2017), and this affects trustworthiness. Munnukka et al. (2016) found that if the audience discovers that an endorser benefited from a product endorsement, it has a negative impact. Influencers are believed to be more authentic Padia (2016). This study

expected that followers could see influencers as being trustworthy. As a result, the following hypothesis emerged.

H3: The trustworthiness of SMIs positively affects consumer purchase intention.

2.4.4 Attractiveness

Attractiveness is the preferences people have when it comes to other people's physical attributes, particularly when it comes to facial characteristics and body proportions. The preferred physical attribute is defined as attractiveness (Ellis et al., 2019). First impressions last, so influencer attractiveness is significant (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) to aid in remembering the influencer. Attractiveness aids in attracting and directing follower attention to the influencer and follower recognition or remembering the sponsored brand (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

In addition, the attractiveness of the opposite sex and the newness of the product contributed to the effect of attractiveness. An advertisement in India by Veet with Indian celebrities found that advertisements that create attention for the opposite gender are easier to remember (Syed & Raja, 2014). Syed and Raja (2014) found that newer products increase product awareness if introduced by attractive models who charge less.

Research has demonstrated that physical attractiveness signals notable increases communicator persuasiveness (Chaiken, 1979). This study expected that followers could see influencers as being attractive. As a result, the following hypothesis emerged.

H4: The attractiveness of SMIs positively affects consumer purchase intention.

2.4.5 Similarity

Similarity refers to resemblances thought to exist between the influencer and the follower (Syed & Raja, 2014). These resemblances can be demographic, economic, religious, or political. These resemblances are factors of the influencers and followers and positively affect consumer purchase intention. For example, with the increase in Bollywood quality movies, Indian endorsers are rising. The study by Syed and Raja (2014) in Pakistan found that similar ethnic group endorsers have an effect of increasing consumer purchase intention.

This study expected that followers could see influencers as being similar to themselves. As a result, the following hypothesis emerged.

H5: The similarity of the SMIs to the consumers positively affects consumer purchase intention.

2.4.6 Moderating role of age

Previous studies have found that factors such as gender, age, marital status, and wealth impact purchasing decisions (Yuniarinto et al., 2017). Studies that researched acceptance of technology used demographic variables (such as age) considered to be moderators as opposed to direct antecedents (Sun et al., 2010).

The use of age as a moderator found that age groups have different needs when participating in online communities (Rubin & Rubin, 1982). When the needs are satisfied, online community participation increases (Rubin & Rubin, 1982). On the one hand, older consumers were found to be less likely to look for additional information

to make decisions or to solve problems. Instead, older consumers used heuristic processing to make decisions or to solve problems. On the other hand, younger shoppers with limited experience before deciding to purchase depended on e-services to look for more information (Fang et al., 2016).

This study expected the younger consumer to rely on quality information provided by their favourite SMIs. This study expected older consumers to rely on their own experiences when making purchases and not to seek additional information through SMIs. This study expected that older consumers are less likely to examine the quality of the information when considering a purchase. This study also expected the SMIs' attractiveness and informative quality to be a more persuasive influence for younger consumers than older consumers.

***H6:** The effect of (a) informative quality and (b) attractiveness of the SMIs is moderated by age. The informative quality of SMIs' does not influence older consumers' purchase intention. The attractiveness of SMIs' influences younger consumers' purchase intention.*

2.5 Conclusion of literature review

The literature review indicates a reason for understanding the characteristics SMIs use to influence consumer purchase intention. The models and frameworks reviewed by Lou and Yuan (2019) and Saima and Khan (2021) had key concepts similar to those from the source and credibility model (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). However, there is limited literature on how these characteristics affect consumers in South Africa.

Social media usage in daily life is becoming more prevalent, calling for re-evaluating the source and credibility model to move from traditional celebrity endorsers to SMIs.

This study applied the proposed adaptations to the model for the South African context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach used to analyse the perceived impact of SMIs on consumer purchase intention of followers in South Africa is described in Chapter 3. First, this chapter describes the methodology that is applied, the population and sample, and the research tools. Then, data gathering, data analysis, and interpretation approaches are discussed. Finally, at the end of the chapter, the reliability and validity of this research were tested.

3.1 Research approach

Khalid et al. (2012) explain that research is an analysis of primary or secondary data to produce information. In order to solve the study question, a quantitative research approach was used. The quantitative research approach uses probability or non-probability sampling and depends on larger sample sizes (Khalid et al., 2012). This study used a non-probability sampling approach to derive data for the research.

Quantitative research aims to find cause-and-effect relationships in data (Gaille, 2019). This research aims to determine the association between SMIs and consumer purchase intention. The ability to establish statistical relationships between variables in this approach proved valuable for this study.

3.2 Research design

An online survey was distributed to test the study's research objectives. A link was generated and shared on email and electronic social media to invite respondents to participate. The questions asked were close-ended. The results were retrieved and captured in Qualtrics (see Table 1).

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of the chosen study approach

(Adapted from (Gaille, 2019))

Advantages	Disadvantages
Real-time gathering of data as it is done online	No follow-up questions can be asked to clarify answers
Samples are randomised	Data can be manipulated
Results are consistent and reliable when the same data points are evaluated	Questionnaire may be biased toward the researchers' view
Findings can be generalised to larger specific target groups	False correlations to the general population can be drawn from the collected data
Surveys can be taken anonymously	False information can be given as there is no face-to-face contact
No contact is needed with the participants, and it can be done remotely	

3.3 Population and sample

3.3.1 *Population*

Convenience sampling was used in this study. The study has a targeted population where members fit specific practical criteria (Etikan et al., 2016). The target group for this study are active social media users in South Africa who are active on at least one social media platform and follow at least one SMI.

Figure 7 shows that WhatsApp is the most (93.2%) popular social media network among internet users in South Africa. However, this study concentrated on platforms that promote influencer-and-follower relationships. Thus, this study excluded WhatsApp.

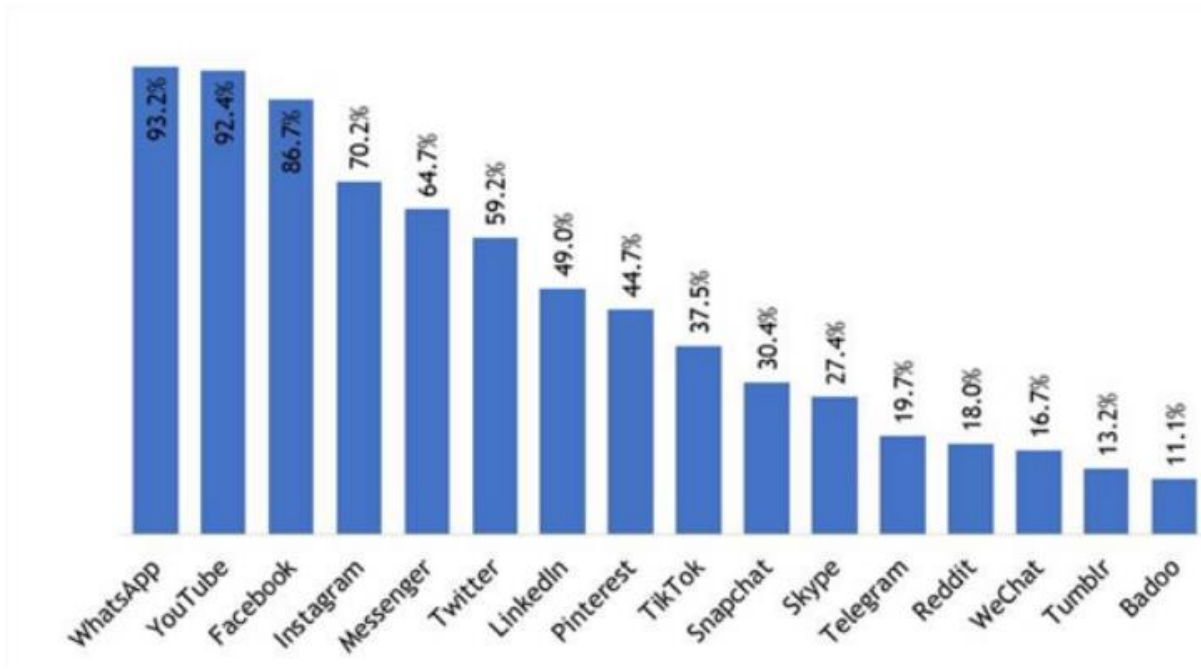


Figure 7: Most popular social media networks among 16 to 64-year-olds in South Africa (Lord, 2021)

3.3.2 Sample and sampling method

Hair et al. (1995) suggest using a ratio of 20 participants to 1 variable. This research aimed to implement this to yield the best results with a target of 200 to 250 respondents. This study targeted active social media users in South Africa who utilise one social media platform and follow at least one SMI. Convenience sampling was used. This form of sampling enabled ease of access at any time and despite the geographical location (Etikan et al., 2016). The purpose of the study was shared with the participants (Etikan et al., 2016).

A link was shared on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram). The link led respondents to the self-administered survey. The sharing of the link on the various platforms and the anonymity of respondents helped decrease study bias as the researcher did not know the respondents personally.

There were screening questions to confirm that respondents were part of the targeted respondents. In addition, upon opening the link, a participant information sheet shared a statement that anonymity would be maintained, and a description was provided of the research, research purpose, and how the data would be used.

3.4 Data collection methods

Convenience sampling requires specific characteristics before selecting the population sample (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore, this study involved the stratification of the population. Lefever et al. (2007) research found the benefits of using online surveys compared to face-to-face methods. Online surveys are faster to complete compared to the paper and pencil method and less prone to human error. Online surveys also lower costs due to lower administrative costs such as paper, printing, postage, and travel costs and reach respondents who are geographically far away.

An online survey was created and shared with active social media users on at least one social media platform. Respondents who follow at least one SMI locally or internationally were targeted. The SMIs' number of followers or area in which they are regarded as experts did not matter.

3.5 Research instrument

A questionnaire was designed and adapted from previous studies that explored the perceived impact of SMIs on consumer purchase intention. In addition, modifications were made to adapt the instruments to the South African context. The items were

measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

There were two types of data collected using the questionnaire:

1. Respondent demographic information
2. SMI characteristics that influence consumer purchase intention.

3.6 Measures

A 7-point Likert scale indicated the degree to which participants agreed with the statements. Table 2: Independent variable for this study, follows this list and provides detailed content regarding the points in the bullet list below.

- Informative quality was measured using four perspectives extracted by Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021).
- Expertise was measured in agreement with four statements adapted from Syed and Raja (2014) and Munnukka et al. (2016).
- Trustworthiness was measured using four statements by Munnukka et al. (2016).
- Attractiveness was measured using four statements adapted from Munnukka et al. (2016) and Syed and Raja (2014).
- Similarity to influencer was measured in participants' agreement with four statements adapted from Munnukka et al. (2016).
- Influencer credibility was measured by four statements by Syed and Raja (2014).
- Consumer purchase intention was measured with four statements adapted from Chakraborty and Bhat (2018).

- Respondents' demographic information collected: Age, level of education, social media platform used to follow SMI, frequency on the platform, and the kind of SMI followed.

Table 2: Independent variables for this study

Construct	Factors	Source
Informative quality	I get knowledge from the information offered by the influencers I follow on social media.	(Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021)
	I obtain exciting information from the influencers I follow.	
	I find the information supplied by the influencers I follow to be useful.	
	Influencers that I follow provide me with new information.	
Expertise	I believe the influencer is well versed in the product.	(Munnukka et al., 2016), (Syed & Raja, 2014)
	I feel the influencer is qualified to make product claims.	
	The influencer is regarded as a product expert by me.	
	I believe the influencer has enough product knowledge to make statements about it.	
Trustworthiness	I feel the influencer is honest.	(Munnukka et al., 2016)
	The influencer is someone I trust.	
	I believe the influencer is telling the truth.	
	I consider the influencer sincere.	
Attractiveness	I find the influencer to be incredibly appealing.	(Syed & Raja, 2014), (Munnukka et al., 2016)
	I think the influencer is very fashionable.	
	I consider the influencer to be good-looking.	
	I think the influencer is sexy.	
Similarity	The influencer and I are a lot alike.	(Munnukka et al., 2016)
	The influencer and I have a lot in common.	
	I can quickly identify with the influencer.	
	I can see myself being a similar influencer to my favourite influencer.	

Purchase intention	Influencer reviews assist me in determining which product I am most likely to purchase.	(Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018)
	Influencer reviews assist me in determining which product I should purchase.	
	Influencer reviews guide me in considering the product I am likely to obtain.	
	Influencer reviews assist me in deciding which product to purchase.	

3.7 Procedure for data collection

An online survey was created and shared with active social media users on at least one social media platform. A link was shared with social media users that led them to the online survey. The respondents were required to be a follower of at least one SMI locally or internationally.

Consent and ethical procedures were followed. At the start of the survey respondents are requested to give consent to proceed. When consent is not given survey ends and when given respondents may continue with the survey. The complete surveys with their responses were saved to a database. The ones that were missing information were tracked, but they were not included in the final dataset for analysis.

3.8 Data analysis strategies and interpretation

The online survey results were collected in Qualtrics and then imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for cleaning and analysis. The benefits of using SPSS include finding patterns, creating forecasting models, and arriving at informed conclusions. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2015). SmartPLS was chosen over Amos because it performs better with a small sample size. In this study, the sample size was small relative to the number of statements/items. Amos would have required a minimum sample of at least 250, as the rule of thumb is that there should be at least 10 respondents per item and the model had 25 items.

3.9 Limitations of the study

- This study focused on social media users in South Africa who are active on at least one social media platform and follow at least one SMI.
- The possible reduced survey response rate could be due to low motivation, lack of internet connectivity, or too many questions asked.
- The researcher was not present; thus, the respondents may have misunderstood the questions.

3.10 Validity and reliability

The instrument was developed using pilot testing. According to Khalid et al. (2012), pilot testing is essential for checking instrument validity and reliability. Validity and reliability examine the measure's fitness for studying the variables (Khalid et al., 2012). According to Yong and Pearce (2013), although variations could be called for by the study's design, for a factor to be valid, the factor should have at least three variables. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2015) to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs.

3.10.1 External validity

External validity is the ability of the data to be generalised across persons, settings, and times (Cooper et al., 2006). This study was conducted on active social media users in South Africa; generalising to other persons might be limited.

3.10.2 *Internal validity*

Internal validity is the instrument being limited to the function it was meant for and the ability of the instrument to measure what it was designed to measure Cooper et al. (2006). This study used previously tested questions regarding the characteristics influencers use to impact consumer purchase intention.

3.10.3 *Reliability*

Reliability is the degree to which a measure is free from random error and gives consistent results (Khalid et al., 2012). Cronbach's alpha tests measured the consistency of how related the constructs are.

3.11 Ethical considerations

This study strictly adheres to the ethical principles of the University of Witwatersrand. The university's ethics committee approved the study with protocol number WBD/DB909583/333 (see Appendix B). This study strictly follows the committee's guidelines. The study clearly states the aim and the data used, with demographic information used only to identify patterns between demographic factors (see Appendix B). The anonymity of the respondents was maintained.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Characteristics used by SMIs to influence consumer purchase intention are presented in Chapter 4. Firstly, data screening was used to test for the completeness of responses. Data screening was followed by reliability and validity testing of the researched constructs. Hypothesis testing based on structural equation modelling (SEM) concludes this chapter. SEM is a collection of statistical methods for assessing and examining the connections between accessible and observable data.

4.2 Data screening

The online survey generated 311 replies. However, 125 replies were insufficient and removed from the sample (see Table 3). After incomplete replies were eliminated for accuracy, 186 responses were examined. No replies were missing for the objects measuring the key constructs. Therefore, data imputation was not necessary.

Table 3: Survey responses summary

Total responses	Complete	Incomplete
311	186 (60%)	125 (40%)

4.3 Descriptive statistics

4.3.1 *Demographic profile of the respondents*

Age of the respondents

According to the findings shown in Table 4, half (47%) of the sample was between the ages of 31 and 40 years, while 32% were 30 years or younger, 6% were between the ages of 41 and 50 years, and 5% were between the ages of 51 and 60 years.

Level of education

The majority (68%) of respondents had a bachelor's degree or above as their highest level of education, and high school (16%) and diplomas (12%) were the next highest level attained. The findings are shown in Table 4.

Frequency of social media usage, excluding WhatsApp

The majority (80%) of respondents indicated using social media more than five times each week. Table 4 presents these findings.

Social media platforms used to follow social media influencers

Respondents could select one social media platform or a combination of platforms. Table 4 show that the two social media sites most frequently utilised to follow social media influencers were Instagram (67%) and YouTube (67%), followed by Facebook (53%), Twitter (41%), and Tik Tok (38%).

Kind of influencers followed

Respondents could select one kind of social media influencer or a combination of kinds. The most popular influencers are those who focus on healthy living and health

(47%), followed closely by those who focus on beauty and fashion (45%) and travel (43%). The findings are displayed in Table 4.

Attributes about SMIs

Respondents could select one attribute or a combination of attributes. As displayed in Table 4, respondents said they are primarily interested in SMIs that offer entertainment (75%), followed by educational (66%) and exciting content (34%).

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Variable	Option	Frequency	Percentage
Age	30 years or younger	59	32%
	Between 31-40 years	88	47%
	Between 41-50 years	29	16%
	Between 51-60 years	10	5%
	Older than 60 years	0	0%
Level of education	High school	30	16%
	Diploma	23	12%
	Bachelor	37	20%
	Postgraduate	90	48%
	Other	6	3%
How often are you on social media (excluding WhatsApp)?	Once a week	4	16%
	2-3 times a week	15	12%
	4-5 times a week	18	20%
	more than 5 times a week	148	48%
	Not indicated	1	3%
*Which of the following social media platforms do you follow your favourite social media influencers? Facebook	Instagram	125	67%
	YouTube	124	67%
	Facebook	99	53%
	Twitter	77	41%
	TikTok	70	38%
	Other	23	12%
*What kind of influencers do you most like to follow? Beauty/ fashion	Beauty/ fashion	83	45%
	Travel	80	43%
	Healthy Living/Fitness	88	47%
	Current affairs	70	38%
	Other	80	43%
*Social media influencers are...	Educational	122	75%
	Exciting	64	34%
	Memorable	38	20%
	Entertaining	140	66%
	Sense of comfort	41	22%

* Questions where the respondents could select one option or in combination with other options

4.3.2 *Informative quality of the influencer*

The highest-rated item on the informative quality construct was finding information supplied by the influencers followed to be useful (mean = 5.27), with 77% of the respondents agreeing with this item.

4.3.3 *Expertise of the influencer*

The highest-rated item on the expertise construct indicated the influencer is well-versed regarding the product (mean = 5.06), with 70% of the respondents agreeing with this item.

4.3.4 *Trustworthiness of the influencer*

The highest-rated items on the trustworthiness construct were thinking the influencer is honest (mean = 4.58) with 56% and believing the influencer is telling the truth (mean = 4.58), with 51% of the respondents agreeing with this item.

4.3.5 *Attractiveness of the influencer*

The highest-rated items on the attractiveness construct were finding the influencer to be very appealing (mean = 4.49) with 80% and thinking the influencer is very fashionable (mean = 4.59), with 76% of the respondents agreeing with this item.

4.3.6 Similarity of the influencer

The highest-rated item on the similarity construct was quickly identifying with the influencer (mean = 4.85), with 58% of the respondents agreeing with this item.

4.4 Measurement model

This study focused on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). SmartPLS was used to present the factor loadings. Figure 14 and Table 5 demonstrate that each factor significantly impacted the corresponding constructs. No item was loaded onto more than one construct, and the factor loading with the lowest value was 0.746. This indicates that the constructs were valid. Wixom and Watson (2001) recommend measuring reliability at a level of above 0.7 to show satisfactory internal consistency.

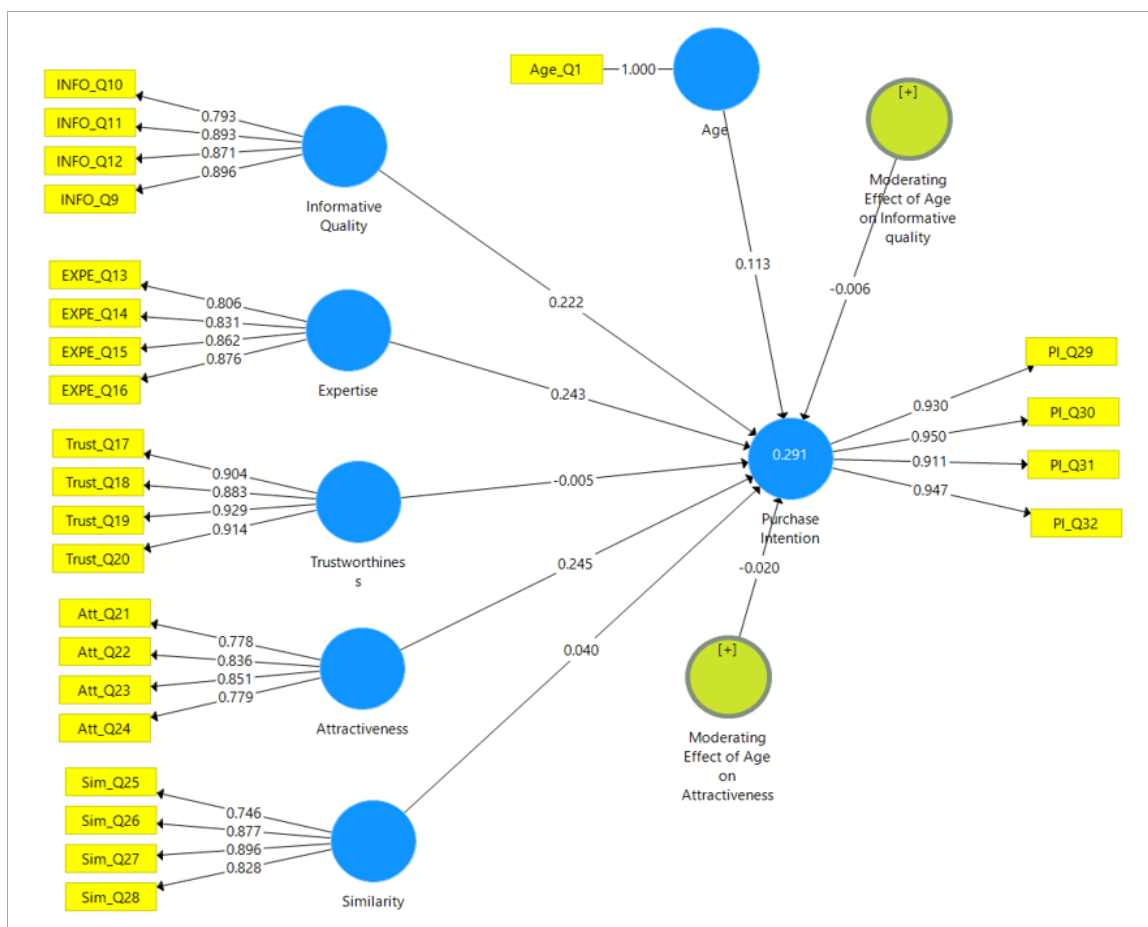


Figure 8: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model

With SmartPLS, the outer loadings are output from CFA. The outer loadings discuss how the latent structures in SEM relate to the observed objects and statements. The degree to which each item loads onto the latent construct, or the extent to which the construct explains the variation in the item, is measured by these variables. It has a range of 0 to 1, with a larger loading indicating a more significant correlation between the construct and the indicator. High outer loadings imply that the items provide an accurate representation of the construct. No item was loaded onto more than one construct in Table 5, and the lowest factor loading value was 0.746. This demonstrates the legitimacy of the structures.

Table 5: Outer loadings

	Attractiveness	Expertise	Informative Quality	Purchase Intention	Similarity	Trustworthiness
Att_Q21	0.778					
Att_Q22	0.836					
Att_Q23	0.851					
Att_Q24	0.779					
EXPE_Q13		0.806				
EXPE_Q14		0.831				
EXPE_Q15		0.862				
EXPE_Q16		0.876				
INFO_Q10			0.793			
INFO_Q11			0.893			
INFO_Q12			0.871			
INFO_Q9			0.896			

PI_Q29				0.930		
PI_Q30				0.950		
PI_Q31				0.911		
PI_Q32				0.947		
Sim_Q25					0.746	
Sim_Q26					0.877	
Sim_Q27					0.896	
Sim_Q28					0.828	
Trust_Q17						0.904
Trust_Q18						0.883
Trust_Q19						0.929
Trust_Q20						0.914

In order to determine convergent validity, average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5 (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). There was convergent validity for all the constructs since the AVE values were all higher than the prerequisite (Table 6). Table 5 also showed that there was internal consistency (reliability) given that all constructs had Cronbach's alpha values that were higher than the minimum requirements of at least 0.7 (Ab Hamid et al., 2017).

Table 6: Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Attractiveness	0.834	0.858	0.885	0.659
Expertise	0.866	0.872	0.908	0.713
Informative quality	0.887	0.895	0.922	0.747
Purchase intention	0.952	0.952	0.965	0.874
Similarity	0.868	0.943	0.904	0.704
Trustworthiness	0.929	0.935	0.949	0.824

The findings in Table 7 demonstrate the existence of diverging validity. The reason for this is that the Fornell-Larcker criterion values' diagonal components were higher than their off-diagonal correlations with other constructs. This suggests that objects within a construct were more closely related to one another than to objects from different constructs.

Table 7: Correlation matrix

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Age	Attractiveness	Expertise	Informative Quality	Moderating Effect of Age on Attractiveness	Moderating Effect of Age on Informative quality	Purchase Intention	Similarity	Trustworthiness
Age	1.95	0.83	-								
Attractiveness	5.29	1.20	-0.174	0.812							
Expertise	4.59	1.39	0.147	0.250	0.844						
Informative Quality	5.19	1.21	-0.058	0.194	0.480	0.864					
Purchase Intention	4.72	1.55	0.095	0.336	0.434	0.387	0.115	0.162	0.935		
Similarity	4.09	1.41	0.031	0.307	0.387	0.414	0.177	0.099	0.298	0.839	
Trustworthiness	4.56	1.37	0.125	0.293	0.704	0.497	0.225	0.214	0.376	0.476	0.908

4.5 Hypothesis testing

A partial least square method of structural equation modelling (PSL-SEM) was applied with bootstrapping also fitted to assess the hypotheses (the significance of the path coefficients).

4.5.1 *Dependent variable*

The model is presented in Figure 15 and the hypothesised t-value paths indicate the relationship between consumer purchase intention and SMI characteristics.

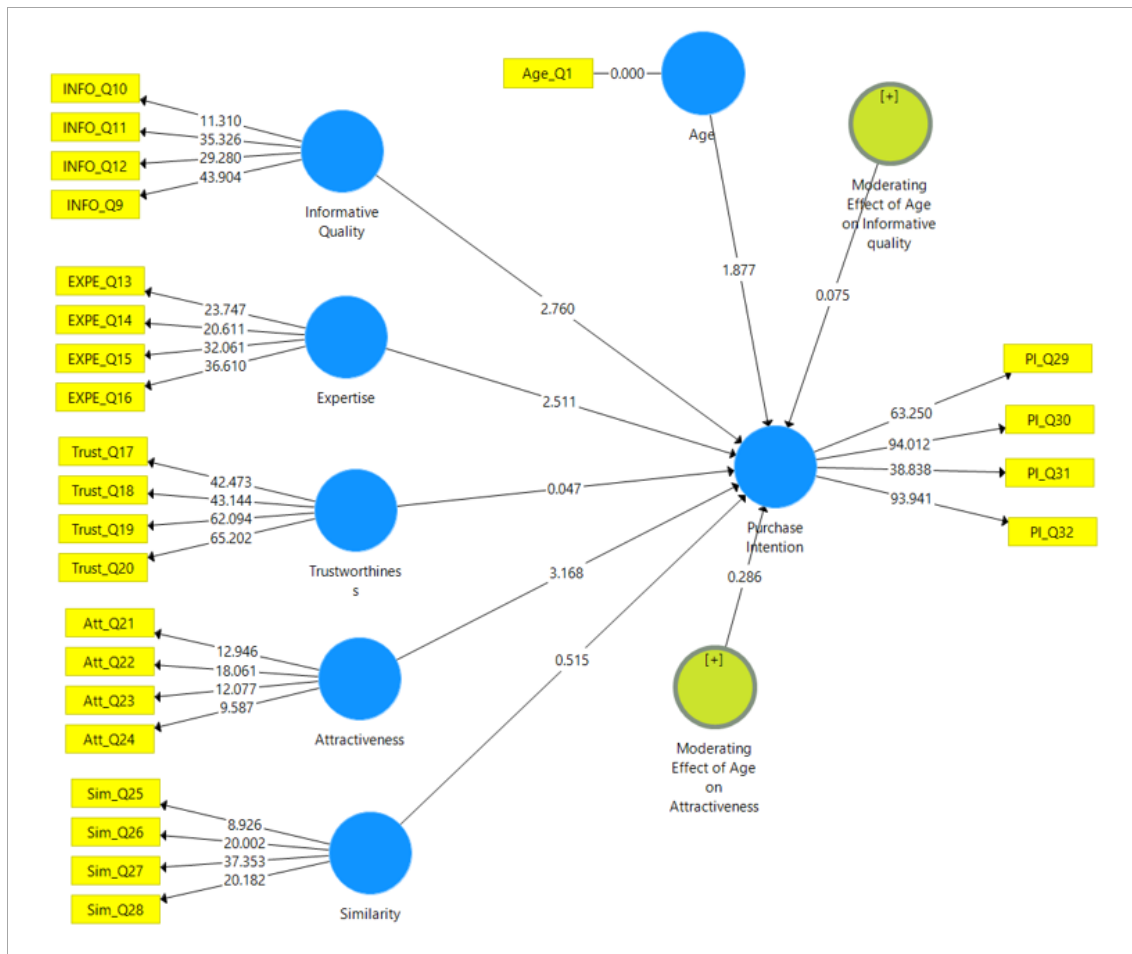


Figure 9: Structural equation modelling (SEM)

Table 8: Mean, standard deviation, t-values, p-values – dependent variable

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
Informative quality -> Purchase intention	0.222	0.224	0.081	2.760	0.006
Expertise -> Purchase intention	0.243	0.245	0.097	2.511	0.012
Trustworthiness -> Purchase intention	-0.005	-0.011	0.101	0.047	0.963
Attractiveness -> Purchase intention	0.245	0.247	0.077	3.168	0.002
Similarity -> Purchase intention	0.040	0.049	0.077	0.515	0.607

Moderating effect of age on informative quality -> Purchase intention	-0.006	0.008	0.077	0.075	0.941
Moderating effect of age on attractiveness -> Purchase intention	-0.020	-0.019	0.069	0.286	0.775

Table 8 displays the findings of the hypothesis testing. For a p-value to be statistically significant it should be less than 0.05 ($p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$), while a p-value higher than 0.05 ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$) is statistically insignificant the null hypothesis is kept while the alternative hypothesis is rejected (McLeod, 2019).

Hypothesis H1: Informative quality of the influencer positively affects consumer purchase intention.

The results presented in Table 8 display that informative quality ($B = 0.22$, $t\text{-value} = 2.76$, $p\text{-value} = 0.01$) had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention. It is thus concluded that the informative quality of the SMI positively affects a consumer purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis H1 was supported and significant.

Hypothesis H2: Expertise of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention.

The results presented in Table 8 display that the expertise of the SMI ($B = 0.24$, $t\text{-value} = 2.51$, $p\text{-value} = 0.01$) had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention. It is thus, concluded that the expertise of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis H2 was supported and significant.

Hypothesis H3: The trustworthiness of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention.

The results presented in Table 8 display that the trustworthiness of the SMI ($B = -0.01$, $t\text{-value} = 0.04$, $p\text{-value} = 0.96$) had a negative and insignificant effect on consumer purchase intention. It is thus, concluded that there is no sufficient evidence at a 5% significance level to suggest that the trustworthiness of the SMI negatively affects consumer purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis H3 was not supported, and the result was insignificant.

Hypothesis H4: Attractiveness of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention.

The results presented in Table 8 display that the attractiveness of the SMI ($B = 0.24$, $t\text{-value} = 3.16$, $p\text{-value} = 0.00$) had a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase intention. It is thus, concluded that the attractiveness of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis H4 was supported and significant.

Hypothesis H5: The similarity of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention.

The results presented in Table 8 display that the similarity of the SMI ($B = 0.04$, $t\text{-value} = 0.51$, $p\text{-value} = 0.60$) had a positive but insignificant effect on consumer purchase intention. Thus, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. It is thus concluded that there is no sufficient evidence that the similarity of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention. Thus, although hypothesis H5 was supported, the result was insignificant.

Hypothesis H6a: The effect of the informative quality of the SMIs on consumer purchase intention will be moderated by age.

The results presented in Table 8 display that the moderating effect of age on the effect of informative quality of the SMI ($B = -0.02$, $t\text{-value} = 0.07$, $p\text{-value} = 0.77$) was negative but not significant. Thus, hypothesis H6a was supported but not significant.

Hypothesis H6b: The effect of the attractiveness of the SMIs on consumer purchase intention will be moderated by age.

The results presented in Table 8 display that the moderating effect of age on the effect of attractiveness of the SMIs ($B = -0.00$, $t\text{-value} = 0.28$, $p\text{-value} = 0.94$) was negative but not significant.

4.6 Summary of the results

This chapter presented the study of the sample dataset and its findings. SMI characteristics that influence consumer purchase intention were presented in the results. The validity and reliability tests of the study were performed, as well as hypothesis testing using SEM. The results of the hypothesis testing are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9: Summary of results

Hypothesis		Supported/ Not supported	Significant/ Not significant
H1	The informative quality of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention	Supported	Significant
H2	The expertise of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention	Supported	Significant
H3	The trustworthiness of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention	Not supported	Not significant
H4	The attractiveness of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention	Supported	Significant
H5	The similarity of the SMI positively affects consumer purchase intention	Supported	Not significant
H6a	The effect of the informative quality of the SMIs on consumer purchase intention will be moderated by age	Not supported	Not significant
H6b	The effect of the attractiveness of the SMIs on consumer purchase intention will be moderated by age	Not supported	Not significant

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

An extensive analytical examination of the findings from the data analysis described in Chapter 4 is provided in Chapter 5. This chapter starts by looking at the demographics of the respondents and moves on to extensively examine the results relating to the hypothesis.

5.2 Discussion referring to each hypothesis

This section overviews the research findings and discusses how SMI characteristics can affect consumer purchase intention. This section also provides an analytical discussion of the results relating to each hypothesis.

5.2.1 *SMI information quality and consumer purchase intention*

Informative quality has a positive and significant impact on consumer purchase intention. Jiang et al. (2021) examine how various rich kinds of information affect customers, including text, video, and image material. For information to reach many target markets and positively impact customers successfully, the information should be provided in several formats. When the influencer's information about a product is seen as being of high quality, this favourably affects the purchase forecasts (Park et al., 2007). In this study, followers find information supplied by SMIs useful and exciting. Followers find the information given by the SMIs to be new. Therefore, late information that lacks full detail would negatively impact consumer purchase intention (Chen & Tseng, 2011). This study is consistent with the previous study of Jiang et al. (Jiang et

al., 2021) that found that quality information has a higher positive impact on the consumer.

5.2.2 SMI expertise and consumer purchase intention

Expertise has a positive and significant impact on consumer purchase intention. Influencers are perceived to have expertise due to the more relevant knowledge, skills, or experience they offer (Schouten et al., 2020). Followers find the SMIs they follow to be well versed, thus making them competent to make statements about product knowledge. Digital marketing managers work more closely with influencers with expertise in a certain field than those with more general material (Vanninen et al., 2022). Contrary to the study by Saima and Khan (Saima & Khan, 2021), expertise was found to positively impact consumer purchase intention. This study aligns with the study by Munnukka et al. (2016), who found that items recommended by influencers who have used items are more suitable to consumers.

5.2.3 SMI trustworthiness and consumer purchase intention

Trustworthiness has a negative and insignificant impact on consumer purchase intention.

Influencers are regarded as being more trustworthy than celebrities (Padia, 2016). In this study, however, followers did not see the trustworthiness of an influencer as significant in influencing their purchase intention. Instead, followers are more likely to be influenced by other characteristics such as influencer expertise and ability to provide useful information. This study suggests that when it comes to purchasing decisions, followers are more concerned with finding useful information related to a product/service of interest than with the trustworthiness or the authenticity of SMIs.

Therefore, this study is not consistent with the previous study (Seiler & Kucza, 2017), which found that trustworthiness positively affects consumer purchase intention.

5.2.4 *SMI attractiveness and consumer purchase intention*

Attractiveness has a positive and significant impact on consumer purchase intention. In this study, followers found the influencers to be appealing and fashionable.

In this study, followers find influencers appealing and fashionable. Lou and Yuan (2019) study indicated that for a brand to be remembered by influencers, physical attractiveness can be used. In order to increase product awareness, attractive models were found to be more effective (Syed & Raja, 2014). This study aligns with previous studies by Lou and Yan (Lou & Yuan, 2019) that found that the attractiveness of influencers positively increased brand awareness and consumer purchase intention.

5.2.5 *SMI similarity and consumer purchase intention*

Similarity has a positive but insignificant impact on consumer purchase intention.

According to Syed and Raja (2014), similarity can be due to demographic, economic, religious, or political considerations. These researchers found that these factors positively impact consumer purchases. However, this study's results showed no significant relationship between influencer similarity to a follower and follower purchase intention. Therefore, this study does not align with the previous study by Syed and Raja (2014).

5.2.6 *Moderating effect of age on SMI informative quality*

The moderating effect of age on the effect of informative quality of the SMI was negative but not significant.

This implies that among younger respondents, the impact of the informative quality of SMIs on consumer purchase intention was slightly more pronounced than at older ages. This aligned with the findings of Fang et al. (2016), who found that younger consumers look for more information before purchasing. Unlike the older consumers who use experience when making purchases.

However, the differences were not significant since the p-value was greater than 0.05. Thus, hypothesis H6a was supported but not significant.

In other words, there is not enough evidence at a 5% significance level to suggest that age moderates the effect of the informative quality of the SMI on consumer purchase intention.

5.2.7 *Moderating effect of age on SMIs attractiveness*

The moderating effect of age on the effect attractiveness of the SMIs was negative but not significant.

This finding implies that among younger respondents, the impact of the attractiveness of the SMIs on consumer purchase intention was slightly more pronounced than the impact at older ages. However, the differences were not significant since the p-value was greater than 0.05. Thus, hypothesis H6b was supported but not significant.

In other words, there is not enough evidence at a 5% significance level to suggest that age moderates the effect of SMI attractiveness on consumer purchase intention.

5.3 Chapter summary

The first section of this chapter explored the respondents' demographic profiles. This was followed by a discussion of the findings of the hypothesis. According to the findings of this study, SMIs' informative quality, expertise, and similarity to followers positively impact consumer purchase intention. Trustworthiness was found to have no positive or significant impact on consumer purchase intention. Age as moderating effect on informative quality and attractiveness impacts the younger age group. As opposed to older age group who base their decisions on experience. However, age does not have a high enough impact to influence consumer purchase intention.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study's findings are discussed in Chapter 6, which offers recommendations for the South African marketing sector and potential topics for further investigation.

6.1 Managerial Implications

This research indicates that consumer purchase intention is influenced by SMIs. Social media marketing is a digital marketing tool ranked the fourth most effective tactic (Bala & Verma, 2018). Therefore, brands should make SMIs part of their digital marketing strategies and automate selection processes for SMI to collaborate through more efficient workflows and analytical tools.

Increased fake accounts and bots used to inflate followership negatively impacted businesses (Wallach, 2021). Analytical tools may be used to find patterns, trends, and other key information that could assist in guiding marketing choices. This might include details such as the ideal time to post on each platform and the type of post, such as videos, photos, and reels, among others. Influencer-generated marketing increases the brand's awareness and intentions to buy (Lou & Yuan, 2019). As a result, marketing managers can increase the return on investment. Influencer marketing is more affordable than celebrity endorsement (Padia, 2016). For SMIs to monetise and increase their brands, they should understand what it takes to be a successful influencer as the number of followers an influencer has does not translate into success (Padia, 2016).

Correctly selecting an SMI for endorsements creates relationships between the brand and the consumer (Glucksman, 2017). Brands should look for SMIs who are regarded

as experts in the area so the information they provide can be quality information that is relevant and timeous. This study found that the informative quality is most effective at influencing the younger respondents. When the target market is the younger age groups, the platform, kind of post, and time should all be considered by brands to determine whether they will draw in their target audience.

The majority of the respondents agreed that they found SMIs to be appealing and fashionable. The attractiveness of an SMI should be considered as it impacts the first impression of the consumer regarding the brand. On the other hand, the SMIs trustworthiness and similarity to the followers do not positively impact consumer purchase intention. This suggests that when marketing managers want to increase consumer purchase intention, they do have to only collaborate with SMIs who resemble their target market. The marketing managers can instead look at analytics to determine the reach of SMIs for guiding their strategy.

6.2 Conclusion

There have been numerous studies on the impact of SMI marketing on consumer purchase intention. However, fewer studies have been undertaken in the South African setting. More than 32.7 million people use social networks in South Africa, and by 2026, that figure is expected to increase to 40.8 million (Statista.com, 2021). The use of these platforms for digital marketing strategies has become crucial for brands for increasing consumer awareness and market share retention.

The objective of this study was to better understand the traits used by SMIs to affect the purchasing decisions of South African followers, as well as the moderating effects of age on influencer attractiveness and informative quality.

An online survey was used to conduct this study on active social media users in South Africa who are active on at least one of the social media platforms and follow at least one SMI. Of the 311 responses received, 125 were considered incomplete and eliminated from the sample. The responses of the remaining 186 respondents were then explored. Instagram and Facebook are the most frequently used platforms for following SMIs. Most (80%) of respondents log in to social media more than five times a week.

The findings from this research supported that SMI informative quality, expertise, and attractiveness positively impact consumer purchase intention. Previous studies by and Syed and Raja (2014) found the trustworthiness and similarity of SMIs positively impact consumer purchase intention. The findings were inconsistent with this study and did not hold in the South African context. South African followers are impacted by SMIs who have some similarities, but this impact is not significant enough to result in increased consumer purchase intention.

South Africans are aware that SMIs receive brand sponsorships, which affects the followers' attitudes toward the brand. Thus, the trustworthiness of SMIs has no impact on the followers. The age of followers positively impacts the informative quality and attractiveness of SMIs. This is because younger followers have little to no life experience to consider when making a purchase.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

In this study, follower similarity to SMIs did not impact consumer purchase intention. Future studies could focus on SMIs following SMIs that resemble what they aspire to

become while remaining authentic to their brands. Exploring other SMIs can help SMI understand what works and what does not work in terms of content creation, audience engagement, and overall brand presence. This will help them create a more successful social media presence that resonates with their target audience and helps them reach their desired goals.

Influencer trustworthiness was not supported or significant in this study. Future studies could focus on product and SMI alignment. Future studies could determine if the products being endorsed impacts the trustworthiness of the SMIs.

A primary market strategy segmentation has been gender as it is identifiable and accessible (Sun et al., 2010). Lim et al. (2017) indicate that hedonically motivated users are more engaged online as they see it as enjoyable than utilitarian users who seek convenience. In addition, social media is used differently by men and women for different reasons: Men express their opinions, and women use social media to communicate with friends (Lim et al., 2017). Sun et al. (2010) found that men find information important, and women find sending invitations to entertainment more important. Future studies could investigate a gender moderator to determine the effect on (a) information quality and (b) attractiveness of the influencers instead of the age moderator used in this research.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase intention in SA

Dear Participant,

My name is Judith Mmolotsane. I am completing my Master of Management in the field of Digital Business at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. In my journey, I am required to complete a research project, for which I have chosen the marketing sector. I am conducting research on the impact of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on consumer purchase intention in SA under the supervision of **Dr. Emmanuel Quaye**

I humbly request your assistance in enabling me to complete my task by taking part in this survey. Attached is a questionnaire that should take 15 minutes to complete. You are not required to provide your name, so your response is anonymous and guarantees confidentiality. However, you must please give some demographic information, which is used purely to establish patterns between different demography.

The first part of the survey captures some demographic data. Please tick the appropriate options. The second part of the survey comprises 26 statements. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement by ticking the appropriate box. Your participation is entirely voluntary and involves no risk, penalty, or loss of benefits whether or not you participate. You may withdraw from the survey at any stage. Submission of the questionnaire will be taken as your consent to participate. Thank you in advance. Please feel free to contact me should you have any queries in this regard at 909583@students.wits.ac.za or on 073 219 2136.

Regards,

Judith Mmolotsane

APPENDIX B: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg



Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/DB909583/333

This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	The perceived impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase intention in South Africa
Investigator / Researcher	Mrs Judith Mmolotsane
Nature of Project	MM (Digital Business)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.
Issue Date of Certificate	2022-06-15
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Prof Anthony Stacey ☎ +27 11 717 3587 ☎ +27 82 880 4531 ✉ anthony.stacey@wits.ac.za

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Stacey'.

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized name.

Signature

15/05/2022

Date:

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

#	Background Information						
1	Are you an active social media user	Yes			No		
2	Age	< 30	31-40	41-50	51-60	> 60	
3	Level of education	High school	Diploma	Bachelor	Postgraduate	Other	
4	Which of the following of the social media platforms do you follow your favourite social media influencers?	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	TikTok	YouTube	Other
5	Name one or two of your favourite social media influencers that follow						
6	How often are you on social media	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-5 times a week	> 5 times a week		
7	What kind of influencers do you mostly like to follow	Beauty/fashion	Travel	Healthy living/Fitness	Current affairs	Other	
8	Social media influencers are	Educational	Exciting	Memorable	Entertaining	Sense of comfort	
Influencer characteristics							

Informative quality

9	I gather knowledge through the information shared by the influencers that I follow	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
10	I get interesting information through the influencers that I follow	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
11	The information provided by the influencers that I follow is helpful to me	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
12	I get new information through the influencers that I follow	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

Expertise

13	I feel the influencer knows a lot about the product	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
14	I feel the influencer is competent to make claims about the product	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

15	I consider the influencer an expert on the product	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
16	I consider the influencer sufficiently experienced to make statements about the product	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Trustworthiness								
17	I feel the influencer is honest	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
18	I consider the influencer trustworthy	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
19	I feel the influencer is truthful	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
20	I consider the influencer earnest	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Attractiveness								

21	I find the influencer to be incredibly appealing.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
22	I think the influencer is very fashionable.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
23	I consider the influencer to be good-looking.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
24	I think the influencer is sexy.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Similarity								
25	The influencer and I are a lot alike.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
26	The influencer and I have a lot in common.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
27	I can quickly identify with the influencer.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

28	I can see myself being a similar influencer to my favorite influencer.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Purchase intention .								
29	Influencer reviews assist me in determining which product I am most likely to purchase.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
30	Influencer reviews assist me in determining which product I should purchase.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
31	Influencer reviews guide me in considering the product I am likely to obtain.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
32	Influencer reviews assist me in deciding which product to purchase.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Gender								

33	I follow an influencer because they make me feel good	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
34	The influencers I mainly follow are fun and pleasant to follow	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
35	I follow an influencer because I get essential information about current affairs	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
36	The influencers I mainly follow are industry experts	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Credibility								
37	I feel the influencer is dependable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
38	I feel the influencer is honest	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
39	I consider the influencer reliable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

40	I consider the influencer sincere.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
40	I consider the influencer sincere.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

