



Exploring the role of social media influencers and brand ambassadors in influencing purchase intention

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the comparative influence of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors on purchase intention within the South African cosmetics industry, specifically targeting millennial and Generation Z consumers. Grounded in the Source Credibility Model, the research examines how credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise shape consumer decision-making. Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) were introduced as higher-order constructs to evaluate and compare which type of endorser has a stronger influence on overall purchase intention. A Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) methodology was used to analyse survey data collected from 130 respondents.

The findings indicate that both Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) influence consumer purchase intention, with celebrity brand ambassadors exerting a more substantial effect due to their higher perceived credibility and expertise. Celebrity brand ambassadors were shown to play a pivotal role in enhancing consumer trust and confidence, making them more effective in driving purchase behaviour compared to social media influencers. These insights offer strategic guidance for marketers and brands looking to refine their influencer marketing strategies to better resonate with the evolving preferences of millennial and Generation Z consumers in the South African market.

Keywords: Social media influencers, celebrity brand ambassadors, purchase intention, Source Credibility Model, millennials, Generation Z, cosmetics industry.

DECLARATION

I, Helen. Da Fonseca, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Marketing by Research 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: Helen Da Fonseca

Signature:

Signed at

On the day of 20.....

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, A.M.C. Da Fonseca, who has instilled in me the enduring values of perseverance, dedication, and resilience. Her unwavering support, boundless love, and wisdom have not only shaped my ambitions but also taught me the importance of hard work, independence, and the courage to break barriers. She has always encouraged me to embrace my individuality, pursue my passions relentlessly, and never compromise on my dreams, even in the face of adversity. Her guidance has been the foundation upon which I have built my career and my personal growth.

This work is also dedicated to my beautiful friend, Dr. Ndoni Mcunu, who continues to be a profound source of inspiration to many. She lived fearlessly, always striving for excellence in everything she did. You left this world far too soon, my friend, your legacy and the love we have for you will remain forever. We miss you every day.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
DECLARATION	III
DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURES.....	IX
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....	1
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	1
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
1.4 MAIN PROBLEM	7
1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	10
1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	11
1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	12
1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS	13
1.9 ASSUMPTIONS	14
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	15
2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOURCE CREDIBILITY MODEL	15
2.3 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND PURCHASE INTENTION.....	19
2.4 THE BEAUTY AND COSMETICS INDUSTRY OVERVIEW.....	21
2.5 BEAUTY BRANDS AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS.....	25
2.6 CELEBRITY BRAND AMBASSADORS AND BEAUTY BRANDS	30
2.7 OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	33
2.8 GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MILLENNIALS AND GENERATION Z CONSUMERS	43
2.9 HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT	48
2.10 CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT	61
2.11 CONCLUSION OF LITERATURE REVIEW	61
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	63
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	63
3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM	63
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	65

3.4	POPULATION AND SAMPLE.....	66
3.5	THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT	68
3.6	PILOT RESEARCH	71
3.7	DATA ANALYSIS.....	71
3.8	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	71
3.9	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	72
3.10	SUMMARY.....	74
4	PRESENTATION OF RESULTS.....	75
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	75
4.2	DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE.....	75
4.3	DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: MEASUREMENT SCALE	90
4.4	RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY MEASUREMENT	102
4.5	VALIDITY MEASUREMENT.....	106
4.6	RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY MEASUREMENT (HIGHER ORDER MODEL).....	114
4.7	ASSESSING PROPERTIES OF THE HIGHER-ORDER MEASUREMENT MODEL.....	115
4.8	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF MEASUREMENT	118
4.9	ASSESSING THE STRUCTURAL MODEL	122
4.10	HYPOTHESIS TESTING.....	122
4.11	CONCLUSION OF THE PRESENTATION OF RESULTS.....	125
5	DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS.....	126
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	126
5.2	DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS DISCUSSION	127
5.3	HYPOTHESES DISCUSSION	129
5.4	SUMMARY.....	141
6	CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	142
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	142
6.2	CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY.....	146
6.3	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	148
6.4	LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	151
6.5	CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER.....	153
	APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	176
	APPENDIX B: INSTRUMENT	178
	APPENDIX C: CONSISTENCY MATRIX	187

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Socio-demographic variables	88
Table 2 Social media-related variables <i>Description of social media-related variables of the respondents (N = 130)</i>	89
Table 3 Credibility measurement scales	91
Table 4 Trustworthiness measurement scales.....	93
Table 5 Expertise measurement scales	94
Table 6 Purchase intention measurement scales	95
Table 7 BA Credibility measurement scales	97
Table 8 BA Trustworthiness measurement scales.....	98
Table 9 BA Expertise measurement scales	99
Table 10 BA Purchase intention	100
Table 11 Measurement scales.....	102
Table 12 Reliability coefficients for the measurement scales.....	103
Table 13 Factor loadings of indicators retained for the conceptual model.....	105
Table 14 Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF) for indicators	106
Table 15 <i>Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF) for latent constructs</i>	107
Table 16 Average Variance Extracted (AVE).....	108
Table 17 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values.....	109
Table 18 Cross-loadings	111

Table 19 Fornell-Larcker criterion.....	112
Table 20 Internal Consistency Reliability (Higher Order Model)	115
Table 21 Factor loadings of latent constructs on second-order construct PI...117	
Table 22 Outer model multicollinearity	118
Table 23 Inner model multicollinearity	119
Table 24 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Higher Order Model	119
Table 25 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Higher Order Model	120
Table 26 Cross-loadings Higher Order Model.....	120
Table 27 Fornell-Larcker Criterion Higher Order Model	121
Table 28 Hypothesis Testing Results	122

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Ohanian Source Credibility Model	16
<i>Figure 2.2 Conceptual model for the study</i>	61
Figure 4. 1 : <i>Birth year range</i>	75
<i>Figure 4.2 Age group</i>	76
<i>Figure 4.3 Frequency of social media usage</i>	77
<i>Figure 4.4 Duration using social media platforms</i>	78
<i>Figure 4.5 Device used to access social media</i>	79
<i>Figure 4.6 Most preferred social media platform</i>	80
<i>Figure 4.7 Least preferred social media platforms</i>	81
<i>Figure 4.8 Gender</i>	82
<i>Figure 4.9 Ethnic group</i>	83
<i>Figure 4.10 Employment status</i>	84
<i>Figure 4.11 Highest level of education</i>	85
<i>Figure 4.12 Province</i>	86
<i>Figure 4.13 Household income</i>	87
<i>Figure 4.14 Maybelline New York influencer campaigns</i>	90
<i>Figure 4.15 Lancôme brand ambassadors</i>	96
Figure 4.16 The Measurement Model (Outer Model) showing Indicators and Latent Constructs	113
Figure 4.17 Graphical Output of Path Model for Second-Order Construct PI..	121

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

This study investigates the influence of social media influencers and brand ambassadors on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa. The main objective is to compare Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) to determine which has a greater influence on overall purchase intention. By evaluating the perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of both influencers and ambassadors, the study provides valuable insights for brands seeking to leverage these marketing channels in the evolving South African social media landscape.

1.2 Context of the study

The proliferation of social media has transformed how consumers source information, reducing the dominance of traditional mass media such as television, radio, and print publications. Social media platforms have become integral spaces for users to exchange information and build relationships, fundamentally reshaping the media landscape (Hair et al., 2010). By 2025, the global number of social media users is projected to reach approximately 4.41 billion (Statista, 2021). Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) possesses unparalleled scalability and dissemination speed, allowing consumers to access and share brand-related information instantaneously before making purchasing decisions. This rapid exchange of information occurs through diverse online channels such as discussion forums, newsgroups, blogs, review sites, and social networking platforms (Cheung & Lee, 2012).

This study focuses on comparing Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa. The South African beauty market is recognised for its strong presence of global and local cosmetic brands, positioning it as one of the most dynamic markets on the continent. In 2024, the global Beauty & Personal Care market was projected to generate revenue of US\$648.60bn (Statista, 2024a). This market continues to experience significant growth, particularly in cosmetics and skincare segments, attributed to the influx of younger consumers. Social media, internationalisation, and eCommerce are influencing shifts in consumer behaviour related to the purchase of beauty products (Mordor Intelligence, 2023).

Consumer behaviour, defined as the actions consumers display when searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007), is undergoing substantial transformation with the rise of commerce on social media platforms. The expansion of commerce on social media platforms has transformed the landscape of consumer behaviour. The global social commerce industry, valued at \$492 billion, is expected to expand three times faster than traditional e-commerce, reaching an estimated \$1.2 trillion by 2025 (Accenture, 2022). This expansion is primarily driven by Generation Z and millennial consumers, who are expected to account for 62% of global social commerce spending by 2025. This trend presents a significant opportunity for brands and creators to engage these consumer segments effectively. A survey by Accenture revealed that 64% of social media users had made a purchase through social media within the previous year, representing nearly 2 billion global social buyers. The Covid-19 pandemic further accelerated this shift, positioning social media as the primary entry point for online activities, creating new opportunities for platforms and brands to enhance user experience and increase revenue (Accenture, 2022).

This study conducts a comparative analysis of the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors, evaluating their distinct impacts on consumer purchasing decisions. Furthermore, it examines the roles of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) in shaping the overall purchase intention of millennial and Generation Z consumers toward cosmetic brands.

Influencer marketing, where brands collaborate with selected influencers to create and promote branded content to both the influencers' followers and the brands' target consumers, is an extension of traditional word-of-mouth marketing but with a stronger social context and professional approach. Sudha and Sheena (2017) define influencer marketing as the process of identifying and engaging individuals who can influence a specific target audience or medium. Brands leverage influencers to expand their reach, boost sales, or enhance consumer engagement. It is a relationship-building process that can be highly beneficial for brands seeking to grow their audience and cultivate customer loyalty through trust and authenticity.

Similarly, celebrity brand endorsements have been widely adopted by major corporations to enhance their corporate or brand image. Companies invest considerable resources to align their brands with desirable endorser traits, such as attractiveness, amiability, and reliability, which are believed to generate positive results in advertising campaigns. This strategy can be particularly impactful in mature and saturated markets, where product differentiation through the selection of an ideal brand ambassador is key (Erdogan, 1999).

1.3 Problem statement

The rise of social media platforms and the expansion of influencer marketing have reshaped brand engagement and consumer behaviour, particularly in emerging markets like South Africa. Companies increasingly rely on social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors to promote their products. This study explores and compares the influence of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennials and Generation Z cosmetic brand consumers. Specifically, it examines how the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of social media influencers differ from those of traditional brand ambassadors in shaping consumer purchase behaviour within these segments. By focusing on these factors, the study aims to better understand the unique roles that influencers and brand ambassadors play in influencing purchase intentions across both millennial and Generation Z consumers.

Influencers and celebrities differ conceptually in how they engage with their audiences. Influencers, as described by Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) are “born” on social media, where they cultivate and maintain direct relationships with multiple users, influencing their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours through content that informs and entertains. Conversely, traditional celebrities, such as actors, athletes, and musicians, are primarily known for their achievements outside social media, gaining recognition through their work in fields unrelated to digital platforms (Hu et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Authenticity also improves message receptivity, making it a critical factor for content creation in industries such as beauty, lifestyle, and fashion (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Labrecque et al., 2011; Moulard et al., 2014; Napoli et al., 2014).

Building on existing studies in emerging markets, this study contributes to the growing body of research on influencer marketing. For instance, Nyamakanga et al. (2019) provides insights into local and international celebrity credibility on the purchase intentions of female Generation Y and Z consumers in South Africa. The study found that attractiveness and trustworthiness were primary drivers for local celebrities, while expertise had a more significant impact for international celebrities. Motara (2022) explored the role of social media influencers in shaping the consumer purchase intentions of beauty products in South Africa. The study highlighted social media as a critical, cost-effective platform and emphasized the role influencers play in the consumer buying process and product lifecycle.

Chikweche and Fletcher (2014) investigated the effect of social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions in a developing African economy, focusing on the growing middle-class segment. The findings in these studies reflect an evolving landscape for influencer marketing across the African continent, highlighting the potential for further research in this dynamic and rapidly expanding digital environment.

This study also aims to contribute valuable insights to the global body of work on influencer marketing and consumer behaviour within emerging markets. Several studies have explored the evolution of the digital marketing field (Barwise & Meehan, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kohil et al., 2014; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Vanden Bergh et al., 2011; Yan, 2011). Other studies sought to understand why consumers engage in virtual communities (Brodie et al., 2013; Füller, 2006). Research studies by (Kamboj, 2019), (Ngai et al., 2015), and (Phua et al., 2017a) examined the application of mass communication theories in the context of social media. Several researchers have also explored the topic of social media influencers (Audrezet et al., 2018; Casaló et al., 2018; De Jans et al., 2020; Forbes, 2016; Freberg et al., 2011).

Zoghلامي and Himmet (2023) investigated the factors influencing consumers' attitudes towards the recommendations of female influencers on Instagram and the impact of this attitude on purchase intentions, perception and response to the recommendation delivered by the influencer.

The study found that perceived usefulness, information quality, source credibility, and trust positively influenced attitudes, which positively impacted the purchase intent of the recommended products.

Glaeser et al. (2000) conducted a study measuring two important aspects of social capital - trust and trustworthiness. To achieve this, they conducted two experiments and a survey. The results showed that trusting behaviour within the experiments could predict trusting behaviour outside of them. Individuals who have closer social ties tend to display greater trust and trustworthiness. Moreover, people with high social status are likelier to inspire trustworthiness in others. Other studies have explored the evolution of electronic word of mouth and consumer behaviour (de Vries et al., 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Kapoor et al., 2018; Laroche et al., 2013; Laroche et al., 2012; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2013; Zhao et al., 2020).

Building on these findings, this study focuses on two consumer segments, millennials and Generation Z. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, have a different approach to social media platform usage compared to Generation Z. Born between 1981 and 1996, they are considered digital natives and were the first group to encounter influencer marketing due to their early adoption of social media. Despite concerns about misinformation, they show a high level of trust in influencers. From a global perspective, 80% of millennials trust influencers to some extent and are 15% more likely than the average consumer to trust them completely (Beresford Research, 2024; GWI, 2023b).

Generation Z, also known as 'Gen Z', falls into the category of people born between 1997 and 2012 (Beresford Research, 2024). According to a global report on this consumer segment, many Gen Z consumers discover new brands through celebrity endorsements or recommendations from well-known individuals (GWI, 2023a). Additionally, 18% of this demographic rely on posts or reviews from expert bloggers, while 13% are influenced by advertisements or sponsored podcast content. Regarding online purchase drivers, 24% of Gen Z prioritise products with numerous "likes" or positive comments on social media platforms.

Despite the growing reliance on both social media influencers and traditional celebrities in marketing strategies, there remains a gap in understanding how these endorsers differentially influence purchase intentions, particularly in emerging markets like South Africa. While existing research has provided valuable insights into the individual effects of credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise on consumer behaviour, few studies have directly compared the distinct roles of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) within the same framework, particularly in relation to their influence on overall purchase intention.

This study addresses this gap by offering a comparative analysis of these two types of endorsers, providing insights into how brands can effectively engage millennials and Generation Z consumers. By highlighting the nuances of influencer versus brand ambassador effectiveness, this research contributes to the broader discourse on digital marketing in emerging markets, offering practical implications for brands navigating the evolving landscape of consumer engagement.

1.4 Main problem

The rise of social media has transformed the way brands interact with consumers, leading to the emergence of two prominent forms of product endorsers—social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors. These endorsers differ in how they shape consumer perceptions and drive purchasing decisions, particularly among millennials and Generation Z consumers, who are highly engaged on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Understanding which type of endorser is more effective in influencing purchase intention is important for marketers and businesses operating in the competitive cosmetics industry.

Although extensive research has been conducted on influencer marketing and celebrity endorsements in developed markets, limited studies focus on the South African context, especially within the millennial and Generation Z cohorts.

This research aims to fill that gap by comparing Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) to determine which endorser type has a greater impact on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands. The study examines the role of credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise in influencing these two constructs to provide insights into optimising marketing strategies for a diverse and digitally active consumer segment.

1.4.1 Sub-problem 1

The first sub-problem explores whether there is a significant influence of social media influencers' perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa. This sub-problem aims to identify which endorser characteristics are most influential in shaping Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).

***H1:** Social media influencer credibility has a significant positive influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

***H2:** Social media influencer trustworthiness has a significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

***H3:** Social media influencer expertise has a significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

1.4.2 Sub-problem 2

The second sub-problem investigates whether there is a significant influence of celebrity brand ambassadors' perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) among

millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa. This sub-problem aims to establish which endorser characteristics are most influential in shaping Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI).

***H5:** Celebrity brand ambassador credibility has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

***H6:** Celebrity brand ambassador trustworthiness has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

***H7:** Celebrity brand ambassador expertise has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

1.4.3 Sub-problem 3

The third sub-problem compares the influence of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) to determine which endorser has a greater impact on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa. Using H4 and H8, the study compares which type of endorser—social media influencers or celebrity brand ambassadors—exerts a stronger impact on shaping overall purchase intention. This sub-problem aims to determine the comparative effectiveness of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) in influencing the purchasing decisions of this demographic.

Hypotheses for Sub-Problem 3:

H4: *Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) has a significant influence on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

H8: *Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) has a significant influence on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.*

1.5 Research objectives

1.5.1 To explore the relationships between social media influencers' perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise and their influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa.

1.5.2 This objective aims to identify which endorser characteristics are most impactful in shaping Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and their overall effect on purchase intention for cosmetic brands.

1.5.3 To investigate the relationships between brand ambassadors' perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise and their influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa. This objective seeks to determine which endorser characteristics play a more prominent role in shaping Brand

Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and their subsequent effect on purchase intention for cosmetic brands.

1.5.4 To evaluate and compare the influence of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa. This objective assesses the relative impact of each type of endorser on driving overall purchase intention and identifies which type of endorser—social media influencers or celebrity brand ambassadors—is more effective in influencing the target demographic's purchasing behaviour.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study aims to contribute to the literature and knowledge in influencer marketing by exploring its impact on consumer purchase intention among millennial and Generation Z cosmetic brand users, with a particular focus on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). The South African beauty and personal care market is experiencing growth due to several factors, including a rising population, rapid urbanisation, and increased per capita spending on beauty products. Additionally, the increasing availability of affordable skincare products and a growing working population contribute to the expansion of the skincare market (Mordor Intelligence, 2023).

The core concept of social media influencer marketing revolves around leveraging everyday individuals as advocates for brands, making products more accessible to consumers (Yodel, 2017). Social media influencers serve as new, independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through their social media channels (Freberg et al., 2011). Influencer Marketing Hub, a leading resource for industry data and trends, reported that the influencer marketing

industry is growing rapidly and is now a USD 21.1 billion industry (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023).

Social commerce presents many opportunities for consumers and brands. Achieving success in this space requires creators, resellers, and brands to engage consumers where they are. This necessitates collaboration within a dynamic ecosystem of platforms, marketplaces, social media, and influencers to exchange data, insights, and capabilities, ultimately providing the most effective incentives and optimal consumer experiences throughout a unified digital marketplace (Accenture, 2022).

For marketers and cosmetic brands utilising influencer marketing, this study reinforces the importance of understanding the distinct characteristics and preferences of different consumer segments.

By strategically leveraging both Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI), brands can effectively engage with millennial and Generation Z consumers, fostering deeper connections and influencing their purchasing decisions. This study highlights the critical role that both social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors play in establishing trust and driving consumer purchase intention within the South African cosmetics industry.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

This study focuses on the South African beauty and cosmetics industry, specifically targeting millennial and Generation Z consumer segments. The research is limited to users of three prominent social media platforms in South Africa: Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal, as well as long-form video content platforms like YouTube, are excluded from the scope of this study. These exclusions are intended to ensure that the study remains focused on platforms most commonly associated with influencer marketing and consumer engagement in the beauty and cosmetics sector.

1.8 Definition of terms

1.8.1 Cosmetic products

Cosmetic products are designed for application on the human body with the purpose of cleansing, enhancing beauty, increasing attractiveness, or altering appearance (United States Food & Drug Administration [FDA], 2018).

1.8.2 Celebrity brand ambassadors

Celebrity ambassadors or endorsers are individuals who garner public recognition and use this recognition to endorse a consumer product by showcasing it in advertisements.

They are accomplished and prominent individuals in their field who are recognised for their achievements (McCracken, 1989).

1.8.3 Social media influencers

Social media influencers are third-party actors who have established relevant relationships and influence organisational stakeholders through content production, content distribution, interaction, and personal appearance on the social web (Enke & Borchers, 2021).

1.8.4 Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing can be defined as the promotion of brands through the use of specific key individuals who exert influence over potential buyers (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

1.8.5 Social media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describes social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow users to create and exchange user-generated content.

1.9 Assumptions

The following assumptions are established in terms of this study:

- The findings can be generalised to other sectors or product categories beyond the cosmetics industry.
- Participants are active users of social media platforms, specifically Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok.
- The respondents possess adequate knowledge of both celebrity brand ambassadors and social media influencers within the context of cosmetic brands.
- The respondents provide unbiased responses based on their personal experiences with cosmetic brands and their interactions on social media platforms.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review explores the key theoretical and empirical research that underpins this study. It focuses on the role of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors in shaping consumer purchase intention, particularly in the context of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). Existing studies on the perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of these endorsers are examined to understand their influence on consumer behaviour within the beauty and cosmetics industry.

This review also discusses the significance of these themes among millennial and Generation Z consumers, who are active users of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Additionally, the literature review covers the evolution of the cosmetics industry, its history, and the role of social media platforms in modern marketing strategies. Key insights from various geographies and sectors are summarised to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the study's variables interact and how they may influence purchase intention.

2.2 Theoretical framework: Source Credibility Model

This study draws on the Source Credibility Model established by (Ohanian, 1990). Source credibility is defined as a “communicator’s positive characteristics that affect the receiver’s acceptance of a message” (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). The model consists of three primary constructs: attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness. Attractiveness refers to the communicator’s similarity, likeability and familiarity to the audience.

Expertise is the perceived knowledge and competency of the communicator, while trustworthiness relates to the perceived honesty and credibility of the communicator.

Understanding the role of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness is essential in establishing credibility, building trust, and fostering a positive relationship with the audience. When considered jointly, expertise and trustworthiness embody the construct of source credibility (Ohanian, 1990).

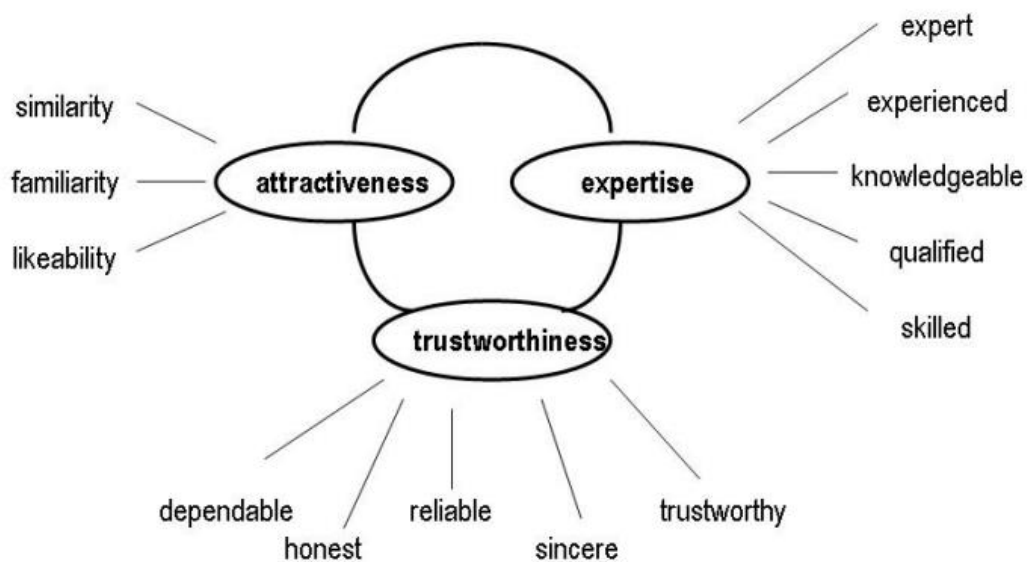


Figure 2.1 Ohanian Source Credibility Model

Source: (Ohanian, 1990)

The application of the source credibility is fundamental to understanding the role of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors in influencing purchase behaviour based on how consumers perceive their messages. Hovland and Weiss (1951), prominent scholars in the field of persuasion and communication posited that source credibility is based on two main factors: knowledge and trustworthiness. The source's expertise refers to their understanding of the subject matter, while the audience's perception of them determines their trustworthiness.

This research study integrates credibility as a distinct construct to be measured alongside source trustworthiness and expertise, drawing on the perspectives of various scholars in the field.

It employs frameworks from earlier studies conducted in the field (Belanche et al., 2021; Giffin, 1967; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Moran & Muzellec, 2014; Yoo et al., 2018).

Social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors are the two types of endorsers evaluated in this study. According to Ohanian (1990) celebrity endorsement has been extensively researched, with two general models emerging: the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model. The source credibility model originated from a landmark study by (Hovland et al., 1953), which found that the perceived credibility of the communicator plays a crucial role in persuasion. In contrast, the source-attractiveness model has its theoretical foundation in social psychology research and is a component of McGuire's "source valence" model (McGuire, 1985). Based on this model, the effectiveness of a message depends on the familiarity, likability, similarity, and attractiveness of the source to the recipient.

Several studies in the field have confirmed the significant effect of trustworthiness. Ohanian (1990) reviewed prominent studies about trustworthiness. For instance, Miller and Baseheart (1969) investigated the influence of source trustworthiness on communication persuasiveness. The findings showed that a message delivered by a highly trustworthy communicator was more persuasive when it contained an opinion, compared to a non-opinionated message. However, this relationship was not statistically significant when the communicator was perceived as less trustworthy. McGinnies and Ward (1980) also studied the impact of a communicator's expertise and trustworthiness on persuasiveness. Their findings indicated that communicators perceived as both credible and possessing expertise exerted the greatest influence on opinion change. Even when a communicator lacked perceived expertise, their trustworthiness alone was sufficient to maintain a persuasive effect.

Friedman and Friedman (1976) investigated the correlation between trustworthiness and likeability. Their study examined the relationship between trust in students' judgments of political figures and various factors, including awareness, likeability, similarity, lifestyle, personal attributes, and expertise. According to the findings, likeability demonstrated the strongest positive correlation with trust. Two studies were later conducted by Friedman et al. (1978) to examine which celebrity attributes are most closely associated with trust. In the first study, students rated 33 celebrities—who were not involved in product endorsements—based on six distinct attributes: awareness, trust, likeability, similarity, lifestyle, and personal attractiveness.

In the second study, members of a civic group rated 20 celebrities—who were endorsing products—on the same six attributes, along with additional attributes such as talent and voting intention. The findings from both studies revealed a strong relationship between trust and likeability.

The aforementioned studies concluded that celebrities who were liked were also perceived as trustworthy. Perceived similarity to the source, level of expertise, and the source's attractiveness were all significantly correlated with celebrity trustworthiness. Therefore, trustworthiness emerges as a central component in research on persuasion and attitude change, particularly in the context of celebrity communicators (Ohanian, 1990).

2.3 Consumer behaviour and purchase intention

Consumer behaviour is a relatively new field of study, having developed in the mid-to-late 1960s. Due to the absence of its own established history and body of knowledge, marketing theorists initially drew on concepts from other disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and economics. As a result, consumer behaviour models have continued to evolve as marketers seek to understand the various factors that influence consumer decision-making (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

Consumer behaviour is defined as the process by which individuals make decisions regarding the allocation of their time, money, and effort on consumption-related activities. This decision-making process involves determining what to purchase, why, when, and where to buy it, how frequently to make these purchases, how often to use the product, how to evaluate it post-consumption, the impact of these evaluations on future purchase decisions, and the ultimate disposal of the product (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). Consumer decision-making comprises three distinct stages: the input stage, the process stage, and the output stage. The input stage considers the impact of a company's marketing efforts and external sociological factors, such as interactions with friends, family, neighbours, and non-commercial sources, which can shape consumers' purchasing decisions and influence how they use their purchases.

The process stage focuses on the internal mechanisms of decision-making, emphasizing psychological factors such as motivation, perception, learning, personality, and attitudes, all of which affect consumer behaviour. These elements influence how external inputs from the initial stage impact a consumer's recognition of a product need, pre-purchase information-seeking, and evaluation of alternatives. The output stage of the consumer decision-making model involves two post-decision activities: purchase behaviour and post-purchase evaluation. For low-cost consumer products, trial purchases are often driven by discounts or special offers, and consumers are likely to repurchase if satisfied with the product following the trial phase.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of purchase intention as a behavioural outcome, research in social psychology has extensively applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour to predict and explain human behaviour (Amoako et al., 2020; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Kumar, 2012; Madden et al., 1992; Maichum et al., 2016; Manstead & Parker, 1995). The Theory of Planned Behavior extends the Theory of Reasoned Action by addressing its limitations in explaining behaviours over which individuals have limited volitional control.

Ajzen (1991) posits that a behavioural intention can only be expressed as an actual behaviour if the behaviour is under volitional control, meaning the individual can choose, at will, whether or not to engage in it. Motivational factors such as time, money, skills, and the cooperation of others are important considerations.

The original theory emphasizes that the individual's intention to perform a specific behaviour is a central determinant of that behaviour. Behavioural intentions are influenced by both individual and normative factors. Individual influence pertains to one's attitude toward the behaviour, while subjective norms reflect the normative pressures on intentions (Hale et al., 2002). Although there is some debate among social scientists regarding the origins of attitudes, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) theorise that an individual's attitude toward performing a specific behaviour is determined by the beliefs they hold about that behaviour.

The attitude toward the behaviour represents the consumer's overall evaluation of performing a specific action. In contrast, perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of the resources and opportunities available to perform the behaviour, as well as the ease or difficulty associated with executing it. The resources and opportunities available to an individual play a crucial role in determining the likelihood of achieving a particular behaviour. Perceived behavioural control is a key distinguishing factor between the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1991).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour emphasises cognitive factors, such as attitudes and subjective norms, but does not account for the role of emotions in influencing behaviour. Although emotions can have a substantial impact on decision-making and behaviour, they are not explicitly addressed in this theory. A study on the purchase intention of Generation Y fashion consumers towards emu leather by Belleau et al. (2007) found that the more favourable the respondents' attitudes were, the higher their purchase intention. Subjective norms and other external variables did not significantly impact the group's purchase intention.

2.4 The Beauty and Cosmetics Industry Overview

The beauty industry encompasses a diverse array of products, broadly categorised into four segments: cosmetics, skincare, personal care, and fragrances. The cosmetics segment includes products specifically designed for the face, lips, and eyes. The skincare segment comprises items aimed at maintaining and enhancing the health and appearance of the skin. Personal care, which includes hair care, deodorants, and shaving products, represents another significant segment within the beauty industry. Fragrances, the fourth major segment, offer a wide variety of consumer options (Mordor Intelligence, 2023).

Globally, multinational corporations such as L'Oréal, Unilever, Procter & Gamble Co., The Estée Lauder Companies, Shiseido Company, and Beiersdorf dominate the cosmetics and beauty products industry. As of 2023, L'Oréal, the French cosmetics company, was the leading beauty manufacturer worldwide, generating revenues exceeding 44 billion U.S. dollars that year. L'Oréal also owns the world's leading personal care brand, L'Oréal Paris, which was valued at nearly 48 billion U.S. dollars in 2023. The retail market for cosmetics is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by technological advancements aimed at enhancing the customer experience. With the increasing influence of social media and e-commerce, the cosmetics industry has become heavily reliant on these platforms.

Additionally, the beauty tech market is introducing innovative solutions such as try-on apps, product personalisation software, and improved product formulas to cater to the ever-evolving demands of consumers. These advancements are expected to significantly contribute to the growth and success of the cosmetics industry within the retail market (Statista, 2024b).

The market for cosmetics and personal care products in South Africa is projected to grow from USD 3.35 billion in 2023 to USD 4.19 billion by 2028, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.62% over the forecast period of 2023-2028. Several major companies dominate the South African cosmetics and personal care products market, including Unilever PLC, Beiersdorf AG, Natura & Co, The Estée Lauder Companies Inc., and L'Oréal.

These companies have established themselves as key players in the industry by offering a diverse range of products and services that cater to the needs and preferences of South African consumers (Mordor Intelligence, 2023).

Building on this growth projection, the South African cosmetics and personal care market is highly competitive, with both local and international brands vying for market share (Mordor Intelligence, 2023). The growing demand for skincare products is largely driven by an increased focus on self-care and consumers' desire to be more informed about the brands they use. The beauty and cosmetics industry has positioned itself at the forefront of utilising smart technologies to enhance the consumer experience both in-store and online. Through the implementation of beauty tech, artificial intelligence, and augmented reality-based tools and software, the industry can now perform skin diagnostics, anticipate beauty-related consumer needs, simulate appearances, and offer intelligent recommendations (Statista, 2023).

The retail market for cosmetics is undergoing a profound transformation, spurred by technological advancements aimed at enhancing the overall customer experience. With the growing influence of social media and e-commerce, the cosmetics industry increasingly depends on these platforms.

Moreover, the beauty tech market is introducing innovative solutions such as virtual try-on applications, personalisation software, and advanced skincare formulations to address the ever-evolving demands of consumers. These developments are expected to significantly contribute to the growth and success of the cosmetics industry within the retail sector (Statista, 2024b).

The personal care and cosmetics market in South Africa is projected to experience significant growth due to several key drivers. These factors include an increasing focus on improving quality of life, the role of skincare in boosting self-confidence and enhancing social interactions, and a rising consumer inclination towards premium and luxury brands. Additionally, the growing demand for men's grooming products, particularly those that offer multi-functional benefits, further propels market expansion.

Furthermore, there is a notable shift towards natural and organic personal care and cosmetic products, as consumers are increasingly seeking to avoid synthetic ingredients such as parabens. This trend is expected to contribute substantially to the growth of the organic cosmetics segment in the coming years (Mordor Intelligence, 2023).

2.4.1 The history of cosmetics

The origins of cosmetic use can be traced back to the ancient Egyptians, who were among the first to utilise cosmetic products to enhance specific aspects of physical appearance. For instance, they believed that the eyes were mirrors to the soul and could represent either good or evil. Historical evidence suggests that the Egyptians began using eye makeup, specifically eye paint, as early as 3000 B.C. (Brown, 2008).

Cosmetics and skincare products have a long history, marked by significant technological advancements in chemistry, materials, and packaging innovations. The examination of ancient cosmetic artefacts, recovered from archaeological sites, offers insights into the practices of past civilisations.

Similarly, contemporary market offerings reflect current health and beauty trends. Throughout human history, cosmetics and skincare products have served diverse purposes, ranging from preparing for battle to enhancing physical allure during courtship and even embellishing the deceased before burial. These products have also played a role in religious rituals and contributed to society's overall health (Diana Draelos, 2000).

Over 4000 years ago, the Hittites of Asia Minor introduced the concept of soap and body cleansing by using ash from the soapwort plant mixed with water to wash their hands (Diana Draelos, 2000; Stewart, 2017). The Sumerians of Ur were the first to create a form of cleanser by producing alkali solutions for washing, although these preparations were not chemically equivalent to modern-day soap. In 17th-century Europe, smallpox survivors used black silk or velvet patches shaped like stars, moons, and hearts to cover permanent facial scars. The use of eye cosmetics can be traced back to 4000 B.C., when people applied green powder made from malachite on their upper and lower eyelids.

Dark kohl eyeliner paste, composed of powdered antimony, burnt almonds, black copper oxide, and brown clay ocher, was also widely used in ancient times. Lip colour dates back to 7000 B.C. with the Sumerians, a practice passed down through many generations—from the Egyptians to the Syrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and eventually, to modern civilisations. The lipstick we recognise today was first introduced in the 1920s. Nail polish also emerged during the 1920s following the development of lacquer technology. It serves various functions, including nail adornment, covering discolouration, and strengthening weak nails.

Beauty practices in the Victorian Age underwent a significant transformation in the perception and application of cosmetics (Brown, 2008; Hunt et al., 2011). Major socio-political shifts, such as the French, American, and Industrial Revolutions, greatly influenced attitudes towards makeup.

While older women continued to use powder and rouge, unmarried girls were encouraged to rely on their natural beauty to attract suitors. Industrialisation popularised the practice of applying rouge generously to create a stark contrast between the vibrant tint of the skin and a pale, milky complexion. Additionally, the theatre industry during the 1900s played a pivotal role in shaping everyday makeup practices.

The media continued to exert a profound influence on American women's fashion choices well into the 1930s. Women accessed information about fashion trends and styles through various channels, including radio, newspapers, and magazines. World War II brought significant changes to the cosmetic industry. Before the war, petroleum and alcohol were commonly used in cosmetic formulations. However, these ingredients were largely diverted for military use during the war.

Additionally, the war established new grooming standards for men, including a clean-shaven face, neatly maintained hair, and a well-pressed uniform, due to the large number of men in the military. Today, consumers have access to a wide array of cosmetic brands and products, offering them the means to express themselves. Beauty standards, often shaped by culture and society, are readily accepted and adhered to. As society evolves, so too does the perception of beauty.

2.5 Beauty brands and social media influencers

Brands are increasingly leveraging social media influencers (SMIs) for product promotion, a strategy widely known as influencer marketing. By partnering with SMIs, brands tap into the influencer's ability to reach and persuade their followers, often leading to mutual benefits for both the influencer and the brand. Influencer marketing is defined as the promotion of brands through individuals who possess the capacity to influence potential buyers (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

Existing research has demonstrated that product placements can significantly enhance brand recall, positively shape brand attitudes and preferences, and ultimately increase purchase intentions (Babin & Carder, 1996; d'Astous & Chartier, 2000; Hughes et al., 2019; Law & Braun, 2000; Russell, 2002).

Some practitioners refer to influencer marketing as "seeding" or "sponsored" campaigns, while others describe it as "native" or "organic" advertising. Influencer marketing has gained considerable traction as a promotional strategy, influencing brand perception across a spectrum of approaches. For minimal impact, marketers may offer complimentary products to social media influencers, with the expectation that these products will be featured in their social media content. Conversely, maximum impact occurs when marketers provide monetary compensation in exchange for posts that comply with specific content requirements, formalised through contractual agreements.

In such cases, the brand may outline specific content requirements, including a minimum number of posts referencing the product, a predetermined number of brand mentions, photographs featuring the influencer with the product, and a direct link to the brand's online store (Audrezet et al., 2018). The subsequent section will explore the various types of influencers pertinent to this study.

The cosmetics industry has significantly benefited from the increasing popularity of social media platforms, particularly Instagram and YouTube. These channels are highly influential among specific demographic groups, driving demand for beauty products and bridging the gap between cosmetics brands and consumers. As of March 2024, Sandra Cires Art was the most subscribed beauty content creator on YouTube, with approximately 16.5 million subscribers to her channel. In addition, social media extends beyond influencers merely showcasing or promoting cosmetics. Social commerce has become an integral part of the consumer experience, allowing users to purchase beauty products directly through platforms like TikTok, primarily via live sales (Statisa, 2024b).

Beauty influencers focus on areas such as makeup, skincare, and other beauty-related topics, including nail art and hair styling. This diverse group consists of men, women, and non-binary individuals worldwide who disseminate their knowledge and expertise through makeup tutorials and product reviews. These influencers frequently collaborate with companies and brands on a variety of campaigns. While some beauty influencers are trained makeup artists or skincare professionals, others are self-taught enthusiasts driven by a passion for beauty. (Scott, 2023).

Celebrity influencers, also referred to as mega-influencers, hold the highest rank among social media influencers, with followings exceeding one million people. Although their fame often outweighs their direct influence on purchasing behaviour, their extensive reach allows brands to engage with significantly larger audiences—though at a substantial cost.

According to Influencer Marketing Hub (2024), the highest-earning celebrities and influencers on Instagram in 2024 included Cristiano Ronaldo, earning 3.2 million U.S. dollars per post; Lionel Messi, earning 2.5 million U.S. dollars per post; Selena Gomez, earning 1.7 million U.S. dollars per post; and Kylie Jenner, earning 2.3 million U.S. dollars per post.

While mega-influencers can engage a massive audience, often at significant cost, brands are increasingly turning to micro and macro-influencers for more niche, authentic, and cost-effective campaigns. Micro-influencers are often self-taught and provide a genuine perspective on the products they use, making their recommendations especially appealing to brands seeking authenticity. Their makeup and skincare suggestions tend to be more affordable for brands compared to mega-influencers, who typically work as beauty industry professionals or makeup artists. On the other hand, macro-influencers, who generally have between 100,000 and 1 million followers, occupy the middle ground between micro and mega-influencers. They are more likely to be considered 'public figures' and often pursue content creation as a full-time career, leading brands to make a higher financial investment when partnering with them (Meltwater, 2024 ; Scott, 2023).

While macro and micro-influencers offer brands substantial engagement with a targeted audience, nano-influencers—social media users with fewer than 3,000 followers—are becoming an increasingly valuable marketing channel. Despite being perceived as everyday users, their followers tend to trust their recommendations, offering brands an authentic, grassroots approach to reaching consumers. Typically motivated by a desire to share their passions, nano-influencers see product reviews or brand collaborations as an added benefit, making them more accessible and affordable for brands. Their lower fees and openness to partnerships, especially when a brand's values align with their own, make them an attractive option for marketing campaigns (Ornico & World Wide Worx, 2023, p. 128).

Building upon the prominence of these influential content creators, their ability to shape consumer behaviour and brand engagement in the beauty and cosmetics industry is significant. The top three makeup and skincare influencers in South Africa—Mihlali Ndamase, Snikiwe Mhlongo, and Naledi Mallela—are key figures in this space. Mihlali Ndamase, with a follower base of over 2.1 million, is featured on the Forbes Africa 30 Under 30 list. She is a certified makeup artist with extensive experience in brand strategy, and her content—primarily created for YouTube and Instagram—focuses on beauty, lifestyle, and travel. Snikiwe Mhlongo, with over 334,000 followers, is known for her creative content on YouTube and Instagram, which highlights fashion and makeup. Similarly, Naledi Mallela, renowned for her vlogs and expertise in makeup and skincare, confidently engages her broad following of over 142,000. These influencers have established platforms that enable brands to connect with their target audience and drive sales, demonstrating the powerful role that beauty influencers play in shaping brand perception and consumer loyalty in South Africa (McInnes, 2023).

The rise of male makeup influencers has significantly impacted the makeup industry in recent years. While women have traditionally dominated the beauty and makeup sector, there has been a notable shift recently as more men have gained prominence.

These male makeup influencers bring a fresh, innovative perspective to the industry, challenging stereotypes and redefining gender norms (Scott, 2023).

Male beauty influencers have gained immense popularity in the beauty industry by leveraging their online presence to showcase their expertise and creativity (Achrekar, 2023). Their engaging content and charismatic personalities have attracted millions of followers, driving emerging trends and playing a critical role in shaping consumer behaviour. Moreover, these influencers have redefined traditional beauty standards by advocating for inclusivity, diversity, and self-expression. Through tutorials, product reviews, and innovative styles, they have fostered genuine connections with their audiences, leaving a significant impact on the industry.

Prominent male beauty influencers include Jeffree Star, James Charles, Bretman Rock, and Patrick Starr, among others. Jeffree Star, a well-known makeup influencer, has amassed a significant following and is recognised for his fearless approach and creative expression within the beauty industry. He is also the founder of Jeffree Star Cosmetics, a popular beauty brand. James Charles began his YouTube career in 2015 by posting makeup tutorials, quickly rising to fame with over 21.4 million followers. He has collaborated with prominent cosmetic brands and celebrities. Filipino-American beauty influencer Bretman Rock, known for his unique makeup videos, has garnered over 18.7 million followers. His bold and fearless approach to makeup has empowered people worldwide. Similarly, Patrick Starr, a Filipino-American makeup artist, has earned a reputation as a skilled and charismatic beauty influencer. Through his engaging tutorials and makeovers, he has inspired people from all walks of life to embrace their unique identities (Achrekar, 2023).

This study investigates the broader role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behaviour—focusing specifically on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers. As the social media influencer industry continues to grow rapidly, scholarly debates increasingly focus on the extent and nature of these influencers' impact on consumer decisions.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) posit that social media influencers have supplanted traditional role models and opinion leaders from the pre-digital era, attributing this shift to influencers' ability to cultivate personal connections with their audiences and often appear more trustworthy than celebrity endorsements. Similarly, Jin et al. (2019) argue that while brand ambassadors remain a credible marketing strategy, social media influencers may offer a more effective means of engaging consumers, particularly those with varying levels of appearance-related self-discrepancy. This perspective highlights the importance of interactivity and social comparison in social media marketing, where consumers are likely to relate and identify more closely with influencers.

2.6 Celebrity brand ambassadors and beauty brands

Celebrities have been endorsing products since the late nineteenth century. In addition to individual influencers, brand ambassadors hold a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour (Sherman, 1985). Brand ambassadors are often recognised as celebrities or individuals with established reputations. McCracken (1989) defines a celebrity endorser as someone who gains public recognition and uses this status to endorse consumer products through advertisements. Such endorsers are typically successful figures in their respective fields and possess a substantial social media following. This marketing strategy has become widely acknowledged for enhancing brand recognition and fostering consumer loyalty.

The effectiveness of brand endorsements is significantly influenced by the alignment between the celebrity's image and the product being promoted. The product match-up hypothesis suggests that advertising messages are most effective when there is congruence between the celebrity's public image and the brand's message (Forkan, 1980; Kamins, 1990). Misra and Beatty (1990) argue that the perceived degree of 'fit' between the brand—specifically, the brand name and attributes—and the celebrity endorser plays a crucial role in influencing the effectiveness of the endorsement.

An example of the effective use of brand ambassadors occurred in January 2023, when Lancôme announced the appointment of Emma Chamberlain as a new face of the brand. Emma, an American Gen Z fashion icon and entrepreneur, began her YouTube career at the age of 16 and quickly amassed a substantial social media following (Lancôme, 2023). Similarly, Zendaya Coleman became a Lancôme brand ambassador in 2019, joining a prestigious group that includes Julia Roberts, Kate Winslet, Penélope Cruz, Lupita Nyong'o, and Lily Collins, star of *Emily in Paris*. Zendaya currently has over 184 million followers, and as a self-proclaimed makeup enthusiast, she regularly shares beauty tips with her fanbase (Hamanaka, 2019).

In another strategic move, Maybelline New York announced in April 2023 that Ayra Starr, a rising African musician, had become the new brand ambassador for sub-Saharan Africa. Starr's role includes promoting initiatives that empower and encourage self-expression among women (News, 2023).

Historically, celebrities have been closely associated with beauty and have often been regarded as the original influencers. Many have since expanded their influence into the business world by creating their own brands. Prominent examples include Fenty Beauty by Rihanna, SKKN by Kim Kardashian, Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez, and Kylie Cosmetics by Kylie Jenner. Millie Bobby Brown, known for her role in *Stranger Things*, launched Florence by Mills in 2019, a brand that specifically targets Generation Z consumers. Other celebrities who have ventured into the cosmetics and skincare sectors include Ariana Grande, Pharrell Williams, and Victoria Beckham (Robin & Blay, 2022).

Fresha, a marketplace for beauty and wellness, released the 2023 list of the most popular celebrity beauty brands (Global Cosmetic Industry, 2023). The ranking is based on several factors, including each brand's average monthly search volume, the number of followers on its official Instagram account, the quantity of TikTok posts, and the number of views on each TikTok hashtag. These variables were used to calculate an overall beauty index score out of 100, which determined the most popular celebrity beauty brand.

The top ten celebrity beauty brands, ranked according to their overall beauty index scores, are as follows: Rare Beauty (94.58), Kylie Cosmetics (88.43), Fenty Beauty (86.3), Florence by Mills (86.64), r.e.m beauty (75.62), Jeffree Star Cosmetics (75.53), Supergoop (64.59), Haus Labs (64.21), Rhode (64.04), and Goop (61.98).

A review of the top three brands by Jabarkhyl (2023) for *Grazia* lifestyle magazine highlights the key factors contributing to their success. Selena Gomez's brand, Rare Beauty, launched in September 2020, aims to challenge unrealistic beauty standards, which has made it a highly desirable brand across social media platforms.

With over 6.2 million followers on Instagram, Rare Beauty ranks fourth among the most-followed celebrity beauty brands. Its TikTok hashtag, #rarebeauty, garners an average of 6 billion views annually—the highest among all beauty brands. Globally, Rare Beauty holds the second-highest monthly search volume, averaging 621,500 searches per month.

Kylie Cosmetics was launched in November 2015, initially selling lip kits, which included lip liner and liquid lipstick. Since then, the brand has expanded to include a wide range of makeup products, skincare items, and even baby products. With over 25.6 million Instagram followers, Kylie Cosmetics has the highest number of followers on the list. Kylie cosmetics is also a prominent brand on TikTok, with more than 2 billion posts using the hashtag #kyliecosmetics. The brand is the fourth most-searched celebrity beauty brand, with an average of 246,000 monthly searches.

In third place, Fenty Beauty, launched by singer Rihanna with luxury company LVMH in September 2017, is reportedly worth an estimated 2.8 billion USD. The brand is well known for its inclusivity, offering 50 shades of foundation, which has garnered appreciation and admiration from consumers. Fenty Beauty has the highest monthly search volume, with an average of 656,000 global monthly searches and the second-highest Instagram following of over 12.6 million.

On TikTok, the brand's hashtag has over 3 billion yearly views, making it the second-highest among all beauty brands.

Huda Beauty held the top position in the cosmetics industry on TikTok in 2023, with over 8.7 million followers. Rare Beauty and Florence by Mills were ranked second and third, respectively, with roughly 3.5 million followers each (Statista, 2023c).

This study examines the role of celebrity brand ambassadors in influencing purchase intention among millennial and Generation Z consumers. It further investigates how the source's credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise influence Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI), and subsequently, overall purchase intention and consumer purchase decisions.

2.7 Overview of social media platforms

Mass communication theories have shaped the modern era of social media communication. Both traditional and contemporary forms of mass communication can influence large audiences (Kamboj, 2019). The Uses and Gratifications theory is one such example. Social media platforms, as a new form of mass communication, have the capacity to reach a vast number of users (Phua et al., 2017b).

Introduced in the early 1940s, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers a well-researched perspective on the audience's role. The theory posits that media serves four primary functions. The first is surveillance, which provides the audience with information. The second is personal identity, which allows individuals to identify behavioural models in the media, compare themselves to others, and ultimately discover their own identity (Katz et al., 1973). The UGT approach adopts a psychological perspective, acknowledging the active role played by audiences, and is one of the earliest theories to do so (Ko et al., 2005).

The third function of media is to allow users to form personal connections and build relationships. Another function is diversion, which serves as an "escape" for the audience from their daily lives. Katz et al. (1973) expanded on this theory by arguing that audience gratification arises from three sources: media content, media exposure, and the social context. They further noted that media producers should assess whether their content satisfies audience needs. This perspective suggests that audiences challenge producers to deliver content that meets a variety of needs, thereby acknowledging that consumers demand a certain level and quality of content from producers, particularly in the context of social media.

Similarly, in social media, content producers, such as brands, social influencers, and brand ambassadors, are responsible for creating relevant and valuable content for their audiences. A study by Whiting and Williams (2013) applied the Uses and Gratification Theory to explore its relevance in the context of social media. The study identified ten distinct uses and gratifications that people seek when engaging with social media platforms.

These ten uses and gratifications include utilising social media for social interaction, seeking information, passing time, finding entertainment, relaxing, communicating, convenience, expressing opinions, sharing information, and gaining knowledge about others through surveillance. The Uses and Gratification Theory has also been applied in other studies to enhance the understanding of the motivations behind consumers' use of social media platforms and the relationship between consumers and brands (Kamboj, 2019; Ko et al., 2005; Ngai et al., 2015; Phua et al., 2017b; Ruggiero, 2000). Additionally, Brodie et al. (2013) and Füller (2006) examined the reasons behind consumers' engagement in virtual communities.

The following section provides an overview of the three social media platforms examined in this study: Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, as well as an analysis of the social media landscape in South Africa.

2.7.1 Facebook

According to Statista, a leading provider of market and consumer data, Facebook remains the leading platform, with nearly three billion monthly active users as of January 2023. Over the years, Facebook has undergone various changes and controversies, including a significant rebranding and name change in 2021 (Statista, 2023a). In October of that year, Mark Zuckerberg announced that Facebook, which had previously acquired Instagram and WhatsApp, would now operate under the name Meta. As Meta expanded beyond social media, it introduced the metaverse, focusing on creating immersive virtual and mixed-reality experiences (Meta, 2023d).

In January 2023, India had the largest Facebook user base, with 314 million users, representing approximately 10.6% of the total user population. The United States, Indonesia, and Brazil each had over 100 million Facebook users. Approximately 20% of the world's Facebook users are men aged 25 to 34, while women in the same age group account for roughly 12% of the total Facebook population.

These figures highlight social media's increasing popularity and influence in modern society, which has significant implications for businesses, marketing, and communication strategies (Statista, 2023a).

Meta Platforms, the parent company of Facebook, earned over 116 billion USD in revenue in 2022. However, this figure represents a decrease from the previous year's revenue of 117.9 billion USD, marking the company's first annual revenue decline since 2009. The economic impact also affected net income, which experienced a yearly decrease of over 40%. Meta's average revenue per user (ARPU) in 2022 decreased by three per cent compared to the previous year.

These challenges are believed to result from the return to normalcy following the global COVID-19 pandemic boom and the emergence of strong competitors such as TikTok (Statista, 2023a).

In summary, while Facebook continues to prioritise artificial intelligence, messaging, creators, and monetisation, it faces increasing competition from other platforms better suited to the needs of modern content creators. Nevertheless, Facebook's ongoing investment in these areas highlights its commitment to remaining a relevant and valuable tool for both creators and users.

2.7.2 Instagram

According to Statista, the content creator and influencer industry owes much of its success to Instagram, which has evolved beyond being a platform for showcasing carefully curated content. Through social media marketing, Instagram has proven to be a highly effective tool for promoting products and services. In 2022, 80% of global marketers used Instagram for advertising, making it the second most popular social media network (Statista, 2023b). Instagram offers a variety of features that enable users and brands to share their content. The Instagram Feed allows users to connect and engage with others. Upon opening Instagram or refreshing the feed, users are shown content from brands, individuals, and hashtags they have chosen to follow. Additionally, they may encounter suggested accounts that align with their interests (Meta, 2023a).

As the platform evolved, new features were introduced. Instagram Stories enable users to capture everyday moments, highlight special occasions, or express themselves using text, music, interactive stickers, filters, and GIFs (Meta, 2023c). Instagram Reels, introduced in 2020, are multi-clip videos that can be up to three minutes long and include easy-to-use text, AR filters, and audio.

Instagram provides different ways for consumers to purchase from brands, including tapping product tags, saving items on wish lists, and buying directly through checkout (Meta, 2023b).

When users find a brand they are interested in, they can tap the product tag to get more information and add items to a private wish list for later viewing. Customers in the United States can use the "Buy on Instagram" button, which allows them to checkout with Meta Pay for a secure and seamless shopping experience, enabling them to store their payment information for future purchases. According to Meta (2023) reports, an estimated 130 million people tap product tags in shopping posts every month to reveal details such as the name and price of the item.

In terms of users, as of early 2023, Instagram had a user base of 2 billion monthly active users worldwide, providing competition for Facebook and YouTube. The app's audience is diverse, with India having the largest number of users at 230 million, followed by the United States with 143 million and Brazil with 113 million. Most of Instagram's users are between 18 and 24 years old, accounting for almost 31% of its total user base (Statista, 2023b). This suggests that it is a social media platform popular among millennials and older Generation Z individuals. Despite the buzz around TikTok, Generation Z and millennials continue to show a strong preference for Instagram. We Are Social, a global socially-led creative agency, reported that 44.4% of female internet users within the age range of millennials and older Generation Z consider Instagram their top social app, while 40.7% of male internet users share this sentiment (Hootsuite, 2023).

Influencer marketing originated long before the advent of social media. However, Instagram has significantly elevated the role of tastemakers to unprecedented levels. No other platform has driven the growth of influencer marketing as effectively as Instagram, where thousands of brands leverage the popularity and reach of the app's most prominent figures daily. In 2023, lifestyle emerged as the leading category for Instagram influencers, followed by music and beauty. The appeal of influencer marketing on Instagram lies in its vibrant influencer community and the diverse range of features available to creators for promoting businesses (Statista, 2024).

According to Meta, Instagram's parent company, value-driven content and personalised customer care give businesses and consumers unique opportunities. Two out of three active Instagram users report that the platform helps them develop deep connections with brands (Hootsuite, 2023).

Threads, a new app developed by Instagram, allows users to exchange text updates and participate in open discussions. Users can access the app by logging in with their Instagram account. Posts can be up to 500 characters long and may include links, images, and videos up to five minutes in length (Instagram from Meta, 2023). The app has quickly gained popularity. According to Hootsuite (2023) Threads amassed over 100 million users within the first five days of its launch, surpassing the record previously held by ChatGPT. For comparison, it took Instagram two and a half months to reach the same number of users. Currently, Threads has approximately 15.36 million active users.

2.7.3 TikTok

Newer social media platforms, like TikTok, are disrupting the landscape of user-generated content and redefining how brands connect with consumers. The Chinese tech company ByteDance owns TikTok, which debuted in 2017. TikTok enables users to create, edit, and share short video clips with filters and trendy music. The app is top-rated among younger audiences, with 21.5% of users being women aged 18 to 24 and 17% being men in the same age group as of January 2023. Additionally, most TikTok content creators are between 18 and 24 years old, contributing to the platform's popularity among millennials and Generation Z.

In the United States, 67% of TikTok users were aged 18 or 19 in 2022, reflecting the generation's heavy use of smartphones and interest in trending content (Statista, 2023c). Despite a ban in India in June 2020, which resulted in a significant decrease in its user base, TikTok reached a major milestone of three billion downloads worldwide by July 2021. The app's downloads peaked at over 313.5 million in the first quarter of 2020.

Despite download fluctuations from 2021 to early 2023, the popular short video platform remains one of the leading apps globally and in the United States (Statista, 2023c).

TikTokers have created a new online ecosystem of video content where users can follow, comment, and like each other's videos, leading to the emergence of teen celebrities. In June 2022, Khabane "Khaby" Lame, an Italian content creator born in Senegal, became the most followed personality on TikTok, surpassing U.S. influencer Charli D'Amelio. As of March 2023, Lame had over 155 million followers, while D'Amelio had approximately 150 million followers (Statista, 2023c).

TikTok Shop is a personalised and fully integrated commerce platform that enables sellers to establish authentic connections with creators and communities, thereby creating impactful shopping experiences. By merging entertainment with commerce through relatable and engaging content, the platform fosters a seamless transition from inspiration to purchase. This approach utilises authentic narratives to cultivate consumer trust and engagement, enhancing the overall efficacy of social commerce strategies (TikTok, 2024).

TikTok's tremendous popularity reflects one of the major technological trends of the past decade—the shift from desktop to mobile platforms. Furthermore, it highlights recent changes in internet user behaviour, such as a shorter attention span, which has led to the rise of short-form video platforms as key players in the digital space.

This trend has been particularly pronounced during the Covid-19 pandemic, as viewers have sought out videos that are high in quality, compelling in their storytelling, and accessible in their format. Short-form videos have generated high engagement levels among users and delivered the most significant return on investment (ROI) compared to other forms of digital content (Statista, 2023c).

A dispute in early 2024 between TikTok and Universal Music Group led to Universal Music Group removing its music from TikTok due to disagreements over music royalties. This decision initially prevented more than 1 billion platform users from streaming a vast catalogue of songs of major global artists such as Taylor Swift, Drake, Olivia Rodrigo and Ariana Grande (CNN, 2024 ; NBC News, 2024). In an official statement, Universal Music Group cited inadequate compensation for its artists' music. Concerns were also raised regarding TikTok's potential to allow an influx of music recordings generated by artificial intelligence, which could have reduced the royalty pool for human musicians and increased copyright infringements. As a result, TikTok removed recordings by Universal artists from its music library and muted the audio on all existing videos that featured Universal's music. (The New York Times, 2024a). However, the issue has since been resolved, and Universal Music Group's catalogue has been restored on TikTok, allowing users to once again include these artists' songs in new videos (BBC News, 2024).

Since its rise in 2019, TikTok has become a major player in the music industry. The app's emphasis on lip-syncs and dance battles have made it an essential component of marketing campaigns for new music. Many artists have succeeded by using specific strategies for launching new music and going viral on TikTok. The recent partnership breakdown has negatively affected users, brands, and content creators worldwide, creating uncertainty about the future of content creation on the app (NBC News, 2024). More recently, Lawmakers in the US, Europe, and Canada have increased their efforts to limit access to TikTok citing security concerns. In India, the government banned the app, among others, claiming that Chinese-owned apps sent users' data to servers outside India.

Government agencies have banned TikTok in several countries, including Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the European Union executive arm. In addition, several states have banned TikTok on government-issued devices, and many colleges have blocked it on their campus Wi-Fi networks. Despite these measures, users often switch to mobile data to use the app. Governments and universities have imposed most of the current bans on TikTok.

However, a broader government-imposed ban that prevents American users could face legal challenges on First Amendment grounds. In March 2024, TikTok took action to protect its interests when lawmakers in Washington introduced legislation calling for the company to terminate the relationship with its Chinese parent company, ByteDance (The New York Times, 2024b).

2.7.4 Social media platform usage in South Africa

The South African Media Landscape Report is an annual publication by Ornico, a leading brand and media intelligence company, and World Wide Worx, a prominent technology research and strategy organisation. The report showcases the latest trends in social media usage among businesses and consumers and explores emerging topics such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact on social media. The following section highlights the key insights in the report.

The widespread use of social media has led to increased interest in the role of AI in this domain. With the advent of Chat GPT, AI has become a powerful tool in social media and digital marketing. In South Africa, where a large percentage of the population uses social media, AI has become prominent topic of discussion in these industries. According to Statista, in 2023, there were 43.5 million internet users in South Africa; 35.15 million were active on social media, making up 81% of the country's internet users (Ornico & World Wide Worx, 2023).

South Africa has a large number of internet and social media users, with 43.5 million internet users and 35.15 million active social media users. As a result, artificial intelligence has become a prominent topic in South Africa, particularly in digital marketing and social media. The technology has existed since the 1950s and is the foundation for many of the most popular social media platforms (Ornico & World Wide Worx, 2023).

Content creation has gained significant traction since the introduction of OpenAI's ChatGPT. Generative AI algorithms, including text-to-image, image-to-video and image-to-image models are being utilised to produce diverse types of content such as text, images, music, and video.

Facebook continues to dominate South Africa's social media landscape. TikTok has experienced remarkable growth, overtaking Instagram to secure the second position. Instagram maintains a relatively high share of users and closely follows TikTok.

The age distribution of Instagram users is one reason why it may no longer be the preferred platform for younger audiences. The penetration rate is comparable for the 15-24 and 25-34 age groups, with the 35-44 age group not far behind. While this normalisation across age groups is beneficial, it may disadvantage a brand when competitors focus on specific age segments. Although Instagram is an effective platform for reaching all segments of the South African population, brands may need to consider other platforms when targeting the youth. Nonetheless, brands remain more committed to Instagram than TikTok in South Africa, highlighting the platform's importance to brand decision-makers (Ornico & World Wide Worx, 2023).

TikTok's growth in South Africa remains strong. Its popularity is driven by its appeal to young audiences, with 44% of the 15-24 age group already using the platform, compared to Facebook's 71% penetration in this segment. TikTok is particularly dominant among users under 15, which is likely to increase its penetration among older age groups as these users transition into the 25-34 age group in the coming years. Currently, the 15-24 age group significantly influences the size of Facebook's overall user base.

If current trends persist, TikTok is poised to surpass Facebook in this segment. This suggests that the youth audience will serve as the launchpad from which TikTok will challenge Facebook for social media dominance. Notably, TikTok has already surpassed Meta's other primary platform, Instagram, in all age segments (Ornico & World Wide Worx, 2023).

User-generated content is highly popular on TikTok, where people with shared interests come together to form communities such as #FoodTok, #SmallBusinessTok, #DogsofTikTok, and #MomTok. This interaction fosters story-sharing and authentic conversations among users.

TikTok has generated a new form of word-of-mouth communication, leading to various movements flourishing on the platform and driving meaningful business impact for brands. Examples include hashtags like #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt and #AsSeenonTikTok. Brands can initiate trends, connect with communities, and even raise awareness of public service initiatives. By doing so, they can become creative storytellers and establish authentic audiences, as successful marketing campaigns often begin with compelling narratives (Ornico & World Wide Worx, 2023).

The emergence of digital platforms like TikTok, has led to the democratisation of content creation, providing users with an accessible means to produce content. This shift effectively puts a studio, complete with music, effects, and editing tools, into the hands of the user, thereby transforming how content is created and shared. Users can easily discover their niche, become creators, and showcase their passions, whether in music, food, fashion, sports, DIY, skincare, or other areas of interest. Another paradigm shift involves greater user control over content consumption. On platforms like TikTok, users are served content based on their consumption patterns and interests rather than explicit searches or posts from their social circles. This shift has led to more engaging and educational content consumption (Ornico & World Wide Worx, 2023).

2.8 Generational differences between millennials and Generation Z consumers

This research study examines the influence of social media influencers and brand ambassadors on the Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) of millennial and Generation Z consumers toward cosmetic brands. This section will delve into generational differences to provide insights into the distinct consumer behaviours exhibited by millennials and Generation Z, particularly focusing on the impact of SIPI and BAPI in shaping overall purchase intentions within these demographics.

In the South African market, where the median age is 27 and over 70% of the population under 40, millennials are an important demographic in the growth discussions. While South African millennials are environmentally conscious, their actions lag behind their attitudes—despite alignment with environmental views, this has not yet translated into behavioural change when a premium is involved. Although environmental issues resonate with this cohort, they may not significantly influence purchasing decisions yet. Nevertheless, brands can still leverage this opportunity by refining their environmental credentials without expecting consumers to pay a premium, similar to what has been observed in the retail and automotive sectors. Brands incorporating meaningful environmental credentials into existing and new offerings without imposing a premium are likely to gain a competitive advantage (M&C Saatchi Group South Africa, 2023).

The report highlights key distinctions between South African millennials and their global counterparts. South African millennials prefer purpose-driven brands, but expect this purpose to be practical, beneficial, and accessible to facilitate personal growth. Although they extensively use technology and social media, they view technology as a tool for development rather than solely for social interaction or entertainment. Due to high unemployment rates, many are engaged in the Gig Economy and are highly entrepreneurial. While a "great resignation" is unlikely, this demographic still seeks employment that aligns with their values and passions (M&C Saatchi Group South Africa, 2023).

Forbes, a global business media brand reported in 2018 that millennials, who have the highest expectations, expect brands to take a stand on values. When purchasing, nearly seven out of 10 U.S millennials actively consider a company's values, which is higher than 52% of all online U.S adults. This trend is anticipated to extend to South African millennials, as 77% of this demographic reportedly value companies that incorporate ethical messaging into their branding, which slightly exceeds the national average. South African millennials have a strong presence on social media, with 35% spending more than four hours daily on these platforms.

While WhatsApp and Facebook remain the preferred apps among this demographic, TikTok has gained traction and surpassed Instagram to become a rising favourite (M&C Saatchi Group South Africa, 2023).

Millennials are more likely to believe that influencers possess knowledge about the products they promote, which is a positive for brands. However, there are specific challenges in this area. In early 2023, a trend known as deinfluencing gained popularity when social creators discouraged people from buying certain products and suggested less expensive alternatives. The ongoing trend was mainly driven by concerns about overconsumption, financial pressures, and a desire for more authentic content. Nonetheless, deinfluencing still has an impact, albeit with a different perspective.

Despite the deinfluencing trend, over one-third of millennials claim that social media influencer recommendations are more trustworthy than regular advertisements. Moreover, the number of millennial social media users following influencer accounts has increased since 2020. More markets are increasingly taking steps to address misinformation, driving brands to select the right influencers to partner with (GWI, 2023b).

While millennials are typically more established in their careers and tend to have higher levels of disposable income, Generation Z or Gen Z, by contrast, is largely in the early stages of their professional journeys or still pursuing education. This distinction leads to comparatively lower income levels and consumer spending power among Gen Z. Despite this, they hold brands to high standards, particularly when it comes to environmental and social responsibility. Generation Z places a strong emphasis on environmental action from brands, making it a crucial factor in their purchase decisions. In terms of social media usage, Gen Z favours short-form content, such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, for its brevity and entertainment value. Additionally, gaming plays a major cultural role for this demographic, with nearly 90% identifying as gamers across various devices. This generation's interest in socialisation extends to the virtual world, with nearly half expressing a desire to participate in the metaverse, reflecting their inclination towards new digital experiences (GWI, 2023a).

Accounting for one-third of the global population, Generation Z's collective disposable income projected to reach 33 trillion USD over the next decade. A study conducted by a global brand consultancy surveyed 1,000 consumers representing the Gen Z, Gen Y, Gen X, and Baby Boomer cohorts in South Africa, revealing that Gen Z is an activist generation.

This demographic expects brands to prioritise values such as authenticity and inclusivity. They believe brands should contribute positively to society and are willing to pay a premium for black- or female-owned brands employing inclusive practices. Moreover, Gen Z expects brands to engage in social conversations about necessary changes, and this focus on social justice is reflected in their spending behaviour (Human8, 2023). Furthermore, 17% prefer click-and-collect delivery, exclusive content or services, with 16% and 14% of the respondents citing using the "buy" feature on a social network or entering a competition as their primary motivation for purchasing. Gen Z spends an all-time high of 41% of their time online, with nearly 3 in 10 using social media to find inspiration. They are 11% more likely to do so than any other generation.

Social media has also become a significant platform for shopping, with Gen Z's top brand discovery tool being advertisements seen on social media. While Instagram is their most-used platform outside of China, TikTok has become a big part of social media's growth. Gen Z's use of TikTok outside of China has grown the most among all social media platforms tracked by GWI, rising by 37% since Q4 2020. A large proportion, 83%, of Gen Z TikTokers state that they use the app for entertaining content. One of the most significant advantages of an app like TikTok is its ability to provide real views and opinions from real people, making it more relatable (GWI, 2023a).

Euromonitor, a leading provider of global market research and strategic analysis on industries, economies, and consumer trends, reported in its *Voice of the Consumer: Beauty Survey 2022* that while Gen Z embraces expressive make-up for special events, their daily routines tend to be more simplistic.

Approximately 40% of Gen Z consumers prefer a "natural or no-makeup" look. This suggests that beauty and personal care companies should aim for a balanced product portfolio that includes everyday, skin-first items and products designed for play or special occasions. Gen Z's active participation in beauty user-generated content (UGC) on platforms like TikTok, Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu)—China's most trusted social shopping platform, and YouTube is transforming how brands market themselves. As a result, influencers and virtual avatars are playing an increasingly prominent role in shaping consumer behaviour. (Lee, 2023).

Social media is the primary source for brand discovery and product research among the Gen Z demographic. Their shopping journey diverges from other generations as they primarily seek out new brands and products through social media channels rather than traditional search engines. This generation relies heavily on social media to research products, utilising platforms such as blogs, vlogs, online pinboards, and video sites (GWI, 2023a).

In comparison, millennials follow a different purchase journey that encompasses brand discovery, online product research, online purchase drivers, and brand advocacy. For brand discovery, 17% of millennials encountered brands through updates on the brand's social media platforms, 16% through posts or reviews, and 14% via ads on music-streaming services. Regarding online product research, microblogs such as X (formerly Twitter), forums, message boards, blogs, and vlogs were the primary platforms used. Brand advocacy is driven by a desire to feel involved, gain insider knowledge, and connect with topics relevant to friends' interests. These insights are based on GWI's Q1 2023 wave of research, spanning 52 markets with a global sample of 81,921 millennials. (GWI, 2023b).

2.9 Hypotheses development

2.9.1 Social media influencer credibility and purchase intention

Sokolova and Kefi (2020) and Yerasani et al. (2019) recognise that social media influencers have gained considerable followings on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. They function as brand ambassadors and endorse products or services through their online presence. Influencer marketing draws its value from three sources: the scope of the influencer in terms of audience size, producing relevant content, and resonance. Credibility contributes to the influencer's reputation, which is determined by the audience's perception of trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

Social media influencers have become essential in bridging the gap between consumers and companies, particularly on Instagram (Zoghلامي & Himmet, 2023). The authors' research examined attitudes toward Instagram beauty influencers' recommendations, as well as the determinants and impact on purchase intent. The findings suggested that perceived usefulness, quality of information, trust, and source credibility positively influenced consumer attitudes. These factors, in turn, influenced the purchase intention towards the recommended products.

Belanche et al. (2021) investigated the impact of influencers' promotional activities on their credibility, as well as their followers' attitudes and behavioural responses. The study aimed to determine whether followers would continue following, emulating, and recommending influencers to others. The results indicated that perceived influencer-product congruence positively influenced followers' perceptions of influencer credibility and their attitudes towards them. The findings also revealed that when followers perceived these promotional activities as paid communication, it negatively impacted the influencers' credibility. A study by Pick (2020) investigated the effect of customers' perceptions on influencer credibility, specifically within the context of purchase

intention, attitude towards advertising, and product, using the source credibility model. The results indicated that how individuals perceive influencer credibility significantly determines their attitudes towards advertising, products, and their intention to purchase. Furthermore, it plays a role in communicating persuasive messages that enhance psychological ownership of a product and the perceived association with the influencer. These factors collectively contribute to positively influencing consumer behaviour.

According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and Stubb et al. (2019) influencers are often perceived as having a higher degree of credibility than celebrities due to their specialised knowledge and closer alignment with their respective influencer's interests.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₀: The credibility of social media influencers has no significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) towards cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H_{1A}: The credibility of social media influencers has a significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) towards cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers. Social media influencer trustworthiness and purchase intention.

The trustworthiness of a social media influencer plays a critical role in their effectiveness to engage and influence their audience. Studies have demonstrated a direct link between an influencer's trustworthiness and the likelihood of consumers considering, trying, and ultimately purchasing the products or services endorsed by the influencer (Jang et al., 2021; Masuda et al., 2022; Zoghلامي & Himmet, 2023).

Chekima et al. (2020) explored how social media influencers' credibility impacts advertising's effectiveness investigated how factors such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Their study investigated whether these attributes make social media influencers more effective in advertising cosmetics compared

to celebrities. The research focused on attitudes toward the product, attitudes toward the advertisement, and purchase intention. They further highlighted that the absence of trust hinders the ability of an endorser's attributes to influence consumer perceptions effectively (Miller & Baseheart, 1969). According to Moore et al. (1986), trust is an essential component of credibility and has proven to be effective in persuading consumers as well as in motivating attitudes (McGinnies & Ward, 1980)

The study's findings suggest that consumers are more likely to trust influencers who share similarities with them compared to celebrities. Furthermore, consumers are more satisfied with a product's fit and attractiveness when the influencer promoting it shares certain similarities with them. Therefore, influencer marketing, relatability and perceived similarity can influence consumer behaviour and increase trust.

Thus, the following is hypothesised:

H2₀: The trustworthiness of social media influencers has no significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) towards cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H2_A: The trustworthiness of social media influencers has a significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) towards cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

2.9.2 Social media influencer expertise and purchase intention

Social media influencers are often considered more trustworthy than celebrities because of their expertise and stronger alignment with their followers' interests. Consequently, their opinions carry more weight with followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Stubb et al., 2019) This credibility is reflected in the growing number of brands partnering with influencers to promote their products, effectively shaping their followers' perceptions and reactions to these offerings (Casaló et al., 2020; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

Social media influencers have specialised knowledge in various fields that align with their personal interests or professional backgrounds, which enhances their credibility. When influencers have a genuine understanding of the products or services they endorse, consumers are more inclined to trust their recommendations.

The effectiveness of influencers' in shaping consumer opinions and purchase behaviour is influenced by their perceived level of expertise (Schouten et al., 2020). Furthermore, the impact of product-endorser compatibility on credibility is especially pronounced for influencers, compared to traditional celebrity endorsers.

This is because influencers often establish themselves as experts in niche areas, such as 'gaming vlogger', 'fitness vlogger', 'makeup vlogger', or 'fashion blogger', and consistently share product information with their online followers (Balog et al., 2008). The relatability and expertise of social media influencers can influence the purchase decisions of consumers, as influencers are often perceived as relatable individuals who share similar product experiences with their audience.

A study conducted by Tien et al. (2019) found that perceived persuasiveness, informativeness, and source expertise are reliable predictors of the perceived usefulness of electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The authors suggest that perceived persuasiveness, source expertise, and trustworthiness also significantly predict the believability of electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites. Furthermore, combining perceived usefulness and credibility increases the likelihood of adopting an eWOM. This adoption plays a crucial role in influencing the credibility and usefulness of eWOM and, subsequently, consumer purchase intentions for products recommended on social networking sites.

Thus, the following is hypothesised:

H3₀: The expertise of social media influencers has no significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) towards cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H3A: The expertise of social media influencers has a significant influence Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) towards cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

2.9.3 Influencers and overall purchase intention

Consumer purchase intentions are influenced by individual taste and preferences, which are shaped by cultural and social norms (Islam & Sultana, 2020). External factors such as product range, brand, and quality along with internal factors play a crucial role in shaping purchase intentions. Personal traits and characteristics are significant predictors of consumer behaviour and consumers often base their buying decisions on these traits (Mirabi et al., 2015).

According to a study by Park et al. (2007), online consumer reviews play a role in influencing purchase decisions and product sales. The persuasiveness of these reviews is influenced by two key factors: the quantity and the quality of the reviews.

A higher number of reviews can create a sense of popularity and credibility for a product, making it appear more trustworthy to potential buyers. Meanwhile, the quality of the reviews refers to the level of detail, relevance, and accuracy of the information provided. High-quality reviews offer in-depth insights that can help consumers make informed purchasing decisions, thereby increasing their influence on buying behaviour.

The study applied the elaboration likelihood model to explain how the level of customer involvement with a product moderates the relationship between reviews and purchasing intentions. The findings demonstrate that the quality of online reviews positively influences consumers' purchase intention, and an increase in the number of reviews further strengthens this effect. Moreover, low-involvement consumers are influenced more by the quantity of reviews than by their quality while high-involvement consumers consider the quantity only when the quality of the reviews is also high.

Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) examined the effects of awareness of paid endorsements by social media influencers on followers' cognitive persuasion knowledge (e.g., ad recognition), attitudinal persuasion knowledge (e.g., relationships with the influencer), and behavioural intentions, specifically eWOM and purchase intention.

Awareness of paid endorsements was found to be associated with ad recognition, which, in turn, is positively correlated with purchase and eWOM intentions. Similarly, awareness of paid endorsements is linked to the influencer-follower relationship, which also influences purchase and eWOM intentions. However, ad recognition does not have a direct impact on the influencer-follower relationship. These findings have important implications for public relations theory, practice, and policy.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4₀: Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) has no significant influence on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H4_A: Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) has a significant influence on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

2.9.4 Brand ambassador credibility and purchase intention

Celebrity brand ambassadors serve as key drivers of purchase intention due to their aspirational appeal. To ensure the effectiveness of their promotional campaigns, they must establish credibility as reliable sources. Referred to as "endorsers," these individuals possess public recognition and leverage it to promote products by appearing in advertisements (McCracken, 1989).

Several scholars have explored the concept in depth (Olmedo et al., 2020; Rocha et al., 2020; Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020) to gain a deeper understanding of celebrity endorsement. McCracken (1989) meaning transfer model posits that celebrities add value through their personas, which are shaped by societal roles and media portrayals. Society assigns specific meanings to these personas, which are then transferred to products when celebrities endorse them (Amos et al., 2008). An earlier study by Kaikati (1987) identified different types of celebrity endorsers, the advantages and risks of using them.

In their research study, Jun et al. (2023) evaluated how a celebrity endorser's key associations—such as their personality traits, public image, and reputation—can strengthen a brand's weaker associations. This means that when a brand lacks certain positive attributes or recognition, these associations can be enhanced or supplemented by leveraging the celebrity's established qualities, thereby improving the brand's image and appeal to consumers.

When consumers lack prior knowledge about a brand's benefits, the celebrity's enabling, enticing, and enriching (3E) associations are transferred to the brand. The 3E associations represent the positive attributes a celebrity endorser brings to a brand. Enabling refers to empowering consumers to engage with the brand, enticing relates to enhancing the brand's appeal, and enriching pertains to adding value or credibility to the brand. Therefore, the importance of a celebrity's enriching benefits is emphasized for both unknown and well-known brands. The study also theorises and demonstrates that consumer elevation acts as the underlying mechanism through which these enriching benefits are transferred to the brand.

Erdogan (1999) evaluated the effectiveness of celebrity's endorsements, discussing both the advantages and disadvantages of this strategy, and the implementation of source credibility and source attractiveness models. Celebrity endorsements are particularly useful for expanding into international markets as well-known personalities with global appeal can help businesses overcome various challenges. However, while celebrities in marketing campaigns may offers several benefits it poses several risks. These risks include sudden changes

in the celebrity's public image, a decline in popularity, involvement in unethical activities, damage to credibility due to over-promotion, or the possibility of the celebrity overshadowing the products they endorse (Cooper, 1984; Erdogan, 1999; Kaikati, 1987).

The outcomes of the meta-analysis conducted by Amos et al. (2008) suggest that a celebrity's positive image and attributes can be effectively communicated to the product or brand they endorse.

However, it is crucial to recognise that negative information associated with the celebrity can also be transferred. The expertise and credibility of the celebrity are key factors in establishing source credibility.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5₀: The credibility of brand ambassadors has no significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) towards cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H5_A: The credibility of brand ambassadors has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

2.9.5 Brand ambassador trustworthiness and purchase intention

Celebrity brand ambassador trustworthiness extends beyond product endorsements; it influences the establishment of authentic connections between the brand and the consumer. Trust fosters a sense of reliability, and when consumers believe in the authenticity of a celebrity brand ambassador's endorsement, it strengthens their connection with the brand.

Trustworthiness, in essence, encompasses the honesty, integrity, and credibility of an endorser, which are all subject to the target audience's perception. Celebrity trustworthiness is derived from celebrity credibility, which consists of two additional dimensions: expertise and attractiveness (Yoo et al., 2018).

Advertisers leverage the importance of trustworthiness by selecting endorsers who are well-regarded for their honesty, dependability, and believability (Shimp, 1997). However, Smith (1973) argued that even if celebrity endorsers possess other favourable attributes, they may still be perceived as untrustworthy sources if they lack trustworthiness.

A study by Amos et al. (2008) explored the relationship between celebrity endorser effects and advertising effectiveness. The results suggest that the source credibility model-comprising celebrity trustworthiness, celebrity expertise, and celebrity attractiveness- represents the three most influential source effects on purchase intentions, brand attitudes, and attitudes towards the advertisement. Trustworthiness is consumers' confidence in the communicator's intention to convey valid assertions (Ohanian, 1990). Giffin (1967) noted that trust can lead to positive outcomes, including a favourable disposition, acceptance, psychological safety, and a perceived supportive climate. Similarly, Chao et al. (2005) demonstrated that trustworthiness has a positive effect on effectiveness..

A highly trustworthy communicator with a strong opinion can effectively produce attitude change, whereas untrusted communicators have minimal impact (Miller & Baseheart, 1969). As stated by (McGinnies & Ward, 1980), perceived trustworthiness is a more significant factor in producing attitude change than perceived expertise. Building on existing literature, trustworthiness is a crucial predictor of celebrity endorsement effectiveness. In the context of sports celebrity endorsement, (Tzoumaka et al., 2016) investigated the influence of endorser

credibility attributes, such as expertise and trustworthiness, and consumer characteristics like gender and team identification on endorsement effectiveness, measured by purchase intentions. The findings revealed that gender differences only impacted team identification but did not affect endorser credibility or endorsement effectiveness. Team identification significantly influenced purchase intentions but only marginally affected the athlete's credibility. Trustworthiness, when compared to the other two credibility attributes, was identified as the most significant factor in distinguishing purchase intentions.

Trustworthiness can vary depending on age groups, with its importance differing across generations. Older individuals prioritise security features and brand recognition whereas, younger individuals are more inclined to engage with live streams and place strong emphasis on buyer reviews (Accenture, 2022).

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6₀: The trustworthiness of Brand Ambassadors has no significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H6_A: The trustworthiness of Brand Ambassadors has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

2.9.6 Brand ambassador expertise and purchase intention

This study examines the role of Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and how brand ambassadors' domain-specific expertise shapes

consumers' purchasing decisions, similar to the impact of social media influencers. More specifically, the research investigates the influence of BAPI expertise on consumers' willingness to trust brand ambassadors' recommendations and subsequently make purchase decisions based on these endorsements. Several studies have demonstrated that an endorser's actual expertise is not necessarily significant in determining their effectiveness (Erdogan, 1999; Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990) . Furthermore, Amos et al. (2008) state that the perceived expertise of an endorser is more influential in shaping consumer responses than their actual expertise.

Within the context of persuasive communication and celebrity endorsements, perceived credibility and expertise play pivotal roles in determining the effectiveness of promotional messages.

The perceived credibility of a celebrity endorser is crucial in determinant of their expertise (Erdogan, 1999).

According to (Ohanian, 1990) studies on persuasive communication consistently show that the audience's perception of the endorser's expertise positively influences the effectiveness of the message. The success of a celebrity endorser's recommendations is contingent upon the perceived expertise and the extent to which the target audience agrees with those recommendations. Thus, individuals who view the source as highly credible are more likely to accept the recommendation than those who perceive the source as less credible. Consequently, the perceived level of expertise is a strong indicator of the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements.

Till and Busler (1998) investigated the significance of the congruence between an endorser and the endorsed product, commonly referred to as the "match-up hypothesis." Previous research on the match-up hypothesis predominantly focused on physical attractiveness. In contrast, their study presented two separate experiments that collectively demonstrated the importance of expertise over attractiveness in establishing endorser-brand fit. The first experiment

revealed a general “attractiveness effect” but no match-up effect based on attractiveness. In contrast, the second experiment confirmed a match-up effect when considering expertise as the primary dimension.

Thus, the following is hypothesised:

H7₀: The expertise of Brand Ambassadors has no significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H7_A: The expertise of Brand Ambassadors has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

2.9.7 Brand ambassadors and overall purchase intention

Celebrity brand ambassadors can be a profitable strategy for businesses. McCormick (2016) examined the influence of product endorsers on millennials' attitudes and purchase intentions in the context of celebrity endorsements.

The study found that a congruent product-endorser match positively influenced purchase intention and fostered a favourable attitude toward the brand among millennial consumers. Conversely, when the celebrity endorser was unfamiliar, millennials demonstrated lower purchase intention. Understanding the correlation between an authentic celebrity and a congruent product helps clarify millennials' attitudes toward celebrity endorsements and their influence. This is particularly important given millennials' distinctive perspectives on brands and public figures.

The research concluded that millennials are less likely to purchase a product if they do not perceive a strong fit between the unfamiliar celebrity endorser and the product, regardless of their attitudes toward the brand

Boerman et al. (2017) examined the effects of sponsorship disclosures using a 2x2 experimental design, comparing posts with no disclosure to those with a "sponsored" disclosure, while also considering the source as either a celebrity

endorser or a brand. The findings revealed that sponsorship disclosures activated persuasion knowledge only when the post was shared by a celebrity. This activation led to a process where recognising the advertisement—triggered by conceptual persuasion knowledge—resulted in consumers developing distrustful beliefs about the post. Consequently, this increased scepticism diminished their intention to engage in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Othman et al. (2022) investigated the factors influencing the purchase intention of Korean skincare products among Generation Y females. The study found no significant relationship between celebrity endorsement and the purchase intention of Malaysian Generation Y females toward Korean skincare products. Instead, this generation prioritises brand image, which fosters brand loyalty. These results contradict previous studies that highlighted celebrity endorsement as an effective strategy.

Pradhan et al. (2016) conducted a study to comparing the effectiveness of celebrity-user, brand-celebrity, and user-brand personality congruence in influencing brand attitude and purchase intention.

The findings indicated that user-brand and brand-celebrity personality congruence significantly impact brand attitude and purchase intention, while celebrity-user congruence does not. Moreover, the study revealed that brand attitude partially mediates the relationship between different types of personality congruence and brand purchase intention.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8₀: Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) has no significant influence on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

H8_A: Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) has a significant influence on overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

2.10 Conceptual model and hypothesis development

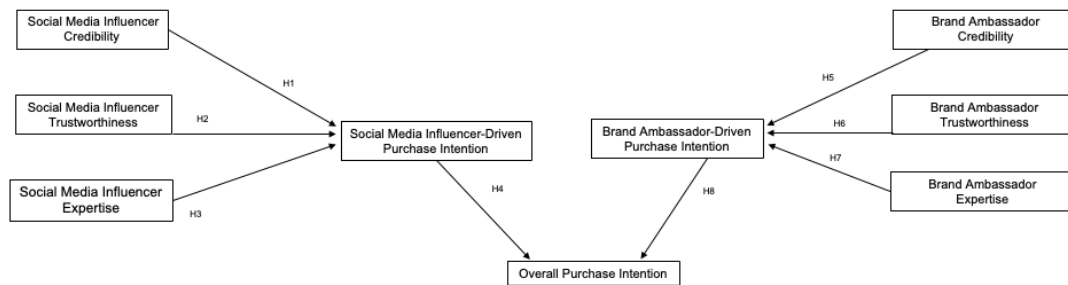


Figure 2.2 Conceptual model for the study

trustworthiness on Social Media Influencer-Driven and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention and their impact on overall purchase intention.

2.11 Conclusion of literature review

The above discussion in the literature review highlights that factors such as credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise play a crucial role in shaping consumer purchase intention, particularly in relation to social media influencers and brand ambassadors. While these factors are not exhaustive of all possible influences on purchase intention, they are prioritised in this study due to their relevance to the South African context, where influencer marketing is emerging within a unique social and economic landscape. This study tests the influence of these key factors, aligning with the overall hypotheses, and aims to provide insights into the role that both social media influencers and brand ambassadors play in influencing

purchase intentions among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa's cosmetic industry.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted in the study. The introductory section presents the research paradigm and design. Subsequent sections detail the population, sample, sampling frame, and research instrument. Procedures for data collection, data analysis, study limitations, validity testing, path modeling, and ethical considerations are also comprehensively outlined.

A quantitative research approach was deemed appropriate for this study due to its strengths in providing structured, numerical insights for investigating relationships (Creswell, 2012). The study aimed to systematically collect and analyse quantitative data to make statistical inferences and identify patterns within social media and influencer marketing. This approach enabled the quantification of key variables, namely, Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI), through the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors, assessing their subsequent impact on consumer purchase intention among millennials and Generation Z.

3.2 Research paradigm

A quantitative research approach was employed in this study, incorporating structured surveys, path analysis, and statistical tests to evaluate the significance and strength of the relationships outlined in the hypotheses.

This approach is rooted in the positivist paradigm, which emphasises empirical evidence and logical reasoning. Positivism, as articulated by Wellman et al. (2005), is based on the principles of logical positivism and is closely aligned with the natural scientific method, making it particularly appropriate for examining behavioural research within social media contexts.

The positivist perspective asserts that empirical research should primarily focus on observable and objectively measurable phenomena. Quantitative methodology facilitates the replication of studies using validated and reliable scales established in prior research. This study investigates how Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) influence overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands. Specifically, it examines the impact of credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise associated with each type of endorser on consumer behaviour. The primary objective is to determine which endorser type—social media influencers or brand ambassadors—has a more significant effect on overall purchase intention among millennial and Generation Z consumers. Adopting a quantitative research approach facilitates a systematic assessment of these variables (Bryman, 2016).

Several quantitative research studies have explored the various relationships between social media influencers, celebrity brand ambassadors and purchase intention (Amoako et al., 2020; Cheung et al., 2021; Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Kim & Chung, 2011; Lim et al., 2017; McCormick, 2016; Rani et al., 2022; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012; Vanga & Yang, 2019). For instance, Othman et al. (2022) employed a quantitative methodology to investigate the factors influencing the purchase intention of Korean skincare products among Malaysian Generation Y females.

3.3 Research design

The quantitative research design enabled systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, allowing for the identification of patterns, trends, and statistical relationships among the study variables. Hair et al. (2007) highlight the significance of research design in determining a study's direction. Research methodologies generally fall under two paradigms: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research is exploratory and inductive, employing non-numerical data. In contrast, quantitative research is deductive, aiming to quantify relationships between variables using numerical data and statistical analyses, enhancing the study's generalisability by relying on these methods for generalisability.

Quantitative research designs can be broadly categorised into three main types: exploratory, descriptive and causal. Exploratory research aims to identify patterns, themes and relationships through observation and analysis (Hair et al., 2007). Descriptive research involves systematically observing and describing phenomena without altering variables, offering a detailed overview. In contrast, causal research seeks to determine cause-and-effect relationships between variables, typically using experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

This study examined the relationships between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) through the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors. These factors served as key predictor variables, with overall purchase intention as the higher-order outcome variable. The analysis explored the interactions between these constructs to determine their influence on consumer behaviour, specifically in relation to cosmetic brands. By focusing on millennial and Generation Z consumers, this study provides insights into how different endorser types—social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors—differentially impact overall purchase intention.

3.4 Population and sample

3.4.1 Target population

According to the Census 2022 report, South Africa's population increased from 51.7 million in 2011 to 62 million in 2022, reflecting an average annual growth rate of 1.8%, the highest since 1996(Stats SA, 2023).

South Africa has a notable youth population of approximately 38 million, with females constituting 51.1% (31.0 million). A considerable portion of the youth population falls within the 25-39 age range (Stats SA, 2023). As of the third quarter of 2023, the number of working-age women in South Africa reached nearly 20.6 million, while men of working age were approximately 20.3 million. This reflects a year-on-year increase of 1.3% and 1.5%, respectively, compared to the third quarter of 2022. The report indicates a growing trend in the working-age female population, which is a positive indicator for economic development (Statista, 2023).

Given the demographic composition of South Africa, the research sample needed to be clearly defined to ensure the findings were representative and meaningful. A target population refers to the complete group of respondents who meet the established criteria (Saunders et al., 2007). To qualify for this study, respondents had to be millennials or Generation Z (over 18 years old), active users of Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok (accessing the platform at least once a month), and consumers of cosmetic brands. Moreover, respondents were required to either work or study in South Africa. These criteria were essential to ensure that the sample accurately reflected the target population and provided valuable insights for the research questions.

3.4.2 Sample frame and sampling size

Sampling is a statistical technique used to obtain a representative subset of data from a larger population (Saunders et al., 2007). For this study, respondents were recruited through the researcher's personal and professional networks via platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, which served as instrumental tools in sourcing diverse and engaged participants. Leveraging personal networks can enhance response trustworthiness and reliability, as respondents may feel more comfortable participating in the study. Utilising social media platforms extends the sample's reach, allowing for the inclusion of diverse participants beyond immediate connections, such as friends of friends or acquaintances. This broader reach helps the sample capture a wider demographic and reduces potential bias, thereby improving the generalisability of the findings by incorporating various viewpoints and experiences.

The final sample size of this study was 130 respondents, representing millennials and Generation Z consumers of cosmetic products who actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok. Respondents who did not fall within the specified generational categories or did not engage with social media or cosmetic brands were excluded based on screening questions. This approach ensured that the sample was representative of the target population and aligned with the research objectives focusing on social media use and purchase intentions.

3.4.3 Sampling method

Sampling, as described by Babbie (2013), involves the systematic selection of observation units or research subjects. This process is essential for ensuring that the sample's characteristics are reflective of the population, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of research findings.

In this study, a non-probability sampling technique, commonly employed in quantitative research, was utilised. Non-probability sampling methods include convenience, quota, and snowball sampling, each providing unique advantages depending on the research context objectives.

Given the heterogeneous nature of the population and constraints related to cost and time, non-probability sampling was employed for this study. Convenience sampling, characterised by its reliance on accessibility, proximity, and existing contacts, was deemed suitable for this study due to its efficiency in gathering data quickly and cost-effectively. As outlined by Kumar (2019), this technique is advantageous for obtaining initial insights, particularly when the population is scattered or diverse. The researcher had direct access to social media users and cosmetic brand consumers through online networks, making participant recruitment more feasible and efficient.

3.4.4 Sampling size

To reach the desired sample size of 130, the survey was initially distributed to a broad pool of potential respondents, increasing the likelihood of obtaining sufficient responses. This approach resulted in a total of 366 responses. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a final sample size of 130 responses was retained for analysis, ensuring the sample was representative of the target population—millennial and Generation Z consumers active on social media and using cosmetic brands.

3.5 The research instrument

Babbie (2013) states that a data collection instrument serves to obtain the information necessary for subsequent analysis. In this study, a self-administered online questionnaire was distributed to respondents. The decision to use an online survey was based on its ability to provide anonymity, reduce time pressure for participants, and encourage a higher response rate.

This method is both cost-effective and convenient, particularly in contexts characterised by remote work and limited physical interaction. Moreover, online surveys facilitate efficient data collection and analysis, making them valuable tools in academic research.

The questionnaire was divided into three main sections, concluding with a segment on demographic information. The first section comprised screening questions to categorise participants' age group, social media platform usage, frequency of use, and device preference for accessing social media. The second section focused on social media influencers and featured a Maybelline FIT ME foundation campaign, showcasing various South African influencers using the hashtag #MaybellineSA.

Respondents completed a survey assessing their perceptions of social media influencers' credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) as well as Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) concerning cosmetic brands. The items used to measure each construct were derived from validated scales in previous research, ensuring both reliability and relevance. The scales for the questionnaire were adopted from the following research studies:(Cheung & Lee, 2012; George, 2004; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Kumar, 2011; Masuda et al., 2022; Ohanian, 1990; Shimul et al., 2022). Each construct was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5), maintaining consistency across the survey. By differentiating between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI), the study was able to more effectively assess the impact of these two types of endorsers on consumer purchase behaviour.

Section three of the questionnaire presented social media posts featuring Lancôme, a luxury French cosmetics and fragrance brand, highlighting various campaigns with celebrity brand ambassadors, sourced from the brand's Instagram page.

Participants were asked to assess the credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, and purchase intention driven by brand ambassadors in relation to cosmetic brands. The final section gathered demographic information, including race, gender, household income, education level, and employment status. For the statistical analysis, SMART PLS-4 and SPSS were employed.

3.5.1 Questionnaire distribution and collection method

The data collection procedure for this study followed a systematic and structured approach to gather comprehensive insights into how Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) compare in their influence on overall consumer purchase intention. The study specifically examined these relationships among millennial and Generation Z cosmetic brand users in South Africa, aiming to determine which type of endorser—social media influencers or brand ambassadors—has a greater impact on shaping purchase decisions. The study employed convenience sampling and utilised a self-administered online survey as the primary data collection tool. Qualtrics survey software was used to administer the survey. The survey link was distributed through various digital channels, such as email invitations WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, ensuring broad reach. The survey included clear instructions and was pre-tested to ensure question clarity and relevance. Ethical protocols, including participant confidentiality and obtaining informed consent, were rigorously followed throughout the data collection process.

3.5.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are integral at every stage of a research study (Hair et al., 2007). Participants were fully informed at the outset through a detailed disclosure outlining the study's background and the researcher's details. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personal identifiers were collected in the survey, and all responses were securely stored and kept confidential.

Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, with the option to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

3.6 Pilot research

Pilot studies are often conducted before primary research to identify potential issues with the research design, particularly with the research instrument (Blanche et al., 2006). In this study, a pilot study was conducted with 25 respondents, consisting of millennial and Generation Z cosmetic brand users who were active social media platform users. The primary objective of the pilot study was to assess the reliability and validity of the scales prior to commencing the main research.

3.7 Data analysis

The data analysis process commenced with data extraction and coding. The responses were exported to Excel for preliminary coding and organisation. SPSS and Smart PLS 4 were utilised to perform descriptive statistical analyses, calculating the mean and standard deviation. Various visual representations, such as diagrams, tables and charts, were used to present and interpret the findings, aiding in understanding of patterns and insights derived from the study's results.

3.8 Limitations of the study

Given the constraints of accessibility and feasibility, the final sample size of 130 respondents, drawn from an initial pool of 366 responses, may be considered relatively small when compared to the broader population of social media users and cosmetic consumers in South Africa. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalising these findings. Additionally, it is assumed that participants provided honest and accurate responses based on their authentic interactions with social media influencers and brand ambassadors when forming their purchase intentions.

3.9 Validity and reliability

Ensuring the validity and reliability of measurements, as well as employing appropriate statistical models, is essential for drawing accurate conclusions from research studies. This section examines the concepts of validity, reliability, and path modeling within the context of the study. Two primary limitations in research are threats to internal and external validity (Price & Murnan, 2004). A research design with strong internal and external validity is necessary to ensure robust and accurate findings (Fink, 2003).

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument accurately measures the intended concepts. In the context of this study, which examines the relationship between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI), Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI), and overall Purchase Intention (PI), several types of validity are considered: content validity, construct validity, and criterion-related validity. Ensuring validity is imperative for establishing confidence in the study's results. Reliability pertains to the consistency and stability of the measurements. Internal consistency reliability and test-retest reliability, as suggested by Roberts and Priest (2006), were assessed to ensure the data's dependability and replicability.

3.9.1 Causal approach and validity

Establishing causal relationships within a research study requires a rigorous methodological approach, directly impacting the validity of the study's findings. The primary goal of the causal approach is to examine the cause-and-effect dynamics between variables. Unlike correlational studies that demonstrate associations, a causal approach aims to determine whether variations in one variable directly lead to changes in another. This approach typically necessitates the use of experimental designs or advanced statistical methods to control for confounding variables (Bryman, 2016).

Internal validity refers to the accuracy of causal inferences within a study (Hair et al., 2007). It ensures that observed changes in the dependent variable can be confidently attributed to manipulation of the independent variable. Maintaining internal validity is key in a causal approach and can be achieved by controlling extraneous variables, randomising treatments, and implementing rigorous experimental designs. Any potential threats, such as selection bias or history effects, must be meticulously addressed to ensure the study's credibility and the accuracy of its findings (Fink, 2003).

3.9.2 Path modeling

Path modeling is a statistical technique used to evaluate complex relationships between variables, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interactions among social media influencers, brand ambassadors, and purchase intention within a higher-order model. Key components include mediation analysis, moderation analysis, and model fit assessment.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a multivariate data analysis method frequently applied in marketing research to test linear and additive causal models underpinned by theoretical frameworks. There are two primary approaches to SEM: Covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM). CB-SEM, commonly implemented using software like LISREL, AMOS, MPlus, and EQS, is suited for theory testing and confirmation, emphasising model fit indices. In contrast, PLS-SEM focuses on variance analysis and prediction, making it suitable for exploratory research. It can be performed using software like PLS-Graph, SmartPLS, VisualPLS, and WarpPLS. This study adopts PLS-SEM using SmartPLS software due to its ability to handle complex models and small sample sizes effectively (Wong, 2013).

3.10 Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the study's methodology, research design, and ethical considerations. It justified the use of a quantitative approach and detailed the sampling strategy, data collection tools, and analytical methods employed, including SPSS and SmartPLS. The chapter also provided a comprehensive overview of the survey design, participant selection criteria, and data analysis techniques. Furthermore, it addressed research ethics, including participant confidentiality and informed consent, ensuring adherence to ethical research standards.

4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from a sample of 130 respondents who completed the online survey. The data analysis was conducted using SPSS and SmartPLS 4. The chapter is structured as follows: first, the descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographic profile are presented, followed by an overview of the measurement scales utilised for each construct in the study. Lastly, an evaluation of the reliability and validity of these constructs is provided. The chapter concludes with an examination of the hypotheses testing outcomes and interpretations of the results.

4.2 Descriptive statistics: demographic profile

4.2.1 Birth year range

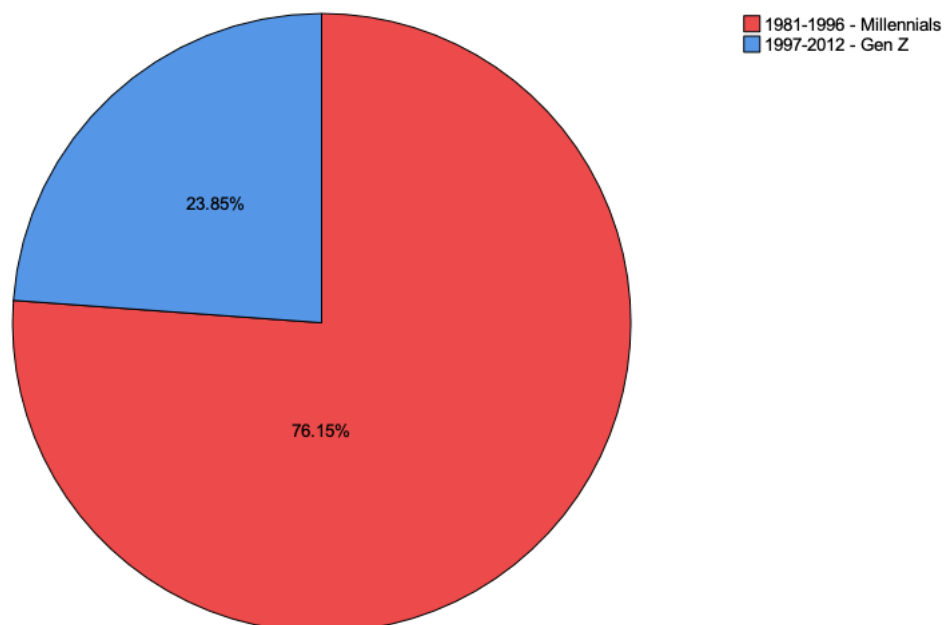


Figure 4. 1 : Birth year range

The survey results in Figure 4.1 show that 76.15% of the respondents belong to the millennial age group born between 1981 and 1996, while 23.65% fall under Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012. These findings indicate that millennials are the predominant consumer group for cosmetic brands in this study.

4.2.2 Age group

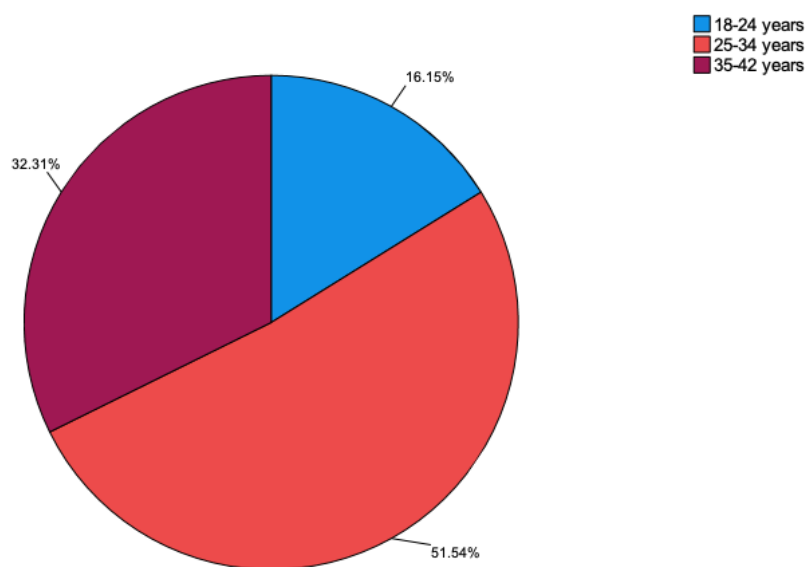


Figure 4.2 Age group

As shown in Figure 4.2, 16% of the respondents are aged 18-24, while the majority (52%) are part of the 25-34 age segment. A third of the respondents (32%) fall into the 35-42 age range, contributing to the sample's overall maturity and diverse age distribution.

4.2.3 How frequently do you use social media platforms?

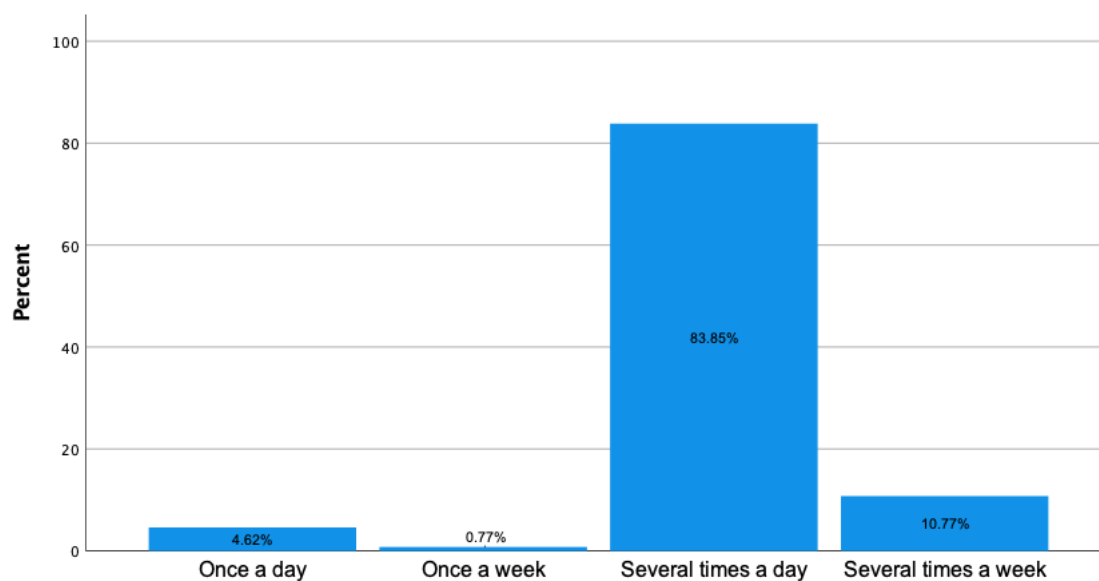


Figure 4.3 Frequency of social media usage

Figure 4.3 illustrates that the majority of respondents (84%) engage with social media multiple times per day, signifying a high frequency of daily interaction and an increased likelihood of exposure to social media content.

4.2.4 How long have you been using social media platforms?

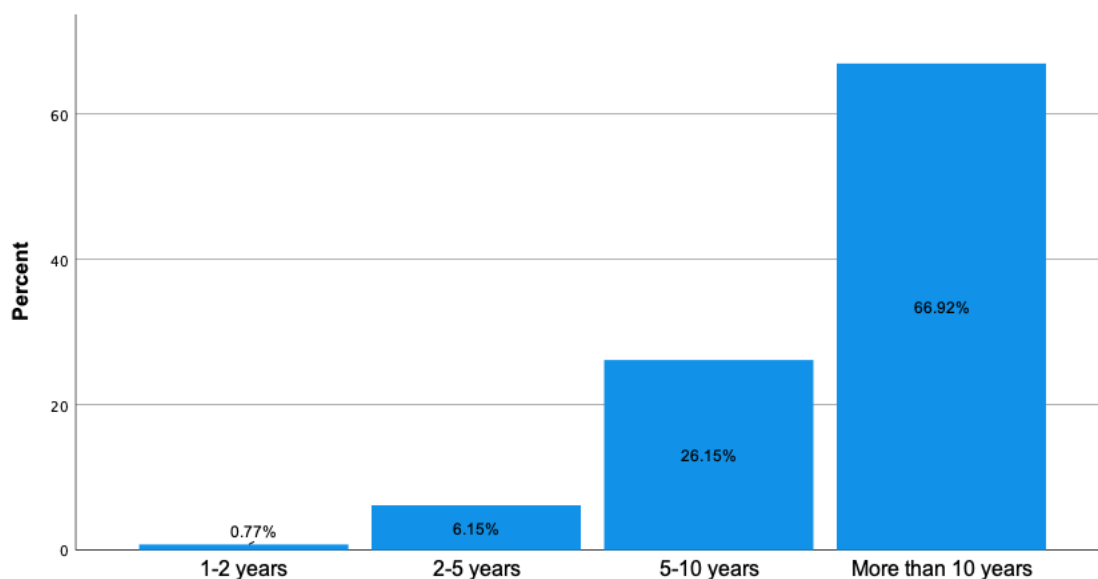


Figure 4.4 Duration using social media platforms

Figure 4.4 shows that most participants have been active on social media for over a decade (67%), reflecting an experienced user base. A quarter (26%) of the respondents have been using social media for 5-10 years, while the remaining respondents have engaged with social media for shorter periods, contributing to a varied social media engagement experience.

4.2.5 Which device do you mainly use to access social media platforms?

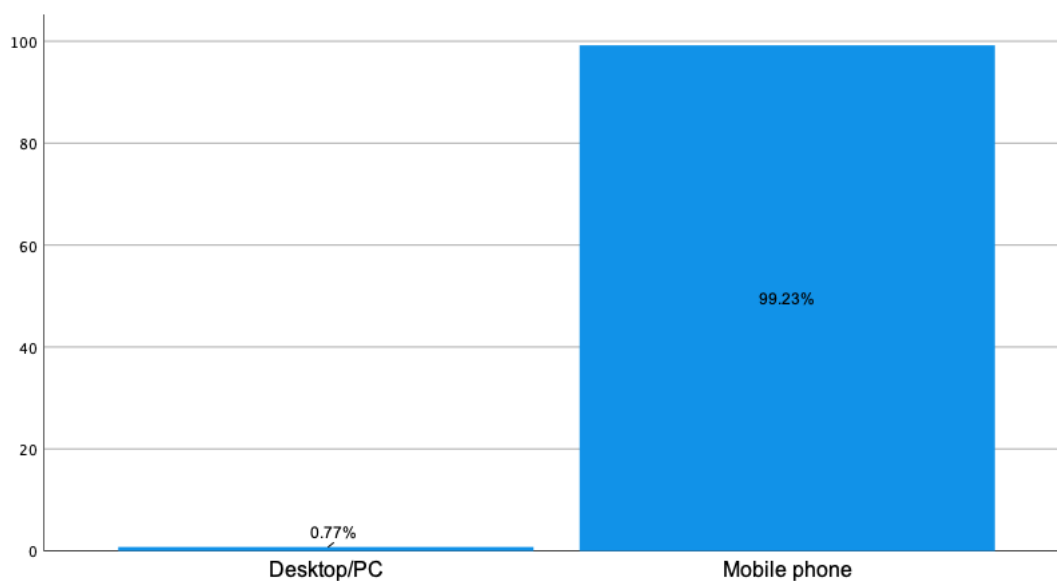


Figure 4.5 Device used to access social media

As depicted in Figure 4.5, most respondents (99%) preferred using their mobile phones to access social media platforms, indicating that engagement on digital platforms is strongly driven by mobile-centric usage.

4.2.6 Of the following social media platforms, which one do you prefer the most?

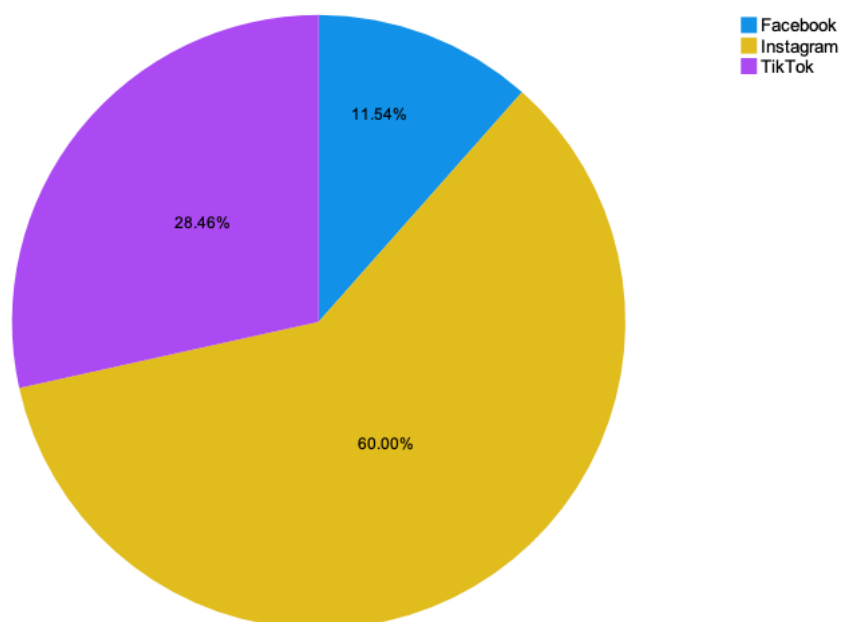


Figure 4.6 Most preferred social media platform

Figure 4.6 shows that 60% of the respondents preferred Instagram, which users prefer because of its visual nature. Over a quarter (28%) of the respondents preferred TikTok, which is particularly popular among younger audiences. While 12% of the respondents preferred Facebook, this platform is less dominant than Instagram and TikTok.

4.2.7 Of the following social media platforms, which one do you prefer the least?

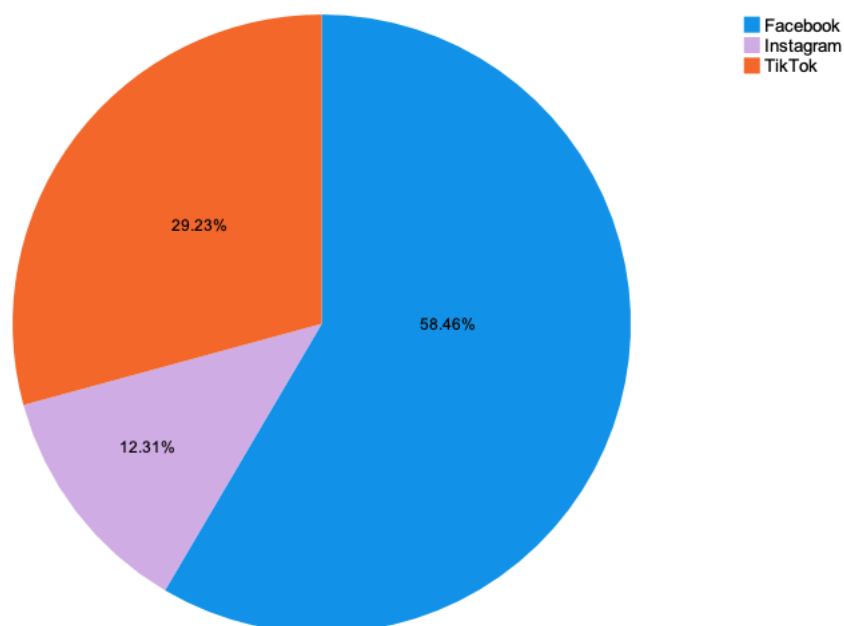


Figure 4.7 Least preferred social media platforms

As shown in Figure 4.7, more than half of the participants indicated that Facebook is their least preferred social media platform. This suggests a demographic shift, implying that younger generations, such as millennials and Generation Z, tend to favour other platforms. It also highlights Facebook's decline in popularity among these age groups. Additionally, changing content preferences may play a role, as Facebook focuses more on longer-form, text-based content, whereas Instagram and TikTok offer more visual and short-form content. Twelve percent of respondents indicated that Instagram is their second least preferred platform, while 29% selected TikTok.

4.2.8 Gender

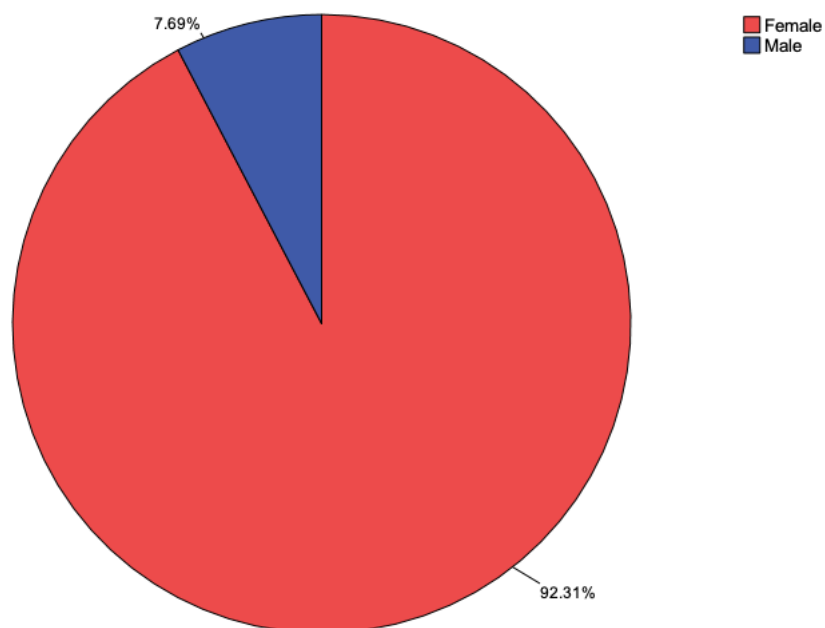


Figure 4.8 Gender

As shown in Figure 4.8, females comprised most of the respondents, accounting for 92%. This suggests that females are the primary consumer base for cosmetic brands, while male respondents account for 8%, adding some gender diversity to the study.

4.2.9 Ethnic group

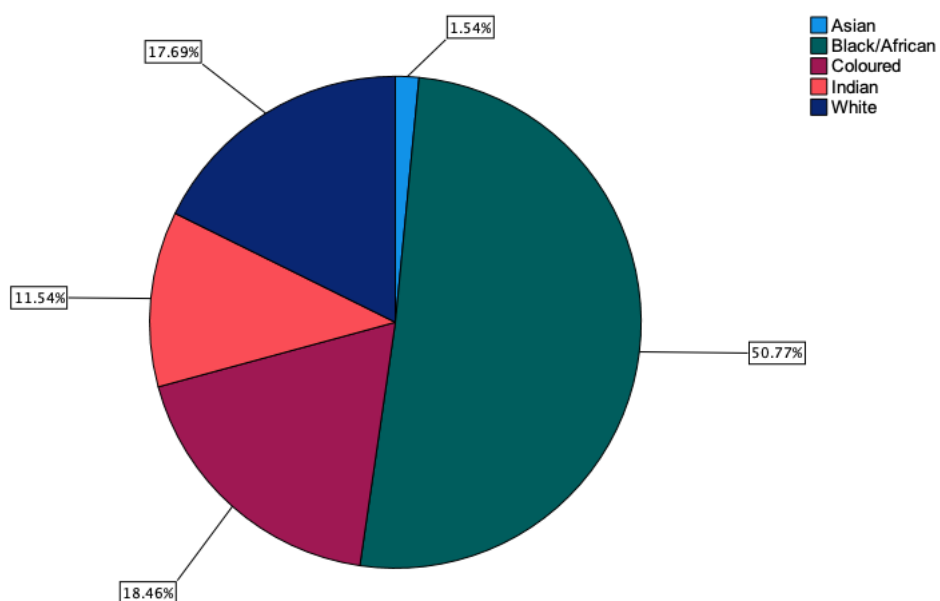


Figure 4.9 Ethnic group

As seen in Figure 4.9, respondents predominantly belong to the African ethnic group (51%), followed by Coloureds and Whites at 18% each. Indians and Asians accounted for 12% and 2%, respectively.

4.2.10 Employment status

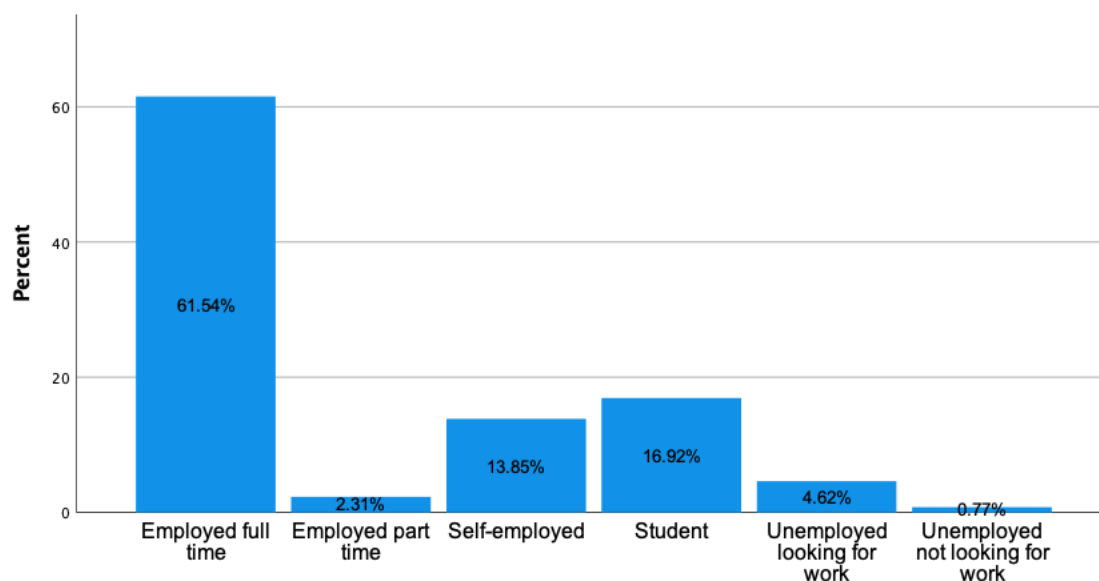


Figure 4.10 Employment status

As shown in Figure 4.10, the majority of respondents (62%) reported being employed full-time. Part-time employment accounted for 2%, while 17% identified as students, and 14% as self-employed. Additionally, 5% of respondents indicated they were unemployed and seeking work, while 1% were unemployed and not seeking work.

4.2.11 Highest level of education

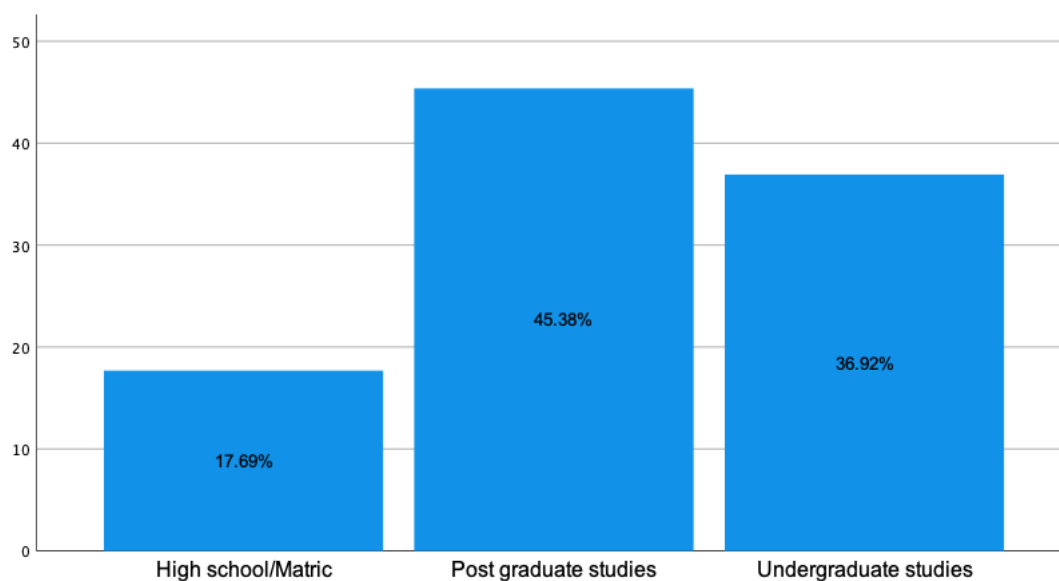


Figure 4.11 Highest level of education

Figure 4.11 indicates that 45% of respondents have postgraduate qualifications, while 37% have undergraduate qualifications. High school or matric qualifications represent 18% of the respondents.

4.2.12 Province

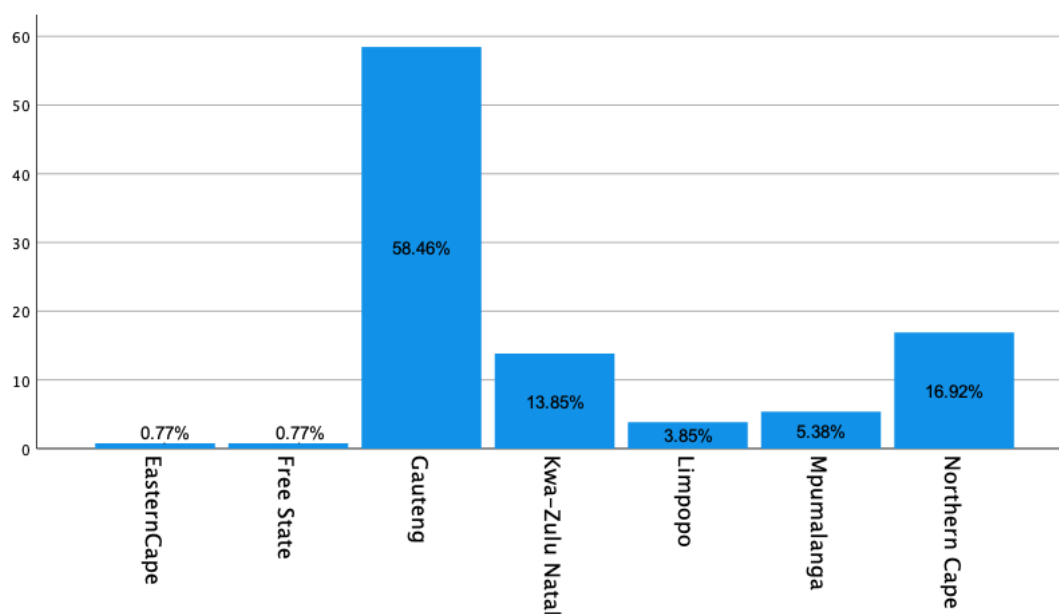


Figure 4.12 Province

As depicted in Figure 4.12, the majority (58%) of the respondents are from the Gauteng province. The Northern Cape accounts for 17%, Kwa-Zulu Natal 14%, Mpumalanga 5%, and Limpopo 4%. The Eastern Cape and Free State account for under 1% each.

4.2.13 Household income

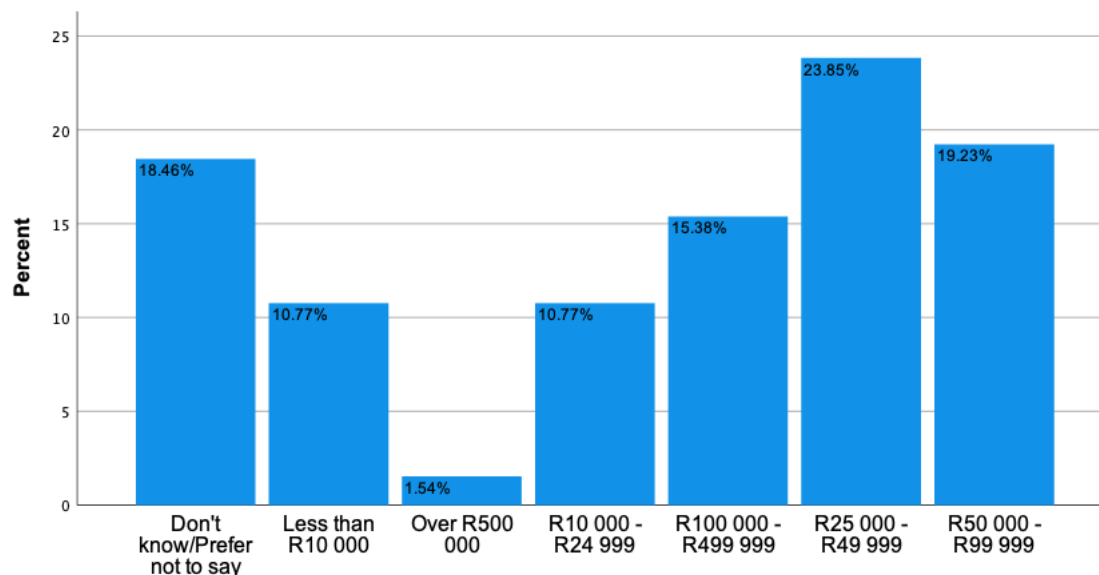


Figure 4.13 Household income

Figure 4.13 shows that most respondents fall within the income range of R25 000-R49 999. The remaining income brackets are accounted for as follows: less than R10 000 and R10 000-R24 999 make up 11% each.

R50 000-R99 999 and R100 000-R499 999 account for 19% and 16%, respectively, while over R500,000 accounts for 2%. Eighteen percent of the respondents indicated that they did not know their household income or preferred not to say.

The demographic and social media-related variables are summarised in the following tables.

Table 1 Socio-demographic variables

Description of the socio-demographic variables of the respondents (N = 130)

Factor	Levels	n	%
Age group	18-24 years	21	16%
	25-34 years	67	52%
	35-42 years	42	32%
	Total	130	100%
Birth year	1981-1996: Millennials	99	76%
	1997-2012: Gen Z	31	24%
	Total	130	100%
Gender	Female	120	92%
	Male	10	8%
	Total	130	100%
Race	Black/African	66	51%
	Coloured	24	18%
	Asian	2	2%
	Indian	15	12%
	White	23	18%
	Total	130	100%
Employment status	Student	22	17%
	Unemployed looking for work	6	5%
	Unemployed not looking for work	1	1%
	Self-employed	18	14%
	Employed part time	3	2%
	Employed full time	80	62%
	Total	130	100%
Level of education	High school/Matric	23	18%
	Undergraduate studies	48	37%
	Post graduate studies	59	45%
	Total	130	100%
Province	Free State	1	1%
	Gauteng	76	59%
	KwaZulu-Natal	18	14%
	Mpumalanga	5	4%
	North West	7	5%
	Western Cape	22	17%
	Total	129	100%
Household income	Less than R10 000	14	11%
	R10 000 - R24 999	14	11%
	R25 000 - R49 999	31	24%
	R50 000 - R99 999	25	19%

Factor	Levels	n	%
	R100 000 - R499 999	20	16%
	Over R500 000	2	2%
	Don't know/Prefer not to say	23	18%
	Total	129	100%

Table 2 Social media-related variables

Description of social media-related variables of the respondents (N = 130)

Factor	Levels	n	%
Social platform usage	Yes	130	100%
	Total	130	100%
Frequency	Once a week	1	1%
	Once a day	6	5%
	Several times a week	14	11%
	Several times a day	109	84%
	Total	130	100%
Duration	1-2 years	1	1%
	2-5 years	8	6%
	5-10 years	34	26%
	More than 10 years	87	67%
	Total	130	100%
Device	Mobile phone	129	99%
	Desktop/PC	1	1%
	Total	130	100%
Most preferred platform	Facebook	15	12%
	Instagram	78	60%
	TikTok	37	28%
	Total	130	100%
Least preferred platform	Facebook	76	58%
	Instagram	16	12%
	TikTok	38	29%
	Total	130	100%

4.3 Descriptive statistics: Measurement scale

This section presents the results of the survey responses collected from the 5-point Likert scale items. The results are organised and analysed in alignment with the literature review and hypotheses statements.

4.3.1 Social media influencers



Source: Instagram

Figure 4.14 Maybelline New York influencer campaigns

4.3.2 Social media influencer credibility

4.3.2.1 Social media influencer credibility measurement scales

Table 3 Credibility measurement scales

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
My perceptions of cosmetic brands often change when I receive information from the social media influencers that I follow.	15.4%	42.3%	16.2%	16.9%	9.2%
I value the opinion of the social media influencers whom I follow as if they were someone close whom I trust.	11.5%	38.5%	21.5%	13.8%	14.6%
The social media influencers who I follow suggest helpful cosmetic products or brands to me.	23.1%	48.5%	19.2%	6.2%	3.1%

Table 3 outlines the respondents' perceptions of social media influencer credibility. A considerable segment (42.3%) disagrees that their perceptions often change when they receive information from social media influencers, suggesting that social media influencers may not always influence consumer perceptions.

A combined 33.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media influencers shape their views, suggesting that influencers can influence consumer perceptions. For brands, this emphasises the importance of maintaining consistent and authentic messaging from influencers to positively impact consumer attitudes. However, 38.5% of respondents somewhat disagreed with valuing the opinions of social media influencers, indicating that not all consumers perceive influencer opinions as trustworthy sources of information.

Meanwhile, 28.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, showing some level of confidence in the credibility and persuasiveness of social media influencers.

A substantial proportion (48.5%) agreed that the cosmetic products or brands recommended by social media influencers they follow are helpful, demonstrating influencers' impact on consumer product recommendations. However, 25.3% of respondents somewhat disagreed or disagreed, suggesting that a portion of consumers may not find influencer suggestions valuable. Thus, brands must ensure that influencers they collaborate with resonate with their target audience's interests and preferences.

The study's results reflect diverse consumer attitudes towards influencer authenticity. Given these varied responses, brands should consider segmenting their target audience based on influencer preferences and developing tailored influencer marketing strategies for each subgroup.

4.3.3 Social media influencer trustworthiness

4.3.3.1 Social media influencer trustworthiness measurement scales

Table 4 Trustworthiness measurement scales

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I consider social media beauty influencers to be dependable.	5.4%	28.5%	29.2%	9.2%	9.2%
I consider social media beauty influencers to be honest.	4.6%	18.5%	28.5%	32.3%	16.2%
I consider social media beauty influencers to be sincere.	3.8%	23.1%	34.6%	27.7%	10.8%
I consider social media beauty influencers to be trustworthy.	3.8%	21.5%	39.2%	25.4%	10.0%

Table 4 shows that 34% of respondents hold a somewhat negative or negative stance towards the dependability of beauty influencers. Conversely, 18.4% of respondents agree or strongly agree with influencers' trustworthiness, indicating a level of trust in their opinions.

On the other hand, a smaller proportion of respondents (23.1%) somewhat disagreed or disagreed regarding the honesty of beauty influencers. Almost half (48.5%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the perceived honesty of these influencers, indicating a level of trust in their authenticity. Overall, these results suggest a need for further exploration into the factors shaping consumer perceptions of beauty influencers and their impact on purchasing decisions.

Additionally, 25.3% of respondents somewhat disagreed or disagreed about the overall trustworthiness of beauty influencers, while 35.4% agreed or strongly agreed, suggesting a considerable level of perceived trustworthiness.

The survey responses show a range of sentiments, reflecting varying degrees of agreement and disagreement concerning the reliability, integrity, and overall credibility of beauty influencers. Although many participants expressed trust in beauty influencers, there remains an opportunity to enhance the perceived dependability, integrity, and authenticity of these influencers.

4.3.4 Social media influencer expertise

4.3.4.1 Social media influencer expertise measurement scales

Table 5 Expertise measurement scales

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Beauty Social media influencers that I follow know a lot about cosmetic brands.	25.4%	42.3%	18.5%	10.0%	3.8%
Social media influencers are competent to make assertions about cosmetic brands.	10.8%	28.5%	30.8%	24.6%	5.4%
I consider social media beauty influencers to be experts in their field.	6.9%	23.8%	22.3%	28.5%	18.5%

Table 5 presents the respondents' views on social media influencers' expertise. Regarding the perceived level of expertise of beauty influencers, the results indicate that a substantial proportion of respondents do not agree with their level of knowledge. Specifically, 25.4% of participants strongly disagree, and 42.3% somewhat disagree with the expertise of influencers. In contrast, 10% of respondents somewhat agree, and 3.8% strongly agree that they trust the influencers' knowledge. Additionally, 18.5% of participants neither agree nor disagree.

Overall, while many respondents expressed uncertainty or disagreement, a subset of respondents acknowledges the expertise of beauty influencers in the field.

4.3.5 Social media influencers-driven and purchase intention

4.3.5.1 Social media influencers and purchase intention

Table 6 Purchase intention measurement scales

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I am likely to purchase a cosmetic brands based on the advice I am given by social media influencers .	13.1%	33.1%	25.4%	19.2%	9.2%
I do purchase products and services endorsed by social media influencers .	16.9%	41.5%	18.5%	16.2%	6.9%
Overall, I'm happy with purchasing cosmetic brands advertised by social media influencers .	14.6%	35.4%	37.7%	8.5%	3.8%

A significant portion of respondents either somewhat disagreed (41.5%) or strongly disagreed (16.9%) with being likely to make a purchase based on influencer advice. Less than 20% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, while 16.2% somewhat agreed, and only 6.9% strongly agreed, indicating that a minority of consumers are receptive to purchase decisions based on influencer recommendations. These results suggest that establishing trust and credibility is essential for influencers to enhance Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase (SIPI) Intention among consumers who are currently less inclined to purchase based on their recommendations.

To strengthen Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and its relationship with overall purchase intention, influencers should focus on transparency by providing authentic reviews and sharing personal experiences.

Doing so can help build trust with their followers. It is also recommended that influencers ensure the quality and efficacy of the products they endorse, as this can foster positive attitudes and increase customer satisfaction, ultimately leading to higher overall purchase intention based on influencer-driven endorsements.



Figure 4.15 Lancôme brand ambassadors

Source: (Lancome, 2023)

4.3.6 Brand ambassador credibility

4.3.6.1 Brand ambassador credibility measurement scales

Table 7 BA Credibility measurement scales

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
My perceptions of cosmetic brands often change when I receive information from the celebrity brand ambassadors that I follow.	6.2%	33.8%	30.8%	20.0%	9.2%
I value the opinion of the celebrity brand ambassadors whom I follow as if they were someone close whom I trust.	6.9%	25.4%	26.2%	29.2%	12.3%
The celebrity brand ambassadors who I follow suggest helpful cosmetic products or brands to me.	12.3%	30.0%	31.5%	17.7%	8.5%

Table 7 shows that most respondents do not report a change in their perceptions based on the information received from brand ambassadors.

The study results indicate that the majority of respondents did not perceive any change in their perceptions based on the information received from brand ambassadors, with 33.8% somewhat disagreeing and 6.2% strongly disagreeing. Nearly a third (30.8%) of respondents reported neutrality by neither agreeing nor disagreeing. However, a subset of respondents (20% somewhat agreeing and 9.2% strongly agreeing) experienced a change in their perceptions due to brand ambassador endorsements. These findings suggest that while brand ambassadors may have a limited impact on overall consumer perceptions, they can still influence a specific subset of consumers.

Respondents also expressed varying opinions regarding the value of brand ambassador opinions, with 26.2% remaining neutral.

A total of 41.5% of respondents either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that brand ambassadors' opinions were valuable, while 32.3% either somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed. Although some results reflect doubt about the effectiveness of brand ambassador endorsements, a segment of consumers perceives value in the recommendations provided by brand ambassadors.

Participants somewhat disagreed (30%) or strongly disagreed (12.3%) with the proposition that brand ambassadors suggest helpful cosmetic products or brands. Additionally, 31.5% of respondents indicated neutrality, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of participants somewhat agreed (17.7%) or strongly agreed (8.5%) with the effectiveness of brand ambassadors in providing valuable recommendations about cosmetic products or brands.

4.3.7 Brand Ambassador trustworthiness

4.3.7.1 Brand ambassador trustworthiness measurement scales

Table 8 BA Trustworthiness measurement scales

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be dependable.	2.3%	16.9%	40.0%	24.6%	16.2%
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be honest.	1.5%	14.6%	30.0%	35.4%	18.5%
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be sincere.	3.1%	15.4%	32.3%	35.4%	13.8%
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be trustworthy.	1.5%	17.7%	36.2%	30.0%	14.6%

Table 9 shows that several respondents hold negative views about the reliability of brand ambassadors. Only 16.2% of participants strongly agreed that brand ambassadors can be relied upon, while 2.3% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, a large

proportion of respondents (40%) remained neutral, indicating an absence of a clear stance on the dependability of brand ambassadors. This suggests that participants need more certainty regarding the honesty of brand ambassadors. A third (30%) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, while 35.4% somewhat agreed that brand ambassadors are truthful, and 18.5% strongly agreed. In contrast, 14.6% of participants somewhat disagreed, and 1.5% strongly disagreed. These results imply that, although some uncertainty exists regarding the honesty of brand ambassadors, most participants believe they can be relied upon to a certain extent.

The results further indicated that a minority of respondents strongly disagreed (3.1%) or somewhat disagreed (15.4%) with the sincerity of brand ambassadors, while a third (32.3%) reported neutrality, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. A portion of respondents somewhat agreed (35.4%) or strongly agreed (13.8%) with the statement, suggesting that they perceive brand ambassadors as sincere in their promotion of products. Only 1.5% of participants strongly disagreed with the trustworthiness of brand ambassadors, while 17.7% somewhat disagreed. Over a third (36.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Meanwhile, 30.0% agreed that brand ambassadors are trustworthy.

4.3.8 Brand ambassador expertise

4.3.8.1 Brand ambassador expertise measurement scales

Table 9 BA Expertise measurement scales

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
	16.9%	25.4%	30.0%	23.1%	4.6%

Celebrity brand ambassadors know a lot about cosmetic brands.					
Celebrity brand ambassadors are competent to make assertions about cosmetic brands.	3.8%	14.6%	35.4%	29.2%	16.9%
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be experts in their field.	3.8%	11.5%	20.8%	39.2%	24.6%

Less than 20% of respondents strongly disagree (16.9%) or somewhat disagree (25.4%) with the idea that brand ambassadors possess extensive knowledge about cosmetic brands. Additionally, 30% of respondents neither agree nor disagree, while 23.1% somewhat agree. Only 4.6% of respondents strongly agree, perceiving brand ambassadors as knowledgeable. These results indicate a mixed perception of brand ambassadors' competence in making assertions about cosmetic brands.

Regarding brand ambassadors' expertise, 39.2% of respondents somewhat agree, and 24.6% strongly agree that brand ambassadors are experts in their field, while 11.5% somewhat disagree, and 3.8% strongly disagree. A substantial number of respondents (20.8%) expressed neutrality. These percentages reveal that 39.2% of respondents somewhat agree about the expertise of brand ambassadors, and 24.6% strongly agree, whereas 11.5% somewhat disagree, and 3.8% strongly disagree. The results demonstrate that a considerable portion of respondents perceive brand ambassadors as experts in their field.

4.3.9 Brand ambassadors and purchase intention

4.3.9.1 Brand ambassadors and purchase intention

Table 10 BA Purchase intention

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
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I am likely to purchase a cosmetic brand based on the advice I am given by a celebrity brand ambassador .	8.5%	23.8%	26.2%	30.8%	10.8%
I do purchase products and services endorsed by a celebrity brand ambassador .	10.8%	31.5%	25.4%	21.5%	10.8%
Overall, I'm happy with purchasing cosmetic brands advertised by a celebrity brand ambassador .	10.8%	32.3%	33.8%	19.2%	3.8%

Table 10 shows that only 8.5% of respondents strongly disagreed with the idea of purchasing based on celebrity brand ambassadors' advice. A quarter of respondents (23.8%) somewhat disagreed, while 26.2% neither agreed nor disagreed. Almost a third (30.8%) somewhat agreed with the proposition, and only 10.8% strongly agreed that they would purchase products based on the advice of celebrity brand ambassadors.

When considering the purchase of products promoted by celebrity brand ambassadors, 10.8% of respondents strongly disagreed, and 31.5% somewhat disagreed. Additionally, 25.4% neither agreed nor disagreed, while 21.5% somewhat agreed, and 10.8% strongly agreed.

Furthermore, 10.8% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that celebrity brand ambassadors influenced their purchases, while a more significant proportion (32.3%) somewhat disagreed.

The largest percentage (33.8%) remained neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, suggesting the absence of strong opinions. Meanwhile, 19.2% somewhat agreed, and only 3.8% strongly agreed, indicating that although there may be some influence, it is limited to a small segment of respondents.

4.4 Reliability and validity measurement

The following section presents the results of the measurement scales for validity and reliability.

4.4.1 Measurement scales

Table 11 Measurement scales

Measurement scale	Name	Mean	Median	Std.Dev.	Skewness
Brand Ambassador Credibility	BACR	3.1	3.2	0.8	-0.4
Brand Ambassador Expertise	BAEXP	2.5	2.7	1.0	0.2
Brand Ambassador Trustworthiness	BATW	2.6	2.8	0.9	0.0
Brand Ambassador Purchase Intention	BAPI	3.2	3.1	0.8	-0.1
Social Media Influencer Credibility	SICR	3.5	3.4	0.8	-0.1
Social Media Influencer Expertise	SIEXP	3.2	3.3	0.9	0.0
Social Media Influencer Trustworthiness	SITW	2.8	2.8	0.9	0.0
Social Media Influencer Purchase Intention	SIPI	3.5	3.6	0.7	-0.2

Utilising statistical measures such as mean, median, standard deviation, and skewness in research studies provides valuable insights into the characteristics of the dataset. The mean represents the average value of a dataset and serves as a measure of central tendency (Glavan et al., 2019). In contrast, the median identifies the central value of a dataset that is unaffected by outliers, offering a robust measure of central tendency (Salerno et al., 1998). Standard deviation measures the extent of variation or dispersion from the mean, where a smaller standard deviation indicates that the data points are closely clustered around the mean.

Skewness, on the other hand, assesses the asymmetry of the distribution and provides information on the tails of the distribution, thereby highlighting the probability of extreme values (Delmas & Liu, 2005). These statistical measures enhance the accuracy and reliability of research findings. When comparing the overall means, it was found that brand ambassadors had a mean of 2.85, whereas social media influencers had a mean of 3.25. This analysis suggests that social media influencers

scored higher for the measured attributes compared to brand ambassadors. Therefore, on average, respondents rated social media influencers more favourably than brand ambassadors.

4.4.2 Internal Consistency Reliability

4.4.2.1 Cronbach Alpha Coefficient and composite Reliability

There are three primary methods determine the internal consistency or stability of measurement scales for constructs: Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability (rho_a), and Composite reliability (rho_c) (Hair et al., 2007). Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are widely used to assess the internal consistency and reliability of a given set of scale items. These metrics evaluate the reliability of a measurement instrument by quantifying the degree of intercorrelation among the items comprising the scale (Bonett & Wright, 2015). The internal consistency of all measures in this study was found to be acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.74 to 0.90, as shown in Table 12.

The internal consistency of the measurement model is typically assessed through the measurement of composite reliability. Composite reliability values exceeding 0.70 are generally deemed acceptable, while above 0.80 are often considered good. As shown in Table 12, all variables in the study exhibit strong composite reliability values, ranging between 0.85 and 0.93, which exceeds the 0.80 threshold. These results indicate a high level of internal consistency and reliability for the measurement model.

Table 12 Reliability coefficients for the measurement scales

Measurement scale	Name	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Brand Ambassador Credibility	BACR	.82	.82	.89

Brand Ambassador Expertise	BAEXP	.86	.86	.91
Brand Ambassador Trustworthiness	BATW	.90	.91	.93
Brand Ambassador Purchase Intention	BAPI	.79	.79	.88
Social Media Influencer Credibility	SICR	.74	.74	.85
Social Media Influencer Purchase Intention	SIPI	.80	.81	.88
Social Media Influencer Expertise	SIEXP	.75	.75	.86
Social Media Influencer Trustworthiness	SITW	.90	.90	.93
Purchase Intention	PI	.77	.77	.84

4.4.3 Assessing the Psychometric Properties of the Measurement Model

Three criteria were employed to develop the measurement (outer) model. These criteria included the assessment of item or indicator loadings, also referred to as factor loadings, which should exceed the threshold of 0.71. Additionally, multicollinearity among the indicators was evaluated using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistic, which should be less than 5 to ensure that the model is free from excessive collinearity. Given the large number of items measuring each construct, items with relatively low loadings were excluded from the model to enhance its robustness. The retained items are presented in Table 13. The final model, termed the posteriori model, delineates the indicators and latent constructs along with their respective loadings. All items, known as indicators, demonstrated significant loadings ($p < .001$), with values exceeding 0.71 (Hair et al., 2007).

4.4.4 Factor loadings of indicators

Table 13 Factor loadings of indicators retained for the conceptual model

Construct	Item	Factor loadings	Item description
BACR	BACR_3	.86	
	BACR_4	.87	
	BACR_5	.85	
BAEXP	BAEXP_1	.88	
	BAEXP_2	.89	
	BAEXP_3	.87	
BAPI	BAPI_5	.80	
	BAPI_8	.86	
	BAPI_9	.85	
BATW	BATW_1	.81	
	BATW_2	.93	
	BATW_3	.89	
	BATW_4	.88	
SICR	SICR_3	.78	
	SICR_4	.86	
	SICR_5	.78	
SIEXP	SIEXP_1	.75	
	SIEXP_2	.83	
	SIEXP_3	.86	
SIPI	SIPI_5	.86	
	SIPI_8	.84	
	SIPI_9	.84	
SITW	SITW_1	.84	
	SITW_2	.87	
	SITW_3	.87	
	SITW_4	.90	

4.5 Validity measurement

4.5.1 Multicollinearity (VIF)

The following section presents the multicollinearity analysis of the indicators and latent constructs. Multicollinearity is a statistical phenomenon that occurs when predictor variables in a regression model are highly correlated, making it difficult to isolate their individual effects on the dependent variable. One established method for evaluating multicollinearity is by examining the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). A VIF score exceeding 10 is typically considered elevated, indicating potential multicollinearity concerns (Alin, 2010).

4.5.1.1 Multicollinearity of indicators

Table 14 Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF) for indicators

Indicator	VIF
BACR_3	1.82
BACR_4	1.97
BACR_5	1.78
BAEXP_1	2.04
BAEXP_2	2.26
BAEXP_3	2.14
BAPI_5	1.55
BAPI_5	1.44
BAPI_8	2.08
BAPI_8	1.90
BAPI_9	1.98
BAPI_9	1.87
BATW_1	2.06
BATW_2	3.90
BATW_3	3.88
BATW_4	3.29
SICR_3	1.40
SICR_4	1.73
SICR_5	1.44

SIEXP_1	1.29
SIEXP_2	1.72
SIEXP_3	1.77
SIPI_5	1.80
SIPI_5	1.93
SIPI_8	1.71
SIPI_8	1.91
SIPI_9	1.81
SIPI_9	1.69
SITW_1	2.15
SITW_2	2.80
SITW_3	2.91
SITW_4	2.82

4.5.1.2 Multicollinearity of Latent Constructs

Table 15

Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF) for latent constructs

Latent constructs	VIF
BACR -> BAPI	1.95
BAEXP -> BAPI	2.57
BAPI -> PI	1.10
BATW -> BAPI	2.12
SICR -> SIPI	1.68
SIEXP -> SIPI	2.10
SIPI -> PI	1.10
SITW -> SIPI	1.73

4.5.1.3 Convergent validity

Convergent validity is assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures the extent to which a construct explains the variance of its indicators. AVE represents the percentage of variance captured by the construct's indicators and should exceed the threshold of 0.50 to be considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2020).

4.5.1.4 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

AVE values above 0.50 are generally considered acceptable for establishing convergent validity. In this study, all the AVE values exceed 0.66, indicating a high level of convergent validity for each construct.

Table 16 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BACR	.74
BAEXP	.78
BAPI	.70
BATW	.77
SICR	.66
SIEXP	.66
SIPI	.72
SITW	.76

4.5.2 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity assesses the degree of distinction between constructs. It is typically evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and cross-loadings. HTMT values below 0.85 indicate satisfactory discriminant validity. Additionally, indicators should exhibit stronger correlations with their respective construct than with other constructs.

4.5.3 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

The results presented in Table 17 show that most HTMT values fall below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity for the respective construct pairs. Notably, the HTMT values along the diagonal are equal to, which signifies the average correlation within constructs.

Table 17 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values

	BACR	BAEXP	BAPI	BATW	SICR	SIEXP	SIPI
BACR							
BAEXP	.81						
BAPI	.84	.62					
BATW	.68	.81	.72				
SICR	.34	.33	.35	.30			
SIEXP	.25	.38	.15	.37	.84		
SIPI	.21	.26	.38	.28	.75	.74	
SITW	.23	.29	.19	.41	.61	.76	.68

4.5.3.1 Cross-loadings

Cross-loadings assess the degree to which indicators of a particular latent variable load on other latent variables within a given measurement model. The values in the matrix indicate the potency of the relationships between each indicator and the latent variables (Kock, 2014). Below is an in-depth analysis of the cross-loadings.

As shown in Table 18, most indicators demonstrate strong discriminant validity by exhibiting high loadings on their respective latent variables. This is ideal, as each indicator typically shows its highest loading on the corresponding latent variable.

In the context of brand ambassadors and social media influencers, the results indicate that Brand Ambassador Credibility (BACR) is primarily influenced by BACR_4, with a loading of 0.87. Similarly, Brand Ambassador Expertise (BAEXP) is mainly influenced by BAEXP_2, with a loading of 0.89. Furthermore, Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) is primarily influenced by BAPI_5, with a loading of 0.80, while Brand Ambassador Trustworthiness (BATW) is influenced by BATW_2, with a loading of 0.93.

Likewise, Social Media Influencer Credibility (SICR) is primarily influenced by SICR_4, with a loading of 0.86, while Social Media Influencer Expertise (SIEXP) is mainly influenced by SIEXP_3, with a loading of 0.86. Additionally, Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) is primarily influenced by SIPI_5, with a loading of 0.86, and Social Media Influencer Trustworthiness (SITW) is predominantly influenced by SITW_4, with a loading of 0.90.

Table 18 Cross-loadings

	BACR	BAEXP	BAPI	BATW	SICR	SIEXP	SIPI	SITW
BACR_3	.86	.46	.59	.40	.22	.13	.14	.07
BACR_4	.87	.66	.56	.54	.28	.16	.13	.21
BACR_5	.85	.64	.60	.58	.17	.20	.16	.22
BAEXP_1	.66	.88	.48	.56	.24	.23	.15	.13
BAEXP_2	.58	.89	.45	.68	.21	.23	.18	.27
BAEXP_3	.55	.87	.43	.65	.25	.33	.25	.29
BAPI_5	.66	.54	.80	.52	.37	.19	.27	.20
BAPI_8	.52	.40	.86	.55	.17	.01	.27	.09
BAPI_9	.52	.34	.85	.47	.11	.01	.23	.12
BATW_1	.63	.72	.55	.81	.25	.28	.21	.27
BATW_2	.56	.68	.59	.93	.23	.24	.21	.29
BATW_3	.41	.56	.49	.89	.21	.28	.24	.38
BATW_4	.46	.53	.51	.88	.18	.26	.17	.35
SICR_3	.21	.16	.26	.10	.78	.42	.46	.29
SICR_4	.27	.26	.25	.28	.86	.59	.49	.54
SICR_5	.16	.21	.13	.22	.78	.49	.46	.39
SIEXP_1	.18	.23	.08	.23	.54	.75	.46	.40
SIEXP_2	.23	.32	.11	.33	.49	.83	.44	.51
SIEXP_3	.07	.18	.03	.19	.49	.86	.52	.63
SIPI_5	.15	.15	.21	.15	.63	.56	.86	.52
SIPI_8	.18	.26	.32	.24	.43	.39	.84	.42
SIPI_9	.08	.14	.25	.21	.40	.51	.84	.53
SITW_1	.19	.25	.22	.32	.51	.66	.53	.84
SITW_2	.19	.19	.15	.32	.36	.54	.44	.87
SITW_3	.06	.20	.05	.28	.37	.43	.48	.87
SITW_4	.22	.24	.15	.34	.50	.57	.57	.90

4.5.3.2 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

The Fornell-Larcker criterion, proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), assesses whether a latent construct explains the variance of its indicators better than it explains the variance of other constructs. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for a specific construct (represented by the value on the diagonal) must be greater than its correlations with all other constructs in the model. As shown in Table 19, the criterion has been satisfactorily met, as evidenced by the square root of the AVE for each construct, which is higher than the correlations between that construct and other constructs in the model.

Table 19 Fornell-Larcker criterion

	BACR	BAEXP	BAPI	BATW	SICR	SIEXP	SIPI	SITW
BACR	.86							
BAEXP	.68	.88						
BAPI	.68	.51	.84					
BATW	.59	.71	.61	.88				
SICR	.26	.26	.26	.25	.81			
SIEXP	.19	.30	.09	.30	.62	.82		
SIPI	.16	.22	.31	.24	.58	.58	.85	
SITW	.19	.25	.17	.36	.51	.63	.58	.87

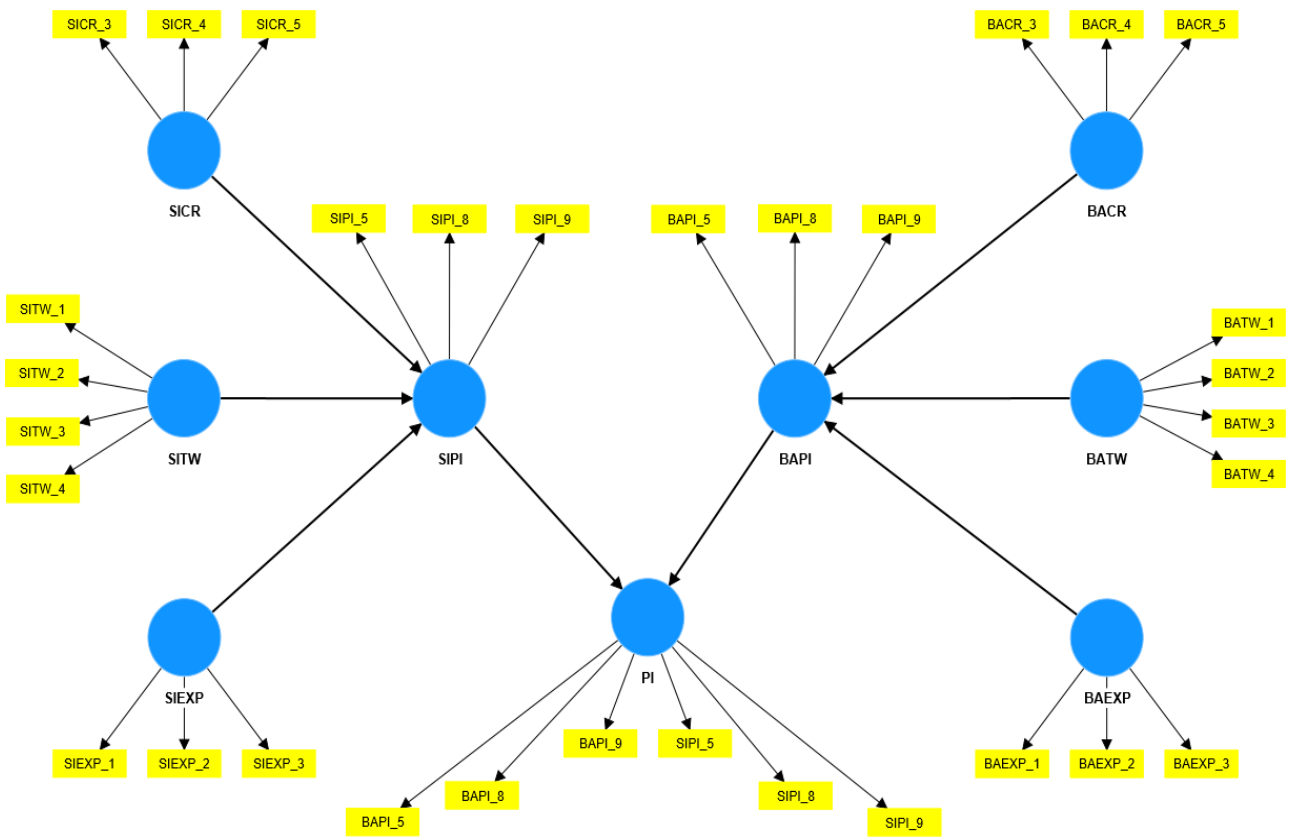


Figure 4.16 The Measurement Model (Outer Model) showing Indicators and Latent Constructs

4.6 Reliability and validity measurement (Higher Order Model)

The use of higher-order constructs in partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) has become increasingly prevalent. These constructs enable modeling at a more abstract level and facilitate the examination of lower-level subdimensions (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

In the outer model analysis, Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) were considered standalone constructs with direct relationships to other variables in the model, namely credibility, trustworthiness and expertise.

The introduction of Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) as higher-order variables refines the modeling approach compared to the previous analysis. The transition to higher-order modeling adds a hierarchical structure to the study, suggesting that these constructs influence both at the first-order level (on individual indicators) and the second-order level (on an overarching latent variable), in this case, overall purchase intention.

4.6.1 Internal Consistency Reliability (Higher Order Model)

As presented in Table 20, the reliability analysis of the higher-order model focuses on Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency and composite reliability for construct robustness. Both Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) demonstrate high composite reliability, indicating that their reliability extends beyond individual item consistency. The composite reliability values for Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) are 0.86 and 0.91, respectively. Similarly, Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) exhibits strong composite reliability, with values of 0.82 and 0.89. These results suggest that higher-order constructs maintain internal consistency and effectively capture shared variance among their first-order constructs.

Consequently, Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) reliably represent the concept of purchase intention in the context of brand ambassadors and social media influencers. The outer model analysis evaluated the overall Purchase Intention (PI) reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability measures. In comparison to other constructs, the reliability results for Purchase Intention (PI) are as follows:

The Cronbach's alpha score for overall Purchase Intention (PI) was 0.77, indicating a moderate level of internal consistency that meets the conventional reliability threshold. For alpha and rho, the composite reliability measures for overall Purchase Intention (PI) were 0.77 and 0.84, respectively. These values surpass the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, suggesting satisfactory internal consistency.

Table 20 Internal Consistency Reliability (Higher Order Model)

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
BAPI	0.85	0.86	0.91
PI	0.47	0.47	0.79
SIPI	0.81	0.82	0.89

4.7 Assessing Properties of the Higher-Order Measurement Model

This section assesses the psychometric properties of the higher-order measurement model.

4.7.1 Factor loadings of latent constructs on purchase intention

This study examines the strength and direction of the connections between latent variables, specifically the latent variable scores, and the corresponding constructs in the outer model, focusing on their impact on overall Purchase Intention (PI).

As presented in Table 21, the constructs under investigation are Brand Ambassador Credibility (BACR), Brand Ambassador Expertise (BAEXP), Brand Ambassador Trustworthiness (BATW), Social Media Influencer Credibility (SICR), Social Media Influencer Expertise (SIEXP), and Social Media Influencer Trustworthiness (SITW).

The results of the factor loadings analysis show that BACR, BAEXP, and BATW possess high factor loadings of 0.87, 0.90, and 0.88, respectively, on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention. These high factor loadings indicate that brand ambassadors' perceived credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness significantly contribute to and influence Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). Similarly, SICR, SIEXP, and SITW have high factor loadings of 0.85, 0.87, and 0.83, respectively, on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention. These factor loadings suggest that social media influencers' perceived credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness significantly contribute to Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).

Furthermore, Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention exhibit equal and high factor loadings of 0.81 on overall Purchase Intention (PI). This finding suggests that the combined influence of purchase intentions driven by brand ambassadors and social media influencers significantly contributes to the overall Purchase Intention (PI). This study's findings highlight the importance of brand ambassadors and social media influencer credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness in driving purchase intention, with celebrity brand ambassadors having a more significant overall influence.

Table 21 Factor loadings of latent constructs on second-order construct PI

Construct	Latent variables	BAPI	SIPI	PI
BAPI	LV scores - BACR	.87		
	LV scores - BAEXP	.90		
	LV scores - BATW	.88		
SIPI	LV scores - SICR		.85	
	LV scores - SIEXP		.87	
	LV scores - SITW		.83	
PI	LV scores - BAPI			.81
	LV scores - SIPI			.81

4.8 Validity and reliability of measurement

4.8.1 Multicollinearity (VIF)

4.8.1.1 Outer model multicollinearity

As presented in Table 22, most of the latent variables display VIF values in the outer model that are below 2, indicating a low to moderate level of multicollinearity. However, BAEXP, BATW, and SIEXP exhibit slightly elevated VIF values (between 2 and 3), indicating moderate multicollinearity.

Table 22 Outer model multicollinearity

	VIF
LV scores - BACR	1.95
LV scores - BAEXP	2.57
LV scores - BAPI	1.10
LV scores - BATW	2.12
LV scores - SICR	1.68
LV scores - SIEXP	2.10
LV scores - SIPI	1.10
LV scores - SITW	1.73

4.8.1.2 Inner model multicollinearity

The VIF values in Table 23 show the Variance Inflation Factor for the latent variables Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) concerning their impact on the overarching construct of overall Purchase Intention (PI).

The relationship between Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and overall Purchase Intention (PI) yields a VIF value of 1.141027. This result indicates minimal multicollinearity between BAPI and overall Purchase Intention, suggesting that the inclusion of Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) in predicting overall Purchase Intention (PI) does not significantly affect the stability of the model.

Similarly, the VIF for the relationship between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and overall Purchase Intention (PI) is also very low at 1.141027. This finding is consistent with Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and suggests minimal multicollinearity between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and overall Purchase Intention (PI). Therefore, including Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) in predicting overall Purchase Intention (PI) does not significantly contribute to multicollinearity.

Table 23 Inner model multicollinearity

	VIF
BAPI -> PI	1.141027
SIPI -> PI	1.141027

4.8.2 Convergent Validity (Higher-Order Model)

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is used to evaluate how well a construct explains the variation in its indicators, with a threshold of > 0.50 for the percentage of variance captured (Henseler et al., 2015).

4.8.2.1 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Table 24 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Higher Order Model

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BAPI	0.85	0.86	0.91	0.77
PI	0.47	0.47	0.79	0.65
SIPI	0.81	0.82	0.89	0.72

4.8.3 Discriminant validity

To ensure the validity of a research model, researchers must establish discriminant validity (Kock, 2014; Kock & Lynn, 2012). This process involves confirming that all constructs included in the model are distinct. Without such verification, there is a risk of overlap and confusion between constructs, which could undermine the accuracy and reliability of the research findings. As such, researchers must rigorously assess the distinctiveness of each construct in their models to ensure the validity and integrity of their research.

4.8.3.1 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Table 25 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Higher Order Model

Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) - Matrix			
	BAPI	PI	SIPI
BAPI			
PI	0.90		
SIPI	0.42	0.90	

4.8.3.2 Cross-loadings

Table 26 Cross-loadings Higher Order Model

	BAPI	PI	SIPI
LV scores - BACR	0.87	0.52	0.26
LV scores - BAEXP	0.90	0.45	0.32
LV scores - BAPI	0.69	0.81	0.22
LV scores - BATW	0.88	0.52	0.35
LV scores - SICR	0.29	0.53	0.85
LV scores - SIEXP	0.30	0.42	0.87
LV scores - SIPI	0.23	0.81	0.68
LV scores - SITW	0.31	0.47	0.83

In constructing the model, careful consideration was given to avoid double-counting of indicators across constructs.

Specifically, each indicator was only associated with its respective latent variable in the cross-loadings analysis. This approach ensured that the latent constructs were measured independently and did not share indicators, thereby preserving the accuracy and robustness of the measurement model.

4.8.3.3 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Table 27 Fornell-Larcker Criterion Higher Order Model

Fornell-Larcker criterion				
	BAPI	PI	SIPI	
BAPI	0.88			
PI	0.57	0.81		
SIPI	0.35	0.56	0.85	

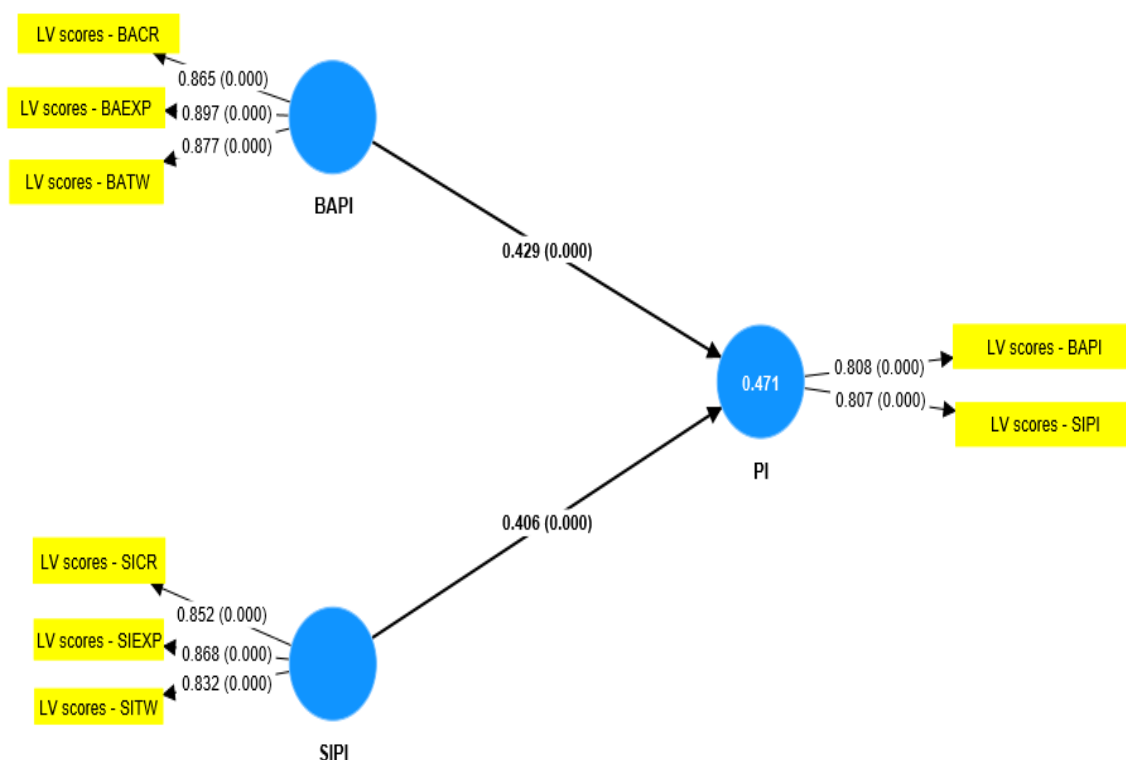


Figure 4.17 Graphical Output of Path Model for Second-Order Construct PI

Note. The path coefficients for all constructs are derived from the latent variables of their predictor constructs.

4.9 Assessing the structural model

4.9.1 Coefficient of determination (R^2) of the structural model

The adjusted R-squared (R^2) metric is a refined variant of the R^2 statistic that accounts for the number of predictors utilised in a regression model (Chin, 2009). The R-squared outcome for the model is 0.463.

4.10 Hypothesis testing

Table 28 Hypothesis Testing Results

Path Coefficient	Hypothesis	Estimate	P-Value	Result
Social Media Influencer Credibility → Purchase Intention	H1	.85	< .001	Significant and supported
Social Media Trustworthiness → Purchase Intention	H2	.83	< .001	Significant and supported
Social Media Influencer Expertise → Purchase Intention	H3	.87	< .001	Significant and supported
Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase → Intention Purchase Intention	H4	.41	< .001	Significant and supported
Brand Ambassador Credibility → Purchase Intention	H5	.87	< .001	Significant and supported
Brand Ambassador Trustworthiness → Purchase Intention	H6	.88	< .001	Significant and supported
Brand Ambassador Expertise → Purchase Intention	H7	.90	< .001	Significant and supported
Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention → Purchase Intention	H8	.43	< .001	Significant and supported

4.10.1 H1: Social media influencer credibility has a significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI)

The path coefficient between Social Media Influencer Credibility and Purchase Intention is 0.85. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.10.2 H2: Social media influencer trustworthiness has a significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI)

The path coefficient between Social Media Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention is 0.83. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.10.3 H3: Social media influencer expertise has a significant influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI)

For H3, the path coefficient between Social Media Influencer Expertise and Purchase Intention is 0.87. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.10.4 H4: Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) has a significant influence on overall Purchase Intention (PI)

For H4, the path coefficient between Social Media Influencer Purchase and Purchase Intention is 0.41. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.10.5 H5: Brand ambassador credibility has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI)

For H5, the path coefficient between Brand Ambassador Credibility and Purchase Intention is 0.87. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.10.6 H6: Brand ambassador trustworthiness has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI)

For H6, the path coefficient between Brand Ambassador Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention is 0.88. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.10.7 H7: Brand ambassador expertise has a significant influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI)

For H7, the path coefficient between Brand Ambassador Expertise and Purchase Intention is 0.90. This is the strongest relationship, and the p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.10.8 H8: Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) has a significant influence on overall Purchase Intention (PI)

For H8, the path coefficient between Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Purchase Intention is 0.43. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

4.11 Conclusion of the presentation of results

This chapter presented the statistical analysis using SPSS and Smart PLS 4, along with the results derived from the data collected from 130 respondents on how social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors influence purchase intention. As discussed, the study meets the reliability and validity requirements regarding the measurement instrument. The model demonstrated an acceptable fit, and a path modelling analysis was performed based on the hypotheses testing results. The test found that all eight hypotheses were significant and supported, with H7 showing the strongest relationship and H4 the weakest relationship. The next chapter will further interpret and discuss these results.

5 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The results and findings of the research on the influence of social media influencers and brand ambassadors on purchase intention are discussed in this chapter, alongside the eight hypotheses tested. These hypotheses examined the relationships between Social Media Influencer Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Expertise, as well as Brand Ambassador Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Expertise, and their respective influences on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). The relationship between both SIPI and BAPI with overall purchase intention was also explored.

The results and findings were compiled by evaluating and analysing information gathered from the online survey. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to assess the data, which included responses from individuals who were active users of Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, aged 18-42, and consumers of cosmetic brands. Respondents who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the analysis, resulting in a final sample of 130 participants.

The discussion is presented in alignment with the research objectives and takes into account supporting literature from prior studies to provide a comprehensive overview of the results.

5.2 Demographic results discussion

The analysis of the respondents' birth year age ranges provides valuable insights into the demographic composition of the research sample, which includes both millennials and Generation Z cohorts. A majority of the respondents (76.15%) fall within the millennial group, born between 1981 and 1996. This overrepresentation of millennials highlights the relevance of the study to this cohort, who are known for being early adopters of digital technologies and for influencing market trends. The remaining 23.65% of respondents belong to Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012. While Generation Z represents a smaller proportion of the sample, their inclusion is essential, as they contribute unique perspectives shaped by their status as digital natives. Their strong affinity for technology and social media platforms adds significant value to the study's findings.

The age distribution of respondents shows that 52% fall within the 25-34 age group, representing a highly engaged and economically active segment of the population. Another 32% of participants are aged between 35-42, adding maturity and diversity to the sample, while the remaining 16% are from the 18-24 age group. This diverse age range allows for a comprehensive examination of consumer behaviour across different life stages. The findings provide meaningful insights into how both social media influencers and brand ambassadors impact the purchase intentions of individuals at varying stages of their lives.

Female respondents make up the majority of the sample at 92%, which aligns with the general trend in the cosmetics industry, where women are the predominant users of cosmetic brands. However, the inclusion of male respondents, who represent 8% of the sample, is important. This indicates a growing interest in male grooming, skincare, and cosmetics, highlighting an evolving market that increasingly includes men as active consumers in the beauty and cosmetics industry. The gender distribution in this study helps capture these shifting dynamics, offering a broader understanding of consumer behaviour across genders.

This emerging trend enables cosmetic brands to tap into niche market segments and broaden their customer base. Embracing diverse gender identities allows brands to leverage inclusive marketing strategies that resonate with evolving consumer identities. By tailoring their marketing efforts to encompass a broad spectrum of gender expressions, brands can effectively penetrate new markets and position themselves as progressive and socially responsible entities.

In terms of racial composition, the survey respondents comprised 51% African, 18% Coloured, 12% Indian, 18% White, and 2% Asian. This diversity reflects the varying beauty needs of different consumers and emphasizes the necessity for developing marketing strategies that resonate with audiences from diverse racial backgrounds.

Regarding social media platform preferences, Facebook emerged as the least preferred platform among respondents. This may be attributed to a demographic shift driven by millennials and Generation Z. Additionally, Facebook's text-centric and longer-form content may not align with contemporary users' dynamic and visually-oriented preferences. TikTok, while the second least preferred platform, faces challenges due to data privacy and security concerns, which may contribute to users' hesitancy. Nevertheless, TikTok's growing popularity, especially among younger audiences, presents opportunities for innovative and visually compelling cosmetic brand campaigns. Instagram remains the most preferred platform, with high preference rates, highlighting its popularity and effectiveness for influencer marketing and engaging visual content.

5.3 Hypotheses discussion

5.3.1 Social media influencer credibility and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI)

This study revealed that celebrity brand ambassadors are perceived as more reliable and influential in shaping consumer purchase decisions compared to social media influencers. Findings indicate that millennial and Generation Z consumers attribute higher levels of credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, and influence on purchase intention to celebrity brand ambassadors. These insights provide practical guidance for marketers and businesses aiming to optimise the effectiveness of their influencer and celebrity brand ambassador marketing strategies.

The path coefficient of H1 was 0.85, indicating a highly significant relationship between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and social media influencer credibility. The p-value associated with this coefficient was less than 0.001, supporting the hypothesis. This result aligns with the conceptual foundation of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention, which posits that the perceived credibility of social media influencers—manifested through trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness—directly enhances consumers' purchase intentions. Consequently, a higher level of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) is associated with a stronger positive influence on consumer decision-making.

Source credibility plays a fundamental role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchase decisions. Social media influencers are considered experts in electronic word-of-mouth. Consequently, electronic word-of-mouth from influencers, as opposed to brand marketers, has been shown to be more effective, as consumers tend to perceive it as more credible and trustworthy (Lee & Youn, 2009).

The State of Influencer Marketing report, published by Influencer Marketing Hub (2023), highlighted that 83% of respondents expressed a positive sentiment towards influencer marketing, considering it an effective form of marketing.

Furthermore, 67% of respondents plans to increase their expenditure on influencer marketing, reflecting a growing trend of companies allocating more of their budgets to this form of marketing. These companies place value on partnering with well-known influencers and emphasize building long-term relationships with their existing influencer network. Over 60% of respondents reported plans to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Machine Learning (ML) technologies to identify influencers or build successful campaigns. Additionally, affiliate marketing is gaining traction, as influencers increasingly earn a percentage of sales generated through their campaigns. Seventy-five percent of brands reported tracking sales derived from influencer marketing efforts, and the most commonly tracked metrics include views, engagement, and conversions or sales.

The findings in this study are consistent with those in existing literature. Forbes (2016) introduced a framework identifying relatability, knowledge, helpfulness, confidence, and articulation as key characteristics to analyse YouTube advertorials for a specific cosmetic brand. A positive correlation was established between relatability and the ability to create connections, suggesting that consumers are more likely to feel connected to influencers with whom they share a perceived similarity. Similarly, Al-Nasser and Mahomed (2020) explored the effect of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intentions in Saudi Arabia, using Instagram as an evaluation platform. The results demonstrated that social media influencers significantly impact consumers' purchase decisions, particularly on Instagram.

In another study, Trivedi and Sama (2020) concluded that when marketing electronic products in an emerging market, using an expert influencer instead of an attractive celebrity can offer a strategic advantage. The study highlighted the mediating role of brand attitude and brand admiration, with a focus on comparing the effectiveness of celebrity and influencer endorsements on consumers' online purchase intentions, with brand admiration and attitude serving as critical mediators.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) explored the impact of Instagram on source credibility, consumers' buying intentions, and social identification with various types of celebrities. Their findings indicated that non-traditional celebrities—such as bloggers, YouTube personalities, and 'Instafamous' profiles—exert a more significant influence, as participants perceive them as more credible and relatable compared to traditional celebrities. The study further noted that female users consciously prefer to engage with Instagram profiles that intentionally portray positive images and provide encouraging reviews.

5.3.2 Social media influencer trustworthiness and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI)

The path coefficient for H2 was 0.83, and the p-value associated with this coefficient was less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and social media influencer trustworthiness. Thus, the hypothesis is supported. This relationship aligns with the conceptual framework of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI), as trustworthiness—being a key component of source credibility—directly contributes to enhancing consumers' purchase intentions through the increased credibility of social media influencers.

These findings are consistent with a study by Reichelt et al. (2016), which investigated trustworthiness as a determinant of followers' intention to purchase. The study's results confirmed that trustworthiness was the most important credibility dimension influencing both the utilitarian and social functions of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and its effects on attitudes toward behaviour and intentions to engage with eWOM content from influencers.

Schouten et al. (2020) found that participants identified more with social media influencers than with celebrities. Their study explored the effectiveness of celebrity and influencer endorsements in advertising, focusing on the role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit.

These results suggest that influencers may be a more practical choice for endorsement campaigns than celebrities in terms of increasing consumer identification and trust. Lou and Yuan (2019) proposed a social media influencer value model encompassing advertising value and source credibility. The informative value of content generated by influencers, combined with their trustworthiness, attractiveness, and relatability to their followers, all contribute positively to followers' trust in the influencers' branded posts. This trust can ultimately translate into increased brand awareness and purchase intentions, reinforcing the concept of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).

The source credibility model has been widely used by scholars to investigate the role of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise (Ayeh, 2015; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Jang et al., 2021; Tormala, 2016; Whitehead Jr, 1968). In a study by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), an analysis was conducted to establish how Instagram impacts social identification with various types of celebrities, purchase intentions, and the source's credibility. The study's results reported that celebrities influence young female Instagram users' purchasing decisions. However, non-traditional celebrities—such as bloggers, YouTubers, and "Instafamous" profiles—had a more significant influence because participants found them more credible and relatable than conventional celebrities.

Gupta et al. (2020) examined the role of 'instafamous celebrities', popular social media influencers on Instagram. The research findings suggest that instafamous celebrities can build trustworthy relationships with their followers, resulting in high engagement and influence on purchase decisions. These buying decisions are primarily based on the influencer's direct recommendations and tagged suggestions. The study demonstrates that consumers increasingly rely on bloggers and reviews before making purchasing decisions. Instafamous celebrities, are perceived to be more honest and transparent than traditional celebrities, which enhances their credibility and trustworthiness.

5.3.3 Social media influencer expertise and purchase intention

For H3, the path coefficient was 0.87, and the p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship between social media influencer expertise and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI). Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

Expertise refers to the influencer's knowledge and proficiency on a topic. Nafees et al. (2021) investigated social media influencer power and its influence on consumer brand attitudes, with perceived social media influencer credibility as a mediating role. The study explored how social media influencers can contribute to building positive brand attitudes among consumers, ultimately increasing product acceptance and business performance. The research was grounded in the naïve theory, consumer socialisation theory, and market signaling theory. The study's results showed that social media influencer power and perceived source credibility are important factors that influence consumer attitudes towards a brand.

In South Africa, social media influencers have leveraged their expertise to build credibility with their followers by showcasing their knowledge and experience in specific fields. TikTok, in particular, has emerged as a prominent platform for showcasing African social media talent globally, captivating millions of viewers with authentic and dynamic content. From comedians to dancers, musicians to makeup artists, this diverse range of entertainment resonates with audiences worldwide and continues to make a lasting impression (TikTok Africa, 2023a).

The TikTok African All Stars profiles prominent creators from across the continent, showcasing how they have used the platform to grow their following in different domains and industries. In the beauty sector, South African creator Kayla Kim Kay built a following of over 2.5 million and started a successful hair care brand called *Afrocurl* for all natural hair types. By leveraging TikTok as a platform, she has reached a broad audience by sharing diverse content driven by creative expression (TikTok Africa, 2023b).

Another prominent TikTok influencer is Mbali Nhlapo, who gained popularity with over 3.7 million followers by sharing viral cleaning tips and tricks under the hashtag #Cleantok. She also owns *Sisters@work*, a cleaning and hygiene service in South Africa (TikTok Africa, 2023). In the mental health domain, South African Counselling Psychologist and mental health activist Sanam Naran gained over 13 million views by creating awareness about mental health issues and motivating people. Sanam's engaging and informative content has made her a reliable source of guidance and inspiration for her followers (TikTok Africa, 2023c).

5.3.4 Social media influencer-driven purchase intention and overall purchase intention

For H4, the path coefficient was 0.41, and the p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a significant relationship between social media influencer purchase intention and overall purchase Intention. Thus, the hypothesis is supported. The positive correlation between Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and overall purchase intention (PI) reinforces the importance of considering the impact of influencer endorsements in marketing strategies.

The results of this study are consistent with findings from other research (Al-Nasser & Mahomed, 2020; Hwa, 2017; Masuda et al., 2022). Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of digital influencers in recommending brands via electronic word-of-mouth and examined whether their potential influence on followers can impact brand engagement, brand expected value, and intention to purchase recommended brands.

The results showed that the perceived influential power of digital influencers generates engagement and enhances expected value and behavioural intention towards the recommended brands. Similarly, a study by Mabkhot et al. (2022) explored the influence of social media influencers' credibility on consumers' purchase intention in Saudi Arabia. The study found a significant link between social media influencers and purchase intention, with credibility acting as a mediating variable between these two factors.

A study conducted by Taillon et al. (2020) aimed to better understand the relationship between social media influencers and their followers by investigating how influencers can effectively manage their personal brands. The study's findings noted that the influencer's attractiveness and likeability positively affect attitudes towards them, as well as word-of-mouth and purchase intentions. However, similarity only predicted word-of-mouth from followers. Additionally, the study also found that closeness plays a crucial role in moderating the effects of attractiveness and likeability. Specifically, closeness positively moderated the effect of attractiveness on purchase intentions but had a negative effect on the relationship between similarity on purchase intentions. Furthermore, closeness moderated the effect of likeability on followers' attitudes towards the influencer.

5.3.5 Brand ambassador credibility and purchase intention

The path coefficient between Brand Ambassador Credibility and Purchase Intention is 0.87. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

In the context of this study, brand ambassadors are perceived by consumers as more reliable sources of information compared to social media influencers. This higher credibility contributes to their influence on consumer purchase intention. The results suggest that when consumers view a celebrity brand ambassador as trustworthy and credible, they are more likely to be influenced in their purchasing decisions. Contrary to these findings, demonstrated that Indonesian consumers perceive non-celebrity endorsers as more trustworthy and expert, despite viewing celebrity endorsers as more attractive. The study concluded that non-celebrity endorsers have a more substantial effect on consumer attitudes towards advertisements, brands, and purchase intentions due to the perceived credibility and trustworthiness associated with non-celebrities. These contrasting results highlight the importance of considering contextual factors, such as cultural differences, when assessing the influence of brand ambassadors and social media influencers on purchase intentions.

These findings vary from those reported by Schimmelpfennig and Hunt (2020), who presented further empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. The study suggested that advertisements featuring celebrities consistently generate more favourable consumer responses compared to those with non-celebrity endorsers, due to the perception of celebrities as more competent and credible sources of information. This perception is largely attributed to celebrities' demonstrated accomplishments and expertise within the public sphere, which serve to enhance their credibility as endorsers (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Ohanian, 1990). While existing research on source credibility yields varying results, there is a general consensus that endorsers with high credibility are more persuasive and influential in particular advertising contexts (Atkin & Block, 1983; Chao et al., 2005; Goldsmith et al., 2000)

Vien et al. (2017) further examined the role of celebrity endorsements in shaping brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The research focused on the influence of endorser credibility, likeability, brand image, and brand credibility on these outcomes. The authors concluded that brand credibility was more influential in shaping brand attitudes than endorser credibility. In terms of purchase intention, endorser credibility, brand credibility, and endorser likeability were ranked in decreasing order of importance, suggesting that the credibility of the endorser remains a critical factor in purchase decisions.

Apejaye (2013) investigated the impact of celebrity-endorsed advertisements on students' purchase intentions, concluding that celebrity endorsements significantly influence students' purchasing decisions. The study recommends employing a strategic combination of elements when designing both celebrity-endorsed and non-celebrity-endorsed advertisements to achieve the desired outcome. It is crucial to rigorously evaluate a celebrity's public image prior to product endorsement to minimise the risk of negative associations that could potentially harm the brand's reputation. Singh and Banerjee (2018) demonstrated that celebrity credibility significantly influences consumers' attitudes towards both the brand and the advertisement. Furthermore, when considering purchase intention, both brand attitude and advertisement attitude—when built on celebrity credibility—exert a positive influence.

5.3.6 Brand ambassador trustworthiness and purchase intention

The path coefficient between brand ambassador trustworthiness and purchase intention is 0.88. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported. This study's results align with those of previous research on the impact of trustworthiness on consumer behaviour. For instance, Singh et al. (2021) confirmed that celebrity endorsement is an effective marketing tool for driving consumer purchase intention via digital media platforms. The study also highlighted that the indirect effect of celebrity endorsement on purchase intention remains significant when digital marketing media serves as a mediating variable.

In the context of advertising, trustworthiness refers to the honesty, integrity, and believability of a celebrity endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Similarly, Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined trust as the confidence one has in the reliability and integrity of an exchange partner. These definitions collectively suggest that trustworthiness represents the confidence consumers place in the reliability and integrity of a given source. Advertisers should thus prioritise celebrity trustworthiness as a key factor for effective endorsement strategies.

The results of this study further indicate that trustworthiness-related factors were higher for brand ambassadors than for social media influencers, suggesting that consumers perceive brand ambassadors as more dependable sources of information. This finding is consistent with the premise of Osei-Frimpong et al. (2019) who investigated the effects of celebrity endorsements on consumer purchase intentions in emerging markets. Their study found that celebrities exhibiting high levels of attractiveness, trustworthiness, and familiarity positively influenced consumers' perceptions of product quality, purchase intentions, and brand loyalty.

Hussain et al. (2020) utilised signalling theory to investigate the impact of celebrity trust on advertising credibility, brand credibility, and corporate credibility, while considering various moderating variables such as age, gender, and ethnicity. The findings revealed that celebrity trust positively influences both advertising and brand credibility.

Although ethnicity was found to have a significant effect, age and gender did not yield notable impacts. The study substantiated the conclusions of prior research, which have consistently demonstrated that the three dimensions of credibility—trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness—positively influence consumer buying behaviour and recall rates (Bekk & Spörrle, 2010; Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994; Erdogan et al., 2001; Freiden, 1984).

Among these dimensions, celebrity trustworthiness is regarded as the most critical factor in enhancing consumer confidence in both the brand and the company. Firman et al. (2021) investigated the relationships between celebrity endorsements and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on consumer purchasing intentions. The study analysed the indirect influence of celebrity endorsements and e-WOM, with trust as the mediating variable for purchase intentions. Results indicated that trust variables mediated the positive influence of celebrity endorsement and e-WOM on consumer confidence and purchasing intentions.

5.3.7 Brand ambassador expertise and purchase intention

The path coefficient between brand ambassador expertise and purchase intention is 0.90; representing the strongest relationship among all hypotheses tested. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

The findings of this study suggest that brand ambassadors are highly regarded for their expertise, positioning them as trusted sources of information for millennial and Generation Z consumers of cosmetic brands. Consumers are more likely to make a purchase when information is presented by a source perceived as reliable and knowledgeable. These results align with existing literature and previous studies in the field.

Herron (1996) posited that the quality of arguments presented by a source only influences persuasion if the source is perceived to have high expertise. In contrast, Chebat et al. (1988) found that low-expertise sources can be more persuasive than high-expertise sources if the audience already holds a positive initial opinion of the subject. Their study examined the interactive effects of four cognitive variables—perceived expertise of the source, recipients' initial attitudes, number of arguments, and message-sidedness—on attitude change.

The results of the study by Chebat et al. (1988) showed that initial attitudes positively and significantly impacted attitude change. The study also identified three significant compensatory effects among the independent variables on attitude change. Specifically, two-sided messages with fewer arguments were more persuasive, while one-sided messages were more persuasive when accompanied by a larger number of arguments. Additionally, high expertise compensated for a low number of arguments, and vice versa. Higher expertise proved more effective in persuading unfavourable recipients, while low expertise was more persuasive than high expertise among initially opposed recipients when the message was one-sided and contained numerous arguments, thereby confirming the cognitive response theory.

Homer and Kahle (1990) explored the interactive role of source expertise, timing of source identification, and involvement in an experiment on advertising effectiveness. Their findings suggest that source expertise information was processed more as a central persuasion cue rather than as peripheral information. The study concluded that a high-expertise source is more effective than a low-expertise source in high-involvement situations, but less effective in low-involvement contexts.

Silvera and Austad (2004) examined whether consumers believe that celebrity endorsers genuinely like the products they promote. Their research presented a model that used the endorser's beliefs and other characteristics to predict attitudes towards the endorsed product. In two experiments, participants were given written endorsement advertisements and asked to evaluate the extent to which they believed the endorser genuinely liked the advertised product.

Participants also rated the endorser's attractiveness, perceived similarity to themselves, and knowledge of the product, as well as their attitudes towards the advertisement, the endorser, and the product. The resulting model demonstrated that attitudes towards the product were predicted by the belief that the endorser genuinely liked the product, alongside attitudes towards the endorser.

5.3.8 Brand ambassador-driven purchase intention and overall purchase intention

The path coefficient between Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and overall purchase intention is 0.43. The p-value associated with this coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant relationship. Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

Integrating Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) as a variable within the higher-order model validates that brand ambassadors exert a more significant influence on consumers' overall purchase intentions compared to Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).

Celebrities are widely recognised as influential brand ambassadors who can influence consumers' intention to purchase. This study's results align with previous research demonstrating that celebrity endorsements are a highly effective marketing tool across various product categories and industries. Several studies have reported that when a product or service is not endorsed by a celebrity, consumers tend to focus more on the brand and its intrinsic features. Additionally, advertisers often rely on celebrities for marketing campaigns due to their extensive appeal, which can enhance brand recognition and evaluation while shaping consumers' perceptions of the brand (Amos et al., 2008; Dissanayake et al., 2017; Seno & Lukas, 2007; Tzoumaka et al., 2016).

While celebrities may endorse products or brands primarily for commercial reasons, such as financial compensation, consumers tend to attribute purer motives to these endorsements. By associating their name with a product or brand, celebrities are often perceived as genuinely liking the product, rather than being driven solely by financial gain (Atkin & Block, 1983).

5.4 Summary

In summary, the results supported the hypotheses related to Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI), with Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) demonstrating stronger associations overall.

Specifically, the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of brand ambassadors exhibited strong relationships with overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands, with brand ambassador expertise showing the strongest association. In contrast, the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention, while present, was less pronounced, particularly in terms of expertise.

The research findings were discussed in light of prior studies, theoretical frameworks from the literature, and emerging trends in the influencer marketing domain, particularly with respect to millennial and Generation Z consumers. Social media platform usage, particularly Instagram, also demonstrated a notable relationship with influencer-driven purchase intention. The following chapter will conclude the overall research report, synthesising key findings and implications.

6 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The theoretical findings of this study significantly contribute to the existing body of research, literature, and knowledge in the field of influencer marketing by addressing the three sub-problems. The first sub-problem explored the significant influence of social media influencers' perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers. The results confirmed that social media influencers have a notable impact on shaping consumer decisions among millennial and Generation Z consumers, though this impact was not as strong as that of brand ambassadors.

Among the three key factors—credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise—trustworthiness emerged as the most significant predictor of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers. Influencers who are perceived as authentic and relatable build stronger trust with their followers, resulting in higher purchase intention. Expertise, though still impactful, was less influential than trustworthiness. This suggests that while consumers value the knowledge and expertise of influencers, the perceived authenticity and sincerity of the influencer play a larger role in driving Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

This finding reinforces the application of Source Credibility Theory, which posits that source credibility—encompassing expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—significantly influences how messages are perceived and accepted by consumers, particularly among millennial and Generation Z consumers. For social media influencers, credibility is imperative in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions regarding the cosmetic brands they promote. Consumers expect influencers to provide genuine feedback and reviews about cosmetic products, making authenticity a critical component of credibility. Influencers perceived as trustworthy can build positive consumer attitudes, establish trust, and ultimately influence purchase decisions among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

Additionally, social media influencers' expertise helps build a connection and proximity with consumers, as information from trusted sources who share similar traits or interests—such as professional makeup artists or self-taught makeup enthusiasts—enhances credibility. This study confirms that Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) significantly influences overall purchase intention among millennial and Generation Z consumers due to influencers' relatability and their ability to connect authentically with their followers.

The second sub-problem investigated the influence of celebrity brand ambassadors' credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers. The results showed that all three factors—credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise—significantly influenced Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers. However, expertise was the strongest predictor, with brand ambassadors being perceived as highly knowledgeable in their field. The strong association between expertise and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) reinforces the notion that consumers regard brand ambassadors as authoritative figures whose endorsements are based on thorough product knowledge.

This perception of expertise, combined with the ambassadors' public profiles, strengthens their ability to drive purchase intention more effectively than social media influencers among millennial and Generation Z consumers. The higher influence of Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) suggests that consumers among millennial and Generation Z consumers are more likely to engage with brands endorsed by celebrities due to their perceived trustworthiness and expertise, particularly when considering high-involvement products such as beauty and cosmetic brands.

The outcomes of this study further align with the Source Credibility Theory, which asserts that messages from credible and knowledgeable sources are more persuasive and lead to higher consumer acceptance. The results show that celebrity brand ambassadors, in particular, hold a stronger position as endorsers when compared to social media influencers.

Their established public profiles, perceived expertise, and trustworthiness play a pivotal role in driving purchase intentions among millennial and Generation Z consumers. This aligns with the overarching finding of the study, which suggests that consumers view celebrity brand ambassadors as more reliable and knowledgeable, especially in the context of high-involvement products like beauty and cosmetics.

The stronger influence of celebrity brand ambassadors among millennial and Generation Z consumers can be attributed to their perceived authority and recognizability, as they are often viewed as aspirational figures by consumers. The differentiation between celebrities and social media influencers is particularly relevant in established communication models such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). According to this model, consumers processing high-involvement products are more likely to be persuaded by credible, authoritative sources, reinforcing the idea that celebrity endorsements resonate more strongly with consumers in this product category. Therefore, leveraging celebrity endorsements could be a more effective strategy for cosmetic brands seeking to build trust and influence purchase decisions among millennial and Generation Z consumers.

The third sub-problem compared the influence of Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) on overall purchase intention among millennial and Generation Z consumers. The results indicated that Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) had a stronger impact on overall purchase intention compared to Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).

The greater influence of Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) among millennial and Generation Z consumers can be attributed to the public recognition and authority associated with celebrity brand ambassadors. Consumers tend to perceive these figures as more credible and knowledgeable, particularly when endorsing high-involvement products like cosmetics. Although Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) also contributed to overall purchase intention, its influence was less significant, especially in terms of expertise, where social media influencers were seen as less authoritative compared to brand ambassadors.

This finding supports the argument that while social media influencers play a role in consumer decision-making, celebrity brand ambassadors act as more authoritative and credible sources among millennial and Generation Z consumers. Theoretical implications suggest that the Source Credibility Theory could be expanded to differentiate between types of endorsers and their specific impacts on consumer behaviour.

Additionally, these findings have strategic importance for marketers, indicating that brand ambassador initiatives could have a more substantial effect on consumer purchasing decisions among millennial and Generation Z consumers than relying solely on social media influencers.

The study demonstrated that all eight tested hypotheses were supported, confirming significant relationships between the variables. The findings align with established frameworks such as the Source Credibility Theory, which posits that consumers are more likely to act on recommendations from credible and trustworthy sources. The perceived credibility of celebrity brand ambassadors plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer trust among millennial and Generation Z consumers. As public figures, ambassadors are seen as authentic endorsers, increasing the likelihood of influencing purchase decisions among millennial and Generation Z consumers. This reinforces the argument that a communicator's credibility directly impacts the acceptance of their message.

6.2 Conclusion of the study

6.2.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical findings of this study contribute to both existing and emerging research on how social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors influence consumer purchase intentions in the South African context.

Specifically, the study adds to the Source Credibility Theory by examining how credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of social media influencers and brand ambassadors directly influence Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) and Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). These constructs significantly influence overall consumer purchase intention, particularly among millennial and Generation Z consumers in the beauty and cosmetics industry.

The study expands on current influencer marketing research by highlighting the stronger impact of Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) compared to Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI), demonstrating that celebrity brand ambassadors are perceived as more credible and influential in driving consumer decisions.

These findings provide valuable insights for academia and practitioners on how different types of endorsers can shape consumer behaviour, and they reinforce the importance of credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise as key factors in the effectiveness of both influencers and brand ambassadors in driving purchase intentions.

6.2.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this study have several implications for marketers and organisations. Although the research focused on the cosmetics industry, the results are applicable across various sectors. To ensure successful social media influencer collaborations, brands should prioritise collaborating with influencers and endorsers who possess established credibility.

Selecting influencers based on their perceived trustworthiness and authenticity aligns with consumer preferences and enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. Genuine and transparent partnerships can strengthen both brand and influencer credibility.

Influencers with strong credibility have the potential to build lasting relationships with their audience, creating positive perceptions of the brand among consumers. Social commerce presents a significant opportunity for both consumers and brands. However, achieving success in social commerce requires creators, resellers, and brands to meet consumers where they are, rather than expecting them to adapt to traditional brand strategies. This involves collaborating within a dynamic ecosystem of platforms, marketplaces, social media, and influencers to exchange data, insights, and capabilities, thereby providing the most effective incentives and optimal consumer experiences throughout a unified digital marketplace.

Genuine endorsements of cosmetic products by influencers foster trust and credibility in the influencer-brand relationship, which has strategic implications for brands seeking to improve their engagement with consumers. By integrating influencers' experiences and preferences into marketing campaigns, brands can create more relatable and compelling narratives that resonate with the aspirations of millennial and Generation Z consumers.

The emergence of brand ambassadors as more expert figures has further strategic implications, indicating that brand ambassadorship programs may have a greater influence on consumer purchasing decisions compared to relying solely on social media influencers. To effectively position endorsers, brands must carefully select individuals whose personal brand and values align with the brand's core identity.

By ensuring that endorsers authentically represent the brand's message, companies can create stronger connections with their target audience and build trust through credible and consistent endorsements.

Endorsers with specialised knowledge can play a pivotal role in creating educational and aspirational content. This content not only enhances consumer understanding of cosmetic products but also fosters a sense of trust.

Consumers value credible and valuable information, and endorsers can serve as educational resources, thus elevating the brand's status and strengthening its position in the market.

6.3 Recommendations

The recommendations derived from the study's findings offer strategic insights for enhancing the effectiveness of social media influencer and celebrity brand ambassador marketing within the cosmetics industry, particularly when engaging millennial and Generation Z consumers. Given that the study identified Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) as a stronger predictor of overall purchase intention compared to Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI), brands should prioritise their marketing strategies around endorsers with high credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise.

6.3.1 Endorsers' credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise

The results of this study demonstrate the critical role that endorsers' credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise play in shaping consumer purchase intention in the cosmetics industry.

Both Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) and Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) were found to significantly influence consumer behaviour, with Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) having stronger influence.

Brands should carefully select endorsers—whether they are celebrity brand ambassadors or social media influencers—who align with their core values and have a proven track record of credibility.

Expertise, in particular, adds considerable value to the endorsement, as consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from individuals who are perceived as knowledgeable and skilled in their field. This alignment ensures that the endorser is seen not only as a credible figure but also as a trusted source of valuable information.

Furthermore, maintaining the endorser's trustworthiness is crucial. Any association with negative publicity can compromise the endorser's credibility, which, in turn, can damage the brand's reputation. To mitigate such risks, brands should continually monitor their endorsers' public image and ensure that they represent the brand's identity authentically.

Enhancing credibility through transparent and authentic marketing campaigns, such as sharing behind-the-scenes content, personal testimonials, and educational initiatives, can reinforce the endorser's authenticity and strengthen their connection with consumers. By focusing on endorsers who are credible, trustworthy, and possess the expertise that resonates with the target audience, brands can effectively enhance the impact of their marketing efforts and drive higher consumer engagement and purchase intention.

6.3.2 Strategic use of brand ambassadors

The study highlights the significance of brand ambassadors in driving purchase intention, especially in the context of high-involvement products like cosmetics. Cosmetics can be considered high-involvement products, particularly for consumers who are highly invested in personal appearance, skincare, and beauty routines.

High-involvement products typically require significant consideration before purchase, as they often have a perceived impact on personal well-being, image, or health. For many consumers, especially in the millennial and Generation Z segments, factors such as brand reputation, product quality, ingredients, and long-term skin or health effects are important considerations. This often leads to more research and deliberation before making a purchase.

Brand ambassadors should be chosen not just for their popularity but for their alignment with the brand's core identity and their expertise in the relevant product categories. Ambassadors who can provide educational content related to beauty, skincare, or cosmetic techniques offer added value to consumers and help elevate the brand's positioning.

Moreover, ambassadors with specialised knowledge in their field are more likely to generate consumer trust and contribute to creating aspirational content that resonates with millennial and Generation Z audiences.

To maintain the effectiveness of these partnerships, brands must ensure that ambassadors continuously reflect the brand's values and present an authentic image. Investing in ongoing credibility-building strategies, such as involving brand ambassadors in product development or inviting them to share personal experiences with the product, can further strengthen their role in influencing consumer decisions.

6.3.3 Maximising social media influencer partnerships

Although Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) was found to have a stronger influence on overall purchase intention, Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) also plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly among younger audiences who rely heavily on social media for purchasing decisions. To optimise their impact, brands should focus on collaborating with influencers who demonstrate credibility and authenticity.

Influencers who are transparent about their product experiences and engage meaningfully with their audience are more likely to build lasting relationships that positively influence consumer perception of the brand.

Brands should prioritise influencers whose followers align with the target demographic and who are skilled at creating content that showcases product benefits in relatable and engaging ways. Additionally, brands should explore innovative ways of integrating influencers into their marketing strategies, such as leveraging live events, tutorials, or user-generated content to maximise reach and engagement.

6.3.4 Enhancing brand-endorser alignment

To ensure the long-term success of marketing campaigns involving endorsers, brands must prioritise alignment between the endorser's personal values, expertise, and public image with the brand's core values.

Endorsers whose image and messaging align closely with the brand create a more authentic and seamless connection with the audience, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and trust.

By carefully selecting endorsers who embody the brand's ethos and who can speak authoritatively about the products, brands can significantly increase the effectiveness of their influencer marketing strategies. This alignment fosters stronger consumer-brand connections and helps position the brand as an industry leader, especially within the competitive cosmetics market.

6.4 Limitations and future research

6.4.1 Limitations of the study

This study focused on a sample of millennial and Generation Z cosmetic brand users in South Africa. While the sample provided valuable insights, the use of this specific demographic and geographic set of respondents poses limitations. The results cannot be fully generalised to the broader millennial and Generation Z consumer population across South Africa. The final sample size of 130 respondents, though reflective of this demographic, is relatively small compared to the overall size of these consumer segments in the country.

The reliance on self-reported measures collected through online questionnaires may have introduced response biases. For instance, there was no direct verification of the respondents' actual social media platform usage or their knowledge of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors. Additionally, the differing social and economic contexts of the respondents were not fully accounted for, which may have influenced their purchasing behaviour and attitudes.

Another limitation stems from the study's cross-sectional design, which makes it difficult to establish causal relationships between the variables. This method captures data at one point in time, but does not allow for the tracking of changes in consumer attitudes or behaviour over time.

A longitudinal approach could provide deeper insights into how consumers' perceptions of social media influencers and brand ambassadors evolve, particularly in relation to purchase intention.

While this study provides useful insights into the South African beauty and cosmetics market, the findings may not apply equally to other industries or consumer segments. Future studies could expand the scope by examining other high-involvement products, or by investigating consumers in different regions.

Lastly, this study employed a quantitative research method with self-administered electronic questionnaires. While this method allowed for the collection of a broad set of data, future research may benefit from employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative insights to provide a more nuanced understanding of consumer attitudes. Similarly, the study's use of the Source Credibility Theory could be expanded in future research to incorporate other theoretical frameworks, to explore additional dimensions of consumer behaviour.

6.4.2 Future research

This study focused on millennial and Generation Z cosmetic brand users in South Africa, with a relatively small sample size of 130 participants. Future research should consider employing larger sample sizes, comparative studies across different geographic regions, and a longitudinal design to provide a more comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing.

Moreover, the study did not conduct a direct comparison of how Generation Z and millennial consumers perceive the various attributes of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors, such as credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise. Future research could address this gap by examining how millennials and Generation Z differ in their evaluation of social media influencers and celebrity brand ambassadors, providing deeper insights into the unique behaviours, preferences, and engagement patterns of each group.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported measures collected through online questionnaires presents another limitation, as it may introduce response biases. Participants' self-assessment of their social media usage or familiarity with influencers may not accurately reflect their actual engagement levels. The cross-sectional design of the study further restricts the ability to establish causal relationships and track changes in consumer attitudes over time.

The scope of the variables examined was restricted to credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise, potentially overlooking other factors such as product quality, pricing strategies, and brand loyalty, which may also influence purchase intention. Expanding the range of variables in future studies would provide a more holistic view of the factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour in the cosmetics industry.

Finally, future studies could focus on a specific cosmetic category to further narrow the scope and examine the nuances within particular product lines. By incorporating these suggestions, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of influencer marketing strategies and their impact on diverse consumer segments.

6.5 Conclusion of the chapter

This chapter summarised the study's key findings and provided recommendations based on the hypotheses discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. It addressed both theoretical and practical implications for marketing strategies, offering guidance to practitioners and scholars on effectively leveraging social media influencers and brand ambassadors. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted the study's limitations and identified future research directions to address gaps in understanding how influencers and brand ambassadors affect consumer behaviour within the cosmetics industry.

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APPENDIX A: Participant information sheet



Participant information sheet

Dear Participant

My name is Helen Da Fonseca, and I am a Masters in Management (Marketing) by Research student at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I need to undertake a research project. My research project explores the role of social media influencers and brand ambassadors in influencing purchase intention toward cosmetic brands in South Africa. The target respondents for this study are millennials (people born between 1981-1996) and Generation Z (people born between 1997-2012) cosmetic brand consumers in South Africa who are active on Facebook, Instagram or TikTok.

As part of the study, I invite you to complete a short questionnaire, which will take approximately 10 minutes.

Confidentiality

Participation in this research study is completely anonymous, with no personal identification details requested. Therefore, no information can be traced back to you.

All data obtained from participants will be kept strictly confidential and only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and nobody other than the researcher will have access to them.

Participation

You have the right to withdraw at any point during the survey. If you wish to withdraw, simply close the page in your internet browser. Should you want to participate in this survey, please answer as honestly and accurately as possible.

If you have any questions during or after this research, please contact me or my research supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Da Fonseca

Email: 2142340@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Yvonne Saini

Email: Yvonne.Saini@wits.ac.za

Appendix B: Instrument



Q1 What is your age group? (Note: If you are under 18, please do not continue with the questionnaire)

- Less than 18 years
- 18-24 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-42 years
- 43 years and older

Q2 What is your birth year range?

- 1981-1996 - Millennials
- 1997-2012 - Gen Z
- 1965-1980 - Generation X
- 1946-1964 - Baby Boomers

Q3 Do you reside in South Africa?

- Yes
- No

Q4 Do you use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram or TikTok? (If you do not use social media platforms at least once a month please do not continue with the survey.)

- Yes
- No

Q5 How frequently do you typically use social media platforms?

- Several times a day
- Several times a week
- Once a day
- Once a week
- Once a month

Q6 How long have you been using social media platforms for?

- Less than six months
- 6-12 months
- 1-2 years
- 2-5 years
- 5-10 years
- More than ten years

Q7 Which device do you mainly use to access social media platforms?

- Mobile phone
- Laptop/Notebook
- Desktop/PC
- Tablet

Q8 Of the following social media platforms, which one do you prefer the most?

Facebook



Instagram



TikTok



Q9 Of the following social media platforms, which one do you prefer the least?

Facebook



Instagram



TikTok



Q10 The following two sections will feature two different campaigns. The first section features a social media influencer campaign and the second features a celebrity brand ambassador campaign.

Section 1: Social Media Influencers & Cosmetic Brands

For each statement below, please use the provided scale to indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree to "Strongly Agree"." Your honest and accurate responses are highly valued.



	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
My perceptions of cosmetic brands often change when I receive information from the social media influencers that I follow.	1	2	3	4	5
I value the opinion of the social media influencers whom I follow as if they were someone close whom I trust.	1	2	3	4	5
The social media influencers who I follow suggest helpful cosmetic products or brands to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Beauty Social media influencers that I follow know a lot about cosmetic brands.	1	2	3	4	5

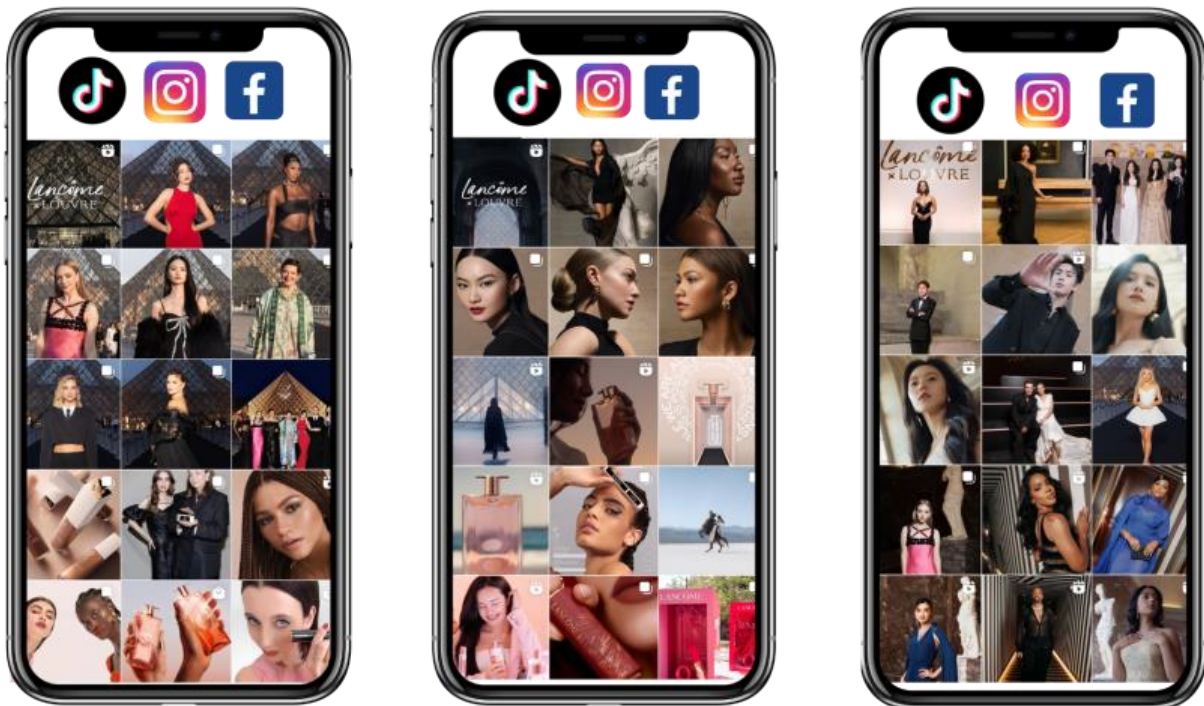
Social media influencers are competent to make assertions about cosmetic brands.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider social media beauty influencers to be experts in their field.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider social media beauty influencers to be dependable.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider social media beauty influencers to be honest.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider social media beauty influencers to be sincere.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider social media beauty influencers to be trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5

Q11 For each statement below, please use the provided scale to indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Your honest and accurate responses are highly valued.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I am likely to purchase cosmetic products that have been endorsed by social media influencers .	1	2	3	4	5
I do purchase products and services endorsed by social media influencers .	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, I'm happy with purchasing cosmetic brands advertised by social media influencers .	1	2	3	4	5

Q12 Section 2: Celebrity Brand Ambassadors and Cosmetic Brands

For each statement below, please use the provided scale to indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Your honest and accurate responses are highly valued.



	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
My perceptions of cosmetic brands often change when I receive information from the celebrity brand ambassadors that I follow.	1	2	3	4	5
I value the opinion of the celebrity brand ambassadors whom I follow as if they were someone close whom I trust.	1	2	3	4	5
The celebrity brand ambassadors who I follow suggest helpful cosmetic products or brands to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Celebrity brand ambassadors know a lot about cosmetic brands.	1	2	3	4	5
Celebrity brand ambassadors are competent to make assertions about cosmetic brands.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be experts in their field.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be dependable.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be honest.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be sincere.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider celebrity brand ambassadors to be trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5

Q13 For each statement below, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I am likely to purchase cosmetic products that have been endorsed by a celebrity brand ambassador .	1	2	3	4	5
I do purchase products and services endorsed by a celebrity brand ambassador .	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, I'm happy with purchasing cosmetic brands advertised by a celebrity brand ambassador .	1	2	3	4	5

Section 3: Demographic information

Q14 What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

Q15 What is your race?

- Black/African
- Coloured
- Indian
- Asian
- White

Q16 What is your current employment status?

- Student
- Employed full time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed looking for work
- Unemployed, not looking for work
- Self-employed
- Other _____

Q17 What is your highest level of education

- No formal education
- Primary school

- High school/Matric
- Undergraduate studies (University/College)
- Postgraduate studies (e.g. Honours, Masters, PhD.)

Q18 Which province do you reside in?

- Eastern Cape
- Free State
- Gauteng
- KwaZulu-Natal
- Limpopo
- Mpumalanga
- Northern Cape
- North West
- Western Cape

Q19 For the statistical purposes of this study, please indicate what the total monthly income of your household is.

- Less than R10 000
- R10 000 - R24 999
- R25 000 - R49 999
- R50 000 - R99 999
- R100 000 - R499 999
- Over R500 000
- Don't know/Prefer not to say

Appendix C: Consistency matrix

Sub-problem	Literature review	Hypothesis	Source of data	Type of data	Analysis
<p>To determine the relationship between social media influencer and brand ambassadors' credibility, trustworthiness, expertise and purchase intention.</p>	<p>(Ohanian, 1990) (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) (Hovland et al., 1953) (McGuire, 1985) (Miller & Baseheart, 1969) (McGinnies & Ward, 1980) (Friedman & Friedman, 1976) (Friedman et al., 1978) (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007) (Amoako et al., 2020) (Maichum et al., 2016) (Hale et al., 2002) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) (Belleau et al., 2007) (Sudha & Sheena, 2017) (Forbes, 2016) (Amos et al., 2008) (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019) (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017)</p>	<p>H1: Social Media Influencer credibility has a positive influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).</p> <p>H2: Social Media Influencer expertise has a positive influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).</p> <p>H3: Social Media Influencer trustworthiness has a positive influence on Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI).</p> <p>H4: Social Media Influencer-Driven Purchase Intention (SIPI) has a positive influence on Overall Purchase Intention.</p>	<p>Section 1- 3 of Questionnaire</p> <p>(Please refer to the questionnaire for full detail)</p>	<p>Ordinal</p>	<p>Partial Least Square (PLS) Path modeling</p>

<p>To determine the strongest relationship between the two sources and overall purchase intention toward cosmetic brands among millennial and Generation Z consumers in South Africa.</p>	<p>(Sherman, 1985) (McCracken, 1989) (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020) (Cheung & Lee, 2012) (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019) (Masuda et al., 2022) (Cheung & Lee, 2012; George, 2004; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Kumar, 2011; Masuda et al., 2022; Ohanian, 1990; Shimul et al., 2022)</p>	<p>H5: Brand Ambassador credibility has a positive influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). H6: Brand Ambassador expertise has a positive influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). H7: Brand Ambassador trustworthiness has a positive influence on Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI). H8: Brand Ambassador-Driven Purchase Intention (BAPI) has a positive influence on Overall Purchase Intention.</p>			
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