Love, Trust and Follow Them? The Role of Social Media Influencers on Luxury Cosmetics Brands' Purchase Intention Among Malaysian Urban Women

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Abstract

Luxury cosmetics brands are growing in Malaysia, especially among urban women. In this age, influencer marketing plays a significant role as many luxury cosmetic brands are partnering with social media influencers or key opinion leaders (KOLs) to increase their brand credibility and consumers' desire. Despite this, the effectiveness of influencer marketing for luxury brands has resulted in mixed findings. As such, this study applies social influence theory to investigate the role of social media influencers (SMI), specifically on the relationships between trustworthiness and attractiveness towards the consumers' attitude and purchase intention of luxury cosmetic brands. Using a quantitative survey of 240 Malaysian urban women collected from two major shopping malls, the data were analyzed using the structural equation modeling technique. Interestingly, the result of this study confirms that the attractiveness of the SMI was more critical than trustworthiness. Meanwhile, the attitude significantly mediated between attractiveness and their intention to purchase luxury cosmetic brands. This study also presents the implications and recommendations for future research. This study offers a novel perspective and gives insights to marketers of luxury cosmetic brands, especially on the suitability of selecting SMI to attract its target market.

Keywords: attitude, influencer marketing, luxury product, purchase intention, urban

1.0   Introduction

Globally, the cosmetics industry has propelled up to US$532 billion, and it is predicted that further growth of 4% per year in both developed and developing countries (Statista, 2021). According to Forbes (2019), the top luxury cosmetics brands include Chanel, Estee Lauder, Urban Decay, Nars Cosmetics, Lancome, MAC, Dior Beauty, and YSL Beauty. In Malaysia, super-premium skincare brands have also grown enormously, and brands like La Mer, Shu Uemura, Bobbi Brown, and Laura Mercier continuously launch new products (Euromonitor, 2019). Besides, other luxury brands like SK-II, Estee Lauder, Yves Saint Laurent, and Chanel are opening new outlets in major shopping malls in main cities in Malaysia, such as Kuala Lumpur (Euromonitor, 2019). The cosmetics and personal care market in Malaysia is worth US$5 billion (Statista, 2019).

Luxury brands are gaining popularity, especially among affluent women from urban areas in Malaysia. Malaysian consumers, particularly the modern and more educated working-class females in urban areas, have responded positively to cosmetic products and are willing to pay higher prices for their preferred brands (Ishak et al., 2020). As a result of urbanization, employment demands have shifted, resulting in the increase of women in the workforce, which gives them a growth in their purchasing power. As purchasing power and disposable income increases, premium cosmetic brands become more appealing based on customers' lifestyles, social status, and self-image. (Nur & Sapir, 2021). Generally, the luxury brand's positioning in consumers' minds is associated with high pricing, prestigious, premium quality, and a high degree of symbolic value (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Most retailers are leveraging Internet marketing as part of their marketing strategy to grow their businesses (Han et al., 2021). Today, various social media platforms allow us to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real time (Wang et al., 2021). However, social media is constantly evolving. With the rise of influencer marketing trends in social media, most marketers judge influencer marketing as effective in meeting campaign goals and expanding their market reach (Ye et al., 2021). In 2016, Facebook influenced 62 percent of consumers' online and offline purchases compared to 52 percent of purchases in 2015 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). According to the research on Influencer Marketing Hub (2019), each social media platform attracts a different degree of influencers for the influencer campaigns; Instagram successfully attracts 79 percent of influencers while Facebook attracts

46 percent, YouTube attracts 36 percent, Twitter attracts 24 percent, and LinkedIn attracts 12 percent.

According to the Influencer Marketing Hub's report (2019), many cosmetics brands constantly partner with social media influencers (SMIs) and brand ambassadors to continually evolve their marketing strategies according to market and industry trends. The social media influencer is a person who has the power to influence the audience on social media platforms or endorses a product or service with the skillsets and knowledge within (Ryu & Han, 2021). Social media influencers can be celebrities, micro-influencers, or even bloggers (Silalahi, 2021). Micro-influencers are not celebrities; however, they have many followers on social media and have high engagement with their followers (Belch & Belch, 2018).

However, there are uncertain business risks related to influencers' and bloggers' credibility and authenticity (Hudders et al., 2021). There have been a few reported cases of unethical practices whereby the followers of the "influencers" on social media platforms were fake, costing millions of dollars in losses to the companies (Anand et al., 2020). According to past research conducted on 56,000 Internet users from 81 countries, it was found that only 4% of Internet users trust influencers (Stewart, 2019). Looking at the importance of influencer marketing and the ethical challenges associated with its usage, there is still a limited number of studies that focus on the effectiveness of influencers, especially by luxury cosmetics brands. Hence, this study aims to investigate how trustworthiness, attractiveness, and attitude toward SMIs impact the purchase intention of luxury cosmetic brands, particularly among urban women in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

The Social Influence Theory of Herbert Kelman is an integral theory that describes how others influence people in their social context. It provides a profound grasp of various types of social influence and the mechanisms that cause them (Kelman, 1958). Numerous research studies have examined the impact of social influence on consumer attitudes and behavior. Social influence, for example, has been shown to influence luxury consumption (Zhan & He, 2012), innovation adoption (Kulviwat et al., 2009), brand communities engagement (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008), purchasing decisions

(Hutzinger & Weitzl, 2021), and public and private consumptions (Tata, Prashar, & Gupta, 2020).

Social influence refers to how the social identity of a group's members shapes their beliefs, thought processes, and behaviors, which are then validated by the larger society (Turner et al., 1994; Liang, Liao, & Liu, 2017). A group's collective identity influences its perceptions and behaviors, and this can result in a shared viewpoint that is deemed objective and appropriate (Zhao, Stylianou, & Zheng, 2018). According to Bearden et al. (1989), an individual's behavior is influenced by those around them, and social dissemination plays a crucial role in adopting new products. Various factors, such as modeling, instructions, and social persuasion, can transmit social influence (Langley et al., 2012). Frequently, consumers purchase products not only for their utility or pleasure but also to impress others or improve their social standing (Foxall et al., 1998).

Early research on social influence emphasized that social variables significantly influence individual decision-making. According to Asch (1952), an individual's actions and views are either consistent with their social group, encouraging social cohesiveness, or contradictory. This means that people make decisions and judgments concerning others. When deciding what to buy or what to use, customers will consider the preferences and actions of influential social groups and intimate acquaintances (Wood and Hayes, 2012). Humans are fundamentally social beings, and their actions and reactions are frequently influenced by their interactions with others in society. (Myers & Twenge, 2019, p. 5). This is also true for consumers whose social surroundings significantly impact their purchase and consumption habits (Bhukya, Paul, 2023). Thus, understanding the impact of social influence is critical for marketers and practitioners looking to capitalize on customer purchase intention towards luxury cosmetics. Table 1 shows past studies examining how social influence affects consumers' decision-making process.

Table 1 : Past Studies Examining How Social Influence Affects Consumers' Decision-Making Process

Authors	Objective	Research Method	Sample	Conclusion
Oliveira et al., (2016)	To identify the critical parameters that drive mobile payment	survey	301	Social influence significantly impacts consumers' adoption and recommendation behavior

Authors	Objective	Research Method	Sample	Conclusion
	technology uptake and recommendation.			for mobile payments, both directly and indirectly.
Capuano et al., (2018)	To investigate how social influence impacts the group decision-making process.	experiment	Synthetic data	When there is inadequate information and limited expertise or knowledge, social influence significantly impacts group decision-making.
Cheng and Ho (2015)	To investigate how social influence influences how online review readers perceive reviews.	Review data	983	Social influences have a positive effect on the readers' perception of the utility of the reviews.
Bhurya and Paul (2023)	Conduct a hybrid systematic literature review incorporating bibliometric analysis to provide an overview of social influence in consumer behavior research.	systematic literature review	35	A TCCM framework was devised to explain the field's prevalent theories, contexts, characteristics, and methodologies.
Argan, Argan, Aydinoglu and Ozer (2022)	To investigate the psychosocial drivers of consumer-centric fear of missing out (FoMO) and how it affects consumer behavior.	Survey	1156	Consumer-centric FoMO mediates the relationship between individual consumer differences and socially-motivated consumption behavior.
Vrain, Wilson, Kerr, and Wilson (2022)	The objective is to ascertain the effect of social influence on adopting digital consumer innovations related to climate change in areas such as transportation, food, housing, and energy.	survey	3007	Social influence relies heavily on confidence in digital platforms and local community networks. Social norms can facilitate the development of trust, while word-of-mouth can disseminate positive information about innovations pertinent to the local community.
Ghasri and Vij (2021)	To investigate consumers' intent	Survey	862	The findings indicate eleven distinct groups

Authors	Objective	Research Method	Sample	Conclusion
	to employ autonomous vehicles (AVs), focusing on the influence of informational cues conveyed through various communication channels.			within the study population, each with distinct socio-demographic characteristics, perceptions of trust in social contacts, and communication channel preferences.
Ruiz-Mafe, Tronch, Sanz-Blas (2016)	Determine how emotions and social influences influence the formation of loyalty towards online travel communities.	survey	385	Positive feelings towards online travel communities are enhanced by normative influences, such as subjective norms and a sense of being in the presence of other community members or social presence.
Collin-Lachaud and Diallo, M.F (2021)	To investigate the direct and indirect effects of in-store mobile device usage on store loyalty via the mediation of store value and to determine whether social influence moderates these relationships.	survey	862	This study discovered that social influence moderates the examined relationships. When social influence is weakened, the impact of in-store mobile phone usage on customer loyalty is more significant. However, when social influence is more substantial, the effects of hedonic and symbolic store value are more significant.
Alvarado-Karste and Guzman (2020)	Examine the relationship between brand identity-cognitive style (BI-CS) compatibility and brand perceived value. It investigates how various types of social influence affect the brand's perceived value.	survey	252	Both identification and internalization forms of social influence have a substantial and positive influence on the perceived value of a brand.

Hence, this study applies the social influence theory (SIT) proposed by Kelman (1958). The central theme of this theory is that referent others influence an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and subsequent actions or behaviors through three processes – internalization, identification, and compliance. Firstly, internationalization stems from the credibility and trustworthiness of the information received from the source that influences beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and/or behavior. It occurs when the receiver adopts the opinion of the credible communicator since he or she believes the information from this source is accurate. Once the receiver internalizes an opinion or attitude, it becomes integrated into their belief system and may be maintained even after the message's source is forgotten (Belch & Belch, 2018).

Additionally, the identification process is highly dependent on the source's attractiveness. Source attractiveness is the characteristic that makes him or her appealing that could influence the recipient. Lastly, compliance happens when the source has the power to control the receiver. A source is more persuasive when he or she can administer rewards or punishments and generate conformity in the receiver (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Nonetheless, power as a source characteristic is difficult to apply in non-personal communication. In this instance, social media influencers generally cannot apply any punishment or sanction their viewers' behavior, nor can they determine their compliance (Belch & Belch, 2018). Using source power applies more in situations involving personal communication, such as by a sales representative or managers dealing with clients. As such, this study applies the social influence theory that excludes the source power and posits the influence of source trustworthiness and attractiveness only.

2.1   Consumer Purchase Intention

With the presence of the Internet, consumers' retail trends are moving from the conventional brick-and-mortar model to e-commerce and mobile platforms (Srivastava et al., 2021). A consumer's intention to purchase a product or service arises from the decision-making process (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Purchase intention increases the readiness to own a particular product (Toor et al., 2017). According to Laohasukkasem et al. (2021), social media influencers and social network marketing effectively impact a consumer's purchase intention.

Notably, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have become integral to the cosmetics purchase decision-making process, and 60 percent of heavy buyers rely on these platforms (TABS Cosmetics Study, 2017). The content shared by the influencer on their social media platforms significantly influences consumers' purchasing luxury brand behavior (Liu et al., 2019). Within the past decade, luxury beauty brands have leveraged the power of social media influencers as an essential marketing tool (Roberts, 2022). Influencer marketing is now the most critical and cost-effective social media strategy to build brand trust with viewers and generate profits for business organizations (Savitri et al., 2022).

Influencers have also been known as key opinion leaders (KOLs) on social media because most are seen as content creators who are highly engaged with their followers (Roberts, 2022). The contribution of content is often through postings, photos, messages, or videos to have a digital dialogue with potential consumers (Forbes, 2019). In general, there are two types of influencers; the micro-influencer is more likely an ordinary person who acquired several followers between 10,000 to 100,000 people, while the macro-influencers are often referring to traditional celebrities (Ali & Alqudah, 2022). A past study found that consumers tend to trust micro-influencers more than celebrities or macro-influencers (Yangkluna et al., 2022). Thus, selecting the appropriate influencer as the source or communicator to deliver the company's message is essential to its communications strategy.

2.2   Source Attractiveness

The term "source" means the person communicating a marketing message, either directly or indirectly. A direct source is a spokesperson who delivers a message and endorses a product or service. In contrast, an indirect source does not deliver a message but draws attention to and enhances the appearance of the advertisement (Belch & Belch, 2018). Companies are cautious when selecting attractive individuals to deliver their messages. Many firms spend vast sums of money for a specific influencer to endorse their product or company. A source characteristic frequently used by advertisers is attractiveness, which encompasses similarity, familiarity, and likability (Shimp & Andrews, 2016).

Attractiveness focuses on an endorser's physical appearance, attributes or characteristics, and personality (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt,

2020). An attractive influencer is said to have more appeal in developing effective advertising messages than a less attractive one (Chekima et al., 2020). Lim et al. (2017) and Abdullah et al. (2020) found that physical attractiveness positively influences consumer attitudes, especially toward fashion-related products. Karasiewicz and Kowalczuk (2014) revealed that a celebrity's attractiveness was significantly higher than the non-celebrity as an endorser in altering consumer attitude. For beauty products, female millennial consumers in Ireland stated that the attractiveness of social media influencers remains critical to their choice of cosmetic brands (Baker, 2018). Advertisements for cosmetics, jewelry, and designer fashion brands often use beautiful models to get consumers to associate their physical attractiveness with the brand (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Source attractiveness leads to persuasion through identification, whereby the receiver is motivated to seek some relationship with the source. It thus adopts similar beliefs, attitudes, preferences, or behavior (Belch & Belch, 2018). Many companies feel that the best way to connect with consumers is by using regular-looking, everyday people such as micro-influencers who are easily identifiable to the average customer. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencers' attractiveness has positively affected the attitude of the followers toward purchase intentions. Youtube vloggers' social and physical attractiveness positively influenced consumer attitudes and perceptions toward luxury brands (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Based on the above, the following relationship is hypothesized:

H1: Attractiveness has a significant and positive relationship with consumer attitude

2.3 Attitude

Attitude is a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some measure of favor or disfavor represented by affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects (Netzer et al., 2018). From the general behavioral theory standpoint, attitudes are viewed as internalized anticipatory approaches or avoidance tendencies toward objects, persons, or symbols. The positive and negative attitudes will impact the evaluation of the product or brand (Jaffery et al., 2020).

From the past studies on attitude, a prior understanding is recognized specifically on how attitudes are learned through direct contact with people and events. However, little is known about how

attitudes are acquired without direct contact, in which attitudes towards brands, products, or services are derived from others through online communication of SMIs (Wang et al., 2019). Regarding social attitudes, the motives to affiliate with other individuals, KOLs, and groups are also significant contributing factors. Several studies in the literature show that attitudes could be changed through online communication. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the factors responsible for change and the type of behavioral change, especially from SMIs (Vehmas et al., 2018; Nafees et al.,2021).

Furthermore, the commonly applied Theory of Reasoned Action model explains the relationship between attitude, intention, and behavior (Madden et al., 1992). According to the research findings from Singh & Banerjee (2018), consumer attitude positively affects purchase intention. A favorable attitude toward SMIs influences the influencers' intention to purchase the endorsed product. The research finding of Miranda et al. (2021) supported that consumers' attitude was stimulated and positively impacted purchase intention after watching YouTube videos on related beauty products. Besides, attitudes toward social media advertisements positively affect purchasing intention (Alalwan, 2018). Moreover, consumer attitude was often posited as having a mediating role between the relationships of attractiveness, credibility, and purchase intention in past studies on brand endorsers (Lim et al., 2017; Salam & Wahid, 2012). Based on the discussion provided, below are the hypothesis:

H2:   Consumer attitude has a significant and positive relationship with purchase intention

H4:   Consumer attitude mediates the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention

H5:   Consumer attitude mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and purchase intention

2.4   Source Trustworthiness

One of the most reliable effects found in communications research is that expert and trustworthy sources are more persuasive. Trustworthiness is defined as honesty with integrity and generally is the customer's perception of the source's truthfulness, credibility, reliability, and believability (Belch & Belch, 2018). Marketers can apply social

media influencers' credibility to measure the effectiveness of the endorsement (Taghipoorreyneh & de Run, 2016). One of the ways to earn endorsement is by the recommendations of influencers on the accurate and unbiased feeling after using the product (Rebelo, 2017). Both Lim et al. (2017) and Rebelo (2017) mentioned that the credibility of SMIs encompasses trustworthiness and expertise in the area that the influencers represent. The influencer's trustworthiness is a positive characteristic to strengthen the influence power toward consumers (Lau & Yuan, 2019). The target audience must also find the source believable, and finding influencers with a trustworthy image is often challenging for companies.

Rebelo (2017) demonstrates that SMIs can influence the consumers' perceived trustworthiness, and the SMI's credibility strongly influences attitude. Interestingly, consumers exposed to Instagram celebrity's brand posts perceive the source as more trustworthy and display a positive attitude toward the endorsed products compared to micro-influencers (Jin et al., 2019). Female consumers in Ireland found that the trustworthiness of the SMIs is more important than the expertise in the cosmetics products they endorse (Baker, 2018). Besides, consumers nowadays rarely judge an influencer's authenticity by the number of followers, and micro-influencers are perceived with higher trust that can influence an individual's behavior (Pittman & Abell, 2021). Moreover, consumers tend to trust the influencers' endorsement of the brands in their areas of expertise and knowledge level (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

H3:   Trustworthiness has a significant and positive relationship with consumer attitude.

Below Figure 1 is the conceptual framework that reflects the discussed literature.
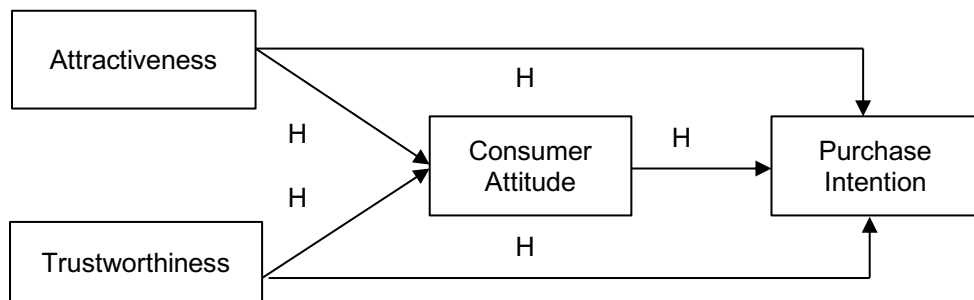
Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

3.0 Methodology

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect the data. The questionnaire consists of 3 sections, namely the demographic section followed by Section B for statements related to trustworthiness, attractiveness, and attitude (adapted from Lee and Watkins, 2019), and Section C consists of statements related to purchase intention (adapted from Wang and Chang, 2013). All items in Sections B and C were measured by the 5 points Likert scale. The survey was physically distributed at Midvalley Mall and Suria KLCC Mall – the top two shopping malls in the Klang Valley area. These shopping malls were also chosen because of the high number of luxury cosmetic retail stores (Lifestyle Asia, 2023). Respondents were asked for their consent before answering survey questions. Filtering questions on their age and current residential location were asked before the data collection to ensure that the respondents were between 20 to 55 years old and from Klang Valley, hence qualified to proceed in answering the questionnaire. For the data collection, systematic random sampling was utilized. Systematic sampling is a probability sampling method whereby respondents are selected at regular intervals – for example, by selecting every 10th person (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). For this study, the researchers conducted systematic sampling via the mall intercept method whereby every fifth female customer who entered the mall was invited to participate in the research.

Due to the limited availability of data on the total population, the sample size was determined based on the explanatory power for the proposed framework by identifying the minimum sample size, which assures an adequate power to detect statistical significance as suggested by Cohen (1992). Using the G*power sample size software calculator, based on a 95% confidence, 5% margin of error, and effect size of 0.15, the minimum sample size required is 120 (Faul et al., 2009). As such, 120 questionnaires were collected from Midvalley Mall and another 120 questionnaires from Suria KLCC Mall. After these 240 survey questionnaires were collected, it was entered into the SPSS software for descriptive analysis. To conduct the partial least squared-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the data were further analyzed using SmartPLS Ver3 software through a two-step process of measurement modeling followed by structural modeling. PLS-SEM is a widely used and common method for data analysis in many social

science studies (Hair et al., 2019). Since this framework uses reflective constructs, the first step is to examine the reflective measurement modeling. This step will evaluate the validity and reliability of the relative items used to measure each construct. This includes outer loading, internal consistencies, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Once these are fulfilled and yield satisfactory results, the next is to assess the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). The lateral collinearity is examined beforehand by examining the VIF values, followed by the path coefficients and R^2 value of the hypothesized relationships.

4.0   Findings

4.1   Demographic Characteristics

Based on the total 240 responses, their demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 2. In terms of ethnicity, Malays made up the majority of responses (40.4%), followed by Chinese (36.7%), Indian (18.3%), and others (4.6%). A total of 45.8% were from the age range of 30 to 39, followed by 35.4% in the age range of 20 to 29. While the balance 18.7%, were above 40 years old. The majority of them are married (55%) and between the ages of 30 and 39 (45.8%). While 36.3% of respondents indicated their income ranged from RM7,001 to RM12,000. Almost half of the respondents (54.5%) had a bachelor's degree and were employed as executives/managers(50.4%).

Table 2 : Respondents' Demographic Characteristics (n= 240)

Demographic information	Percentage (%)	Demographic information	Percentage (%)
Ethnicity		**Occupation**	
Malay	40.4	Unemployed	5.4
Chinese	36.7	Professionals	18.3
Indian	18.3	Executive/managers	54.6
Others	4.6	Self-employment	21.7
Age		**Income**	
20 – 29	35.4	Below RM3,000	12.1
30 – 39	45.8	RM3,001 – RM7,000	35.4
40 – 49	15.4	RM7,001 – RM12,000	36.3
50 – 55	3.3	More than RM12,000	16.3
Educational level			

Diploma	27.5		
Bachelor's Degree	50.4		
Master's Degree	19.2		
Doctorate Degree	2.9		
Marital status			
Single	34.6		
Married	55		
Widowed	4.6	Divorced	5.8

4.2 Measurement Model Result

The construct's reliability and validity were assessed using a reflective measurement model. The results of these assessments are presented in Table 3 below. The items with low loadings values which are below 0.70, namely CAT1, CAT2, and PI2, were then deleted (Ramayah et al., 2018). For the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), all constructs met the threshold value upon the deletion of these 3 items. All constructs' CR values were well above the recommended threshold of 0.7, while the AVE values were more than 0.50 (Ramayah et al., 2018).

Table 3 : Convergent Validity and Reliability Analysis Results

Construct	Statement	Outer Loading	CR	CA	AVE
Attractiveness	ATT1: The influencers exude confidence.	0.868	0.931	0.907	0.729
	ATT2: The influencers appear passionate.	0.852			
	ATT3: The influencers look presentable.	0.869			
	ATT4: The influencers look elegant.	0.843			
	ATT5: The influencers had flawless skin.	0.838			
Trustworthiness	TR1: The influencers are authentic.	0.793	0.917	0.886	0.688
	TR2: The influencers have high integrity.	0.818			
	TR3: The influencers are convincing.	0.868			
	TR4: The influencers are dependable.	0.813			
	TR5: The influencers are	0.852			

Construct	Statement	Outer Loading	CR	CA	AVE
	consistent.				
Attitude	CAT1: I believe that the recommendations of influencers are accurate.	0.615	0.919	0.890	0.695
	CAT2: I enjoyed watching product-sharing by influencers.	0.618			
	CAT3: I like the way products are presented by influencers.	0.848			
	CAT4: I feel positive about influencers that endorse products.	0.832			
	CAT5: I agree that influencers reflect luxury cosmetic products very well.	0.855			
Purchase Intention	PI1: I am most likely to buy luxury cosmetic products that are endorsed by my favorite influencer.	0.886	0.939	0.902	0.837
	PI2: I intend to purchase the luxury cosmetic brand because it is promoted by the influencer.	0.638			
	PI3: I am very likely to spend money on buying a luxury cosmetic brand that is endorsed by an influencer in near future.	0.920			

The discriminant validity was then assessed using cross-loadings and the Fornell and Larcker criterion. For cross-loadings, all indicators are higher on their own than the other construct. The result in Table 4 indicates that all constructs exhibit satisfactory discriminant validity where the square root of AVE (diagonal) is larger than the correlations (off-diagonal). It is concluded that the construct meets discriminant validity requirements at this stage.

Table 4 : Discriminant Validity Result

	Attractiveness	Consumer Attitude	Purchase Intention	Trustworthiness
Attractiveness	**0.854**			

Consumer attitude	0.789	**0.873**		
Purchase intention	0.690	0.849	**0.919**	
Trustworthiness	0.748	0.648	0.573	**0.829**

4.3   Structural Model Result

It is important to ensure there is no lateral collinearity issue in the structural model before assessing the structural model. Table 5 presents the outcomes of the lateral collinearity test where the inner VIF values for independent variables (attractiveness, consumer attitude, and trustworthiness) are less than 5, thus lateral multicollinearity is not a concern in this study (Hair et al. 2017). The path analysis value was employed in this study to measure the hypothesis for each direct effect path. The result in Table 6 shows that H1, H2, and H3 are supported at a significant level of 0.05. Specifically, the predictors of Attractiveness and Trustworthiness are positively related to consumer attitude, which explains 63% of the variance in consumer attitude. Next, the effect of consumer attitude on purchase intention (PI) indicates that consumer attitude is positively related to purchase intention, explaining 72.1% of the variance in purchase intention. Overall, the R^2 values of consumer attitude and purchase intention are above 0.26 value as suggested by Cohen (1988) which indicates a substantial model.

Table 5 : Lateral Collinearity Assessment

	Consumer Attitude	Purchase Intention
Attractiveness	2.267	
Consumer Attitude		1
Purchase Intention		
Trustworthiness	2.267	

Table 6 : Hypothesis Testing Results

	Std Beta	Std Error	P Values	Decisions	R^2	f^2	Q^2
H1: Attractiveness -> Consumer attitude	0.689	0.063	0	Supported	0.630	0.566	0.469
H2: Consumer attitude -> Purchase intention	0.849	0.019	0	Supported	0.721	2.588	0.602

H3: Trustworthiness -> Consumer attitude	0.133	0.073	0.034	Supported	-	0.021	-

Note: p>0.05 = significant

Next, the effect size (f^2) was assessed, and Cohen's (1988) guideline was used. The value of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and larger effects respectively. From Table 5, it can be observed that consumer attitude has a larger effect in producing the R^2 for purchase intention. Attractiveness also has a larger effect in producing R^2 for consumer attitude. Whereas, trustworthiness has a small effect in producing R^2 for consumer attitude. Additionally, the result presents that the model has sufficient predictive relevance where the Q^2 values for consumer attitude and purchase intention are more than 0. If the Q^2 is larger than 0, the model has predictive relevance for a certain dependent variable (Hair et al, 2017; Fornell and Cha, 1994).

Table 7 presents the result of the mediation analysis. Bootstrapping was used to analyze the mediation and the result indicated that only one indirect effect, B = 0.585, is significant with a p-value of 0.00. The indirect effects 95% Confidence Interval Bias Corrected (Lower Limit=0.46) do not straddle a 0 in between indicating there is consumer attitude that mediates the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention. However, the indirect effect of trustworthiness and purchase intention is insignificant, with a p-value of 0.081, indicating no mediation effect.

Table 7 : Hypothesis Results on Mediating Relationships

	Hypothesized Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Confidence interval		Decisions
						LL	UL	
H4	Attractiveness -> Consumer attitude -> Purchase intention	0.585	0.059	9.844	0	0.46	0.698	Supported
H5	Trustworthiness -> Consumer attitude -> Purchase intention	0.113	0.065	1.749	0.081	-0.031	0.229	Not supported

Note: p<0.05 = significant

5.0 Discussion

This study confirmed that attractiveness and trustworthiness are essential elements that affect consumer attitudes. Lipsman et al.

(2012) underline the relevance of relating to branded content and that having beauty influencers as advocates is successful since they demonstrate how to utilize the products through tutorials for their followers. Whilst Audrezet et al. (2018), indicate that authenticity consists of both passionate and transparent authenticity. When advocating a product to their network of followers, social media influencers who create tutorials to demonstrate how to use the product are transparent in their endorsement and passionate about the product attributes, regardless of whether those followers believe the influencer was paid to promote the product (Rutter et al., 2021).

Surprisingly, physical attractiveness characteristics show independent positive effects on purchase intention. Considering the mediating effect of consumer attitude, Lim et al. (2017) found that the credibility of social media influencers was judged by their attractiveness, suggesting that transfer and product match-up can increase purchase intention. The attractiveness of influencers has been shown to have a favorable effect on customer sentiments, as was shown in a study by Munnukka et al. (2016). Finally, the results of the current investigation were also converted by De Brito Silva et al. (2019), who similarly researched Instagram. In terms of the existence of the connection, the findings of De Brito Silva et al. (2019) were encouraging. These findings are helpful, but they don't add much to what's previously been established in the scholarly literature. Thus, a successful influencer has the power to influence the consumer purchase intention, not only the outstanding appearance to attract more customers and to create the customer's curiosity but the solid qualifications of the content category to support their statement.

As media platforms emerge and develop over time, marketing theory must progress to accommodate new advancements in both practice and research which will be highlighted in the next section. A spectrum of methods, not just transactional or relational paradigms, is needed to better understand modern services marketing techniques and theoretical frameworks (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). This study offers a novel perspective on social media influencer marketing. It addresses the need for research on physical appearance and trustworthiness in e-commerce (Peng et al., 2020) and consumer purchase decisions (Samper et al., 2018).

5.1   Conclusion and Recommendations

Businesses influence the process through which customers choose to make purchases through the use of social media influencers (Alalwan et al., 2017; Appel et al., 2020). To date, studies on influencer marketing have not accounted for attitude's role as a mediator in their findings. Therefore, this study's findings corroborate the social influence theory and provide an important methodological contribution to the current literature by evaluating the mediating effects of attitude on customer purchase intention and confirming that attitude mediates between attractiveness and purchase intention. The rise of SMI is the opportunity for cosmetics and fashion companies to use SMI to promote their brand or product and ramp up sales. Thus, they need to choose the right SMI to spread the message about their product to the customer. Through this research, it is evident that women will have the confidence to make a purchase when the SMI has a very attractive personality or character. Therefore, these companies may consider this attribute to choose the right SMI.

5.2   Implications of Study

This research will bring benefits to academics, the luxury beauty industry, and some inputs to marketing practitioners. In a theoretical sense, the findings of the study enrich the existing literature on the topic of influencer marketing in some significant ways. As compared to past studies, this study revealed that attractiveness and trustworthiness brought a consumer attitude which leads to purchase intention. The majority of studies have concentrated on the characteristics of social media influencers (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Martinez-López et al., 2020), although influencer marketing is becoming increasingly popular (Jin et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021). Even though research on the subject is still in its infancy (Jin et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021). In the research on influencer marketing, the underlying mechanisms necessary to make influencer marketing more compelling and persuasive are not yet fully understood (Martnez-López et al., 2020; Vrontis et al., 2021). However, the influencer marketing literature still lacks a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms of source characteristics of social media celebrities (Martnez-López et al., 2020; Vrontis et al., 2021). Interestingly, this study contributes to the body knowledge where attractiveness and trustworthiness are the significant characteristics of social media influencers that affect consumer attitude

and purchase intention. In particular, this study focused on urban women, while past studies may not have tested the social influence theory on a specific group of consumers or a specific type of product. Thus, this study contributes to academia by adding knowledge on the applicability of the theory within a specific situation.

Social media is an important and useful tool for luxury brand managers. The finding of this research highlights the importance to the industry and the company to pick the right influencer for the brand ambassador. An attractive social media celebrity will positively influence consumers' attitudes and pique their interest in purchasing. Therefore, despite being honest, attractiveness is the main personality that influences consumer attitude and purchase intention. Thus, it is the responsibility of the marketer to identify the social media influencer with the best characteristics that will bring positive content and brand value (Bakar & Musa, 2020). When choosing social media influencers to sponsor, marketers should not pay as much attention to those with many followers. Instead, they should pay more attention to their social media followers' engagement with their target audience. Marketers need to let them have more leeway to come up with original content that will pique their followers' interest in a more organic way than using the typical celebrity endorsement formula. Because of their originality, audiences trust and follow social media influencers' advice. Therefore, influencers need the autonomy to produce content that speaks directly to the brand's ideal customer. Businesses may help social media influencers better engage with their audiences by making brand, product, and service information easily accessible.

When social media influencers provide genuine and original material rather than solely pushing products or services, their followers are more likely to trust the sponsored posts (Müller & Christandl, 2019; Stubb et al., 2019). When trusted social media influencers recommend items or services based solely on their own experiences with them, their followers are more likely to do further research because they have a higher opinion of the post's reliability (Gamage & Ashill, 2022). With social media influencers, their personal product experience, whether positive or negative, increases credibility (Muda & Khan, 2020). Consequently, social media influencers can increase their followers' desire to buy, in addition to generating interest and brand visibility. By providing relevant links to social media influencers and asking them to share these links in their content with their followers, businesses can help customers' buy intent.

For businesses such as luxury cosmetic brands, the findings of this study indicate the importance of using influencer marketing due to its prospect of attracting the right target market. The usage of attractive and credible influencers can be managed as part of the company's integrated marketing communications strategy. Integral to this, luxury brands ought to have close monitoring of their selection of influencers and the type of content that is shared on social media to avoid any backlash to their premium brand image. Hence, luxury brands can align the source, message, and audience to effectively apply influencer marketing.

Additionally, this study has shown the importance of trustworthiness that brought consumer attitude. Therefore, this study indicates that there is a need for the government to regulate the industry to avoid fraudulent activities and to enhance the overall credibility of online influencers. Therefore, government agencies or policy-makers need to prepare regulations or policies that can protect the consumer from being scammed. The government agencies such as the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) which oversee the communications and multimedia industry in Malaysia have over the years improved their policies and laws. Based on this study, the attractiveness of the influencers has a high impact on their followers. Through tightening of advertising regulations by MCMC. especially in social media platforms, this could further reduce the tendency of influencers to fake their looks or reviews by applying filter applications to hike up their number of followers.

5.3   Limitations and Future Research

Given the quantitative methodology used here, future research could contribute greatly by taking a qualitative approach and conducting in-depth interviews with e-commerce marketing managers to learn how these professionals see the connections between social media influencer credibility, online engagement, and consumer intent to buy. Second, the scope of the suggested theoretical model could be expanded in future studies by including additional variables like the influencer's personality or persuasive power in social media. Third, looking at other variables that may shed light on the nature of the factors driving the purchase intention by mediating their effects, like electronic word-of-mouth and loyalty programs, may be fruitful. Lastly, while the cosmetics and beauty care industry is the best fit for influencer marketing (Kittikowit et al., 2018), future research might look

at social media influencers in other industries such as fashion, food, and beverage to broaden the applicability of results.

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