

“Effect of social media influencers on brand preferences through trust: Moderating role of emotional attachment”

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EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON BRAND PREFERENCES THROUGH TRUST: MODERATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT

Abstract

Social media influencers have gained immense attention in recent times due to increased use in the cosmetics industry. Trust and emotional attachment play a vital role between influencers and followers. The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of social media influencers' characteristics on predicting intention to buy the recommended beauty brands through trust and a moderating role of emotional attachment with influencers. A sample size of 342 respondents from Pakistan was used to empirically test the hypothesized relationships. The respondents were social media users who follow renowned celebrities on various social media platforms and buy beauty products based on their recommendations. Thus, a purposive sampling technique was employed for data collection using online and in-person data collection methods. Quantitative techniques of regression and process models were used for data analysis. The findings show that characteristics of social media influencers, such as credibility and trustworthiness, have a significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.521$, $p < .05$) on the intention to buy cosmetic products from a particular brand. Likewise, emotional attachment between influencers and followers strengthens the effect on willingness to buy an endorsed brand approving moderation ($\beta = 0.584$, $p < .05$). Trust is also an important mediator as it plays a central role between characteristics of social media influencers and intention to buy products ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < .05$). This study discussed the implications and future research directions while incorporating research limitations.

Keywords

marketing, trust, emotional attachment, consumer
behavior, cosmetics industry

JEL Classification

M30, M31, M37, M39

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, social media channels have attracted millions of users worldwide across various platforms. Social media acts as a search tool for individuals and for producing information (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). The widespread connectivity facilitated by social media has changed the role of consumers when it comes to conventional power structures, reshaping the dynamics between brands and consumers. Consumers are likely to rely on and have trust in content shared on social media groups. Such computer-mediated environments allow consumers who voice their opinions to have a certain level of influence over the decisions of the masses. Hence, ordinary people are not only beneficiaries of marketing messages anymore, but the vast use of social media has allowed them to act as not only consumers of a brand but also promoters (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Ordinary people are progressively using social media to share their personal opinions, lifestyles, experiences, and emotions. This trend has allowed ordinary people to emerge as online influencers. Social media influ-

encers (SMIs) emerge as a new category of third-party endorsers who have the power to shape audiences' attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media platforms (Freberg et al., 2011). Brands today are directing an increased amount of their budgets to influencers, representing 40% of influencer marketing budget as compared to celebrities, who account for a mere 28%. This trend is also rising in the beauty or cosmetic industry. Digital 'beauty gurus' have emerged as a dominant force, overshadowing all traditional advertising while redefining beauty standards on social media and allowing greater diversity. These social media influencers or beauty gurus collaborate with cosmetic companies, leveraging their popularity to promote brands, increase product awareness, and monetize their influence. Top cosmetic brands now hire SMIs to target consumers and promote their products, such as Rare Beauty, Sephora, L'Oréal, Maybelline, Kylie Cosmetics NYX, and e.l.f, to name a few (Tracckr, 2023).

Due to the increased use of social media, organizations are strained to turn to contemporary marketing activities, such as influencer marketing, vlogging, and blogging, and use them to their advantage and lure customers in to buy their products (Ladhari et al., 2020). Researchers are trying to explore the reasons behind the acceptance of SMIs and to understand why followers accept the functional and personal information about the brands they recommend and apply that knowledge to their personal purchase decisions. The concept of SMIs may be comprehended by analyzing the concept of opinion leadership; this factor helps to build the influence that affects the behavior of consumers (Ki & Kim, 2019).

There are 4.48 billion people actively using social media all around the globe, compared to 3.69 billion users in 2020 (an increase of 13.13% year-on-year). In 2015, there were only 2.07 billion users, which means that the number of users increased by 115.59% in just 6-7 years (Statista, 2024). This is evidenced by the fact that 70% of teens trust SMIs more than famous celebrities; 86% of women turn to social media to get advice on different products before actually buying them. Influencers are nurtured by a \$1 billion creator fund established by TikTok; 57% of cosmetics and beauty companies make use of influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is anticipated to rise to \$13.8 billion by the end of 2022 (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021). Social media influencers should possess credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and trustworthiness, and they should stay influential to their followers. SMIs' credibility plays a positive role in affecting the buying intentions of consumers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The effective use of SMIs in marketing programs is still under study, as a lack of literature is available on this area of study. Few investigations have been conducted on emotional attachment with SMIs and how this leads to an increased perceived influence, but the characteristics of SMIs that predict buying intention in the presence of emotional attachment are overlooked and underexplored.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The two-step flow theory provides the basic understanding to comprehend the association between social media influencers (SMIs) and the intention to buy (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The theory states that information transmission through mass media does not happen directly. Rather, it is communicated through opinion leaders. The two-step flow theory encompasses social influence theory and power theory, enhancing the understanding of opinion leaders or influencers (Cheung et al., 2022). Influencer marketing is characterized as "a marketing approach that directly addresses common sales process barriers, as well as developing strategies and activities through potential customers, or people who have an impact

on decision-makers" (Brown & Hayes, 2008). In today's fast-moving world, anybody can be an influencer, thanks to the social media. SMIs "act as a dynamic third-party endorser to spread a brand's message to a vast audience across the world. Consumers who exhibit a positive attitude toward social media credibility are attracted through social media advertisements" (Jaitly & Gautam, 2021).

SMIs expand over a variety of social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and they utilize these platforms to engage viewers through personalized video clips. They are used to publicize and disseminate information on products and services and execute marketing promotion campaigns directed to their followers. Moreover, because influ-

encers engage with their followers frequently and apprise them with up-to-date information, such endorsements play a key role in building the reputation of the company and achieving its goals. In the realm of a company's marketing, social media influencers are now deemed reliable, cost-efficient, and cost-effective as compared to traditional marketing methods (Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022). In the same manner, celebrities can also become SMIs after posting regularly on their social media accounts, producing content, and interacting frequently with their fans. Good SMIs possess some common characteristics and qualities that take them to the top of their game. They are passionate about their audience and about learning; they make an effort to stay updated about all the latest trends and everything happening around them. They are trusted by their followers to have a true opinion of themselves, which is original and unbiased. They are knowledgeable and passionate about their respective area of interest, and their words have an impact on their followers. They can be thought of as a leader having respect for their followers through the candid interaction they have with them. They keep their followers engaged and interested on a day-to-day basis through various content posted on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, Discord, etc. Knowledge, reliability, and attractiveness are the essential elements of an influencer's ability to impact young followers (Hassan et al., 2021).

SMIs are perceived to be reliable sources of information due to their in-depth knowledge and proficiency in specific subjects, combined with their massive social media following. Consequently, SMIs have a significant effect on their audiences and peers' decision-making processes (Ki & Kim, 2019). SMIs are tech-savvy and creative. They are authentic in whatever content they create and consistently do so. They are good community managers as they manage an enormous number of followers on their social media pages and accounts.

In recent years, many studies have been conducted to analyze the crucial requirements for being an effective influencer. Conflicting results were found about influencer strength and persuasiveness. A widely used theory about SMIs is the source credibility theory. This theory focuses on SMI characteristics of attractiveness, authenticity, trustworthiness, and similarities. Source credibility can influence con-

sumer attitudes toward a brand and, subsequently, purchase intention when it comes to cosmetic products. This source credibility includes trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Chekima et al., 2020). Influencer's attractiveness is directly related to positive purchasing intent toward the product and the evaluation of the advertisement. Similarly, attractive people are also more effective at persuading other people and gaining their attention than unattractive people. Attractiveness is said to be a cause behind the positive influence of SMIs on a follower; the motive behind is the portrayal of the online personas of the SMIs that helps them to attract as many people as possible. This attribute also affects the followers' confidence in the products being recommended. The attractive physical features of SMIs also help to captivate the attention of their followers by creating an association with the brand that is being sponsored; this also enables the followers to remember the brand by association with SMIs (Ouvrein et al., 2021).

The perceived authenticity of SMIs is a multidimensional concept and consists of five factors: truthful endorsements, sincerity, visibility, uniqueness and expertise that have varying impacts on consumers' willingness to follow and intention to purchase (Lee & Eastin, 2021). Authenticity is demonstrated by "showing the real side of the brand or business to the followers." The importance of this attribute of authenticity cannot be undermined. If consumers feel that the SMI's endorsement is authentic, they will automatically feel inclined to buy the product; hence, authenticity increases purchase intention, thus improving message receptivity and perceived quality of the brand. In addition to these benefits, SMIs' authenticity leads to a deep-rooted connection with followers, improving brand loyalty and securing attention and engagement.

Because the world today is dominated by digital communication, authenticity has become important and relevant for brands, professional communicators, and users of social media. When speaking in terms of branding, the definition of authenticity explains that consumers perceive brands to be more authentic if they are intrinsically motivated. Seeing as SMIs actively promote self-expression, the bigger motivation behind their content sharing is intrinsic in nature, instead of just producing content for the sake of gaining followers or gaining any other financial benefits from sponsors. Since

consumers prefer the authenticity of the brands, products, and services they are buying, authenticity is an attribute that helps build influence on followers and actively affects the buying behavior of consumers (Balaban & Szabolics, 2022).

Authenticity and expertise together have an influence on the SMIs' trust by followers (D. Kim & H. Kim, 2021). The importance of trust has been a popular area in social marketing. Trust can be characterized as a willingness to depend on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence. Source credibility theory explains that if SMIs are more popular, they are perceived as more trustworthy. SMIs are the personalities and people trusted by their online audience who "spark discussion and inspire action." Credibility contains two aspects, trustworthiness and competence. When the person feels that the information is biased, the credibility of that source will be negatively affected (Gupta et al., 2020).

SMIs establish credibility with their followers based on their knowledge and expertise and, therefore, have a huge influence on their followers' purchasing decisions. Expertise increases SMI credibility as opinion leaders (Balaban & Szabolics, 2022). SMI trustworthiness also positively influences the followers' loyalty to the brand and its attributes. However, SMIs must be careful when choosing the brands to endorse. Brands must match their image and personality as well as their expertise. If an SMI chooses to advertise a product that is not in line with his image and his expertise, it will negatively affect his trustworthiness. This could further damage the likeability and the level of engagement. Therefore, influencers must be knowledgeable about the brands and also about selecting brands to endorse; otherwise, this would affect their career and social media presence in the long term. Trust is defined as a desire to believe in an exchange partner in whom one has assurance. If followers think about buying the products that SMIs suggest, they must believe that SMIs are reliable sources of advice and credible bases of information. When SMIs create quality content based on perceptions, it builds positive attitudes and trust among followers (Balaban et al., 2020).

The integrated SMI value model developed by Lou and Yuan (2019) includes the perceived trustworthiness of SMIs as a substantial component. This model investigates the association between source

credibility and SMIs' advertising potential. The main components of this model are influencer credibility, advertising content value, perceived trust, brand awareness, and buying intentions. SMIs should consider these factors if they want to make sure that their followers have favorable feelings about them personally and for the companies they represent (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Customers believe SMIs to be more trustworthy than celebrities because they can relate to them more readily, and they also believe that SMIs have a stronger effect on customers' propensity to buy. Consumers' trust in brands is affected by how they perceive the information, entertainment, and reliability of branded posts shared by influencers. Trust acted as a mediator for the influences of authenticity, expertise, and homophily on outcomes of marketing as well as follower loyalty. However, physical attractiveness did not have a significant effect on building relational trust (D. Kim & H. Kim, 2021). The informative value of a social media influencer's content, attractiveness, and similarity to followers and trustworthiness have a positive influence on followers' trust in branded posts, ultimately enhancing brand awareness and purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

SMIs can impact the emotional attachment of the followers and their memorability (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). Connection with followers leads to success for social media influencers. This is where emotional connection or attachment comes in. Emotional attachment is related to credibility as followers rate an emotional affective link with an influencer (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Perceived credibility is established when an influencer works on creating relational and affective bonds with the followers. Hence, emotional attachment plays a critical role in the persuasive influence of SMIs on their followers who feel attached to them. The emotional connection between influencers and their followers is facilitated by online surroundings. Prominent people may bring out positive emotional responses by fulfilling the needs of their audience's affiliation, imagination, status identification, and attachment. Continual accessibility to the content that celebrities provide on social media makes consumers feel more connected to them and, at times, more able to relate to them. One could predict a deeper emotional bond between SMIs and their followers since

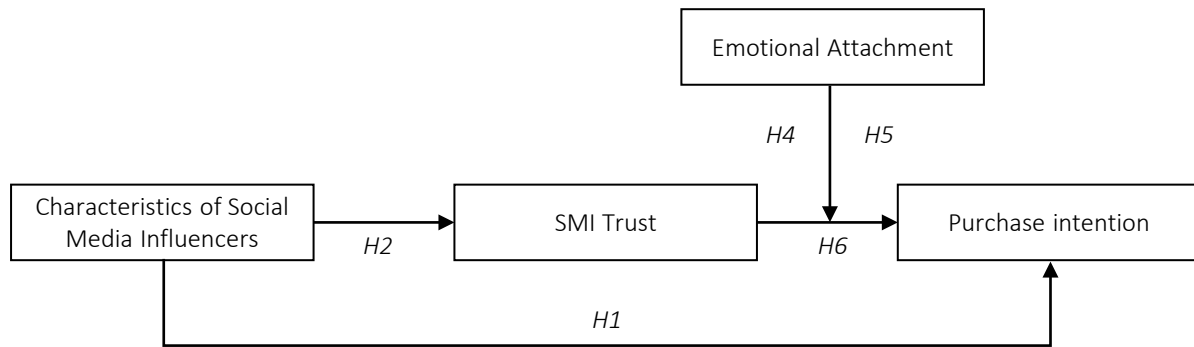


Figure 1. Conceptual model

influencers are perceived as being intimate, more accessible, and simpler to connect with than celebrities (De Veirman et al., 2017). However, only influencers with an increased value and efficiency, i.e., those who are assigned greater opinion leadership, might boost the message effect (Ladhari et al., 2020).

Researchers have explained the massive impact of SMIs on behavioral outcomes and how, after creating an association with SMIs, followers change their online behavioral intentions. The attitudinal loyalty to SMIs may lead to behavioral changes in the customers. However, studies have not explored how these two variables form a relationship. With perceived influence as a mediator, this study assumes that attitudinal loyalty has a relationship with followers' purchase intention through influence. Followers consider social media influencers as reliable sources of information when it comes to personal buying intentions. In this context, followers tend to form a dependency on SMIs and copy their behaviors to maintain their relationship. Here, followers may not just receive the message and move on; they follow SMIs' recommendations, demonstrating the effect of influence (Choi et al., 2020).

The component of trust is vital when it comes to SMIs' efforts to create product or brand admiration in their followers (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Individuals have expectations to obtain trustworthy knowledge and authentic experiences when interacting with social media influencers. This shows that followers adopt the knowledge shared by SMIs, resulting in following their recommendations because they think that information is consistent with their preference or will help them solve an obstacle. When SMIs are perceived as authentic and credible when sharing content or recommendations, their

followers believe that they have the capability to share content and the latest knowledge. Followers then use this factor to gain valuable information and opinions. When there is a high-quality SMI message, they accept it and are willing to analyze the content and, in turn, accept SMI endorsements (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021).

The aim of this study is to analyze whether the characteristics of SMIs predict the purchase intention of recommended brands through SMI trust and a moderating role of emotional attachment between SMI trust and purchase intention toward cosmetics brands. The following hypotheses are formulated, as shown in Figure 1:

- H1: SMIs have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.*
- H2: SMIs have a positive and significant effect on SMI trust.*
- H3: SMI trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.*
- H4: SMI trust has a positive and significant effect on emotional attachment.*
- H5: Emotional attachment has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.*
- H6: SMI trust mediates (partially/fully) the relationship between SMIs and purchase intention.*
- H7: Emotional attachment moderates the relationship between SMI trust and purchase intention.*

2. METHOD

The population is users of cosmetics brands who frequently buy personal or beauty products based on social media recommendations. The sampling technique is non-probability purposive sampling. In non-probability sampling, the researcher chooses the sample according to the subjective perception instead of randomly choosing any sample (Elfil & Negida, 2017). This sampling technique was considered more suitable for the purpose of data collection (Alalwan et al., 2017) when testing theoretical assumptions, and the population is large, considering any individual from Pakistan could be an active follower of any SMI. Purposive or judgmental sampling involves the selection of participants based on the researcher's judgment or arbitrary criteria, where researchers aim to create a representative sample and hence seek diversity explicitly, adding units until a specific criterion is fulfilled (Vehovar et al., 2016). The purposive sampling technique involves the deliberate and non-random choice of participants in a sample because of the qualities the participants possess. The researcher decides what information has to be known and aims to find participants who can and are willing to provide the desired information (Bernard, 2017). Hence, purposive sampling is appropriate for the purpose as the sample is selected based on individuals in the cosmetics industry who regularly purchase beauty products through social media influence and recommendations.

When it comes to purposive sampling, it is unlikely that the sample is representative of the whole population. Thus, purposive sampling is best used when there are a limited number of individuals within a broader community who possess characteristics that the researcher expects from the target individuals (Rahman, 2023). In purposive sampling, there is no need for a list of all the population elements; however, variability and bias cannot be measured or controlled. Moreover, results from the data cannot be generalized beyond the sample.

A five-point Likert scale was used for all the items given in the scales, and respondents were able to select any option of their choice. The dependent variable, the intention to purchase recommended brands, was adopted from Magno (2017) and

Cosenza et al. (2015). The mediating variable, SMI trust, was adopted from Goldsmith et al. (2000). Emotional attachment was evaluated using an instrument developed by Thomson et al. (2005).

For the purpose of data collection, two screening questions were asked about following habits of social media influencers. The respondents of the study were generations Y and Z from Pakistan, as they are at the top of the world in terms of using SMI sites, such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. Data were collected online by posting a survey on social media pages with more than a million followers from all over the world, with the dominance of India and Pakistan. The sample size was 342 among 640 online administered questions, with a response rate of 53%.

The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and mediation/moderation was tested using Hayes Process Macro (Hayes, 2017). Mediation analysis aims to check the mechanisms responsible for an observed effect by understanding how and why relationships occur and provides an assessment for the effect that is more refined. Moderation analysis checks how the intensity and magnitude of the effect depend on other variables. Moderation analysis hence reveals the conditions under which the relationship is either strengthened, weakened, or altered. The Process Macro is a bootstrapping statistical tool developed for SPSS and SAS software (Hayes, 2017). The tool is used to analyze the impact of one or more mediating or moderating variables on the association between independent and dependent variables.

Table 1 shows demographic data, categorizing respondents based on gender, age, and occupation. The gender distribution analysis suggests a balanced representation of both males (49%) and females (51%) in the sample. Generation Y comprises the majority of the respondents, 56%. The occupational distribution of the participants reveals a significant representation from both private and public sectors, with most from the private sector (29%). However, the occupational distribution reveals a rather diverse sample in general, with the remaining respondents working in the public sector (27%), self-employed (25%), and full-time students (19%).

Table 1. Demographic data

Description	Total	Percentage
Gender		
Male	169	49
Female	173	51
Age		
Gen Y	192	56%
Gen Z	150	43%
Occupation		
Self-employed	87	25
Student	65	19
Public sector	92	27
Private sector	98	29

Table 2 provides insights into the social media presence of the respondents across various platforms. The data show that Facebook is the most extensively used social media platform, with 98%, suggesting this social media platform remains dominant. Facebook is followed by Instagram and TikTok with 87% and 74%, respectively. Finally, 23% use other social media platforms, highlighting varied social media preferences within the sample.

Table 2. Social media presence

Platform	Percentage of users
Facebook	98
Tiktok	74
Instagram	87
Others	23

Table 3 provides information regarding the frequency of social media usage among the respondents, highlighting the amount of time they spend on these platforms. While some respondents spend a substantial amount of time daily, others use social media platforms more moderately. Among the sample, 35% actively use the platforms for 6-8 hours, followed by 27% using social media platforms for a more moderate 2-3 hours daily. A quarter of the respondents, 25%, spend 10-12 hours. Finally, 13% use social media platforms for a relatively limited time on social media, 1-2 hours daily.

Table 3. Frequency of social media use

Usage	Frequency
10-12 hours daily	25%
6-8 hours daily	35%
2-3 hours daily	27%
1-2 hours daily	13%

Table 4 provides information on the use of social media for cosmetic recommendations among the respondents. An overwhelmingly high percentage of the respondents, 97%, use social media platforms for cosmetic recommendations. This exhibits the significance of social media platforms in influencing and shaping opinions about cosmetic products. Only 3% of the respondents did not use social media for cosmetic recommendations.

Table 4. Use of social media for cosmetic recommendations

Variant	Frequency
Yes	97%
No	3%

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 5 shows the reliability statistics for the variables. The Cronbach's alpha measures the internal consistency or reliability of the items within each variable. All the variables have Cronbach's alpha values above 0.8. This indicates that there is high internal consistency, and the items within each variable are related closely and consistently measure the construct. Composite reliability assesses the reliability of the latent variables in a structural equation model. Composite reliability is high across all the variables, ranging from 0.821 to 0.865, suggesting that the variables reliably represent their respective constructs. Lastly, AVE represents the amount of variance extracted by the construct in proportion to the measurement error. Since all the variables have AVE above 0.6, it suggests that a substantial proportion of the variance is captured by the constructs.

Table 5. Reliability of variables

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
SMIs	0.862	0.862	0.681
SMIT	0.830	0.821	0.692
EA	0.861	0.865	0.673
PI	0.891	0.835	0.682

Note: SMIs mean social media influencers, SMIT means Social media influencers trust, EA means emotional attachment, PI means purchase intention.

Pearson's correlation is employed to test the direction and strength of the relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient is analyzed

based on the standard values where the values close to -1 show the relationship between the variables is negative, while values close to +1 exhibit the relationship between variables is positive and strong (Gogtay & Thatte, 2017).

Table 6. Correlation analysis

	SMI	SMIT	EA	PI
SMIs	1			
SMIT	.694**	1		
EA	.631**	.756**	1	
PI	.798**	.781**	.634**	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Table 6 shows that the correlation coefficient value for SMIs with SMI trust ($r = 0.694$) is significant at $p < 0.01$, demonstrating a positive, strong relationship between SMIs and SMI trust. SMIs have a strong correlation coefficient of $r = .631$ with emotional attachment, demonstrating a strong relationship between emotional attachment and SMIs. Lastly, the correlation coefficient for purchase intention indicates a strong positive relationship since the value of $r = .798$ with significance at $p < 0.01$.

Table 7. Hypotheses testing

Paths	IV	DV	R ²	F	β	T-test	sig
H1	SMIs	PI	.412	210.34	.521	12.82	.000
H2	SMIs	SMIT	.482	230.33	.587	15.177	.000
H3	SMIT	PI	.571	330.16	.584	18.17	.000
H4	SMIT	EA	.320	143.21	.411	11.32	.000
H5	EA	PI	.381	175.98	.431	11.78	.000
Moderation of EA between SMIT and PI							
					LLCI	ULCI	
Int_1	SMITxEA	PI	.234	145.56	.2204	.5402	.002

Table 7 exhibits the results of hypothesized relationships. The results of the first hypothesis ($R^2 = .399$, $F = 164.34$, $p < 0.01$) showed a 41% variation in purchase intention caused by SMIs with the significance value at less than 0.00, while the value of coefficient ($\beta = .521$, $p < 0.01$), implies that purchase intention would increase by .521 units if there is a single unit change in influencers' characteristics. The t-test values ($t = 12.82$, $p < 0.01$) in-

dicates that the proposed relationship has a positive effect on purchase intention, which is supported by the significance given at less than 0.01, and thus, all given results support H1.

The results ($R^2 = .482$, $F = 230.33$) for the second hypothesis showed that there is a 48.2% change in influencers' trust caused by the independent variable. On the other hand, the coefficient value ($\beta = .587$, $p < 0.01$) represents that unit change in trust due to the independent variable. The positive t-test value ($t = 15.177$, $p < 0.01$) also supports the proposed hypothesis of SMIs having a positive effect on SMI trust, thus accepting the hypothesis.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 can be interpreted as influencers' trust bringing change ($R^2 = .571$, $F = 330.16$, $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = .320$, $F = 143.21$, $p < 0.01$) of 57% and 32% in purchase intention and emotional attachment of followers, whereas the coefficient value ($\beta = .584$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = .411$, $p < 0.01$), suggests a unit change in depended variables. Moreover, the values for the t-test ($t = 18.17$, $p < 0.01$; $t = 11.32$, $p < 0.01$) suggest that the proposed hypotheses are accepted. The hypothesized relationship of emotional attachment and purchase intention also meets the required threshold values of a significant level; thus, it is accepted. Table 7 also shows the results of moderation as the interaction term is significant, with a 23% change in purchase intention. Thus, emotional attachments with influencers strengthen the relationship with purchase intention toward recommended brands.

Table 8 shows the results of mediation by reflecting the results of direct and indirect effects of SMIs on purchase intention. The direct effect of SMIs on purchase intention is positive since $\beta = .197$, $p < 0.001$. The indirect effect of SMIs on purchase intention through the mediating effect of trust is meeting the threshold value, as both values of LLCI and ULCI [0.320, 0.509] are greater than 0 and positive. Thus, trust mediates the relationship between SMIs and purchase intention.

Table 8. Effect of SMIs on purchase intention through SMI trust

Paths	β	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect of SMIs on PI	0.197	0.053	3.658	0.003	0.0911	0.3034
Indirect effect of SMI on PI through SMIT	0.406	0.047			0.3204	0.5096

Note: $R^2 = .442$, $F = 462.87$, $P < .05$.

The findings remain consistent with the previous studies that also stated that followers' trust toward influencers and emotional attachment greatly increase SMI power over their followers. SMIs directly affect consumers' purchase intentions when it comes to online figures supporting them (Srinivasan et al., 2002), which remains consistent with this study.

The second hypothesis indicated that if influencers are trustworthy, they would have a greater influence on followers as they quickly accept their opinions and recommendations. These findings aligned with Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021). The third hypothesis analyzed the buffering impact of emotional attachment on pur-

chase intentions. The results of the study are also consistent with the previous research that followers consider SMIs as reliable and change their purchase intentions based on their recommendations and strong bonds with influencers. Hollebeek (2011) also supported these findings, as followers try to maintain their emotional relationship with SMIs because of this influence, and thus, they follow SMIs' recommendations and change their purchase intentions. The last hypothesis assessed the indirect effects, indicating that trust acts as a mediator between influencers and followers' purchase intentions. SMIs affect the behavioral outcomes of their followers. After creating an association with SMIs, followers change their online purchase intentions (Choi et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to analyze the impact of social media influencers on purchase intention in the beauty industry. Characteristics of influencers, such as credibility and trustworthiness, and trust play a major role in this relationship. The findings support that trust in influencers is an important construct, and marketing managers should consider this when choosing influencers for their brands. It was also found that emotional attachment, based on religion, politics, or entertainment, plays a central role and enhances the relationship. This study also explains the extent of the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on followers, thus proving to be the main tool of marketing. Marketing managers can apply these tools to develop successful marketing strategies to increase their sales, market share, and sustainability.

From a practical perspective, this study offers implications for marketing managers. Social media influencers have the power to influence their followers while affecting their purchase intentions, which will allow SMIs to be a powerhouse for social media brand endorsements and be a solid instrument for companies when it comes to developing social media marketing campaigns. This study supports that the characteristics of SMIs help them create relationships with their followers, which in return gives them a certain power to drive purchase intentions. Brands should also take into account the importance of certain characteristics (i.e., credibility, authenticity, and attractiveness) that help in building the relationship between followers and SMIs so that they can understand the importance of looking for such characteristics while looking for the influencers to endorse their products. When developing promotional activities, brands should ensure that the SMIs they hire have these specific characteristics. It is important for brands to look over these specifications since followers are far more influenced by SMIs because of their attitudinal loyalty to SMIs. Keeping these findings in mind, brands could particularly look for influencers who have this effect on their followers so that efficient strategies could be created and implemented.

This study has some limitations that could be addressed and analyzed in future research. The analysis was conducted at one specific time period; thus, the data gathered were cross-sectional in nature. Future research may use a longitudinal data basis to analyze the effect of attitudinal loyalty on purchase intentions through the role of perceived influence. Second, convenience sampling was used; future researchers could go for a larger sample size and a more efficient sampling method that could generalize the results. Furthermore, more antecedents of SMI trust should also be analyzed in future research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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