Examine the Impact of Attractiveness of Social Media Influencers on Douyin User Purchase Intentions

A Quantitative Study of Sportswear Industry

by

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Abstract

Title: Examine the Impact of Attractiveness of Social Media Influencers on Douyin User Purchase Intentions: A Quantitative Study of Sportswear Industry

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Keywords: Social media influencer, Influencer marketing, Source attractiveness, Consumer attitude, Purchase intention

Thesis purpose: The objective is to understand the impact of social media influencers' familiarity, likeability and similarity on the purchase intention of Douyin users, particularly in the sportswear industry.

Methodology: This study has utilised a quantitative method based on a positivist philosophical position, and followed a deductive approach. The 210 sample data were collected through an online survey. Collected data were analysed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

Theoretical perspective: This study is developed based on the Social Influence Theory (SIT) and Source Attractiveness Model, evaluating the influence of familiarity, likeability, and similarity on consumer attitudes towards brands and purchase intentions.

Empirical data: This study is only based on primary data collection. A cross-sectional research design was deployed. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure participants' level of agreement with several items within five variables (i.e., familiarity, likeability, similarity, consumer attitudes towards brands, and purchase intentions).

Findings: Positive consumer attitudes towards the brand positively influence purchase intention. Consumer attitudes towards the brand mediated the relationship between familiarity, likeability and similarity and purchase intention.

Practical Implications: This research guides marketers in selecting social media influencers based on attractiveness, particularly for the brands that conduct marketing activities on Douyin. In addition, marketers should focus more on building positive consumer attitudes when conducting marketing campaigns on social media.

Acknowledgements

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1   Introduction

Social media makes it common to find short videos promoting various products, and sportswear is one of the popular types. This thesis examines the relationship between the components of social media influencers' attractiveness and consumers' purchase intention for sportswear and the mediating effect of consumer attitudes towards brands.

This chapter provides background information on social media marketing and influencer marketing. Then the special context of sportswear and the platform Douyin are discussed. Subsequently, we elaborate on the rationale behind the formation of the research topic, "the effect of the components of the attractiveness of Douyin influencers on consumers' intention to purchase sportswear". Next, the purpose of this study, the research questions, and the delimitations are discussed. Lastly, we outline the overall structure of this study to provide readers with a clear understanding of the research content.

1.1   Background

The number of social media users continues to grow, which has become a major trend on the Internet. Currently, nearly 60% of the world's population are social media users, with 4.76 billion people using social media as of January 2023 (Datareportal, 2023). According to Datareportal (2023), the growth of social media users has slowed in recent months, with an annual growth rate of only 3%. This indicates that social media users have reached a stable level and the market is maturing. However, according to a forecast, the number of social media users worldwide will reach 5.85 billion in 2027 (Statista, 2022c). Along with the increasing number of social media users, the amount of time spent on social networks per day by Internet users worldwide has been gradually increasing over the decade, from 90 minutes in 2012 to 147 minutes in 2022 (Statista, 2022a), indicating a growing reliance on social media by users.

As the number of social media users continues to grow and reaches a substantial base today, marketing on social media is becoming increasingly important. Marketers generally agree that it is essential to engage customers on social media platforms (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2021). Social media provides marketers with the opportunity to communicate with customers, build relationships, gain consumer trust, and increase consumer loyalty (Durgam, 2018; Jackson, 2011; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal & Hughes, 2013). Furthermore, social media plays a key

role in increasing sales, word of mouth, and profits, as well as influencing the value of the brand (Alves, Fernandes & Raposo, 2016). For companies, it is an opportunity to cross over to traditional intermediaries, and there are an increasing number of companies that are using social media as a marketing tool (Durgam, 2018).

As of the third quarter of the year 2022, the most common reasons people use social media are to find inspiration and buy products, view content from their favoured brands, and follow celebrities or influencers (Statista, 2022b), all of which are closely related to consumption. The act of consumers sharing product reviews, service experiences, and product usage tips on social media also influences consumer purchases (Mason, Narcum & Mason, 2021). The ability of consumers to express their opinions about products and services on social media has greatly influenced the decision-making process of consumers, transforming consumers from passive recipients of marketing communications to active participants who can both consume and promote (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi & Thrassou, 2021). Neither individual consumers nor companies can do without social media, the use of social media has become inseparable from the Internet. Social media has a great growth potential and competition for social media marketing is also increasing (Rapp et al., 2013). Therefore, leveraging social media marketing has become an important strategic approach for small businesses and even large multinational companies (Rapp et al., 2013). Influencer marketing, an important part of social media marketing, has become a popular choice for companies conducting social media marketing. Researchers have emphasised the importance of leveraging the power of influencers to positively affect consumers' purchasing behaviour (Mason, Narcum & Mason, 2021), while also highlighting the priority goal of utilising the information spread and shared by influencers on social media within social media marketing strategies (Alves, Fernandes & Raposo, 2016).

Such a transition to social media marketing strategies that leverage the power of influencers is also applicable to the sportswear market, an industry experiencing rapid growth and offering various common products such as athletic wear, yoga wear, outdoor wear, swimwear, and leisure wear. Well-known sportswear brands include Adidas, Nike, PUMA and Columbia. The market is projected to witness a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.8%-6.6% over the next five years (Fortune Business Insights, 2021; Grand View Research, 2023).

As the awareness of health and fitness increases, more and more consumers are incorporating exercise and fitness activities into their daily lives. Sportswear is designed to be functional, catering to the needs of individuals in the gym and during regular exercise activities (Grand View Research, 2023). Females are also becoming more involved in sports and fitness than ever before (Grand View Research, 2023), which makes sports products for women a thriving segment within the industry (Fortune Business Insights, 2021). Moreover, the retail and fast fashion industries in developing countries are also growing, leading to an increased demand

for sports products and further expanding the market (Grand View Research, 2023). Therefore, the sportswear market is promising and exhibiting significant growth potential.

As the sportswear market continues to experience rapid growth and evolving consumer preferences, the utilisation of social media platforms, such as Douyin, presents a unique opportunity for sportswear brands. Douyin is a video-sharing social media App developed by Beijing ByteDance. It is regarded as the China version of TikTok and emerged as the most popular short video App in China, with 780 million users (Business of Apps, 2023). This platform has attracted numerous celebrities, content creators, and viewers, establishing its own pool of influential figures and attracting a large audience. In 2022, the platform had an average monthly count of over 700,000 popular topic creators (Douyin, 2022). The presence of Douyin and its extensive user base offers significant opportunities for sportswear brands and products to leverage influencer marketing and engage with a vast audience interested in fitness and lifestyle content.

1.2   Problem Formulation

With the growing popularity of influencer marketing, researchers have published many studies on the subject.

One of the most popular and frequently discussed topics in the field of influencer marketing involves the characteristics of SMIs and their impact on consumers. One of the most dominant viewpoints emphasised that there is higher credibility (or perceived credibility by consumers) of SMIs compared to traditional marketing methods, contributing to their successful development in social media. For example, Al-Emadi, Fatima Abdulaziz, Ben Yahia and Imene (2020) stated that influencer credibility is the most important factor to followers. It is derived from SMIs' experience with various products, and consumers value authentic reports on their experiences rather than requiring specialised knowledge or a recognized offline position. However, other scholars usually describe trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, and similarity as components of influencer credibility (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020).

Another trending topic in influencer marketing is the influence of psychological factors on consumers, which has been extensively addressed in the literature (Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019; Hu, Min, Han & Liu, 2020; Ki, Cuevas, Chong & Lim, 2020; Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020). For instance, consumer attachment to social media influencers (SMIs) is a positive emotion that consumers develop towards the influencers, leading them to transfer this attachment to the promotions and endorsements made by the influencers (Ki et al., 2020). This emotional attachment positively influences followers to purchase products or

brands recommended by SMIs, established by satisfying consumers' need for aspiration (by demonstrating inspiration), relevance (by demonstrating similarity and pleasure), and the ability to achieve (by curating informational content) (Ki et al., 2020).

In addition, one of the more researched topics we found was the attributes of the content published by influencers and their impact on consumers. The quality of the content generated by influencers has an important impact on the consumer outcomes to which they are directed. For example, the original and unique content increases consumers' willingness to interact with influencers (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020), while consumers behave more positively when the published content is visually appealing, conveys prestige, has expertise and is perceived as informative and interactive (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki and Kim, 2019).

However, we found that the existing literature has limited studies on the attractiveness of influencers and its impact on consumer behaviour. In addition, few studies have investigated the impact of familiarity, likeability and similarity. While these existing studies are all part of the above-mentioned popular topic of SMIs' characteristics and their impact on consumers, they are primarily more about credibility. Even though there is some literature exploring attractiveness and consumer behaviour, there is a lack of segmented and in-depth studies specifically for the sportswear industry. And when examining the effect of influencer characteristics on consumer influence, particularly in different industries, or in other words, different types of endorsement products, there is a significant possibility of different results (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020). For example, in the context of consumer electronics, influencer expertise and credibility have a definite advantage relative to influencer attractiveness (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the characteristics of SMIs and their impact on consumers across different industries.

In recent years, there has been an increase in traffic on social media platforms, especially on health and exercise-related topics, such as meditation and fitness (Taylor, 2020). The fashion industry has also been widely discussed in social media. Additionally, companies in the fashion industry commonly incorporate influencer marketing as part of their overall marketing strategy to run campaigns and collaborate with influencers (Haenlein, Anadol, Farnsworth, Hugo, Hunichen & Welte, 2020). Given the popularity of both the fitness and fashion industries topics on social media, we decided to focus on the intersection of these two topics, sportswear, as the industry and product category in this study.

As for the choice of social media platforms, it is important to recognise that consumer behaviour, and influencer behaviour, can vary across different platforms (Vrontis et al., 2021). It is worth noting that 32% of the reviews in influencer marketing were for Instagram (Vrontis et al., 2021), with no mention of Douyin. However, according to the information provided in the background, Douyin is a highly popular social media platform in China. Therefore, further

research is needed to explore the specific dynamics and effects of influencer marketing on Douyin.

In the context of broad influencer marketing, the impact on SMIs' attractiveness remains uncertain and is worth further exploration. Furthermore, there is limited literature that has addressed the role of consumer attitudes as mediators in the relationship between the components of SMIs' attractiveness and consumer purchase intentions, particularly the respective mediating roles of the relationships between familiarity, likeability, similarity, and purchase intentions. Therefore, with this study, we are expected to contribute to such aspects above.

1.3   Purpose and Objectives

Considering the limited research on the impact of influencers' attractiveness components (i.e., familiarity, likeability, and similarity) on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions respectively, particularly in relation to different industries and social media platforms, further investigations are necessary. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of these attractiveness components (i.e., familiarity, likeability, and similarity) on consumer attitudes towards brands and purchase intentions among Douyin users, with a specific focus on the sportswear industry. The aim is to make a valuable contribution to the field of influencer marketing.

To examine influencer marketing in the sportswear industry on Douyin, the following main research questions were proposed:

RQ1: How do social media influencers' (SMIs) familiarity, likeability, and similarity with consumers affect consumers' purchase intentions?

RQ2: How do social media influencers' (SMIs) familiarity, likeability, and similarity to consumers influence consumers' purchase intentions through their attitudes towards brands?

1.4   Delimitations

As mentioned above, the findings of related studies examining influencer attractiveness can vary greatly across industries. In this study, the focus is specifically on the sportswear industry within the fashion industry, without considering other industries. And since Douyin is primarily used by Chinese users and is restricted to mainland China, the study's target population is delimited to Chinese users.

In this paper, there is no differentiation between influencers based on their size or reach, such as micro-influencers and macro-influencers. Indeed, we only assess the attractiveness of the influencers. This is because consumers will browse and follow influencers of different sizes rather than sticking to a fixed influencers category; marketers may also choose influencers of different sizes depending on their budgets or business goals.

1.5   Outline of the Thesis

The full paper is divided into six parts. The first chapter is the introduction, including background, problematization, the purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, and delimitation. The second chapter focuses on the literature review and related theories, mainly reviewing the existing literature on influencer marketing, and discussing social influence theory and source attractiveness models of SMIs, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions, followed by an elaboration of the relevant theories and hypotheses. A conceptual framework is also presented. In Chapter 3, methodology, the underlying research philosophy, research design, data collection method, and data analysis method are discussed critically. We further reflect on validity and reliability, and ethical considerations as well. Chapter 4 presents the demographic and descriptive analysis, and reflects the interpretation of the analysis results. Then, in the Discussion, we critically reflect on the relationship between these findings and previous research. Any contradictions or parallels with existing literature are highlighted. The final chapter will include various sections presenting the summary of the main findings of the study, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and also recommendations for future research.

2 Literature/Theoretical Review

In this chapter, the insights from the existing literature are examined to establish the necessary theoretical foundation for this study. This chapter begins by reviewing previous research on influencer marketing and SMIs to provide a relevant background foundation for the study. The concepts of social influence theory, source attractiveness models of SMIs, consumer attitudes, and purchase intention are then introduced and discussed. Thereafter, the hypotheses formed between the variables are described based on the existing literature. At the end of this chapter, a conceptual framework based on the reviewed literature, theories, and hypotheses is developed.

2.1 Influencer Marketing and Social Media Influencer (SMI)

The digital world is real and exciting, providing individuals with the freedom of people to express their ideas and opinions. The increasing use of social media platforms has enabled regular customers to share their perspectives and experiences with their peers (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020). With the emergence and growing popularity of social media, the role of social influencers has gained widespread attention from marketers and customers (Guruge, 2018). This has led to the emergence of a new marketing approach known as influencer marketing, which has become a beneficial marketing tool in the modern marketing era (Guruge, 2018; Li, Lee & Lien, 2012). Influencer marketing refers to a behaviour that focuses on a specific person rather than the entire target market (Henderson, 2018). In other words, it emphasises the use of influencers or social media spokespeople to convey and drive the message of a brand or product to reach the target audience segment (Damirchi, Öney & Sahranavard, 2022; Lim, Mohd Radzol, Cheah & Wong, 2017). Unlike other traditional media channels, influencer marketing has been found to generate 11 times the return on investment compared to other forms of digital communication (Draper, 2017; Geyser, 2021). This indicates that influencer marketing is not only cost-effective but also delivers more effective information. As a result, influencer marketing has become an innovative and trendy way for brands to interact with consumers (Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017). According to Chetioui, Benlafqi and Lebdaoui (2020), influencer marketing strategies have the potential to affect consumers' attitudes toward influencers, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Therefore, many

companies have implemented these strategies and used SMIs to affect the purchase intentions of potential buyers.

In this rapidly iterating Internet era, the concept of SMIs has experienced considerable changes. In the early stages, some studies considered opinion leaders as SMIs (Jansom & Pongsakorn Rung Silp, 2021; Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang & Soutar, 2020). Opinion leaders are individuals who create information bridges between mass media and people's opinions and choices (Feick & Price, 1987). With the development of social media, some scholars have redefined the concept of SMIs. According to Geyser (2023), SMIs are defined as people who are well-known on a specific topic or domain. They created valuable content through social media on a regular and consistent basis to increase the marketing value of a brand or product (Lou & Yuan, 2019) and foster connections and interactions with their followers (Liu, Jin, Briones & Kuch, 2012). Consequently, SMIs can potentially influence consumers' purchase intentions and impact their buying decisions. In particular, in the context of the fashion industry, consumers are more likely to be influenced by SMIs (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020). However, Guruge (2018) argued that it remains challenging to definitely establish whether influencer marketing directly generates purchase intentions. This provides the basis for further investigation in this study.

The literature related to influencer marketing has mainly focused on studying celebrity influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Ilicic, Baxter & Kulczynski, 2016; Moraes, Gountas, Gountas & Sharma, 2019). However, in some existing literature, SMIs are sometimes referred to as micro-celebrities as well (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017; Marwick, 2015) because of their expertise in specific areas such as beauty and fashion (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Researchers have identified several factors that are considered to be crucial for the influence of SMIs on consumers. For instance, source credibility has a significant effect on consumer attitudes (Abdullah, Deraman, Zainuddin, Azmi, Abdullah, Anuar, Mohamad, Wan Zulkiffli, Nik Hashim, Abdullah, Rasdi & Hasan, 2020); Masuda, Han and Lee (2022) found that influencer attributes and perceived characteristics enhance consumer purchase intentions. Source credibility was found to be a recurring theme with a mix of factors (e.g., expertise, attractiveness, authenticity, etc.) (Ohanian, 1990). In addition, there are also studies that focus only on the impact of the attractiveness of SMI on consumer behaviour (Absharina, Yuriani & Hendriana, 2021; Chekima, Chekima & Adis, 2020; Savitri, Suliyanto & Setyanto, 2022; Widyanto & Agusti, 2020). However, as previously mentioned in section 1.2, the differential impacts of the components of attractiveness have not been found to be studied in sufficient depth in the existing literature, especially for specific product categories in the sportswear industry.

2.2   Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory (SIT), developed by Kelman (1958), provides valuable theoretical support for understanding the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between influencers and their followers. SIT refers to the subsequent changes in attitudes, beliefs, personal actions, or behaviours of individuals in social networks who are influenced by others (Savitri, Suliyanto & Setyanto, 2022).

SIT distinguishes three processes of social influence: compliance, identification, and internalisation (Kelman, 1961; Kelman, 1974). In this case, compliance occurs when an individual accepts influence to gain approval or avoid disapproval from the influencer, while identification arises when the follower identifies with and accepts the influence, establishing a relationship based on attraction. Internalisation occurs when the follower and the influencer share the same value system (Kelman, 1974). According to Li (2013), SIT argues that the influence of individuals in a particular social network leads consumers to display certain intentions or patterns of behaviour. SIT has proven useful in explaining the influencing process on social media (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Consumers perceive SMIs as credible and attractive, thus accepting their influence (Savitri, Suliyanto & Setyanto, 2022; Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Therefore, SIT can provide a valuable framework for exploring the degree of influence between SMIs and consumers.

2.3   Source Attractiveness Model

The source attractiveness model is commonly used to identify the persuasive impact of influencers on social media platforms (Weismueller et al., 2020). This model has also been extensively referenced in previous literature to examine the impact of endorsers' attractiveness on consumer behaviour.

Proposed by McGuire (1985), the source attractiveness model emphasises the important role of attractiveness in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviours, as well as the effectiveness of endorsement messages. Attractiveness extends beyond physical attractiveness and includes various other aspects that consumers may perceive from the influencers, including creativity skills, personality attributes, and lifestyle (Erdogan, 1999). The inclusion of attractiveness in the model is based on the trend that attractiveness has become an important factor as influencers are increasingly used as endorsers of products, brands, and/or services (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Caballero, Lumpkin & Madden, 1989; Ohanian, 1990). Joseph's (1982) study demonstrated that attractive influencers have a positive effect on opinion changes and product evaluations. However, some scholars have studied and concluded that while

attractiveness can generate positive attitudes and evaluations, it cannot directly influence purchase intentions (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Caballero, Lumpkin & Madden, 1989; Lim et al., 2017; Ohanian, 1990; Till & Busler, 1998). Additionally, attractiveness includes three major elements: familiarity, likeability, and similarity (Erdogan, 1999; Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

2.3.1 Familiarity

According to McGuire (1985), familiarity was defined as the knowledge that individuals have about the endorser, acquired through exposure and contact (Erdogan, 1999). It can also be understood as the comfort level between the influencer and the audience (i.e., the recipient of the source of the communication), representing a sense of familiarity (Kiecker & Cowles, 2001). According to Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid (2018), in the context of social media, followers perceived their familiarity with the influencer as a one-sided relationship, feeling that they know the influencer well. It has been shown that consumers are more likely to trust and positively relate to influencers whom they are familiar with (Lee & Yurchisin, 2011). This suggested that familiarity may have a positive impact on consumer attitudes because of its lower perceived risks associated with familiar influencers (Lee & Yurchisin, 2011). In addition, Bornstein (1989) indicated that the unknown carried more risk and therefore adults prefer familiar influencers and feel comfortable with their influence as a way to reduce risk. In other words, lower perceived risk could generate higher purchase intentions (Abdullah et al., 2020).

2.3.2 Likeability

Likeability refers to the effect that an influencer's character or other personal characteristics have on individuals (McGuire, 1985; Kiecker & Cowles, 2001), especially the affection they feel towards the influencer based on his or her appearance and behaviour (McGuire, 1985). Existing research suggested that when consumers are attracted to the personality or characteristics of SMIs, such likeability positively influenced consumer attitudes and their purchase intentions (Kumar, 2011; Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). More specifically, according to Cheung, Xiao and Liu (2014), likeability motivated consumers to purchase the same products that SMIs endorse, recommend, or use. Thus, likeability is important as it can transfer influence from influencers to products (McGuire, 1985) and have a greater impact on consumers' product evaluation and selection (Ohanian, 1990). However, Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk and Jones's (2020) full regression model concluded that although there is a small but positive relationship, likeability can not stimulate consumer purchase intentions. Therefore further research is necessary to explore this relationship more comprehensively.

2.3.3 Similarity

Similarity refers to the degree of sameness between influencers and their followers (McGuire, 1985), including similarity in terms of demographics, interests, social status, and lifestyle (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska, 2016). Therefore it can also be referred to as fit (Taillon et al., 2020). SMIs are influential and represent a powerful force in the fashion market (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Langner, 2012). Different arguments exist regarding the impact of similarity in studies on SMIs. It has been argued that endorsers act as references that affect consumer evaluations and behaviours and therefore motivate consumers to use the product or brand conveyed by the influencer (McCracken, 1989). Furthermore, according to Zhafira, Purba, Asteriani and Soesilo (2022), when consumers or audiences perceive themselves as similar to the influencer, they develop higher curiosity about the product introduced by the SMI. There was research supporting that higher similarity leads to more positive attitudinal evaluations (Silvera & Austad, 2004). The existing literature suggested that SMIs are capable of demonstrating their lifestyle and value attitudes to their audiences through creativity and personalization (Li, Lee & Lien, 2012). This indicates that by leading consumers who perceive similarities to replicate their styles, these influencers have the ability to shape fashion trends (Abdullah et al., 2020). Hence, similarity increases consumers' willingness to purchase (Woodside & Davenport, 1974). In other words, this similarity can persuade consumers to make purchasing decisions. However, the study by Taillon et al. (2020) provided the opposite perspective, stating that while similarity can lead to positive evaluations, it does not appear to be an important factor for consumers' purchase intention. Similarity may not directly lead to purchase intention for recommended fashion products (Gomes, Marques & Dias, 2022).

2.4 Consumer Attitudes

In order to develop successful influencer marketing strategies, marketing managers have shown a high level of interest in consumer attitudes (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2010). The concept of attitude originated from the field of social psychology and it is defined as the tendency of an individual to evaluate a particular entity with some degree of approval or disapproval (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Given that attitudes are formed through interactions with other individuals, Perloff (2020) emphasised the social nature of attitudes. Furthermore, according to Perloff (2020), individuals can hold multiple attitudes, including both positive and negative feelings, towards a specific object, indicating that attitudes are not always internally consistent. In the context of influencer marketing, attitudes refer to the overall evaluations and reactions of consumers towards a specific object (i.e., anything that a person may hold, such as products, influencers, and ideas) (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Attitudes are

internal evaluations for the description of objects such as branded products (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). The concept of consumer attitudes is crucial in the field of marketing research. The reason is that marketers try to change the behaviour of consumers by influencing their attitudes (Perloff, 2000).

According to the existing literature, there are two main types of attitude studies of target consumers: attitudes towards products and brands (Lim et al., 2017; Zhafira et al., 2022) and attitudes toward SMIs (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020; Immanuel & Bianda, 2021; Taillon et al., 2020). According to Chan, Leung Ng and Luk (2013) and Damirchi, Öney and Sahranavard (2022), there is a positive relationship between consumers' attitudes toward brands and their purchase intentions. When it comes to products, consumers' attitudes towards specific products are considered to be the dominant factor influencing their purchase intentions (Chen, 2007; Lim et al., 2017). Furthermore, changes in purchase intentions can be jointly explained by attitudes towards SMIs and attitudes towards brands (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020). This implied the importance of attitudes in predicting purchase intentions.

2.5   Purchase Intentions

Purchase intentions exist in the consumer's psyche and represent a form of self-control over the purchase decision (Kotler & Keller, 2006 as cited in Savitri, Suliyanto & Setyanto, 2022). It typically refers to a consumer's conscious decision or intention to purchase a particular brand of product (Spears & Singh, 2004) and can also be defined as the likelihood that a consumer intends or is willing to purchase a particular brand of product in the future (Huang, Jim Wu, Wang and Boulanger, 2011; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2004), purchase intention occurred after the consumer's evaluation of the branded product. This means that consumers should first develop an interest and positive attitude towards the desired product before purchasing in order to drive their eventual purchase intentions.

With the increasing use of social media, consumers' lifestyles and shopping habits have changed significantly in recent years (Jaffari & Hunjra, 2017). According to Bruner and Pomazal (1988), they go through a series of steps before making a purchase, including gathering all the information needed to satisfy their needs or desires, and comparing and evaluating products. They rely on their previous practices, preferences, and suggestions from others to gather information, engage in the product evaluation process and ultimately make a purchase decision (Chi, Yeh & Tsai, 2011). This process is the basis for consumers' purchase decisions and can reflect their purchase intentions. In addition, purchase intention is an indicator of actual purchase and is used to measure consumer behaviour (Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to understand consumers' purchase intentions because they are

closely related to consumer behaviour, attitudes, and opinions, and can even be used to predict the purchase process (Ghosh, 1990 as cited in Savitri, Suliyanto & Setyanto, 2022).

In the context of influencer marketing, previous literature has shown that consumers' attitudes towards specific brands can directly influence their purchase intentions (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000; Zhafira et al., 2022). Moreover, there is also some literature concluded that attitudes towards influencers positively affect consumers' purchase intentions (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020; Taillon et al., 2020; Immanuel & Bianda, 2021; Lim et al., 2017). Therefore, understanding consumers' purchase intentions is widely considered important, particularly in the context of influencer marketing.

2.6   Hypotheses Development

This section will describe the hypothesised relationships that will be tested in this study and provide the literature review and theory derived from the previous sections for support.

2.6.1 SMIs' Attractiveness

Influencer marketing is considered a new form of celebrity endorsement because of its ability to reach consumers who may not be easily accessible through traditional marketing methods (Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017). SMIs are often used to deliver marketing messages (Damirchi, Öney & Sahranavard, 2022) and are increasingly used as channels to understand and influence the purchase intentions and behaviours of target audiences (Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi, 2014). SIT showed that in a social context, individuals' behaviours and attitudes are influenced by others. Similarly, in the context of influencer marketing, it appears that consumers' purchase intentions can be influenced by the attractiveness of SMI.

Lee and Yurchisin's (2011) study suggested that attractive influencers may establish a connection with individuals or businesses, which can have an impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Many scholars have published articles exploring the relationship between SMIs and consumer purchase intentions. These studies have confirmed that the attractiveness of SMIs has a positive effect on consumer purchase intentions (Savitri, Suliyanto & Setyanto, 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020; Widyanto & Agusti, 2020). As stated by Waldt, Loggerenberg and Wehmeyer (2009), attractive endorsers can drive purchase intentions. Moreover, attractiveness had a greater impact on consumers' thoughts (Joseph, 1982; Kahle & Homer, 1985). According to previous literature, attractive influencers are more successful in changing consumer perceptions and beliefs (Baker & Churchill, 1977) and purchase intentions (Till & Busler, 2000) as well. Therefore, influencers are able to influence consumers to exhibit

purchase intention behaviour through social media (Savitri, Suliyanto & Setyanto, 2022). Typically, influencers who are perceived as attractive tend to elicit positive attitudes towards brands or products (Damirchi, Öney & Sahranavard, 2022) and can also encourage consumers to be more receptive to recommended brand products (Immanuel & Bianda, 2021). According to Wang and Scheinbaum (2017), the attractiveness of SMIs can attract followers to build intimate relationships with them, thereby positively influencing attitudes and purchasing interests in the brand. Furthermore, Widyanto and Agusti (2020) observed that attractiveness has a significant beneficial effect on purchase intention because of the sense of similarity, familiarity, and likeability with the influencer. Therefore, this study will consider the attractiveness of SMIs in three dimensions: familiarity, likeability, and similarity.

2.6.1.1 Familiarity

Familiarity represents the knowledge that an influencer has gained through exposure (Erdogan, 1999). It has been shown that consumers are more likely to trust and have positive associations with sources and influencers they are familiar with (Lee & Yurchisin, 2011). According to Zajonc (1968), when a person is familiar with an influencer and has increasing interactions with him or her, they will spontaneously become more affectionate towards that influencer. People tend to accept and trust familiar information or sources compared to unfamiliar ones as well (Chun, Lim, Tan & Teh, 2018). Furthermore, existing research has indicated that familiarity usually plays an important role in influencing consumers' eventual decisions, especially when consumers are trying to make a purchase decision (Doyle, Pentecost & Funk, 2014). This is because familiarity can have an impact on brand preference and thus stimulate consumers' purchase intentions (Hutchinson, Baker, Moore & Nedungadi, 1986). Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid (2018) stated that followers' purchase intentions are perceived more positively when they are more familiar with the influencers. The reason for this is that familiarity enables the receiver (i.e., the follower) to have a degree of comfort with the sender (i.e., the SMIs), thereby making the SMIs appear more convincing. Based on the above findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: SMIs' familiarity has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions for sportswear.

H2: SMIs' familiarity has a positive impact on consumer attitudes towards brands.

2.6.1.2 Likeability

Likeability represents the liking for an influencer due to characteristics such as appearance, behaviour, and personality (McGuire, 1985). According to Kumar (2011) and Xiao, Wang and Chan-Olmsted (2018), when consumers are attracted to the personality or characteristics of

SMIs, such likeability can positively affect consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Many studies in the existing literature have also expressed similar views that SMIs with attractive appearances and attributes have a positive impact on influencing consumers' attitudes and, in turn, purchase intentions (Lim et al., 2017; Till & Busler, 2000). The reason for such an effect is that SMIs are more persuasive when they are likeable (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Consumers usually go for brands and products that are endorsed and recommended by their preferred SMIs (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Therefore, based on the above study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: SMIs' likeability has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions for sportswear.

H4: SMIs' likeability has a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards brands.

2.6.1.3 Similarity

Finally, similarity represents the degree of similarity between influencers and consumers (McGuire, 1985). The similarity is considered to influence buying behaviour and increase consumers' willingness to buy (Woodside & Davenport, 1974). According to Li, Lee and Lien (2012), purchase decisions will be more likely to be influenced when a person interacts with people who have similar interests and ideas. Furthermore, Kapitan and Silvera (2016) also showed that when consumers perceive similarity with SMIs, they tend to purchase products recommended or used by SMIs to become more similar to them. This is because when consumers perceive similarities between themselves and the influencer, they develop higher curiosity about the brand or product they are talking about and in turn show a predisposition toward that brand or product (Zhafira et al., 2022). Moreover, according to SIT, attractive SMIs can motivate consumers to show purchase intentions through the identification and internalisation process. Therefore, based on the above study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: SMIs' similarity has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions for sportswear.

H6: SMIs' similarity can positively influence consumer attitudes towards brands.

2.6.2 Consumer Attitudes Towards Brands

Cognitive social psychologists have shown that attitudes towards a particular object are likely to lead to corresponding behaviours toward that object (Brown & Stayman, 1992). In the realm of consumer research, the connection between attitudes and purchase intentions has also been observed (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005).

Consumers' attitudes towards brands have a significant influence on their brand choices. Several current studies on influencer endorsement have emphasised the importance of attitudes in shaping purchase intentions (Chan, Leung Ng & Luk, 2013; Lim et al., 2017). The earlier literature has consistently shown that consumers' attitudes towards brands can greatly influence their purchase intentions (Mackenzie & Spreng, 1992). When consumers have more positive attitudes toward a brand, they are more likely to express an intention to purchase that particular product (Absharina, Yuriani & Hendriana, 2021). In other words, positive attitudes towards a brand can emerge as purchase intentions (Pradhan, Duraipandian & Sethi, 2016). Moreover, in the existing literature, there are various studies have demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Absharina, Yuriani & Hendriana, 2021; Chan, Leung Ng & Luk, 2013; Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020; Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000; Immanuel & Bianda, 2021; Zhafira et al., 2022). According to Huang et al. (2011), consumers' persistent preference for certain brands can be directly influenced by their attitudes toward those brands, ultimately encouraging consumers to develop purchase intentions. Ha and Lam (2016) also supported this view, highlighting that consumers' purchase intention is significantly impacted by the level of positivity they associate with brands endorsed through SMI promotions. Therefore, based on the above study, the following hypothesis is generated:

H7: Consumer attitudes towards brands have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions for sportswear.

2.6.3 Consumer Attitudes as Mediating Effect

Previous studies have found that the relationship among source attractiveness, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions is strongly and positively correlated (Erdogan, 1999). According to Tsai, Wen-Ko and Liu (2007), a consumer's attitude towards a brand is determined by his or her experience with that brand and also the celebrity who promotes it and ultimately affects the intention to purchase the product. This implies that an attractive and likeable influencer can stimulate positive consumer beliefs, which in turn generate the desire to make a purchase decision (Lim et al., 2017). Similarly, Till and Busler (2000) expressed the view that an attractive endorser can lead to positive consumer attitudes and subsequently influence purchase intentions. This suggested that the attractiveness of SMIs can positively influence consumers (Taillon et al., 2020).

While existing literature has generally considered attractiveness as a whole, there are still a limited number of literature that elaborated on the link between consumer attitudes towards brands and factors such as familiarity, likeability, similarity and purchase intentions. According to Hutchinson et al. (1986), consumers are able to generate a positive influence on

brands through their familiarity with SMIs, which, in turn, influences purchase intentions. Thus,

H8: Consumer attitudes towards brands mediate the relationship between SMIs' familiarity and purchase intentions.

In addition, the positive impact of well-liked SMIs on consumers' attitudes affects their purchase intentions (Till & Busler, 2000; Lim et al., 2017). Therefore, an informed prediction could be made,

H9: Consumer attitudes towards brands mediate the relationship between SMIs' likeability and purchase intentions.

Brands usually act as a priority for consumers. In other words, the impact of influencers on consumers' purchase intentions depends on their attitudes towards brands (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020). Moreover, according to Lim et al. (2017), in the context of SMIs, attitudes have been identified as playing an important mediating role between influencers, brands and products, and the purchase intentions of advertised products. Therefore, an informed prediction can be made that attitudes can play a mediating role in the relationship between SMIs' familiarity, likeability, similarity and purchase intentions. Based on the above research, the following hypotheses are generated:

H10: Consumer attitudes towards brands mediate the relationship between SMIs' similarity and purchase intentions.

2.7   Conceptual Model

In the conceptual model of our study, there are five variables: three independent variables (SMIs' familiarity, likeability, and similarity); a dependent variable (purchase intentions); and a mediating variable (consumer attitudes towards brands).

As shown in Figure 2.1, familiarity to purchase intentions is the first hypothesis (H1), followed by familiarity to consumer attitudes towards brands (H2). Likeability to purchase intentions is the third hypothesis (H3), and to consumer attitudes is shown as Hypothesis 4. Then, similarity to purchase intentions is the fifth hypothesis (H5), followed by Hypothesis 6 which indicates the relationship between similarity and consumer attitudes. Hypothesis 7 is the consumer attitudes towards brands to purchase intentions. Moreover, the mediating effect of consumer attitudes towards brands between SMIs' attractiveness (i.e., familiarity, likeability, and similarity) and purchase intentions are considered as Hypothesis 8, 9, and 10, respectively.
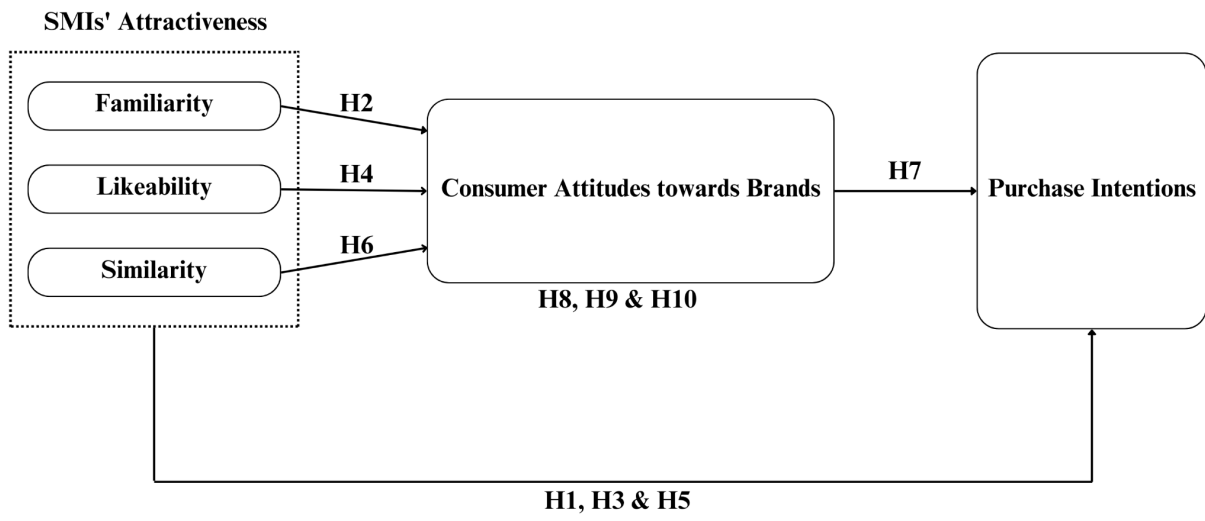
Figure 2.1 Conceptual Model

3   Methodology

In this chapter, we describe the methodological approach adopted for this study. The chapter begins with an introduction to the basic research philosophy, followed by the research approach and design. The subsequent sections provide explanations of the data collection process, questionnaire design, and data analysis methods. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the reliability and validity of the study, and the limitations and ethical aspects are also taken into consideration.

3.1   Research Philosophy

The philosophical tradition of the researcher is the foundation of any research project as long-established considerations about existence, reality, and knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). Essentially, a research philosophy is a set of beliefs about data research and is therefore important for cognitive research objectives and clarifying research design (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This is because philosophy not only helps researchers in identifying and improving the quality of their designs but also contributes to their creativity (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, in the methodology chapter, we will first elaborate on the philosophical positions taken in this study, namely ontology and epistemology, in order to establish the foundation for the methodology.

3.1.1   Ontology

Ontology, as a branch of philosophy, is a fundamental assumption of the researcher about the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). According to Goertz and Mahoney (2012), most concepts or measurements primarily exist to represent the phenomena that actually exist in the empirical world. Ontology can be categorised into four position continuums, namely realism, internal realism, relativism, and nominalism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Considering the purpose of this study, the internal realism position is considered to be the most relevant. This position holds that there is a single truth in the real world that exists independently of human thoughts, but that the researcher can only access that reality indirectly as concrete facts are not always directly observable and accessible (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, in this study, the relationship among the attractiveness of SMIs,

consumers' attitudes towards brands, and their purchase intentions is considered to reflect an existing truth. Instead, it is difficult to fully understand and grasp it. We consider that knowledge is relative and limited, and its authenticity could vary depending on different experiences and contexts. Hence, in the study, the truth will be approached indirectly by observing and collecting phenomena and things, in reality, to approximate the real phenomenon as much as possible. Therefore, internal realism is the most relevant ontological philosophical position for this study, which will help to address our research questions.

3.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and ways of inquiry that help researchers to determine the most appropriate methods for inquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Crotty (1998) showed that epistemology is an intrinsic theory that involves a certain understanding of knowledge. Furthermore, epistemology is concerned with the acceptability of knowledge in the field of study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), epistemology can be divided into positivism and social constructionism. The main idea of the former is that the social world can be measured by objective methods; on the contrary, the latter believes that how people understand their experiences will determine the real world. Therefore, considering our internal realism ontology position, positivism is more suitable for this study than social constructionism as we aimed to examine the phenomenon of truth from an objective standpoint and perspective rather than making subjective inferences through feeling, understanding, or thinking. Moreover, positivism can provide the best way to investigate human and social behaviour (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In this study, we aim to explore the extent to which the attractiveness of SMIs has an impact on consumer purchase intentions, which involves the investigation of human and social behaviour, and therefore, positivism can provide valuable assistance for this study. According to Burns and Burns (2008), positivism has a predictable causal model and can be measured with objective measures. This means that positivism helps to clarify the core assumptions of this study in gaining knowledge and can provide a foundation for the quantitative research methods used in this study. In summary, the philosophical approach of implementing positivism was the most appropriate choice for this study.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

A research design is defined as a strategy developed in response to the principles of research methodology for a particular study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). It is a framework for collecting and analysing data (Burns & Burns, 2008) and can clarify the methods and techniques used in the research process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In order to investigate the extent to which the influence of SMIs affects consumer purchase intention, this study adopted a deductive approach to conduct quantitative research in order to yield measurable results.

3.2.1 Deductive Reasoning

In the field of business research, deductive and inductive approaches are considered to be the most widely used forms of inquiry (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), inductive reasoning involves creating theories based on observations and comparisons of examples and patterns, leading to general conclusions. On the other hand, deductive methods usually derive specific situations from general principles or theories (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Bryman and Bell (2011) explained that deductive methods usually start with hypotheses or predictions, based on known information and existing theories related to a specific field, and then collect relevant data to test the consistency of those theories. For our study, the deductive reasoning approach is considered to be the most appropriate. Studies on the impact of influencer marketing on consumers have been widely discussed and are supported by existing theoretical frameworks, so the goal of this study is not to develop new theories. Hence, an inductive approach is not suitable. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which the components of SMIs' attractiveness affect consumers' purchase intentions. In contrast to the inductive approach, the deductive approach can help to address the research questions and achieve the objectives of this study from general to specific, i.e., by formulating different hypotheses about the relationship between SMIs' attractiveness (familiarity, likeability, similarity), consumers' attitudes towards brands, and purchase intentions based on existing theories. These hypotheses can then be tested by collecting relevant empirical data and drawing conclusions about the relationships between the variables. Thus, following a top-down deductive research approach is considered to be the most appropriate.

3.2.2 Quantitative Approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), qualitative research is usually text-based and tends to emphasise the way individuals interpret their social world; whereas quantitative research is considered a research strategy that emphasises data collection and analysis. Therefore, quantitative research is more appropriate for this study. The reason for this is that this study aims to examine the extent to which the attractiveness (familiarity, likeability, and similarity) of SMIs impacts consumer purchase intentions by collecting data from Douyin users. This process implied a focus on the measurement of the data as well as the relationships between variables. Quantitative researchers typically apply a set of concepts to the research tools being used (Burns & Burns, 2008). Our research is consistent with this statement as theoretical work precedes data collection. The study proceeded with hypotheses formulation and related data collection by prioritising the source attractiveness model and social influence theory. Finally, the study had more focus on consumer behaviour, which is in line with the quantitative research strategy as it focuses on the behaviour of individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, quantitative research is considered to be the most consistent with this study.

3.2.3 Cross-sectional Design

The most common form of a cross-sectional design is social survey research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A cross-sectional research design is defined as a research design in which all data are collected at a single point in time (Burns & Burns, 2008), meaning that data on the interest variables are almost captured and collected in a simultaneous manner. This is distinct from a longitudinal design approach in which the same sample data is measured repeatedly at different times (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). For this study, a cross-sectional design was necessary. The reason is that, after the questionnaire was distributed on social media platforms, the response data from different participants were collected and obtained at essentially the same time. Furthermore, given that the questionnaire for this study contained all the variables as well as indicators required, when participants completed a questionnaire, they provided data for all variables within the same period of time. Finally, considering the time constraints of this study, a cross-sectional design was considered more practical and suitable for the study.

3.3   Data Collection Method

After determining the research approach and design, it is important to determine the data collection method. Data collection methods are used to gather relevant empirical data by employing a range of feasible strategies to address the research questions (Creswell, 2014). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), the two main sources of data for quantitative analysis are primary data (i.e., collected directly through experiments, surveys, etc.) and secondary data (i.e., data obtained from public databases). Given that we did not come across relevant data that aligns with the purpose of this study, we chose to solely rely on primary data. In addition, collecting primary data through surveys provides control over the questionnaire design and sampling strategy (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, primary data were considered more beneficial than secondary data for this study in order to collect targeted and specific data.

Survey design is a traditional method of primary data collection that can be conducted in various ways, such as by mail, telephone, online, or in person (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In this study, we chose to publish online surveys as the data collection method. This is because this method offers significant advantages, including low cost, rapid data collection, high response rates, and the ability to reach survey participants across geographical distances (Wright, 2005). In addition, online questionnaires allow for automatic skipping when researchers use screening questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This means that using this method allowed us to quickly identify and remove data that did not meet the study's requirements from the sample pool. Another reason for choosing the online questionnaire approach is its potential to reduce data loss as well as data entry errors (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The data collected through the online questionnaires were automated and could create a comprehensive database that could be easily downloaded. This enhanced the accuracy of the data for this study to some extent.

The online questionnaire was created through wenjuan.com, which is a widely used online survey creation website in China known for its user-friendly interface for both creators and users. Since the target population of this study is Chinese consumers, the language used in the questionnaire is Chinese. However, since this study is written in English, and for the convenience of other researchers in the future, the specific content information of the questionnaire was translated into English, as shown in Appendix A.

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) and Burns and Burns (2008), the sampling process consists of several steps which are conducted in order, including considering and defining the appropriate population, selecting the sampling method, and determining the sample size. Each of these steps will be discussed separately below.

3.3.1 Population

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021, p. 113), the target population is defined as "the set of entities about which a researcher wishes to draw conclusions". This group of entities consists of individuals from whom the researcher requires information. In this study, the target population consisted of Chinese social media users between the ages of 18 and 58, regardless of gender. More specifically, the population of interest was social media users who have used or are actively using Douyin, representing consumers in the fashion industry in China. Douyin has 780 million users in China (Business of Apps, 2023), providing a sufficiently large pool for data collection purposes. This target population is typically active on social media platforms and is more likely to be exposed to influencer marketing. The population age group contains generations X, Y, and Z. And based on Douyin's user distribution, the age group of 18-58 is considered to be the most active segment among Douyin users in China. Therefore they become a suitable target population.

3.3.2 Sampling Method

Although probability sampling provides a more precise understanding of the relationship between the sample and the sampled population and can reduce uncertainty (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), this study chose to use non-probability sampling methods due to time and cost constraints, it is still valuable for future research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), non-probability sampling is mainly divided into convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and quota sampling. In this study, convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used because they are easy to perform, less time-consuming, and cost-effective (Burns & Burns, 2008).

Convenience sampling involves selecting sample units based on their convenience and accessibility (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In this study, the questionnaire was distributed online through a friends list and group chats on WeChat, which included family members, friends, classmates and teachers. In addition, since the study focused on the Douyin platform, the questionnaire was also shared directly on the Douyin platform to reach the target population more effectively. On the other hand, in the snowball sampling method, the researcher makes initial contact with several individuals who are relevant to the study and then uses their connections with others to expand the sample (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this study, participants were encouraged to introduce their friends who use the Douyin platform and have an interest in the sportswear industry. This sampling method helped us to be time-saving and accelerated the distribution of the survey.

3.3.3 Sample Size

According to Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb, a sample size between 30 and 500 is generally considered appropriate, and for multivariate studies (including multiple regression analysis), it is desirable to have a sample size that is at least 10 times larger than the number of studied variables. Throughout a one-week period, a total of 220 respondents completed the questionnaires. By filtering out responses from the pilot study and irrelevant participant answers, the final 210 responses remained for the subsequent data analysis. This sample size was considered to be appropriate.

3.4 Questionnaire Design

In this section, we will provide an overview of the questionnaire construction, which includes the type of questions used, the source of variables, the phrasing and the order of the questions. In addition, we will also indicate the modifications that were made based on the feedback received from the pilot survey.

3.4.1 Variables

In this study, five variables were used, consisting of three independent variables (i.e., SMIs' familiarity, likeability, and similarity), purchase intentions as the dependent variable, and consumer attitudes towards brands as the mediating variable.

SMIs' familiarity, likeability and similarity as three independent variables will explain dependent variables (i.e., purchase intentions) directly. Moreover, there are three indirect relationships between independent variables and purchase intentions that will be tested by consumer attitudes as the mediating variables.

3.4.2 Construction of Questionnaire

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were informed about the estimated time required to complete the questionnaire. They were also provided with the contacts (Email addresses) to consult the researchers in case they had any confusion regarding the survey.

The questionnaire included a screening question that asked respondents whether he or she is a user of Douyin. If the respondent answered "Yes", he or she would proceed to the next question. On the other hand, if the respondent chooses "No", then the questionnaire would automatically exit, indicating that it was not applicable to them.

After the screening question, the main question consisted of two parts. The first part included some demographic questions such as gender, age, education level, professional status, and income level. The purpose of these questions was to gather information about the respondents' backgrounds. The second part then presented the variables related to the hypotheses. In the questionnaire, we explained to the respondents that familiarity, likeability, and similarity were the three main elements that construct attractiveness. This clarification aimed to ensure that respondents had a clear understanding of these concepts.

The questionnaire was designed by using the Likert scale, a commonly used measurement tool. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement in the questionnaire. The scale consisted of five response options: "strongly agree", "agree", "generally agree", "disagree", and "strongly disagree", accompanied by 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1. Each response option represented a different degree of agreement or disagreement with the statement. By using the Likert scale, we aimed to capture the specific dimensions of the respondents' attitudes towards the statements, allowing for a more intensive understanding of their opinions and receiving valuable insights from their perceptions (Joshi, Kale, Chandel & Pal, 2015).

The Likert scale was chosen because it is the most widely used in surveys, it is easy to use and easy to understand (Joshi et al., 2015). In addition, the Likert scale is an appropriate method for measuring abstract concepts that are difficult to measure effectively; for example, the personal attitudes examined in this study are suitable. It provides a practical and effective means of quantifying subjective opinions. Although there has been controversy as to whether data generated by Likert scales should be considered interval data or ordinal data (Norman, 2010), researchers typically assume equal intervals between points and treat these data as interval data in their analyses, which allows researchers to apply various statistical techniques to these data (Hicks, 2009; Joshi et al., 2015; Wu & Leung, 2017).

To enhance the accuracy and credibility of the data, each variable was described using five similar statements. The order of variables was arranged in a logical sequence from the independent variables to the dependent variable. Specifically, the statements were presented in the order of the component of the attractiveness of SMIs, followed by consumer attitudes as the mediator, and finally with purchase intentions as the dependent variable.

The variables, their sources, and the corresponding English version of the statements that used to measure the variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 3.1: List of Variable Measurement

Variables	Sources	Measurement
SMI's Attractiveness Familiarity	SMIs' Attractiveness is adapted from Chun et al., 2018; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Torres, Augusto & Matos, 2019; Ha & Lam, 2016	F1: I often view the content that the influencer posts. F2: I often interact with the influencer (likes, comments, etc.). F3: I know the influencer well. F4: I always follow the influencer. F5: I'm familiar with the influencer.
SMI's Attractiveness Likeability		L1: The influencer is affinity. L2: The influencer is friendly. L3: The influencer is classy. L4: The influencer is empathetic. L5: The influencer is popular.
SMI's Attractiveness Similarity		S1: I have similar values to the influencers. S2: I have a similar lifestyle to the influencers. S3: I have a similar appearance to the influencers. S4: I have similar interests to the influencers. S5: I have similar perspectives to the influencer.
Consumer Attitudes towards brand	Consumer Attitudes toward Brands are adapted from Spears & Singh, 2004; Ha & Lam, 2016	CA1: I believe the brand that the influencer promoted is a good brand. CA2: The brand that the influencer promoted is appealing to me. CA3: I like the brand that the influencer promoted and/or used. CA4: I think that the brand which the influencer showed has good quality. CA5: I'm pleased with the brand that the influencer endorsed.
Purchase Intention	Purchase Intention is adapted from Chun et	PI1: I would like to buy sportswear that is advertised by the influencer.

	al., 2018; Duffett, 2015; Spears & Singh, 2004	PI2: I have a tendency to buy sportswear promoted by the influencer.
		PI3: The recognition of the influencer will have a positive impact on my intention to purchase sportswear.
		PI4: If the sportswear is promoted by the influencer, I am very interested in purchasing it.
		PI5: I prefer to buy sportswear recommended by the influencer.

3.4.2 Pilot Survey and the Update

According to Roopa and Rani (2012), conducting a pilot survey can test the validity of a study and ensure that the questions in the formal questionnaire are properly designed, sequenced, and worded to be easily understood by respondents. Therefore, we conducted a pilot survey with 6 participants. It is important to note that the data collected from the pilot study were not included in the final analysis.

During this pilot study process, we made improvements to the questionnaire by carefully reviewing the responses and communicating with the respondents. Two participants highlighted that the title and instructions in the questionnaire lacked clarity, making it easy to overlook the specific industry under investigation when responding to the questions. To address this issue, we improved the title of the questionnaire from "A questionnaire on influencer marketing" to "A questionnaire on the attractiveness of Douyin influencers in the sports/fashion field". We also provided better clarity on the definition and examples of sportswear at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure our objective is clear for respondents and minimise confusion. In addition, based on feedback from the pilot survey participants, we realised that the term "influencer" is not commonly used in the Chinese context. Respondents expressed difficulty in comprehending the meaning of the term despite the inclusion of a description in the questionnaire. To overcome this challenge, we then updated the description of influencers and translated it into a popular Chinese term to make it more easily understandable. We also emphasised the term by bolding the font to draw attention to it.

3.5   Data Analysis Method

This study will begin with a descriptive analysis to analyse the collected data. Descriptive analysis is an essential initial step in research, providing an overview of the data before conducting inferential statistical comparisons (Kaur, Stoltzfus & Yellapu, 2018). It enables researchers to gain insights into the sample at a macro level, which informs the next step in the selection of inferential statistics (Fisher & Marshall, 2009). Therefore, conducting a descriptive analysis will be prioritised to provide an initial analysis and general overview of the collected data. In our study, Jamovi will be utilised as the software of choice. Jamovi is a free and open statistical platform and is chosen for its intuitive and user-friendly interface (Jamovi, 2023).

In addition, correlation analysis is necessary for this study to measure the strength of the linear relationship between variables. According to Burns and Burns (2008), correlation analysis is defined as the degree of correspondence between variables. In our research, we aim to examine the existence of a linear relationship between familiarity, likeability, similarity, and consumers' attitudes towards brands, which can be linked to purchase intentions. As Likert scale items are used to measure these variables, we will use a parametric test of correlation, i.e. Pearson's Correlation. The correlation coefficient "r" will determine the strength and direction of the relationship, with values closer to 1 indicating a stronger correlation (Burns & Burns, 2008). Therefore, in order to avoid high correlations between independent variables, it is desirable for the correlation coefficient "r" of all independent variables to be close to 0. In addition, we will also assess multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF). If the value of VIF is below 5, then the sample data can be further analysed without significant multicollinearity concerns (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019).

After conducting descriptive statistics, we used inferential statistics for further analysis. Inferential statistics is a method used to make inferences about the overall population based on findings from the sample data (Allua & Thompson, 2009). This study attempts to generalise the findings from the sample to all Chinese Douyin users, thus inferential statistics are necessary. In this process, we primarily used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM has been widely used in many disciplines in recent years, including marketing management (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) allows simultaneous analysis of relationships between multiple dependent and independent variables, as well as their relationships with mediating variables, to verify theoretical models (Ullman & Bentler, 2012). In addition, PLS-SEM has advantages when dealing with small sample sizes but a large number of variables, surpassing the traditional Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM) (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2019). Since our study

had a relatively small sample size, PLS-SEM is considered to be the most appropriate method. Additionally, PLS-SEM provides greater statistical power compared to CB-SEM (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019), which provides us with powerful predictive and explanatory modelling capabilities.

The software chosen for conducting the PLS-SEM analysis was SmartPLS4, a user-friendly and powerful software specifically designed for SEM based on PLS. It allows for model testing, offers an intuitive user interface, and is widely used in research (SmartPLS, 2023b). However, some parameters are still reported using Jamovi, which can be seen in the Analysis section in Chapter 4.

3.6   Validity and Reliability

We will evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement model in this study through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Validity is a key aspect in assessing the quality of research because it reflects whether a study measures what it intends or claims to measure (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This means that validity is important because it ensures that the data collected in the study accurately reflects the research questions being asked. In this study, we ensured measurement validity and internal validity by designing questionnaires that minimise subjective bias and avoiding questions with direct or indirect orientations. External validity, on the other hand, refers to the generalisability of the study results to a broader range of contexts and situations beyond the sample under study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). However, according to Section 3.3.2, this study used non-probability sampling methods, and therefore the external validity may be compromised because there is uncertainty that the results of the study can be applied to other general situations.

Reliability is related to the consistency and reproducibility of study results and is usually associated with the measurement of a concept (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is important that the instruments and questionnaire items used to measure the variables are accurate and stable enough to produce consistent results upon repeated measurements. In this study, we measured the internal reliability of the scale items used to construct the survey by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used coefficient to check the internal consistency of scales (Foxcroft & Navarro, 2022). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), this coefficient varies between 0 (indicating no internal reliability) and 1 (indicating complete internal reliability). Specifically, as a rule of thumb, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of 0.7 or higher for all scales is considered an acceptable level of internal reliability (Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo & Schaufeli, 2000). The analysis of the measurements reported in

this study (see *Table 4.5*) revealed that Cronbach's alpha for all scale items was greater than 0.7, indicating satisfactory internal reliability.

To test construct reliability, the composite reliability (CR) was used in this study. A construct is considered reliable when the CR of all constructs is greater than 0.7 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). Next, we used the average extracted variance (AVE) to assess convergent validity. It is commonly used to determine the level of explanation of each variable in the measurement model for the underlying construct to which it belongs (Memon & Rahman, 2014). For all constructs, an AVE value of 0.5 or higher is desirable to ensure the convergent validity of our measurement model (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). In addition, this study used item loadings to measure indicator reliability. According to Hanafiah (2020), the loadings should be above 0.7, indicating a strong relationship between the indicators and their respective constructs. Items with loadings below the threshold may be considered to be removed.

3.7   Ethical Considerations

The participants were given a full explanation of the purpose at the beginning of the questionnaire, they clearly understood it and were informed that this questionnaire would be used as part of a master's thesis and for academic purposes only. The study was conducted anonymously, and all data collected were treated as confidential. Upon completion of the study, all raw data will be destroyed, but the results will be submitted to the affiliated university institution alongside the paper.

Obtaining the informed consent of participants is essential (Burns & Burns, 2008). Therefore, respondents are required to voluntarily sign a consent form, acknowledging that they have been fully informed and agree to participate in the survey; the survey will be terminated if the participant does not consent. Moreover, participants were given the option to withdraw the questionnaire at any point without explanation, even after providing their consent.

4 Analysis

In the following chapter, the collected sample data will be analysed and the results retrieved from the dataset will be described. First, by performing the descriptive analysis, we will present the sample's demographic and the descriptive statistics of the studied variables. Second, through correlation analysis, we will introduce and initially determine the relationships between the variables in the study. Finally, the results of the analysis will be shown to determine the relationships and effects of the independent, dependent, and mediating variables.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 4.1 represented the demographic analysis of the dataset. It showed the frequency of respondents' profiles, which were further categorised according to gender, age, education level, professional status, and income level. The final sample of 210 respondents consisted of 68 (32.4%) male respondents and 142 (67.6%) female respondents, dominated by Generation Z (60.5%) with ages ranging from 18 to 26. In terms of education level, the majority of respondents had earned at least a bachelor's degree or higher (71.4%), with only 10.5% of respondents having less than a bachelor's degree.

Table 4.1: Demographic analysis (N=210)

Measure	Item	Counts (N)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
Age	18-26	127	60.5	60.5
	27-42	52	24.8	85.2
	43-58	31	14.8	100.0
Gender	Male	68	32.4	32.4
	Female	142	67.6	100.0
Education level	High school	22	10.5	10.5
	Bachelor	62	29.5	40.0
	Master	85	40.5	80.5

	PhD	3	1.4	81.9
	Other	38	18.1	100.0
Professional status	Unemployed	12	5.7	5.7
	Employed	78	37.1	42.9
	Student-worker	9	4.3	47.1
	Student	99	47.1	94.3
	Retired	12	5.7	100.0
Income level	< 3,500 RMB	88	41.9	41.9
	3,500-6,500 RMB	38	18.1	60.0
	6,500-9,500 RMB	19	9.0	69.0
	9,500-12,500 RMB	8	3.8	72.9
	> 12,500 RMB	11	5.2	78.1
	Prefer not to say	46	21.9	100.0

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics

The results of the descriptive statistics for all variables in the dataset are shown in Table 4.2. The mean values indicate the central tendency of the respondents' responses to the variable. In terms of data variability, variance and standard deviation are statistical measures of the degree of variability in a set of data. According to Foxcroft and Navarro (2022), standard deviation (SD) is used to show the dispersion of the data. From the results, the standard deviations of all the variables are small and quite close to zero (i.e., no dispersion). This means that these data are tightly clustered around the mean; in other words, there is little dispersion and low variability in the data. In addition, skewness and kurtosis are also counted in order to observe the shape of the data distribution. These two statistics are usually used to test the normality of the data. Skewness is a measure of asymmetry and refers to the extent to which the data are skewed in a positive or negative direction, while kurtosis is a measure of the degree of peak or flatness (Foxcroft & Navarro, 2022). According to James, Geir, Ulf and Ragnhild (2021), the absolute values below 1 (i.e., between ±1) are considered acceptable. The skewness and kurtosis of all study variables were shown in the results table to be in accordance with the assessment criteria and were therefore considered reasonable. In summary, the data set of this study can be considered to correspond to a normal distribution.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics of the study variables (N=210)

	Mean	SD	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Skewness	SE	Kurtosis	SE
Familiarity	2.97	1.104	1.219	0.3587	0.168	-0.4867	0.334
Likeability	3.54	0.895	0.801	-0.2236	0.168	0.0641	0.334
Similarity	3.11	0.995	0.990	0.1671	0.168	-0.1966	0.334
Consumer Attitudes	3.22	0.979	0.959	0.1483	0.168	-0.2259	0.334
Purchase Intentions	3.31	1.026	1.053	-0.0505	0.168	-0.3566	0.334

4.1.3 Correlation Analysis

By performing correlation analysis on the data, we got the results shown in Table 4.3. The results are helpful for us to assess the degree of association between the study variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient is usually used to determine the relationship between variables and is traditionally expressed as "r" (Foxcroft & Navarro, 2022). According to Burns and Burns (2008), if the significance level is below $\alpha = 0.05$, then it means that the correlation is significant. Furthermore, the closer Pearson's r coefficient is to 1, the greater the strength of the correlation, because when r equals 1 it implies a perfect positive relationship (Foxcroft & Navarro, 2022).

According to the results in Table 4.3, the independent variables (familiarity, likeability, and similarity) appear to be positively correlated with the dependent variable (purchase intention), with the r value of 0.679***, 0.736***, and 0.749***, respectively. The strength of these associations is significant as the p-value is less than 0.001. The correlation between "consumer attitude towards brands" as a mediating variable and the dependent variable (purchase intention) is strong and positive (r=0.861***). In addition, the relationships between consumer attitude and familiarity, likeability, and similarity are also significant, especially with similarity (r=0.806***). Therefore, based on these results, we can make preliminary speculations that the independent variables (familiarity, likeability, and similarity) and consumer attitude have a positive effect on purchase intention and that consumer attitude appears to have a mediating role.

However, there is also a relatively significant relationship between the three independent variables, i.e., covariance (r=0.700***, 0.705***, 0.759***). This means that a change in one independent variable can trigger a change in another independent variable. This kind of

situation may lead to difficulties for the model to explain the effect on the dependent variable. Therefore, to test the presence of multicollinearity (i.e., whether the independent variables are interdependent) in the model of this study, we checked the collinearity statistics as shown in Table 4.4. The variance inflation factor (VIF) is a measure that usually helps to determine the degree of correlation between predictors in a regression model (Foxcroft & Navarro, 2022). Generally, if the VIF value exceeds 10 and the tolerance is less than 0.1, the model has a multicollinearity problem (Hair, Black, Bush & Ortinau, 2019). More precisely, it would be better if the value of VIF is lower than 5 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). According to the results shown in Table 4.4, the VIFs of all independent variables are much less than the threshold value and the tolerances are greater than 0.1. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no problem of multicollinearity in this study and the collected samples can be directly used in the subsequent analysis.

Table 4.3: Correlation matrix

		Familiarity	Likeability	Similarity	Consumer Attitudes	Purchase Intentions
Familiarity	Pearson's r	—				
	p-value	—				
Likeability	Pearson's r	0.700***	—			
	p-value	<.001	—			
Similarity	Pearson's r	0.705***	0.759***	—		
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—		
Consumer Attitudes	Pearson's r	0.728***	0.780***	0.806***	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	
Purchase Intentions	Pearson's r	0.679***	0.736***	0.749***	0.861***	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4.4: Collinearity statistics

	VIF	Tolerance
Familiarity	2.45	0.408
Likeability	3.08	0.325
Similarity	3.40	0.294
Consumer Attitudes	3.79	0.264

4.2 Measurement Model

In the beginning, we need to clarify that our model is a reflective model, where the subject measurement items reflect the latent variables and the arrows in the PLS-SEM model point from the latent variables to the measurement items. In other words, the flow of causality is from the latent variable to the indicator. The following indicators are reported according to the assessment criteria of the reactive model.

By using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), we evaluated the validity and reliability of the measurement model in this study. Our model includes five latent variables, namely familiarity, likeability, similarity, consumer attitude toward brands, and purchase intention. Each latent variable is measured by five observed items. In order to assess the reflective measurement model, it is necessary to check the indicator and internal consistency reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019; Hanafiah, 2020). The evaluation results of the measurement model are presented in Table 4.5.

We first evaluated the correlation between the observed indicators and their corresponding latent variables. The factor loadings of individual observed items were examined to determine whether they interact with their corresponding latent variables. According to Hanafiah (2020), 0.7 is considered a threshold value for factor loadings, and constructs above this value are considered to be good. The results showed that all factor loadings in this study were higher than 0.7. Then, reliability metrics were calculated for each latent variable, including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average extracted variance (AVE). The results revealed that the values of all measures met the recommended criteria, i.e., Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.7, AVE was greater than 0.5, and CR was greater than 0.7 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019; Hanafiah, 2020). Therefore, it can be considered that all constructs have indicator reliability, convergent validity, and internal consistency reliability.

In addition, we used Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) to detect the discriminant validity of the data (Henseler et al. 2015; SmartPLS, 2023a). As shown in Table 4.6, the values of all items met the criteria of HTMT values below 0.90 (SmartPLS, 2023a). Therefore, it can be determined that the measurement model has discriminant validity.

Table 4.5: Measurement Model for Reflective Constructs

Measure	Items	Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's alpha
Familiarity	F1	0.737	0.767	0.943	0.924
	F2	0.802			
	F3	0.897			

	F4	0.869			
	F5	0.901			
Likeability	L1	0.861	0.791	0.950	0.933
	L2	0.875			
	L3	0.917			
	L4	0.881			
	L5	0.768			
Similarity	S1	0.890	0.772	0.944	0.926
	S2	0.851			
	S3	0.764			
	S4	0.825			
	S5	0.882			
Consumer Attitudes towards brand	CA1	0.891	0.870	0.971	0.963
	CA2	0.906			
	CA3	0.922			
	CA4	0.926			
	CA5	0.931			
Purchase Intentions	PI1	0.917	0.866	0.970	0.961
	PI2	0.921			
	PI3	0.914			
	PI4	0.918			
	PI5	0.891			

Table 4.6: Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

	Consumer Attitudes	Familiarity	Likeability	Purchase Intention	Similarity
Consumer Attitudes	_____				

Familiarity	0.073	_____		
Likeability	0.822	0.756	_____	
Purchase Intention	0.896	0.722	0.778	_____
Similarity	0.856	0.764	0.821	0.796	_____

Finally, we performed model fit checks. The results are presented in Table 4.7. There are several indices used to assess the model fit, including the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). According to MacCallum, Browne and Sugawara (1996), an RMSEA value above 0.10 is considered a poor fit, and the threshold for a good model fit is usually 0.08. For SRMR values, a good-fitting model should be less than 0.05 (Byrne, 1998). In addition, a CFI value greater than 0.9 is required for a well-fitting model (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The results in Table 4.7 showed that the model in this study fits well and the values of all indicators meet the general requirements for statistical purposes.

Table 4.7: Model fit

RMSEA	SRMR	CFI
0.0810	0.046	0.941

4.3 Structural Model

According to Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle (2019), once the measurement model evaluation was satisfactory, the next step will be to discuss the PLS-SEM results by evaluating the structural model. This section will assess the significance of path coefficients and examine the predictive capability of the model.

Before assessing structural relationships, it is important to check for covariance to ensure that it does not bias the regression results (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). In section 4.1.3, Correlation Analysis, we have already examined the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and concluded that our model does not suffer from collinearity issues.

Subsequently, we assessed the significance of path coefficients by conducting Bootstrapping. Table 4.8 presents the results for the direct relationships. The findings support H2, H4, and H6, as Familiarity (β=0.216, t=3.293, p<0.001), Likeability (β=0.303, t=3.835, p<0.001), and Similarity (β=0.424, t=5.615, p<0.001) show a positive impact on consumer attitudes towards brands. Additionally, the relationship between consumer attitudes (CA) (β=0.656, t=7.456, p<0.001) and purchase intentions (PI) are also positive, supporting H7. However, the p-values for the relationships between familiarity, likeability, and similarity with purchase intentions (PI) are all greater than 0.05, and the confidence intervals include 0, indicating that these relationships are not statistically significant. Therefore, hypotheses H1, H3, and H5 are rejected.

Table 4.8: Path coefficients

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Confidence Interval	Result
H1	Familiarity → PI	0.053	0.750	0.453	(-0.086, 0.188)	Not Significant
H2	Familiarity → CA	0.216	3.293	<.001	(0.084, 0.342)	Significant
H3	Likeability → PI	0.116	1.692	0.091	(-0.009, 0.261)	Not Significant
H4	Likeability → CA	0.303	3.835	<.001	(0.148, 0.455)	Significant
H5	Similarity → PI	0.096	1.189	0.234	(-0.059, 0.253)	Not Significant
H6	Similarity → CA	0.424	5.615	<.001	(0.271, 0.568)	Significant
H7	CA → PI	0.656	7.456	<.001	(0.470, 0.819)	Significant

Note: PI (Purchase Intention), CA (Consumer Attitudes towards Brands)

The output of Bootstrapping also includes the assessment of indirect effects. As shown in Table 4.9, the β values for H8, H9, and H10 are 0.142, 0.199, and 0.218, respectively. The corresponding t-values are 3.128, 3.675, and 4.019, all with p-values less than 0.05, indicating that these indirect effects are statistically significant. Additionally, the confidence intervals for H8, H9, and H10 do not include 0, further supporting these hypotheses. Therefore, we can conclude that H8, H9, and H10 are supported by the analysis.

Table 4.9: Hypothesis Testing For Indirect Relationship

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Confidence Interval	Result
H8	Familiarity → CA → PI	0.142	3.128	0.002	(0.054, 0.232)	Supported
H9	Likeability → CA → PI	0.199	3.675	<.001	(0.096, 0.309)	Supported
H10	Similarity → CA → PI	0.218	4.019	<.001	(0.147, 0.419)	Supported

Note: PI (Purchase Intention), CA (Consumer Attitude towards Brands)

We now report the R^2 of the endogenous construct, which is a measure of the explanatory power of the model. R^2 is also known as in-sample predictive power, reflecting how well the model predicts the observed data (Hancock & Mueller, 2013). Higher R^2 indicates that the model has better in-sample predictive power, and the thresholds of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 are considered substantial, moderate and weak in terms of in-sample predictive power (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). In our study, the model demonstrates a substantial predictive capability for PI (R^2=0.759) and moderate to substantial predictive capability for CA (R^2=0.739) within the sample.

Furthermore, we examined f^2 to assess how the removal of a specific predictor construct impacts the R2 value of an endogenous construct (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). In general f^2 values greater than 0.02 indicate a small effect, while values greater than 0.15 and 0.35 indicate moderate and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988). Based on these criteria, in terms of explaining consumer attitudes, Familiarity (0.078) and Likeability (0.125) have small effects, while Similarity (0.241) exhibits a medium effect. Regarding purchase intentions, consumer attitudes (0.466) show a large effect, while the effects of Familiarity (0.005), Likeability (0.018), and Similarity (0.011) are negligible.

Next, we evaluated the out-of-sample predictive capability of the model. This process was conducted using the PLSpredict procedure, which is a method for assessing the model's out-of-sample predictive capability (Shmueli, Ray, Velasquez Estrada & Chatla, 2016). We examined the PLSpredict Q² values. According to Shmueli, Sarstedt, Hair, Cheah, Ting, Vaithilingam and Ringle (2019), the PLS-SEM model provides better predictive performance if the Q² value is positive. As shown in Table 4.10, all Q² values are greater than 0. Subsequently, according to Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle (2019), a model exhibits high

predictive capability if none of the indicators in the PLSpredict results has higher Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) or Mean Absolute Error (MAE) values than the original LM benchmark. The PLSpredict results presented in Table 4.10 indicate that none of the indicators has higher RMSE or MAE values than LM. Therefore, our model demonstrates high predictive capability.

Table 4.10: Result of PLSpredict

	Q²predict	PLS-SEM_RMSE	PLS-SEM_MAE	LM_RMSE	LM_MAE
CA1	0.595	0.663	0.450	0.719	0.488
CA2	0.619	0.661	0.480	0.716	0.511
CA3	0.651	0.625	0.442	0.652	0.477
CA4	0.647	0.626	0.458	0.661	0.477
CA5	0.640	0.623	0.453	0.657	0.479
PI1	0.593	0.715	0.518	0.755	0.530
PI2	0.540	0.752	0.547	0.805	0.573
PI3	0.552	0.704	0.520	0.766	0.545
PI4	0.529	0.762	0.543	0.826	0.590
PI5	0.505	0.801	0.568	0.836	0.595

5 Discussion

This chapter is dedicated to discussing the underlying results and key findings. The findings of the hypotheses are elaborated on first, followed by combining them with the results from previous literature. By critically comparing and reflecting on the results of this study and previous research, the consistency and contradictions of the arguments are placed in a more holistic context. In addition, some new insights are revealed.

5.1 Direct relationships

This study aimed to assess the impact of the components of influencers' source attractiveness on Douyin consumers' purchase intentions with respect to sportswear. More specifically, this study revealed the impact of familiarity, likeability, and similarity on consumers' attitudes toward brands and purchase intentions.

5.1.1 Familiarity, Likeability and Similarity to Purchase Intention

SMIs' familiarity, likeability, and similarity were all found not to directly influence consumers' purchase intention (H1, H3, and H5 were rejected). These findings were unexpected. The results of these three hypotheses will be discussed separately in the following:

First, in this study, we found that respondents did not perceive a significant direct effect of SMIs' familiarity on their willingness to make purchases (H1 not supported). This could be due to the lack of interaction between respondents and SMIs, resulting in their limited knowledge of the influencers. This point of view differs somewhat from the findings of Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid (2018). They argued that SMIs' familiarity could enhance the persuasiveness of the influencer and thus increase consumers' purchase intentions. However, we considered that this contradiction may be caused by the fact that the relationship between followers and SMIs is mainly one-way communication, and the closeness only generated through the content posted by the influencers probably could not allow followers to truly feel a deeper familiarity and connection. Furthermore, a sense of familiarity with SMIs does not necessarily imply a reduced perceived risk, and there might be

intermediate variables that weaken the influence relationship, therefore, the direct effect on purchase intentions is more limited.

Second, according to the participants' responses, SMIs' likeability could not significantly directly influence their purchase intentions (H3 not supported). This result is consistent with the findings in the full regression model studied by Taillon et al. (2020), who also found that likeability had no significant effect of likeability on purchase intention. However, our findings are different from the results of previous studies, such as Xiao, Wang and Chan-Olmsted (2018) and Cheung, Xiao and Liu (2014), who found a positive and significant relationship between likeability and consumers' purchase intentions. We considered that this inconsistency might be due to the perceived lack of empathy of SMIs by followers, which makes it difficult to transfer influence in products and makes it harder for consumers to make purchase decisions regarding brands and products. In addition, different choices of industries and platforms could also have different effects on study results. Despite these differences, our findings provided valuable insights to gain insight into the relationship between SMIs' likeability and purchase intentions.

Finally, based on the results of this study, we concluded that similarity does not directly affect consumers' purchase decisions (H5 not supported). This result is in line with previous research on SMIs by Taillon et al. (2020), suggesting that SMIs' similarity does not influence consumers' purchase intentions toward brands. Furthermore, the study by Gomes, Marques and Dias (2022) also supported that the similarity of SMIs does not directly affect consumers' purchase intentions towards recommended brands or products. Therefore, The result of our study indicated that, in terms of purchase intention, consumers do not seem to be influenced by the degree of similarity between them and the SMI in terms of their purchase intention for recommended brands and products, meaning that similarity is not a direct cause of purchase intention.

In general, such findings of this study contradict the assumptions of SIT theory and source attractiveness theory; however, the reason for this situation may be caused by the presence of mediating effects. Consumers' attitudes towards brands as a mediating variable may have hidden the direct effect in influencing the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The results of the mediating effect in this study will be discussed in section 5.2.

5.1.2 Familiarity, Likeability and Similarity to Consumer Attitudes Towards Brands

Although familiarity, likeability, and similarity of SMIs were not statistically supported as being able to directly influence purchase intentions, influencers were still significant in stimulating positive attitudes among respondents (H2, H4, and H6 were supported). This study showed a positive relationship between SMIs' familiarity and consumers' attitudes toward the brand (H2 was supported). This view is consistent with Hutchinson et al. (1986), which showed that familiarity can have an impact on brand attitudes and choices. In addition, likeability was also found to have a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward brands (H4 was supported). As argued by Ohanian (1990), likeability can have a greater impact on consumers' evaluation of brands and products. Finally, the results of our analysis supported the hypothesis that similarity has a positive impact on consumers' attitudes toward brands (H6 was supported). The findings suggested that consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward a recommended brand when they perceive a similarity in values or lifestyle with SMIs. Likewise, Zharifa et al. (2022) shared the same point of view that when consumers perceive similarities between themselves and influencers, they develop a higher curiosity about the brands or products they talk about. Moreover, it is important to note that similarity has the biggest impact on consumer attitudes towards brands among these three independent variables.

5.1.3 Consumer Attitudes Towards Brands to Purchase Intentions

Through the analysis of the collected data, this study confirmed that consumers' positive attitudes towards brands could positively influence their purchase intentions (H7 was supported). This finding is in line with Absharina, Yuriani and Hendriana (2021), which concluded that brand attitudes tend to influence people's choice of a brand. In other words, when customers have a more positive attitude towards the brand, they are more likely to intend to purchase that product. Furthermore, Ha and Lam (2016) also agreed that purchase intention is strongly influenced by consumers' positive attitudes towards brands endorsed by SMI promotions. This study showed that when consumers are attracted to a brand, they will be more motivated to seek out that brand and purchase it. Similarly, the results align with the study by Zharifa et al. (2022), which confirmed that attitudes towards a brand drive purchase intention, especially in the context of influencer marketing. Therefore, the finding of this study suggests that consumers should develop an interest and positive attitude towards the brand before making a purchase in order to drive their eventual purchase intentions.

5.2 Mediating relationships

Consumer attitudes towards brands were proved to have a mediating effect on the relationship between familiarity, likeability, and similarity and consumer purchase intentions (H8, H9, and H10 were accepted). In the structural model (see section 4.3), the mediating role of consumers' attitudes toward brands is corroborated by the fact that familiarity, likeability, and similarity of SMIs create a highly favourable attitude towards the brand among respondents, which leads to purchase intention. To our knowledge, there is a scarcity of research on the mediating effects of attitudes on the segmented elements of the source attractiveness of SMIs (i.e., familiarity, likeability, and similarity). Therefore, our results can be considered as an additional complement and contribution to the studies of Tsai, Wen-Ko and Liu (2007) and Lim et al. (2017). The former argues that consumers' attitudes toward brands are determined by the public figures who experience and promote them, and ultimately influence product purchase intentions; the latter stated likewise that consumer attitudes have a significant mediating role between products, celebrities, and product purchase intentions. We concluded that this phenomenon is reasonable in the context of SMIs. Our results provided valuable insights into how companies and SMIs can better drive consumers' purchase intentions. Moreover, our findings also support the SIT theory, which suggests that individuals' behaviours and attitudes are indeed influenced by others in the social environment. Furthermore, the mediating role of consumer attitudes in this study provides new insights into the influencer marketing literature.

6 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the key findings of this study, answers the research questions and explains how we have accomplished the objectives of the study. As well as the implications and contributions. The limitation is described and suggestions for future research directions are provided.

6.1 Main Findings

Our findings answer the research questions and achieve the research objective of the impact of elements of social media influencer attractiveness (i.e., familiarity, likeability and similarity) on Douyin users' purchase intentions in the sportswear industry.

This study found that familiarity, likeability and similarity of SMIs do not directly influence consumers' purchase intentions. This answers the question 'How do the SMIs' familiarity, likeability, and similarity with consumers affect consumers' purchase intentions?'. Consumers' positive attitude towards the brand positively influences purchase intention. Furthermore, through the mediating effect of consumers' attitudes towards the brand, higher levels of familiarity, likability, and similarity have a more positive influence on consumers' purchase intentions. These answer the question 'How do SMIs' familiarity, likeability and similarity to consumers influence consumers' purchase intentions through their attitudes towards brands?'.

6.2 Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study is developed based on Social Influence Theory (SIT) and Source Attractiveness Model. Although they are still applicable in some celebrity endorsement literature, they may need further development in the context of SMI. This paper provides a new perspective for their further development. One of the key theoretical contributions of this study is the integration of the SIT and the source attractiveness model to explain the mechanisms by which the elements of social media influencer attractiveness affect customers' purchase intentions and their attitudes towards brands. We find few studies in the existing literature on the effects of familiarity, likeability and similarity on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Distinguishing the components of attractiveness is an important supplement to the findings of existing studies. Our findings suggest that familiarity,

likeability, and similarity do not have a direct effect on purchase intention, but consumers' attitudes toward the brand play as a mediator. Our study reveals the paths by which familiarity, likeability and similarity, as components of source attractiveness, influence purchase intention in the SMI environment. This provides new theoretical support and explanation in the context of social media marketing and influencer marketing for the source attractiveness model. Second, our study further highlights the important role of consumers' attitudes toward brands in the social influence process. Familiarity, likeability and similarity are indirectly influencing purchase intention by affecting consumers' attitudes toward the brand. This finding provides a more comprehensive explanatory framework for social influence theory and emphasises the critical role of attitudes. Finally, the study is conducted by surveying Chinese Douyin users, which provides a new empirical foundation for social influence theory and source attractiveness models. By studying consumer behaviour in the Chinese cultural and social context, it has implications for cross-cultural research.

From a management perspective, this study provides recommendations for companies to choose SMIs, especially for brands that conduct marketing campaigns on Douyin. According to the results of the study, familiarity, likeability and similarity do not directly influence consumers' purchase intentions; consumer attitudes have the greatest impact on purchase intentions. Therefore, when choosing an influencer for a campaign, managers and marketers should not only rely on these factors but also focus on building positive attitudes. For instance, influencers that are more consistent with the brand's image and values can be prioritised to make consumers' attitudes toward the brand more positive. Of the three independent variables, the direct effect of similarity on consumer attitudes and the indirect effect on purchase intention through consumer attitudes are the most significant. This may be due to the nature of the fashion industry where consumers tend to refer to influencers who are more similar to them. Therefore, marketers in the sportswear industry should prioritise influencers that are similar to their target consumers.

6.3   Limitations and Future Study

This paper has some limitations due to time and budget constraints. As far as sampling methods are concerned, convenience sampling and snowball sampling usually lead to self-selection bias. However, in addition to sampling via WeChat, we also posted the questionnaire on Douban to attract participants. In addition, we effectively increased diversity, including different age groups, geographical regions, income and education levels, to maximise sample coverage. In addition, our topics were highly relevant to social media users and there was less self-selection bias in posting this information via social media. In addition to the limitations of the sampling method, the small sample size was also an issue. Also, the

sample for this study had problems with the over-representation of females and the over-representation of lower-income students. These may have resulted in the sample yielding under-representative results. Future studies should use probability sampling methods based on the age and income of Douyin users, proportionally balancing each age group and income level, and conducting larger samples to obtain more credible results.

This study used a cross-sectional study with a short data collection period (7 days) and therefore could not observe the dynamic changes in the market. However, as discussed in section 3.2.3, the cross-sectional study design was the most logical choice among the available options. In the future, it would be an interesting option to extend the survey period and observe market dynamics in comparison. In other words, longitudinal study designs can be used in the future.

In addition, future studies could be conducted in other countries and or on other social media platforms, exploring the differences between countries and platforms. Moreover, findings may vary between industries and products, and future research could examine industries or products that are different from this study to further explore the state of the market segment.

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Appendix A - Questionnaire

A questionnaire on the attractiveness of Douyin influencers in the sports/fashion field

Dear respondents,

Hello!

First of all, thank you so much for your cooperation and for taking the time and effort to complete the following questionnaire for our master's thesis!

We are two Master's students from Lund University studying International Marketing and Brand Management. We are currently conducting a study about social media influencer marketing.

We would highly appreciate if you could respond to the following questions. The completion of this questionnaire will take 3-5 minutes.

Before continuing with the questions, we would like you to read through the following information please:

1. All information gathered will be confidential.

2. The response will be solely used for academic purposes. All collected answers will be destroyed once the study is completed.

3. You may withdraw from the study at any point without penalty and no reasons needed.

4. Your response is anonymous, however, the findings will be published together with the thesis.

5. For this study, participants should be 18-58 years old. If this is not the case, please refrain from answering the survey.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact us without hesitation!

(ze4006su-s@student.lu.se & xi2244ch-s@student.lu.se)

Screening Question

Description (optional)

Do you use Douyin regularly? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

Confirmation

Description (optional)

By clicking the button below, you confirm to be between 18-58 years of age, and acknowledge your participation in this study allowing the researchers to use the data generated from this questionnaire for academic research. *

☐ I consent, I want to participate in this study.

Demographic Questions

Description (optional)

What is your gender? *

◯ Male

◯ Female

What is your age? *

◯ 18-26

◯ 27-42

◯ 43-58

What is your highest degree or education level? *

◯ High school

◯ Bachelor

◯ Master

◯ PhD

◯ Other

⋮⋮⋮

What is your professional status? *

◯ Unemployed

◯ Employed

◯ Student-worker

◯ Student

◯ Retired

What is your monthly income approximately? *

◯ < 3,500 RMB

◯ 3,500-6,500 RMB

◯ 6,500-9,500 RMB

◯ 9,500-12,500 RMB

◯ > 12,500 RMB

◯ Prefer not to say

How often do you use Douyin? *

○ Serveral times a day

○ Once a day

○ 1-3 times a week

Key Questions

The term "**influencer**" in the following statements refers to any fashion or sports & fitness blogger/social media influencers (SMIs) on Douyin that comes to your mind. We do not specify a particular influencer. However, we assume that the influencer will promote or recommend sportswear products.

"**Sportswear**" refers to clothing, footwear, and accessories that are specifically designed to be worn during physical exercise. This category includes a wide range of products, such as athletic wear, yoga wear, swimwear, leisure wear, running shoes and sports hair bands.

The elements of attractiveness that compose social media influencers (SMIs) generally include familiarity, likeability and similarity.

Familiarity

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements in the following.

I often view the content that the influencer posts. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I often interact with the influencer on Douyin (likes, comments, etc.). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I know the influencer on Douyin well. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I always follow the influencer on Douyin. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I am familiar with the influencer on Douyin. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Likeability

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements in the following.

The influencer on Douyin is affinity. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

The influencer on Douyin is friendly. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

The influencer on Douyin is classy. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

The influencer on Douyin is empathetic. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

The influencer on Douyin is popular. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Similarity

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements in the following.

I have similar values to the influencer on Douyin. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I have a similar lifestyle to the influencer on Douyin. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I have a similar appearance to the influencer on Douyin. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

*
I have similar interests to the influencer on Douyin.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I have similar perspectives to the influencer on Douyin. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Consumer Attitude towards Brands

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements in the following.

⁞⁞⁞
I believe the brand that the influencer promoted is a good brand. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

The brand that the influencer promoted is appealing to me. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I like the brand that the influencer promoted and/or used. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I think that the brand which the influencer showed has good quality. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I am pleased with the brand that the influencer endorsed. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Purchase Intention for Sportswear

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements in the following.

I would like to buy sportswear that is advertised by the influencer. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

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I have a tendency to buy sportswear promoted by the influencer. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

The recognition of the influencer will have a positive impact on my intention to purchase sportswear. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

If the sportswear is promoted by the influencer, I am very interested in purchasing it. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I prefer to buy sportswear recommended by the influencer. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree