From Credibility to Connection

Exploring the Dynamics between Influencer Credibility and Parascocial Relationships

by

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Abstract

The rapidly evolving landscape of influencer marketing, particularly within the cosmetics industry, underscores the need to dissect the dynamics between influencer credibility and parasocial relationships. This thesis explores the multifaceted nature of influencer credibility—comprising attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity—and its role in cultivating strong parasocial relationships. Influencer credibility is increasingly scrutinized amid skepticism towards traditional celebrity endorsements, shifting consumer preferences towards trusted and relatable figures.

The core of this research lies in exploring the individual impact of each dimension of source credibility on the strength and formation of parasocial relationships, consequently influencing marketing outcomes. Employing a quantitative methodology, the study examines the hypothesized connections in-depth, unveiling the intricate roles played by distinct credibility dimensions in shaping parasocial relationships. These findings underscore the strategic significance of aligning influencer selection with specific attributes, enhancing marketing strategies.

The research findings highlight the individual impact of perceived attractiveness, similarity, and expertise of influencers in strengthening parasocial relationships. This, in turn, facilitates the effective communication of persuasive messages. The study not only enriches theoretical frameworks by detailing the constituents of influencer credibility but also provides practical insights for brands on optimizing influencer selection to achieve desired marketing goals.

By focusing on the dynamics within the cosmetics industry, this research offers a unique perspective on how businesses in this sector can leverage influencer credibility. It provides recommendations for fostering enduring relationships with consumers, thereby enhancing both the reach and impact of marketing campaigns.

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term
WOM	Word-of-Mouth
eWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
PSI	Parasocial Interaction
PSR	Parasocial Relationship
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

List of Symbols

Symbols	Full Term
α	Type I Error Rate
df	Degrees of Freedom
p	Probability Significance Level
SE	Standard Error
Z	Standard-Score / Z-Score
χ^2	Chi-square

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of communication and marketing, giving rise to a new phenomenon: the social media influencer. These individuals harness the power of digital platforms to cultivate engaged audiences and wield significant influence over consumer perceptions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In contrast to traditional endorsers, social media influencers cultivate authentic relationships with their followers by sharing personal information and perspectives through images and videos to offer insights into their lives (Jourard, 1971). Profound connections like this serve as a cornerstone of influencer marketing, distinguishing it from conventional endorsement strategies. This so-called self-disclosure communication significantly contributes to facilitating and enhancing parasocial relationships (Wang and Hu, 2021), allowing individuals to experience a sense of closeness and familiarity that extends beyond the digital realm despite the one-sided nature of the relationship (Tukachinsky, 2010).

In this context, influencer credibility holds significant importance due to the increasing skepticism of traditional celebrity advertising messages among consumers as individuals seek recommendations from sources they trust (Schouten et al., 2020). The perception of an influencer's credibility by social media users hinges upon various factors that are commonly delineated in literature as perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, as well as the similarity between the individual and the endorser (Hovland et al., 1953; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Munnukka et al., 2016; Ohanian, 1990).

Understanding the correlation between source credibility and the formation of parasocial relationships is pivotal for grasping the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Influencer credibility acts as a cornerstone for fostering trust between social media endorser and their audience, thus facilitating the development of parasocial bonds. The persuasive impact of robust parasocial connections is paramount for achieving key marketing objectives, as they are linked to heightened purchase intention and positive brand attitudes in influencer marketing campaigns (Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Kim et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2023; Shen, 2020). This association highlights the importance of correlating source credibility with the establishment of these one-sided relationships, as it unveils the mechanisms driving the success of influencer marketing strategies. A comprehensive understanding of this relationship is indispensable for brands and marketers aiming to harness influencer partnerships effectively.

1.1.1   Cosmetics Industry Background

The cosmetics industry stands out as a compelling domain for exploring influencer marketing due to its economic importance, competitive landscape, and emphasis on visual aesthetics (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Othmann et al., 2022; Schmid & Klimmt, 2011). With influencers playing a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions, investigating their impact in this sector offers valuable insights for researchers and marketers.

Dating back to the Ancient Egyptians around 10,000 BCE, cosmetics have been an integral part of human society, adapting and evolving over time alongside changes in culture and technology. Despite the differences between ancient and modern cosmetic products, their basic purposes—such as enhancing beauty, participating in religious rituals, and promoting health—have remained consistent (A History of Cosmetics, 2024).

The cosmetics industry is integral to daily routines, with 72% of European consumers considering cosmetic products essential, particularly among those aged 25–34 (Cosmetics Europe, 2022). A study by Cosmetics Europe (2022) reveals that the average European uses over seven cosmetic items daily and almost 13 different cosmetic products weekly, highlighting the industry's importance. Furthermore, the psychological impact of cosmetics is significant; they serve as tools for self-esteem, with a pronounced effect among young adults. About 71% of consumers see these products as beneficial to their quality of life, while 62% acknowledge their influence on social perceptions and interactions (Cosmetics Europe, 2022).

Encompassing skincare, makeup, haircare, and fragrances, and hygiene products (L'Oréal, 2023), the cosmetics industry represents a significant and growing sector of the global economy (L'Oréal, 2023; Statista, 2024a). In 2018, the industry generated a revenue of $87.58 billion and is projected to reach $128.89 billion by 2028, showcasing an expected revenue growth rate of 47.17% (Statista, 2024b). This growth trajectory underscores the industry's resilience and adaptability, particularly in response to emerging market trends and consumer preferences.

Skincare emerges as the leading trend in the industry, consistently capturing the spotlight with the daily introduction of new trends, products, and brands (L'Oréal, 2023). Dominating the market in 2022 with a 41% share (L'Oréal, 2023), skincare is projected to generate approximately $186 billion U.S. dollars by 2028 (Statista, 2024b), indicating its enduring significance and the continued demand for skincare benefits in cosmetic offerings.

While previously dependent on conventional advertising mediums like television and magazines, cosmetics companies have undergone a transformative shift in recent years. There has been a notable inclination towards engaging with customers through social media platforms, marking a significant departure from traditional marketing approaches (Kumar et al., 2006). According to a survey conducted by Cosmetics Europe (2017), approximately 40% of consumers within the age range of 16 to 34 rely on social media platforms as their primary source of information about cosmetics. The digital transformation has paved the way for the emergence of social media influencers, who have quickly become pivotal figures in advertising

(Chuah et al., 2023). Influencers are particularly effective in the cosmetics domain due to their ability to convey messages that combine low fear appeal with high-value information, a strategy that significantly impacts women's cosmetics choices (Zou et al., 2020).

Exploring the cosmetics industry is crucial, given its widespread impact on consumer behavior and constant evolution. With the industry's increasing reliance on influencer marketing via social media platforms, scrutinizing its strategies and effects is essential for businesses and marketers aiming to navigate this dynamic landscape proficiently.

1.2   Problem Statement

In recent years, the remarkable growth of social media influencers has established influencer marketing as a fundamental pillar of contemporary business strategies (Vrontis et al., 2021) and an increasingly prominent field in academic research. Built on the works of scholars like Hovland et al. (1953) and Ohanian (1990), source credibility has become a key focus in influencer marketing literature. The criticality of source credibility has garnered unanimous acknowledgment across numerous studies, which examined the intertwined relationship between influencer credibility and its profound impact on marketing outcomes (Bogoevska-Gavrilova & Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Xiao et al., 2018; Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022;).

While there has been a growing body of literature focusing on examining the individual factors that constitute source credibility for influencers on specific social platforms, the predominant focus has been on exploring the widely recognized source credibility factors, namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Lawrence & Meivitawanli, 2023; Weismueller et al., 2020; Yılmazdoğan & Doğan, 2021). However, a fourth factor, similarity, has begun to emerge in the context of social media endorsers. Nevertheless, the exploration of this factor remains relatively limited, with only a few studies addressing its implications thus far (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Munnukka et al., 2016; Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Exploring the convergence of influencer marketing and source credibility, a large body of research primarily dissected the influence of credibility on consumer-centric metrics such as purchase intention, decision-making, and behavioral patterns (Bogoevska-Gavrilova & Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Yiao et al., 2018; Weismueller et al., 2020; Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022). A significant insight from these studies reveals a predominant concentration on source credibility as a holistic construct rather than delving into its multifaceted components (Breves et al., 2021; Lee & Kim, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Rasmussen, 2018).

Further, it is notable that there has been a focus with certain studies zeroing in on one particular platform like Instagram, YouTube or TikTok, while potentially overlooking others

(Bogoevska-Gavrilova & Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022; Jin & Ryu, 2020; Jin et al., 2021; Lawrence & Meivitawanli, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2020; Rasmussen, 2018; Xiao et al., 2018; Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021). This selective examination might not fully capture the dynamic and platform-independent nature of influencer marketing, thus presenting a further need for exploration.

Furthermore, as influencer marketing has garnered considerable attention within academia, researchers have extensively explored the intricacies of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships between these modern-day endorsers and their audience (Farivar et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2021; Tafheem et al., 2021), contributing significantly to the understanding of this evolving phenomenon. Many studies have investigated how established parasocial relationships affect viewers' perceptions of influencers' credibility (Hasbullah et al., 2020; Ong et al., 2022; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Su et al., 2021). Additionally, contemporary research increasingly suggests that parasocial relationships predict both brand and source trustworthiness (Breves & Liebers, 2022; Chung & Cho, 2017; Lacap et al., 2024; Leite & de Paule Baptista, 2022).

However, there is a growing body of research also exploring the inverse relationship – the influence of source credibility on parasocial relationships – as well as their potential mediating relationships across diverse contexts (Ashraf et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2016). Nonetheless, in these investigations, source credibility is often analyzed holistically, without considering the distinct effects of the dimensions it is made up of.

Consequently, a gap persists in the literature concerning the discrete effects of source credibility dimensions on parasocial relationships within the influencer marketing domain, particularly within the cosmetics industry. While Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021) scrutinized unique factors, their focus was on the relationship with parasocial interactions rather than parasocial relationships. Conversely, Yuan and Lou (2020) explored the effects of source credibility dimensions on parasocial relationships, albeit without considering potential differences between industries. Overall, there is still a need for further exploration of this dynamic within the cosmetics industry in the existing literature.

1.3   Planned Contribution

The purpose of this study is to explore the intricate dynamics between influencer credibility and the formation of parasocial relationships within the context of influencer marketing in the cosmetic industry. By dissecting the multifaceted nature of influencer credibility—encompassing attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity—and its role in cultivating parasocial relationships, this research seeks to unravel how these elements individually contribute to the efficacy of influencer marketing strategies. Through an in-depth analysis, this study seeks to provide empirical insights into how various aspects of source credibility influence the strength of the bond between influencers and their followers.

Furthermore, this research intends to explore the importance of companies identifying the most suitable influencers based on the credibility factors that are most impactful in the cosmetics industry. This investigation seeks to emphasize the essential role of strategic influencer selection in achieving marketing objectives through successful collaborations. Thus, the study aims to investigate the following research question:

RQ: Do the source credibility dimensions - attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity - individually positively affect the strength of parasocial relationship in influencer marketing in the cosmetic industry?

1.4   Outline of the Thesis

Within the framework of this research, an in-depth examination is undertaken to assess how the dimensions of source credibility—attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity—individually influence the strength of parasocial relationships in the context of influencer marketing within the cosmetics industry. This exploration begins with a comprehensive review of the existing literature, which establishes a foundation by defining key terms such as "influencer" and "influencer marketing" and discussing their relevance in today's digital marketing landscape. Further attention is given to the evolution of parasocial relationships, which are increasingly prevalent in digital contexts, and their specific applications within influencer marketing.

The discourse on parasocial relationships and influencer credibility is further reflected upon the theoretical framework, where existing theories are utilized to predict the effects that form the basis for the hypotheses guiding the empirical investigation. This investigation employs a methodical quantitative primary data collection. To ensure clarity and reproducibility of the research process, detailed descriptions of the research approach are provided.

In the data analysis chapter, various statistical techniques are employed to test the proposed relationships within the research model. Reliability and validity checks, confirmatory factor analysis, and inferential statistics through correlation and regression analyses are conducted to examine the impact of each dimension of source credibility on parasocial relationships. Additionally, supplementary data analysis is performed on additional questionnaire items to provide more comprehensive managerial recommendations. These empirical findings are thoroughly discussed and compared with existing literature, leading to the derivation of managerial implications within the context of influencer marketing in the cosmetics industry.

This synthesis of empirical results and theoretical discussion brings the practical and academic implications of the study forward, suggesting how the effectiveness of influencer marketing can be enhanced through strong parasocial relationship bonds. Furthermore, the limitations of the current research are laid out, and an outlook is given on possible avenues to explore in future studies to expand the understanding of influencer marketing dynamics.

2   Literature Review

Within the evolving landscape of influencer marketing, the interplay between influencer credibility and parasocial relationships serves as a focal point for understanding audience engagement and persuasion dynamics. This literature review delves into the intricate dynamics between these constructs, focusing on the strength of parasocial relationships in relation to various factors of source credibility. From defining influencers and influencer marketing to exploring the nature of parasocial relationships within this context and further examining the nuances of influencer credibility, this review offers a comprehensive exploration. Combining these literature streams aims to provide valuable insights into the dynamics shaping one- sided relationships in the realm of influencer marketing.

2.1   The Role of Influencers

2.1.1   Definition Influencer

The landscape of modern marketing has been transformed significantly with the emergence of social media influencers (Sheth, 2018). Evolving from traditional celebrity endorsements, social media influencers represent a new breed of endorsers who wield considerable influence over audience perceptions through the dissemination of content across various digital platforms (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Over time, the conceptualization of social media influencers has evolved, with various definitions proposed in scholarly discourse. Freberg et al. (2011) constitute social media influencers as a contemporary class of autonomous endorsers who wield influence over audience perceptions through the dissemination of content across platforms such as blogs, tweets, and diverse social media channels. Abidin (2015) characterizes influencers as ordinary internet users who garner sizable followings on blogs and social media platforms. They achieve this through textual and visual narratives of their personal lives and lifestyles, actively engaging with their audience across digital and physical realms. Furthermore, influencers monetize their following by seamlessly integrating "advertorials" into their blog or social media content (Abidin, 2015).

Enke and Borchers (2019) advocate for a functional perspective tailored to organizational communication requirements. They define social media influencers as third-party actors who have cultivated a substantial number of relevant relationships with influence over organizational stakeholders through content creation, distribution, interaction, and personal

presence on the social web. Contemporary delineations emphasize their notable presence and active engagement across various social media platforms. As such, influencers are characterized by their exceptional ability to impact others, stemming from attributes such as their consistent communication, personal charisma, and substantial reach within their social networks (Focus Social Media Outreach on Cultivating 'Influencers' among Your Followers, 2015).

Viewed through these perspectives, an influencer embodies an individual who harnesses digital platforms to share genuine content, accruing a significant following and molding audience perceptions. Typically, these influencers are ordinary internet users who connect with audiences through personalized storytelling, skillfully blending promotional material to monetize their following. Moreover, they demonstrate adeptness in cultivating relationships and establishing deep connections with audiences as well as stakeholders, thereby expanding their influence beyond content distribution.

2.1.2 Definition Influencer Marketing

As the definition of influencers has now been established, the meaning of influencer marketing will be dissected. In contemporary literature, influencer marketing frequently intersects with the domains of social media marketing and digital marketing. Consequently, it is often referred to as social media influencer marketing (Coco & Eckert, 2020; Saima & Khan, 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). Bakker (2018) characterizes influencer marketing as a facet of digital marketing wherein opinion leaders are integrated into a company's social media communications. Kadekova and Holienčinova (2018) further refine this view on marketing through opinion leaders and elaborate that influencer marketing involves the promotion of products and services by individuals distinguished by their expertise, considerable popularity, or reputation.

Meanwhile, Leung et al. (2022) suggest that online influencer marketing is rather a strategy but similarly explain that firms endeavor to capitalize on influencers to promote their offerings, ultimately seeking to enhance their performance. This is achieved through the careful selection and incentivization of influencers, for example, through monetary compensation or offering free products, to actively engage with their followers on various social media platforms (Leung et al., 2022; Vrontis et al., 2021).

Another recurring theme, commonly seen in association with influencer marketing, is the comparison to word-of-mouth (WOM). According to Kotler et al. (2002), "word-of-mouth influence" is characterized as personal communication concerning a product that is disseminated among buyers via channels beyond the direct control of the company. Vangelov (2019) highlights significant resemblances between the two, suggesting that in both scenarios, the act of recommending a product or service tends to enhance customer trust and, consequently, increase the likelihood of a purchase. However, the key difference he points out is the greater audience and, thus, more people to "influence". Similarly, Kadekova and Holienčinova (2018) draw a parallel to WOM but emphasize that influencer marketing

encompasses more than mere recommendations, indicating a broader scope of engagement and persuasion.

On a different note, the researcher Morton (2020) presents an alternative perspective, positing that influencer marketing owes its emergence solely to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media. In this framework, eWOM serves as the medium through which influencer marketing operates, with companies leveraging social media influencers' ability to reach and engage the target audience (Morton, 2020). Similarly, Bakker (2018) draws a parallel by distinguishing influencer marketing from traditional WOM, which encompasses both unpaid and compensated forms of communication. He aligns contemporary influencer marketing practices with modern WOM dynamics on the internet, defining it as "brand owners engaging individuals with significant social media followings to advocate for their brand in exchange for compensation." (Bakker 2018, p.80).

Considering these various aspects, influencer marketing can be seen as a strategic approach adopted by companies to amplify their brand presence and reach through selection and collaboration with social media influencers. This collaborative effort involves influencers endorsing products or services to their audience, leveraging their credibility, expertise, and large following to engage with the desired target audience. While influencer marketing shares parallels with traditional WOM marketing, it distinguishes itself by encompassing a broader scope of engagement and persuasion, aligning more closely with eWOM dynamics.

2.1.3   The Relevance of Influencer Marketing

Having elucidated the definition of influencer marketing, the subsequent focus shifts to examining its contemporary significance and relevance. The proliferation of social media users worldwide has seen a swift annual rise, emphasizing the increasing prevalence of social media platforms. From 2.73 billion users in 2017, the count rose to over 3 billion in 2018 and subsequently surpassed 4 billion in 2021. Projections indicate an anticipated surpassing of the 5 billion milestone by 2024, showcasing the extensive reach of these platforms (Statista, 2022).

The emergence of social media platforms has given rise to a generation of authentic endorsers, who have grown to become crucial linchpins in companies' digital marketing strategies. Influencer marketing has demonstrated a pronounced trajectory of growth. From 2016 to 2024, the sector's market size has risen from $1.7 billion to an expected $24 billion, signaling the importance and growing acceptance of influencer marketing in the overall marketing mix (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024). This trend points to the practical reality that influencers have become an essential element for brands looking to connect with their audiences in the digital age. According to the Influencer Marketing Hub study (2024), there is an anticipated upward trend in influencer marketing expenditures, with spending reaching $34.08 billion in 2023. These projections underscore the growing reliance on influencer marketing as a vital component of comprehensive advertising strategies (MediaPost, 2023). Consequently, the steady growth

and substantial allocation of resources toward influencer marketing unequivocally underscores its enduring relevance and indispensability within the marketing realm.

In the digital landscape, influencers have emerged as trusted figures, gaining consumer trust over other online sources (Conick, 2018; Freberg et al., 2011). Marketers are increasingly leveraging influencers to connect with audiences who typically bypass or block traditional advertisements. Consumers, striving to evade advertising clutter, employ ad blockers, signaling a shift towards non-intrusive forms of marketing (Childers et al., 2018). Influencer marketing, viewed as less obtrusive and more engaging than conventional online advertising methods has gained prominence in this context (Conick, 2018). These influencers facilitate interactive brand communication on various online platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, shaping consumer preferences toward specific brands (Solis, 2016). Solis (2016) emphasizes that the rising popularity of social media influencers stems from the influence wielded by consumers themselves, as they grant significant power to these influencers, predisposing themselves to the opinions these influencers hold about various brands.

Among the factors driving the ascent of social media, influencers stand out due to their adeptness at promoting products through a blend of lifestyle and public relations efforts. This approach effectively breaks down communication barriers between brands, consumers, and their followers (Van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021).

In the era predating social media's dominance, as explained by Glucksman (2017), communication with customers primarily occurred through one-sided channels such as television commercials, billboards, print advertisements, and radio spots. However, the advent of social media revolutionized this dynamic, enabling consumers to engage directly with brands (Glucksman, 2017). Influencers play a pivotal role in this ecosystem, encouraging their followers to become active participants rather than passive spectators, thereby fostering social media interactions that drive the creation of new content (Abidin, 2015). By integrating products into their own lives, influencers ensure that consumers make informed decisions when considering brand purchases (Glucksman, 2017).

Singla and Durga (2015) emphasize the pivotal role of influencers as lead acquisition channels for firms, granting them a competitive edge in reaching potential customers interested in the company's product offerings. These influencers also facilitate direct connections between brands and targeted consumer segments, fostering brand loyalty. They serve as credible advocates for brands, enabling bidirectional communication channels that strengthen consumer allegiance (Glucksman, 2017).

Furthermore, social media influencers contribute significantly to firms' competitive positioning by generating consumer-generated content rich in insights for co-creation initiatives. This collaborative process not only enhances product offerings but also fosters the exchange of valuable insights, which essentially can deepen brand loyalty (He et al., 2013; van Doorn et al., 2010).

2.2   Parasocial Relationships

2.2.1   Definition Parasocial Relationships

Having explored the concept of influencers and influencer marketing, the investigation now extends to the realm of parasocial relationships (PSR), which play a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics of influencer-follower interactions. Based on the pioneering work of the researchers Horton and Wohl (1956) on parasocial interactions (PSI), the notion of PSR has evolved into a conceptual framework delineating a distinctive form of social interaction. Horton and Wohl (1956) characterize PSI as the unique response of individuals toward media personalities, wherein they perceive these figures as companions despite the lack of returned sentiment or engagement. While it is a subjective construct perceived by the audience, they often view it as authentic and interpret the behavior of the personality as reciprocating (Hu, 2016).

However, it is crucial to note that this experience is limited to the moment of media consumption. In contrast, PSRs transcend the confines of the viewing period (Cohen, 2003), embodying a more enduring connection between the media consumer and the mediated personality (Dibble et al., 2016). Hoffner and Bond (2022, p.131) describe it as "socio-emotional connections that people develop with media figures such as celebrities or fictional characters". Similarly, Kowert and Daniel (2021) describe this unique kind of relationship as a nonreciprocated emotional connection that a person develops with a media personality. They assert that its one-sided nature, along with its broad-reaching influence and restricted accessibility, are defining features of this type of relationship. The latter aspect highlights how these connections often influence numerous individuals despite the challenge of establishing direct contact with the media figure (Kowert & Daniel, 2021).

In PSRs, the person not only establishes an emotional connection but even regards the personality as a close friend (Cohen, 2003). Expanding on this notion, Tukachinsky (2010) explores the friendship aspect by proposing that in the parasocial realm, friendship entails affection towards the character, a sense of solidarity and trust in the media figure, as well as a desire for self-disclosure and communication. Furthermore, Tukachinsky (2010) notes that PSRs can transcend into romantic territory, characterized by intimacy, trust, and mutual disclosure. Giles (2002) adds to this understanding by explaining that individuals, once they form judgments about media personalities, respond to that figure as if it occupies their physical space, thereby becoming incorporated into their social network. Following pleasurable PSI with these personalities, individuals may engage in a range of activities, such as imitating their behavior, discussing them with others, fantasizing about interactions with them, or even attempting to establish contact (Hu, 2016).

In light of these findings, PSR can be characterized as enduring emotional bonds individuals establish with media figures, resembling close friendships, even in the absence of reciprocal

interaction. These connections are marked by feelings of affection and trust, which in turn influence individuals' behaviors and social interactions.

2.2.2 Parasocial Relationships in Influencer Marketing

Exploring the concept of PSRs lays the groundwork for understanding their specific manifestations within influencer marketing. Investigating this special dynamic elucidates how these one-sided connections shape influencer marketing effectiveness in digital environments. In the realm of brand communication, social media presents unparalleled possibilities for reaching online stakeholders within their social communities. This platform facilitates the establishment of personal connections with consumers, fostering relationships on a deeper and more intimate level (Kelly et al., 2010). Hence, the relationship between influencers and their followers has transcended superficial connections to encompass a deeper, more authentic bond, particularly compared to traditional endorsers (Bond, 2016). This relationship is facilitated by a more interactive social media infrastructure, wherein both influencers and followers actively engage in the creation of content (Abidin, 2015; Chau & Xu, 2012). It extends beyond mere content dissemination, evolving into a co-creation where followers contribute ideas, feedback, and even content itself (Belanche et al., 2020).

However, media personalities often use social media to create a semblance of dialogue with their audience, which might give the impression of a two-way relationship. Yet, the connection that persists is not reciprocated beyond the public interactions on these platforms and is, therefore, fundamentally one-sided and characterized as parasocial (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Yuksel and Labrecque (2016) assert that these interactions predominantly stem from the audience's cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement with the influencer's online presence. Despite the interactive functionalities of social media platforms - encompassing likes, comments, and shares, which imply a sense of mutual exchange - the relationship lacks genuine reciprocity (Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016). Although the audience may experience a profound sense of connection and are significantly influenced by the media persona, this connection is not invariably returned beyond the confines of the platform's public interactions, thus perpetuating the parasocial nature of the relationship (Lou, 2021; Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016). This is also supported by Hoffner and Bond (2022), who argue that the act of following media figures on social platforms can intensify the strength of PSR due to the uniform nature of social media functionalities, which remain consistent whether users are interacting with close friends or with media figures.

Within the communal and interactive environment of social media platforms, brand communicators often assume the role of "friends", seamlessly integrating themselves into the social networks of their fans and followers while maintaining their status as anonymous brand representatives (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Hu et al., 2020; Russell and Stern, 2006).

The dynamics of social media platforms enable users to engage directly with their favorite media personalities, fostering a sense of intimacy among followers (Men & Tsai, 2013; Yuan and Lou, 2020). Influencers actively interact with followers, creating compelling content tailored to their interests and even involving them in content co-creation, such as crafting videos based on follower requests (Abidin, 2015). Over time, viewers may come to accept these characters as role models for making product decisions, emulating their consumption patterns based on the products they use (Russell and Puto, 1999), while these cumulative interactions and collaborative efforts often lead followers to develop enduring attachments to influencers (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Yuan and Lou, 2020).

The importance of PSRs in influencer marketing is highlighted by Tukachinsky et al. (2020), who argue that individuals with a strong PSR towards a media figure delivering persuasive messages are more inclined to accept the message, resulting in reduced resistance and counterarguing. This assertion is further reinforced by Breves et al. (2021), who propose that individuals with robust PSR are less likely to perceive a threat to their autonomy or engage in counterarguing when exposed to persuasive content. Moreover, persuasive messages from well-known communicators with whom an individual has established a PSR heighten the individual's involvement with the message and result in a positive bias in processing (Breves & Liebers, 2023; Lieber et al., 2023). Consequently, followers who cultivate a strong connection with an influencer perceive their communications not as manipulative tactics but rather as recommendations from a trusted peer (Breves et al., 2021). This perception significantly enhances the persuasive impact of advertising messages, as evidenced by Tukachinsky and Stever (2019) and Liebers et al. (2023).

Leveraging influencers who possess the ability to cultivate a strong PSR enables companies to capitalize effectively on the trust and credibility established between the influencer and their audience. Several studies support the notion that PSRs within the context of influencer marketing lays the foundation for achieving marketing goals, including higher purchase intention (Ashraf et al, 2023; Astarini & Sumardi, 2022; Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Kim et al., 2015), and heightened brand attitude among the audience of the employed influencer (Lin et al., 2023; Shen, 2020; Venciute et al., 2023).

2.3   Influencer Credibility

2.3.1   Congruence in Influencer Marketing

Examining PSRs in influencer marketing sets the stage for investigating congruence, as it underscores the importance of alignment between influencers and brands. Within influencer marketing, three distinct forms of congruence are essential in evaluating the impact of endorsements: congruence between the brand and endorser, between the brand and consumer, and between the consumer and endorser (Venciute et al., 2023). These alignments surpass mere compatibility, embodying a seamless blend of values, lifestyle, and image that resonates with

consumers, thus collectively shaping purchase intention and critically influencing the effectiveness of advertising campaigns (Pradhan et al., 2016).

Previous inquiries into influencer marketing have predominantly examined either the correlation between influencers and consumers (Venciute et al., 2023) or the alignment between influencers and brands or products (De Cicco et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021). However, while these investigations often overlook the comprehensive evaluation of all three fundamental components, the congruence between consumers and products hinges on the alignment between the influencer and the promoted product. Followers tend to regard influencers as role models and place significant trust in their endorsements when making their purchasing decisions (Casaló et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2020; Ki et al., 2022). If an influencer appears to genuinely resonate with a product, it can influence their followers' attitudes, prompting them to perceive the product as matching their personal values, too (Belanche et al., 2021). Drawing from this rationale, Belanche et al. (2021) posit that the perceived appropriateness of a product for a consumer is significantly influenced by the congruence between the influencer and the promoted product. Given that followers idolize influencers and aspire to emulate them, an influencer who demonstrates a strong alignment with the product can lead followers to perceive the product as compatible with their aspirational selves (Belanche et al., 2021). As a consequence, the consideration of the alignment between consumers and products within the scope of this study may be deemed redundant, given its predictability through the alignment between influencers and consumers, as well as the alignment between influencers and brands. Both congruence concepts serve as a foundation for fostering genuine connections and enhancing credibility (Belanche et al., 2021).

Influencer-brand congruence ensures that the values, aesthetics, and overall brand persona of the influencer align closely with those of the brand, creating a synergistic relationship that is perceived as authentic and trustworthy by the audience (Childers et al., 2018). Thus, when influencers embody the essence of the brands they endorse, they not only enhance the brand's image but also elevate its position within the minds of consumers (Childers et al., 2018; De Veirman et al., 2017). Min et al. (2019) emphasize that such alignment significantly impacts consumer attitudes toward the brand and increases the likelihood of purchase decisions.

Conversely, influencer-follower congruence highlights the importance of shared values, interests, and lifestyles (Pradhan et al., 2016). This alignment is pivotal in building a credible and engaging influencer persona that resonates deeply with the follower base. Thus, it is evident that both influencer-brand and influencer-follower congruence are not standalone constructs but interrelated dimensions that collectively impact the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns (Venciute et al. 2023).

2.3.2   The Role of Credibility in Influencer Marketing

In addition to the congruence between the consumer and the influencer, another critical process underlying influencer marketing is the perceived credibility of the endorser (Schouten et al.,

2020). Within advertising communication, the credibility of both the messages conveyed and the source itself serves as a pivotal factor in determining the persuasiveness of endorsements (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Lou & Yuan, 2019; MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989). MacInnis and Jakorwski (1989) further illustrate that a message can evoke anger in consumers when they perceive it as lacking credibility.

This fundamental concept is commonly termed "source credibility" in literature. As defined by Ohanian (1990, p.41), source credibility is "[...] commonly used to imply a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message." Source credibility has been demonstrated to impact the confidence or doubt individuals harbor in the thoughts they generate in response to persuasive messages (Saini & Bansal, 2023). The literature explores various facets of influencer credibility, with authenticity emerging as a recurring theme. Audrezet et al. (2020) define authenticity as the extent to which consumers perceive brands, including products, services, and human brands, to be driven by intrinsic motivations. Enli (2015 cited in Wellman et al. 2020) further argues that authenticity is central to contemporary society and closely tied to trustworthiness.

Previous research has underscored the generally higher credibility and trustworthiness consumers give in contrast to paid advertisements, owing to the seamless alignment of their content with the platform's native context (Abidin, 2016). Consumers' deliberate choice of which influencers to follow, granting them the authority to shape their decision-making, along with the implicit trust in these endorsers and their perspectives, highlights the significance of these dynamics (Hsu et al., 2013).

Zniva et al. (2023) shed light on the notion that influencers' actions are considered authentic when they consistently produce content primarily driven by their genuine dedication to a particular topic, product, or brand. This inherent authenticity not only fosters lower resistance to the communicated message but also highlights the pivotal role influencers play in shaping consumer perceptions (De Vries et al., 2012). Conversely, behaviors perceived as motivated solely by societal pressures or financial incentives are often deemed lacking in authenticity (Zniva et al., 2023). Woodroof et al. (2020) elaborate that a message becomes inauthentic for consumers when they perceive a persuasive intent in the sales tactic aimed at deliberately altering their beliefs, actions, and behaviors. This view is also further reinforced by Kapitan et al. (2021), who argue that a truly "authentic influencer" prioritizes neither follower satisfaction nor monetary incentives.

As a result, challenges can arise in the domain of influencer marketing when the authenticity of endorsers is compromised by the intrusion of brands into their content (Audrezet et al., 2020). To navigate this delicate balance and maintain authenticity while operating within commercial spaces, influencers strive to establish credibility with both their audience and the brands they work with (Abidin & Ots, 2016). Wellman et al. (2020), thus, put forth that influencers ought to project authenticity and build trust with their audience by disclosing when they cooperate with a brand.

Influencer transparency also emerges as a crucial element contributing to influencer authenticity and, consequently, source credibility. As highlighted by De Cicco et al. (2021), advertisements perceived as more transparent in disclosing their true nature are often viewed more positively by consumers. Even though such transparency may increase the likelihood of promotions being recognized as advertising, it still fosters a positive perception among consumers (De Cicco et al., 2021). Paradoxically, as influencers are overtly aware of consumer's aversion towards persuasive attempts, some may be inclined to make advertisement disclosures less conspicuous in the hopes that their audience will overlook them (Woodroof et al., 2020).

Furthermore, source credibility in influencer marketing is frequently intertwined with the concept of PSR. Lim & Lee (2023) and Lou et al. (2023) shed light on how influencers' credibility is closely tied to their ability to cultivate PSR with their followers. This assertion is supported by a growing body of research that identifies influencer credibility as a potential predictor of PSR (Yuan et al., 2015; Yuan & Lou, 2020). Simultaneously, several studies also examine how PSR with influencers is initially shaped by perceived credibility (Ong et al., 2022; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Su et al., 2021).

In essence, a highly credible source consistently demonstrates a greater ability to persuade towards advocacy, attract more customers, and foster positive evaluations of brands and products compared to less credible endorsers (Ohanian, 1990; Saini & Bansal, 2023; Schouten et al., 2020,).

3 Theoretical Framework

The subsequent theoretical framework chapter investigates the background and significance of both dependent and independent variables in the context of this research. Through a systematic review of established theories, the objective is to discern predictive effects that will serve as the foundation for hypothesis formulation.

3.1 Parasocial Relationship Strength

Since Horton and Wohl's influential study in 1956 on PSIs involving media figures, extensive research has been undertaken to delve deeper into the realms of PSI and PSR. In this body of research, it is widely recognized that the evolution from PSI to PSR depends on various factors such as the degree of reality approximation of the media persona, the frequency and consistency of their appearance, as well as the persona's behavior and mannerisms (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin et al., 1985). These factors collectively contribute to making the media persona appear predictable, non-threatening, and thereby an ideal role partner for the viewer (Rubin et al., 1985).

However, it is essential to note that the distinct boundaries between PSI and PSR have frequently become blurred in past research, leading to their interchangeable use (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Consequently, this ambiguity has sometimes resulted in a lack of precision in attempts to construct scales for quantifying PSI and PSR (Dibble et al., 2016). One of the most commonly employed scales for measuring the extent of PSI is the one developed by Rubin et al. (1985). However, as noted by Schramm and Hartmann (2008), this scale encompasses aspects of interaction, identification, as well as long-term identification— the latter aligning more closely with PSR characteristics. This has prompted criticisms from researchers, asserting that scales rooted in the PSI framework lack clarity regarding the nature of the measurement they aim to capture (Dibble et al., 2016; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Rosaen & Dibble, 2016).

In response to these critiques, Hartmann et al. (2008) devised a new scale to provide a more accurate quantification of PSR. Originally intended to measure PSR with favorite race car drivers, this scale was subsequently adapted by Rosaen and Dibble (2015) to create a measurement specifically tailored for assessing PSR with media personalities. Additionally, Yuan and Lou (2020) incorporated and adapted this scale in their research to investigate PSR within the context of influencer marketing. The adapted scale by Yuan and Lou (2020) will be employed in this study to measure the PSR strength.

3.2 The Source Credibility Model

The examination of source credibility has been a focal point in academic inquiry for centuries. Even as far back as the era of Aristotle, the influential philosopher recognized the persuasive power of individuals with a strong moral character and goodwill, who could sway beliefs even in the absence of concrete evidence (Whitehead, 1968). However, it was the pioneering research of Hovland et al. (1953) that marked a significant turning point in the study of persuasive communication. The work profoundly shaped contemporary understandings of this fundamental concept. As underscored by Patzer (1983), the effectiveness of persuasive communication is heavily contingent upon the credibility of its source.

In the realm of source credibility research, various dimensions have been delineated over time to elucidate its constituent elements. Notably, a large number of pioneering research in that field identified expertise and trustworthiness as pivotal factors contributing to the credibility of information sources (Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991; Hovland et al., 1953; Whitehead, 1968). However, researchers in the advertising domain soon recognized that in celebrity endorsements, the perceived attractiveness of the source also wielded significant influence over its credibility. McGuire (1985), therefore, introduced the source attractiveness model, which encompasses the dimensions of familiarity, likability, and similarity.

In an effort to establish a more comprehensive framework, Ohanian (1990) expanded upon this model by developing the source credibility model, which includes perceived attractiveness as an additional determinant for assessing the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement messages (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). This model not only serves as a cornerstone in endorser credibility research but also lays a foundational framework for contemporary investigations in influencer marketing.

Given the evolution of source credibility models in response to changes in marketing practices, a fourth dimension emerges to evaluate the credibility of these new types of endorsers. Borrowed from the source attractiveness model, the concept of similarity frequently emerges as an additional factor (Munnuka et al., 2016; Yuan & Lou, 2019). The incorporation of similarity in this research, particularly within the context of exploring influencer - follower congruence, seeks to illuminate the pivotal role of relatability and shared characteristics in bolstering the credibility and resonance of influencers among their audience.

Within this study, source credibility will be delineated by four key factors: expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity. The integration of these dimensions into the conceptualization of source credibility aims to construct a comprehensive framework capable of capturing the nuanced nature of credibility assessments in influencer marketing.

3.2.1 Perceived Influencer Trustworthiness

Within the source credibility model, trustworthiness emerges as a dimension widely regarded by researchers as pivotal for consumers to perceive a source as credible (McGinnies & Ward, 1980; Vangelov, 2019; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). Giffin (1967, p.105) describes trust in the communication process as "reliance upon the communication behavior of another person in order to achieve a desired but uncertain objective in a risky situation.". Similarly, Priester and Petty (2003) elaborate that trust is established when a message recipient can confidently rely on a source to provide accurate information. Moreover, they suggest that this trust may lead the message recipient to forgo the effortful task of scrutinizing the message, opting instead to accept the conclusion without critical evaluation.

On social media platforms, exposure to influencers plays a significant role in fostering relationship formation, evoking emotions of connection similar to those experienced in traditional media contexts (Lee & Watkins, 2016). As followers cultivate PSRs with digital celebrities through frequent engagement with their social media content, they come to view these influencers as credible information sources (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). However, the perception of trustworthiness, and thus source credibility, hinges upon the authenticity, sincerity, and honesty conveyed in the influencer's communication (Munnukka et al., 2016).

Attribution theory posits that a consumer's attributions regarding why a communicator adopts a particular stance in a message significantly influence whether the consumer accepts or rejects the message, thus impacting its persuasive effectiveness (Gotlieb & Sarel, 2013; Kelley, 1973). Consequently, when a source is perceived as biased, it is more likely to be dismissed by the audience (Kelley, 1973 cited in Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). The perceived inauthenticity of an influencer, stemming from apparent persuasion attempts for compensation (Woodroof et al., 2020), diminishes trustworthiness and adversely affects the PSR, as viewed through the lens of attribution theory. Hence, the perceived trustworthiness of the influencer is predicted to be positively associated with PSR relationship strength.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer trustworthiness and parasocial relationship strength.

3.2.2 Perceived Influencer Expertise

As Kim (2012) describes, various authors have conceptualized expertise through diverse terminologies, such as authoritativeness" (McCroskey, 1966), "competence" (Whitehead, 1968), "expertness" (Applbaum & Anatol, 1972), and "qualification" (Berlo et al., 1969) reflecting its multifaceted nature in the context of endorsement and influence. Van der Waldt et al. (2011) further expanded on this by defining expertise as the degree to which an endorser is perceived to possess the necessary knowledge, experience, or skills to effectively promote a product and, therefore "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid

assertions." (Erdogan, 1999, p. 298). Thus, expertise can be defined as the extent of an individual's knowledge about a particular product (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

This aspect of the source credibility model further intersects with the concept of brand influencer congruity. The established congruence, as posited by the congruity theory (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955), creates a relationship that establishes a profound sense of authenticity and credibility among the audience (Belanche et al., 2021). This synergy not only augments the brand's image but also reinforces its presence in the consumer's psyche (Childers et al., 2018; De Veirman et al., 2017) and bolsters the influencer's expertise, thereby intensifying the PSR strength (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Through collaborating with brands whose values and product offerings resonate with the influencer's areas of interest and expertise, the influencer is prone to be perceived as possessing a greater depth of knowledge. The influencer's adeptness in authentically and informatively portraying the brand further reinforces the audience's inclination to attribute expertise to the influencer in relation to the promoted product category (Belanche et al., 2021). When influencers' personal attributes and values are in harmony with those of the brands they endorse, it not only validates the authenticity of the endorsement but also enhances the influencers' reliability in the eyes of their followers (Chahal, 2016 cited in Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This is further supported by Ohanian (1990), who suggests that individuals exposed to recommendations from a perceived expert are more inclined to agree with the source's suggestions.

This alignment fosters a deeper connection, as the audience perceives the influencer's recommendations as more personalized and relevant (Chung & Cho, 2017). Munnukka et al. (2019) emphasize that such congruence facilitates a deeper emotional connection between the influencer and the audience by aligning the influencer's expertise with the brand's messaging. The alignment between influencer and brand thus becomes a potent tool in enhancing perceived influencer expertise.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer expertise and parasocial relationship strength.

3.2.3   Perceived Influencer Attractiveness

Seiler and Kucza (2017) argue that perception leads to stereotype categorization, resulting in a spillover effect on the perception of attributes associated with products, brands, and individuals. Within this framework, attractiveness emerges as a particularly significant factor influencing stereotype categorization. Physical attractiveness, as highlighted by Patzer (1983), prompts individuals to form comprehensive impressions of observed personas. This notion holds significance for relationship formation, as evidenced by Bond's (2018) research, which indicates that perceived attractiveness heightens the likelihood of individuals forming relationships with others deemed attractive in both real-life interactions and PSRs.

Consequently, individuals are more inclined to establish connections with media personalities who possess attractive attributes (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Schmid & Klimmt, 2011). Attractive individuals are characterized by possessing physical, relational, or social traits that individuals deem desirable (Bond, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schiappa et al., 2007).

It is notable that an attractive endorser tends to be most effective in product categories closely associated with attractiveness, such as cosmetics and beauty products (Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000). This phenomenon can be attributed to the match-up hypothesis, which suggests that effective advertisements require alignment between the message conveyed by the celebrity's image and the product's image in terms of attractiveness (Kamins, 1990). Thus, when a celebrity's physical attractiveness aligns with the degree to which the product advertised enhances attractiveness, the "match-up" hypothesis predicts a positive impact on advertisement evaluations (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020).

Additionally, Kahle and Homer (1985) establish a connection between the match-up hypothesis and social adaptation theory. According to social adaptation theory, the impact of information is determined by its relevance for social adaptation. Therefore, consumers may interpret the inclusion of an attractive endorser in an advertisement as indicative that using the product will enhance their physical attractiveness, providing adaptive information (Kamins, 1990). Consequently, within the framework of social adaptation theory, the match-up hypothesis suggests that physical attractiveness serves as a source of information. When an attractive endorser claims to use a beauty product, consumers may infer that the product is a key component of achieving beauty, aligning with their social adaptation goals (Kahle & Homer, 1985).

Further exploration of this hypothesis within the beauty context by Solomon et al. (1992) introduced the concept of the "Beauty Match-Up Hypothesis". This hypothesis suggests that pairing a model whose type of beauty aligns with the product will convey a coherent message. If this message resonates with consumers' desired self-image, it may enhance acceptance of the advertisement (Solomon et al., 1992). Consequently, it could be deduced that this alignment contributes to the formation of a closer bond and consequently strengthens PSRs (Liu et al., 2023) by amplifying feelings of admiration and desired identification with the attractiveness of the influencer.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer attractiveness and parasocial relationship strength.

3.2.4   Perceived Influencer Similarity

In the exploration of influencer marketing and PSRs, the construct of similarity occupies a pivotal role in augmenting the perceived credibility of the source. Rooted in the foundational work of Eyal and Rubin (2003), similarity is defined as the alignment of beliefs, education levels, and social standings among interacting individuals. This principle posits that the

semblance of the communicator's characteristics or viewpoints with those of the audience fosters a milieu of mutual understanding and empathy, thereby rendering the conveyed message more impactful (Chang, 2011). The underlying premise suggests that upon perceiving reflections of their own selves within the communicator, audience members are predisposed to attribute a deeper level of understanding to the communicator regarding their own perspectives, exigencies, and challenges (Andsager et al., 2006). Consequently, this perceived congruence leads the audience to ascribe enhanced credibility and significance to the message being communicated (Mills & Jellison, 1968). Thus, this concept is instrumental in understanding how perceived similarities between influencers and viewers contribute to the credibility of the influencer, thereby intensifying PSRs.

Incorporating the principles of congruity theory (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955) to explore the similarity between the influencer and the audience, this framework focuses on the relationship between influencers and their followers, highlighting the importance of shared values, interests, and lifestyles (Pradhan et al., 2016). Within the framework of communication and persuasion, the concept of congruence emerges as a pivotal principle, positing the inherent human preference for cognitive harmony, which suggests that individuals gravitate towards consistency in their thought processes (Porumbu, 2015). Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) posit that when presented with information, the audience's pre-established attitudes towards the subject and the communicator critically influence whether a harmonious or consistent state is reached. This inclination towards achieving cognitive alignment compels individuals to modify their perceptions, driven by a core desire for congruent outcomes. Consequently, this dynamic facilitates the anticipation of both the nature and extent of shifts in public opinion (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955; Porumbu, 2015). This congruence is pivotal in building a credible and engaging influencer persona that resonates deeply with the follower base to significantly enhance the influencer's credibility, thereby augmenting the effectiveness of their endorsements (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

As posited by Venciute et al. (2023), heightened congruence between followers and influencers fosters a deeper emotional connection, thereby enhancing engagement levels and augmenting the probability of followers acting upon the influencer's endorsements. This idea is further supported by the observation that individuals tend to engage more frequently with those who mirror their habits and preferences, a principle that Jacob and Wonneberger (2016) identify as a central component of communication dynamics. Therefore, followers are naturally drawn to influencers who exhibit traits, tastes, and aspirations akin to their own (Lee & Watkins, 2016), positing that the perceived similarities between influencers and followers are directly correlated with the influencer's credibility and eventually leading to a strong PSR (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer similarity and parasocial relationship strength.

3.3 Research Model

Drawing upon the theoretical framework and the hypotheses formulated, a comprehensive research model was constructed to guide the investigation. This model serves as the conceptual foundation of the study, delineating the relationships between the independent and dependent variables and providing a structured framework for analysis and interpretation.
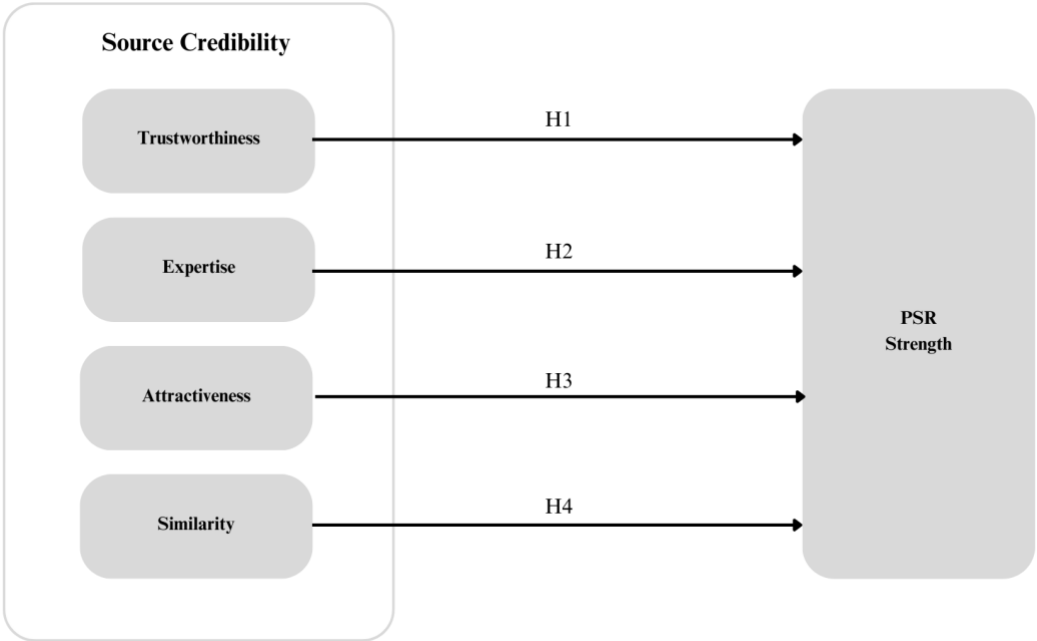
Figure 1: Research Model

4   Methodology

To empirically validate the formulated hypotheses, the following subchapters elucidate the methodological approach of the study. Beginning with the research philosophy, the chapter proceeds to examine the research approach and design, encompassing quantitative methodology and a cross-sectional design. It further addresses the chosen sampling techniques, the data collection methods, operationalization strategies, and the design of the questionnaire.

4.1   Research Philosophy

In this research, the research philosophy adopted subscribes to a realist ontology, asserting the existence of a single truth where facts are tangible and discoverable (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This ontological position supports a positivist epistemology, wherein it is posited that objective reality can be captured through empirical evidence, leading to verifiable truths, where truth and reality exist independently of any observer's perceptions (Aliyu et al., 2014). Consequently, this epistemological stance naturally aligns with a quantitative methodology, with the survey serving as the principal research technique (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The employment of a survey facilitates the systematic collection of quantifiable data, enabling the objective measurement and analysis of variables to confirm or reject hypotheses rooted in theoretical foundations (Goodman, 1972).

The integration of realist ontology with positivist epistemology in quantitative research underscores the commitment to uncovering objective truths through methodological approaches (Aliyu et al., 2014; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). A survey questionnaire, as a key tool in this methodology, is instrumental in generating reliable data that reflect the reality of the research study, thus fulfilling the philosophical commitments of realism and positivism in social science research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This alignment of ontology, epistemology, and methodology ensures that the research design is coherent and robust, capable of yielding insights that are both credible and scientifically valid.

4.2   Research Approach and Design

4.2.1   Research Approach

In the realm of research methodology and data collection, two primary avenues stand out: quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative method finds its application in studies seeking to test hypotheses through measurable outcomes, grounded in an objective perception of reality and offering broader potential for result generalization. Conversely, the qualitative approach delves into societal constructs, often chosen to gain profound insights into emerging or specific subjects. This approach recognizes subjectivity, understanding that reality varies based on individual perception (Lakshman et al., 2000). Considering that this study aimed to yield measurable outcomes and statistically analyze various hypotheses rooted in established theory, a deliberate decision was made to adopt a quantitative approach for gathering empirical data (Aithal & Aithal, 2020).

4.2.2   Research Design

In the thesis, a cross-sectional research design was employed, facilitating the collection and analysis of data at a single point in time. This methodology is esteemed for its capacity to offer a comprehensive snapshot of the research findings, thereby allowing for an effective assessment of variable prevalence and interrelations within a specific population at a defined moment (Sobol, 2014). The cross-sectional approach is particularly noted for its logistical advantages, including cost-effectiveness and rapid data gathering, which are essential in contexts requiring broad demographic engagement (Ray, 2015). The selection of a cross-sectional design was based on its appropriateness for capturing descriptive data and its efficiency in exploring associations between variables without the necessity for the prolonged observation periods characteristic of longitudinal studies (Spector, 2019).

4.2.3   Sampling Process

The sampling methodology employed in this study adopts a non-probability sampling approach, necessitated by constraints in time and resources. Within this framework, convenience sampling serves as the primary method for participant selection, prioritizing accessibility, and practicality. Additionally, snowball sampling is utilized to augment the sample size through referrals from existing participants. Thus, the sample encompasses individuals within the social network of the researchers of varying ages and genders who actively engage with cosmetics content on social media platforms.

Recognizing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of potential participants, the questionnaire is provided in both English and German languages. This decision, informed by the convenience

sampling strategy and the geographical context of the researchers in Germany, ensures inclusivity and facilitates ease of participation for all respondents.

Moreover, given the convenience sampling method and the research focus on cosmetics, it is anticipated that the majority of participants will be female, aged between 20 and 35 years.

4.2.4 Data Collection

In this study, data collection is facilitated through the utilization of the online survey platform Qualtrics, which was selected for its intuitive interface and comprehensive functionalities. Given the study's focus on influencer marketing, the questionnaire is predominantly disseminated through social media channels to ensure alignment with the study's criteria. Consequently, platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn serve as primary channels for reaching potential participants. Additionally, WhatsApp is employed by the researchers to directly engage with individuals who are anticipated to meet the specified criteria, enhancing the targeted recruitment process.

Prior to survey distribution, a pre-test was conducted to ensure its effectiveness and reliability. The survey link was shared with five individuals within the social network of the researchers to assess its understandability, clarity, accessibility, and overall user experience. This phase allowed for the identification of any potential ambiguities or difficulties in comprehending the survey questions, ensuring that respondents could navigate the survey with ease and provide accurate responses. Two participants in the pre-test expressed uncertainties about the inclusion of the verb "play" in question 34, deeming it somewhat incongruous with the survey's content. Nonetheless, it was determined that the item should remain in the survey, given its prior validation by Yuan and Lou (2020) and its use alongside "hang out with" to offer additional context. Feedback gathered from pre-test participants was instrumental in refining the survey instrument, enhancing its validity, and ensuring it effectively captured the intended variables for the study.

4.2.5 Operationalization

In constructing the research instrument, 29 items adopted in this study were measured using a 7-point Likert type scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Perceived Trustworthiness. Perceived trustworthiness is the first independent variable of this research and was measured using a 5-item scale by Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) adapted from Ohanian's studies (1990). Based on earlier studies in this field, subsequent items were formulated, for instance: "My selected influencer is honest.". The reliability of the scale has been substantiated by achieving a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.96 according to Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020).

Perceived Expertise. Perceived expertise is the second independent variable of this research and was measured using a 4-item scale extracted from Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) adapted from Peetz (2012). An example item is "My selected influencer has a good understanding of selected products". The scale's reliability has been quantified by Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.96.

Perceived Attractiveness. Perceived Attractiveness is the third independent variable of this research and was measured using a 5-item scale by Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020), adapted from Peetz (2012). Drawing from prior research on this topic, the following items were developed, for instance: "My selected influencer is attractive". The reliability of the scale has been confirmed by Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.92.

Perceived similarity. Perceived similarity is the fourth independent variable and was measured using a 3-item scale derived from Munnukka et al. (2016) adapted from Bower and Landreth (2001). An example item is: "My selected influencer and I are a lot alike." The reliability of the scale has been substantiated by Munnukka et al. (2016), with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.91.

PSR Strength. The dependent variable in this study is PSR Strength, which was assessed using a 13-item scale derived from Yuan and Lou's (2020) adaptation of the PSR Scale developed by Hartmann et al. (2008). Sample items from the scale include statements like "The selected influencer would fit well into my group of friends" were included. Yuan and Lou (2020) confirm the reliability of the scale with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.94.

4.2.6   Questionnaire Design

Following the completion of pre-tests and careful consideration of all received feedback, the survey was opened for participation on the 16th of April and was closed on 26th of April. The average completion time for the questionnaire ranged from four to five minutes.

The questionnaire was designed with GDPR requirements (GDPR EU, 2020) in mind, aiming to prioritize the inclusion of only necessary questions important to the research objectives. Measures were implemented to ensure that responses could not be traced back to specific individuals, thereby safeguarding participant privacy. Prior to participation, participants were provided with comprehensive information regarding the research background. They were also briefed on the confidentiality of the data collected, assuring them of guaranteed anonymity throughout the research process. Additionally, participants were informed of the purpose of data collection and provided with contact information for any inquiries regarding their data.

The questionnaire opens with a filter question that aimed to confirm all elements meet the necessary sample specifications. This initial step ensured that only individuals utilizing social media platforms, excluding messenger platforms, were included, as this criterion is essential for experiencing influencer marketing, as defined in this study. Participants failing to meet this

criterion were redirected to the end of the survey. Those meeting the requirement were prompted to specify the social media platforms they utilize, providing insight into their overall social media usage patterns.

Following this, another filter question was presented to assess participants' engagement with cosmetics-related content on social media. Respondents who indicated a lack of engagement with such content were filtered out, as their participation did not meet the necessary requirements within the context of the cosmetics industry for this research. The questionnaire then proceeded to inquire about the specific social media platforms through which participants consume cosmetics-related content, aiming to discern potential differences in usage patterns between general social media usage and engagement with cosmetics content specifically.

A final filter question was employed to ascertain whether respondents engage specifically with cosmetics-related content from influencers on social media platforms. Participants indicating "No" to this question were directed to the conclusion of the survey, as their responses did not align with the primary sample criteria essential for evaluating influencer credibility and PSRs.

Participants who advanced through the questionnaire were then asked about their preference for consuming cosmetics-related content from either official brand accounts or influencers. This question aimed to validate the increasing significance of influencer marketing for companies within the cosmetics sector, as indicated in the literature review.

In the following section of the questionnaire, an evaluation encompassing both the four source credibility factors - perceived trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity - as well as the strength of PSR was conducted. Thus, a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" was employed to evaluate variables, leveraging pre-established items outlined in the operationalization chapter, in consideration of time and resource limitations. An overview of the individual items and their sources can be found in Table 1. Participants were instructed to base all responses on their favorite influencer who shares cosmetics-related content. This approach aimed to center respondents' evaluations around a personally significant influencer, thereby eliciting more nuanced and consistent responses.

The questionnaire concluded with demographic questions aimed at gaining insight into the characteristics of the sample. A comprehensive overview of the questionnaire, in both English and German, can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1: Questionnaire Design

Construct	Items		Source
Q1 – Q6: Filter- and Supplementary Questions	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	Do you use social media? Which social media platforms do you use? Do you look at cosmetics content on social media? On which social media channels do you consume cosmetics content? Do you view influencers' content that revolves around cosmetics? When consuming cosmetics content on social media, I prefer to look at…	Own Items
Q7 – Q11: Trustworthiness	7. 8. 9. 10. 11.	My selected influencer is dependable. My selected influencer is honest. My selected influencer is reliable. My selected influencer is sincere. My selected influencer is trustworthy	Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2020) adapted from Peetz (2012)
Q12 – Q15: Expertise	12. 13. 14. 15.	My selected influencer is an expert in cosmetics. My selected influencer is knowledgeable in cosmetics. My selected influencer is qualified in cosmetics. My selected influencer has experience in cosmetics.	Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2020) adapted from Peetz (2012)
Q16 – Q20: Attractiveness	16. 17. 18. 19. 20.	My selected influencer is attractive. My selected influencer is charismatic. My selected influencer is good-looking. My selected influencer is admirable. My selected influencer is beautiful.	Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2020) adapted from Peetz (2012)
Q21 – Q23: Similarity	21. 22. 23.	My selected influencer and I have a lot in common. My selected influencer and I are a lot alike. I can easily identify with my selected influencer.	Munnukka et al. (2016) adapted from Bower and Landreth (2001)
Q24 – Q36: Parasocial Relationship Strength	24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36.	My selected influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend. I look forward to seeing my selected influencer's next post. I see my selected influencer as natural, down-to-earth person. If my selected influencer starts another social media channel, I will also follow. My selected influencer seems to understand the kind of thing I want to know. If I see a story about my selected influencer in other places, I would want to read it. I miss seeing my selected influencer when he/she did not on time. I would like to meet my selected influencer in person. If something happens to my selected influencer, I will feel sad. I would invite my selected influencer to my party. My selected influencer is the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with. If my selected influencer lived in my neighborhood, we would be friends. My selected influencer would fit in well with my group of friends.	Yuan & Lou (2020) adapted from Hartmann et al. (2008)
Q37 – Q40: Demographic Questions	37. 38. 39. 40.	How old are you? What gender do you identify with? What is your current main occupation? What is your highest level of education completed?	Own Items

5 Results and Data Analysis

In this chapter, the outcomes of the empirical investigation are presented, grounded in the methodological framework detailed in the preceding chapter. The description of sample characteristics is followed by a Confirmatory Factor Analysis to elucidate the underlying constructs. The reliability and validity of the measures are then assessed. Descriptive statistics provide insights into central tendencies and dispersion within the dataset. Finally, Correlation and Linear Regression Analysis are employed to uncover the relationships between variables. The chapter concludes with an overview of the final hypotheses results based on the data analysis.

5.1 Description of the sample

During the survey period, a total of 151 individuals accessed the questionnaire. Among them, two participants were excluded as they exited the survey before responding to the first question. Subsequently, in the initial filter question, an additional four participants were filtered out for not using any social media platforms (excluding messenger platforms). Responses from 23 participants who indicated not viewing any cosmetics-related social media content were also excluded from further analysis. Finally, with the last filter question assessing participants' engagement with cosmetics-related posts by influencers, seven individuals who responded negatively were removed from the sample during the data cleansing process. This resulted in a final sample size of 103 participants meeting the specified criteria, whose data was utilized for subsequent analysis.

The demographic profile of participants indicated a notable predominance of those who identify as female, comprising 88.3% of the sample. Male and non-binary individuals accounted for 10.7% and 1% of participants, respectively. The age distribution ranged from 20 to 34 years, with 66% falling between 23 and 25 years old. Regarding their current main occupation, the sample encompassed a diverse range. Of the participants, 1.9% were school students, 2.9% worked part-time, 3.9% were in apprenticeships, and 23.3% worked full-time. The majority, 67%, identified as university students.

In terms of the highest education level achieved, the sample exhibited a varied background. While 1% reported no formal education and 1% had attained a doctoral degree, 1.9% disclosed having a secondary school diploma as their highest educational achievement. A notable portion, 6.8%, completed an apprenticeship, and 21.4% achieved a high school diploma. Furthermore,

12.6% obtained a master's degree, while the majority, 55.3%, had earned a bachelor's degree. An overview of this is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Description of the Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20	2	2%
	21	3	3%
	22	7	7%
	23	18	17%
	24	26	25%
	25	24	23%
	26	10	10%
	27	3	3%
	28	3	3%
	29	2	2%
	32	2	2%
	33	2	2%
	34	1	1%
Gender	Male	11	11%
	Female	91	88%
	Non-binary	1	1%
Occupation	School student	2	2%
	University student	69	67%
	In an apprenticeship	4	4%
	Working part-time	3	3%
	Working full-time	24	23%
	Other	1	1%
Education	No formal education	1	1%
	Secondary school degree	2	2%
	High school degree	22	21%
	Completed apprenticeship	7	7%
	Bachelor's degree	57	55%
	Master's degree	13	13%
	Doctorate degree	1	1%

5.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this data analysis, the source credibility factors—*Trustworthiness, Expertise, Attractiveness, and Similarity*—served as the independent variables. The dependent variable was the *PSR strength*.

The significance level alpha (α) was set at 0.005. This decision reflected a deliberate effort to maintain a high level of statistical rigor and minimize the risk of type I errors (Benjamin et al. 2018). Given this stringent criterion, all items displayed in Table 3 exhibited statistically significant p-values. Moreover, the standard estimate for the majority of items approached or exceeded 0.7, with the exceptions being item Q17 (0.293) and Q26 (0.426). After carefully examining the logical consistency of item Q17 and Q26 within their respective scales and considering their low factor loadings (below 0.5), it was decided to exclude these items from the analysis.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Factor	Indicator	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Stand. Estimate
Trustworthiness	Q7 - My selected influencer is dependable	0.932	0.1064	8.76	<.001	0.750
	Q8 - My seletced influencer is honest	1.039	0.0919	11.31	<.001	0.886
	Q9 - My selected influencer is reliable	0.958	0.0865	11.08	<.001	0.874
	Q10 - My selected influencer is sincere	0.967	0.0950	10.18	<.001	0.831
	Q11 - My selected influencer is trustworthy	1.108	0.0962	11.53	<.001	0.896
Expertise	Q12 - My selected influencer is an expert in cosmetics	1.494	0.1320	11.31	<.001	0.887
	Q13 - My selected influencer is knowledgeable in cosmetics	1.137	0.1076	10.57	<.001	0.852
	Q14 - My selected influencer is qualified in cosmetics	1.695	0.1450	11.69	<.001	0.905
	Q15 - My selected influencer has experience in cosmetics	1.235	0.1166	10.59	<.001	0.852
Attractiveness	Q16 - My selected influencer is attractive	1.483	0.1074	13.80	<.001	0.983
	Q17 - My selected influencer is charismatic	0.292	0.0979	2.99	0.003	0.293
	Q18 - My selected influencer is good-looking	1.458	0.1083	13.46	<.001	0.970
	Q19 - My selected influencer is admirable	0.631	0.1151	5.48	<.001	0.509
	Q20 - My selected influencer is beautiful	1.183	0.1057	11.20	<.001	0.872
Similarity	Q21 - My selected influencer and I have a lot in common	1.306	0.1105	11.83	<.001	0.919
	Q22 - My selected influencer and I are a lot alike	1.317	0.1215	10.83	<.001	0.868
	Q23 - I can easily identify with my selected influencer	1.181	0.1263	9.35	<.001	0.794
PSR Strength	Q24 - My selected influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend	1.152	0.1370	8.41	<.001	0.732
	Q25 - I look forward to seeing my selected influencer's next post	1.040	0.1284	8.10	<.001	0.717

Factor	Indicator	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Stand. Estimate
	Q26 - I see my selected influencer as natural, down-to-earth person	0.529	0.1219	4.34	< .001	0.426
	Q27 - If my selected influencer starts another social media channel, I will also follow	0.951	0.1274	7.46	< .001	0.672
	Q28 - My selected influencer seems to understand the kind of thing I want to know	0.723	0.1033	7.00	< .001	0.642
	Q29 - If I see a story about my selected influencer in other places (or communication channels), I would want to read it	0.709	0.1108	6.40	< .001	0.594
	Q30 - I miss seeing my selected influencer when he/she did not post on time	1.148	0.1577	7.28	< .001	0.657
	Q31 - I would like to meet my selected influencer in person	1.172	0.1623	7.22	< .001	0.656
	Q32 - If something happens to my selected influencer, I will feel sad	0.975	0.1365	7.14	< .001	0.645
	Q33 - I would invite my selected influencer to my party	1.236	0.1669	7.40	< .001	0.666
	Q34 - My selected influencer is the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with	1.107	0.1382	8.01	< .001	0.711
	Q35 - If my selected influencer lived in my neighborhood, we would be friends	0.865	0.1307	6.62	< .001	0.616
	Q36 - My selected influencer would fit in well with my group of friends	1.162	0.1363	8.52	< .001	0.741

Factor Covariances

After removing the items Q17 and Q26, no concerning high correlations were observed among the source credibility factors, as presented in Table 4, with standardized estimates consistently below 0.8.

Table 4: Factor Covariances

		Estimate	SE	Z	p	Stand. Estimate
Trustworthiness	Trustworthiness	1.0000 [a]				
	Expertise	0.5733	0.0735	7.801	< .001	0.5733
	Attractiveness	0.0769	0.1024	0.751	0.453	0.0769
	Similarity	0.3185	0.0974	3.269	0.001	0.3185
	PSR Strength	0.5792	0.0750	7.727	< .001	0.5792
Expertise	Expertise	1.0000 [a]				
	Attractiveness	-0.1876	0.0998	-1.880	0.060	-0.1876
	Similarity	0.0991	0.1066	0.930	0.352	0.0991

		Estimate	SE	Z	p	Stand. Estimate
	PSR Strength	0.4273	0.0903	4.733	< .001	0.4273
Attractiveness	Attractiveness	1.0000 [a]				
	Similarity	0.4259	0.0867	4.915	< .001	0.4259
	PSR Strength	0.4316	0.0868	4.970	< .001	0.4316
Similarity	Similarity	1.0000 [a]				
	PSR Strength	0.7832	0.0506	15.483	< .001	0.7832
PSR Strength	PSR Strength	1.0000 [a]				

[a] fixed parameter

Model Fit

The results in Table 5 suggested that the model does not perfectly fit the data, as evidenced by the statistically significant chi-square value. The p-value, less than 0.001, indicated that the deviations between observed and expected frequencies were highly significant, which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis that the model fits the data well. However, the Chi-Square test's sensitivity to both sample size and model complexity often leads to significant results. Consequently, the model fit measures were also taken into account.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test

χ^2	df	p
802	340	< .001

Table 6 shows a CFI (Comparative Fit Index) of 0.811 and the TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) of 0.790, which indicated a moderate model fit, whereas the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) value of 0.115 suggested a rather poor model fit.

The model fit statistics revealed a rather suboptimal fit, which could potentially be attributed to the limitations posed by the relatively small sample size. This constraint likely hindered the attainment of precise results for this test. Considering the importance of robust data representation in ensuring model validity, this factor warrants careful consideration in the interpretation of the findings.

Despite the unsatisfactory values for the model fit likely due to the limited sample size, the loadings were deemed satisfactory. To further enhance the Confirmatory Factor Analysis, a reliability analysis was conducted as a supplementary measure.

Table 6: Model Fit Measures

			RMSEA 90% CI	
CFI	**TLI**	**RMSEA**	**Lower**	**Upper**
0.811	0.790	0.115	0.105	0.125

5.3   Reliability and Validity

Reliability Analysis

To ensure the dependability of the items utilized in this study, both Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω coefficients were utilized, providing a thorough analysis of their reliability.

The reliability of the scale *Trustworthiness*, as shown in Table 7, is indicated by a Cronbach's α of 0.926 and McDonald's ω of 0.928, which demonstrated internal consistency with values over 0.70. Table 8 gives a further overview of the item reliability statistics.

Table 7: Trustworthiness Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	**McDonald's ω**
Trustworthiness	0.926	0.928

Table 8: Trustworthiness Item Reliability Statistics

	If item dropped	
	Cronbach's α	**McDonald's ω**
Q7 - My selected influencer is dependable	0.926	0.927
Q8 - My selected influencer is honest	0.904	0.905
Q9 - My selected influencer is reliable	0.907	0.909
Q10 - My selected influencer is sincere	0.910	0.913
Q11 - My selected influencer is trustworthy	0.900	0.904

Table 9 demonstrates the reliability of the *Expertise* scale, with a Cronbach's α of 0.923 and McDonald's ω of 0.928, indicated internal consistency. Table 10 provides additional insights into the reliability statistics of the items.

Table 9: Expertise Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Expertise	0.923	0.928

Table 10: Expertise Item Reliability Statistics

	If item dropped	
	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Q12 - My selected influencer is an expert in cosmetics	0.893	0.905
Q13 - My selected influencer is knowledgeable in cosmetics	0.908	0.914
Q14 - My selected influencer is qualified in cosmetics	0.891	0.898
Q15 - My selected influencer has experience in cosmetics	0.904	0.913

Table 11 illustrates the reliability of the *Attractiveness* scale, with a Cronbach's α of 0.904 and McDonald's ω of 0.914, which demonstrated internal consistency. Furthermore, Table 12 provides additional details on the reliability statistics of the individual items.

Table 11: Attractiveness Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Attractiveness	0.904	0.914

Table 12: Attractiveness Item Reliability Statistics

Item Reliability Statistics

	If item dropped	
	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Q16 - My selected influencer is attractive	0.829	0.851
Q18 - My selected influencer is good-looking	0.842	0.860
Q19 - My selected influencer is admirable	0.958	0.960
Q20 - My selected influencer is beautiful	0.848	0.874

As depicted in Table 13, the reliability of the *Similarity* scale was confirmed by a Cronbach's α of 0.891 and McDonald's ω of 0.895, which reflected internal consistency. Additionally, Table 14 provides an overview of the reliability statistics for the individual items.

Table 13: Similarity Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Similarity	0.891	0.895

Table 14: Similarity Item Reliability Statistics

	If item dropped	
	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Q21 - My selected influencer and I have a lot in common	0.809	0.809
Q22 - My selected influencer and I are a lot alike	0.826	0.827
Q23 - I can easily identify with my selected influencer	0.898	0.899

Table 15 presents the reliability of the *PSR Strength* scale, evidenced by a Cronbach's α of 0.906 and McDonald's ω of 0.908, which showed internal consistency. Moreover, Table 16 offers additional insights into the reliability statistics of the individual items.

Table 15: PSR Strength Scale Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
PSR Strength	0.906	0.908

Table 16: PSR Strength Item Reliability Statistics

	If item dropped	
	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Q24 - My selected influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend	0.897	0.899
Q25 - I look forward to seeing my selected influencer's next post	0.898	0.899
Q27 - If my selected influencer starts another social media channel, I will also follow	0.898	0.900
Q28 - My selected influencer seems to understand the kind of thing I want to know	0.902	0.903
Q29 - If I see a story about my selected influencer in other places, I would want to read it	0.901	0.903
Q30 - I miss seeing my selected influencer when he/she did not post on time	0.899	0.901
Q31 - I would like to meet my selected influencer in person	0.896	0.899
Q32 - If something happens to my selected influencer, I will feel sad	0.900	0.903
Q33 - I would invite my selected influencer to my party	0.899	0.901
Q34 - My selected influencer is the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with	0.895	0.899
Q35 - If my selected influencer lived in my neighborhood, we would be friends	0.901	0.904

	If item dropped	
	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Q36 - My selected influencer would fit in well with my group of friends	0.896	0.898

Following the reliability analysis confirming the reliability of all scales and items, the factors were computed.

5.4 Descriptive Statistics

In the study, *Trustworthiness* received the highest average score of 5.55, suggesting that respondents generally rated it towards the upper end of the scale. *Attractiveness* followed closely, with a mean score of 5.46, indicating that this attribute also received high ratings from participants, albeit slightly lower than *Trustworthiness*. *Expertise*, while still rated positively, had a slightly lower mean score of 5.31, reflecting a moderately high perception but less so compared to the previous attributes as shown in Table 17.

The attribute of *Similarity* received the lowest mean score at 4.04, positioning it around the neutral to slightly positive range. This suggests that respondents felt less similarity with the influencers being rated, compared to how they perceived their *Trustworthiness*, *Attractiveness*, and *Expertise*. Meanwhile, the mean score for *PSR Strength* was 4.71, which is above the scale's midpoint of 4, indicating a moderately positive rating of *PSR Strength* among the respondents.

Additionally, for all attributes, the maximum scores reached the top of the scale (7), showing that some respondents gave the highest possible ratings. However, the minimum scores varied, with the lowest scores (1) being notably for *Similarity*, which also had the lowest mean score, suggesting that this attribute tended to receive the most neutral or lower-end ratings among the ones assessed.

While the median values for most attributes were above the midpoint of the scale, affirming a general skew towards higher ratings, *Similarity's* median was exactly at the midpoint. This aligned with its overall lower average score and indicated a more neutral general perception in this category compared to others.

Table 17: Descriptive Statistics

	Trustworthiness	Attractiveness	Expertise	Similarity	PSR Strength
N	103	103	103	103	103
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	5.55	5.39	5.31	4.04	4.66
Median	5.80	5.75	5.75	4.00	4.50
Mode	6.00	6.00	7.00	3.67	4.17
Standard deviation	1.05	1.25	1.45	1.34	1.08
Minimum	2.40	1.75	1.75	1.00	2.17
Maximum	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00

Upon visually inspecting the histograms of the independent variables, as depicted in Figure 2, it appeared that the variables approximate a normal distribution.
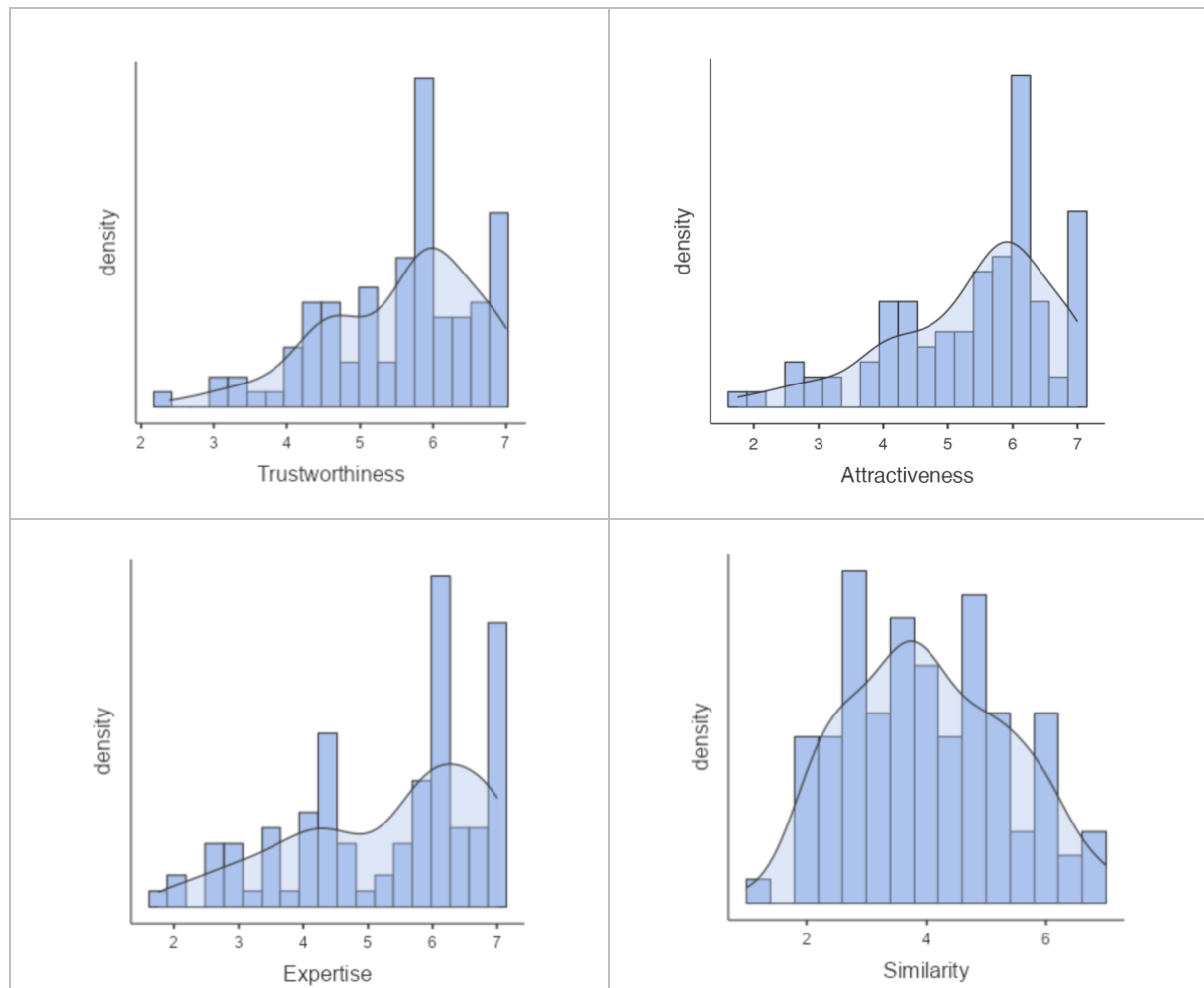

Figure 2: Histograms of the independent variables

Both the histogram (Figure 3) and the Q-Q plot (Figure 4) of the dependent variable indicate that *PSR Strength* followed a normal distribution.
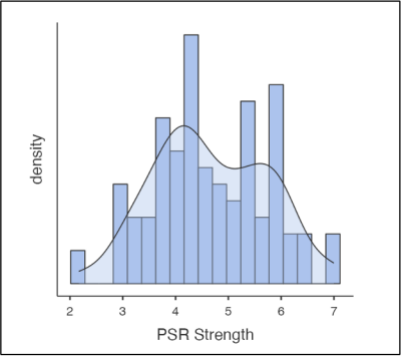

Figure 3: Histogram PSR Strength
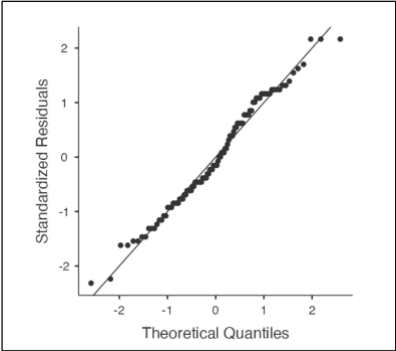
Figure 4: Q-Q Plot PSR Strength

Since the descriptive statistics revealed no abnormalities, the analysis continued with the correlation and linear regression analysis.

5.5 Correlation and Linear Regression Analysis

5.5.1 Correlation

As can be seen in Table 18, *Trustworthiness* showed a moderate correlation with *PSR Strength*, indicated by a Pearson's r value of 0.548. This correlation was statistically significant with a p-value of less than 0.001. Similarly, *Attractiveness* also displayed a moderate positive correlation with PSR Strength, with a Pearson's r value of 0.514, which was statistically significant ($p < .001$). *Expertise* correlated with *PSR Strength* at a Pearson's r value of 0.407, representing another moderate positive correlation that was statistically significant ($p < .001$). Among the variables, *Similarity* had the strongest correlation with *PSR Strength*, exhibiting a Pearson's r value of 0.717. This strong positive correlation was also statistically significant, with a p-value less than 0.001.

Table 18: Correlation Matrix

		Trustworthiness	Attractiveness	Expertise	Similarity	PSR Strength
Trustworthiness	Pearson's r	—				
	df	—				
	p-value	—				
Attractiveness	Pearson's r	0.182	—			
	df	101	—			
	p-value	0.033	—			
Expertise	Pearson's r	0.543	-0.084	—		
	df	101	101	—		
	p-value	< .001	0.802	—		
Similarity	Pearson's r	0.303	0.436	0.118	—	
	df	101	101	101	—	
	p-value	< .001	< .001	0.118	—	
PSR Strength	Pearson's r	0.516	0.483	0.390	0.729	—
	df	101	101	101	101	—
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	—

Note. H_a is positive correlation

5.5.2 Linear Regression Analysis

Assumption Checks for Regression Analysis

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all source credibility factors were close to 1, as demonstrated by Table 19, indicating that the independent variables were truly independent and did not exhibit correlation with each other.

Table 19: Collinearity Statistics

	VIF	Tolerance
Trustworthiness	1.59	0.629
Attractiveness	1.30	0.769
Expertise	1.49	0.670
Similarity	1.32	0.757

As indicated in Figure 5, the Q-Q Plot suggested that the conditions for normality were met.
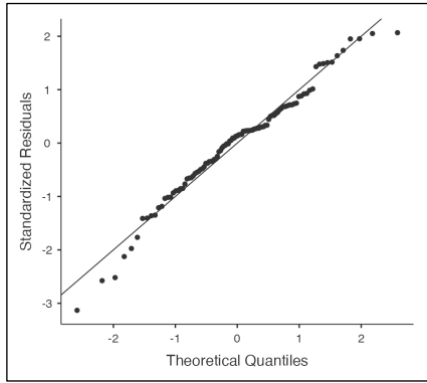
Figure 5: Regression Analysis Q-Q Plot

Linear Regression

The R² value of 0.709, as shown in Table 20, indicated that approximately 70.9% of the variance in the dependent variable was explained by the independent variables in the model. Furthermore, the p-value was less than .001, which demonstrated statistical significance. This combination suggested that the model provided a good fit to the data.

Table 20: Linear Regression Model Fit

				Overall Model Test			
Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.835	0.698	0.686	56.6	4	98	< .001

In the analysis, the coefficient for *Trustworthiness* did not reach statistical significance (p = 0.016), as shown in Table 21. Consequently, H1 is not supported. It is important to note that the significance criterion for this study was set at a stringent level of 0.005. Under a more conventional alpha level of 0.05, the hypothesis would have been supported.

Conversely, *Attractiveness* demonstrated a statistically significant coefficient (p < .001), indicating a strong and significant relationship with *PSR Strength*, supporting H2. Similarly, *Expertise* also showed a significant contribution to *PSR Strength*, with a significant p-value (p < .001), allowing to support H3.

Furthermore, *Similarity* exhibited a highly significant p-value (p < .001), highlighting a strong relationship among the predictors with *PSR Strength*, making it a robust indicator in the model, consequently supporting H4.

Table 21: Model Coeffiecients - PSR Strength

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	-0.181	0.3967	-0.456	0.649	
Trustworthiness	0.176	0.0722	2.443	0.016	0.171
Attractiveness	0.204	0.0548	3.718	< .001	0.235
Expertise	0.189	0.0505	3.730	< .001	0.253
Similarity	0.437	0.0512	8.540	< .001	0.545

Table 22 provides a comprehensive overview of the hypotheses results based on the data analysis.

Table 22: Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses		Results
H1	There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer trustworthiness and the PSR strength.	Not supported
H2	There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer attractiveness and the PSR strength.	Supported
H3	There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer expertise and the PSR strength.	Supported
H4	There is a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer similarity and the PSR strength.	Supported

5.6   Additional Data Analysis for Managerial Implications

As shown in Figure 6 and 7 Instagram emerged as the leading platform in both general and cosmetics-related usage, commanding a strong presence with all respondents being general users and 94.2% consuming cosmetics content. This high level of engagement underscored Instagram's widespread appeal, both as a general platform and as a preferred choice for cosmetic content.

YouTube closely followed, maintaining its popularity across both fields. It was used by around 81.6% of the audience generally and by 61.2% to consume cosmetics content. This suggests that YouTube is particularly effective for delivering niche content like cosmetics.

TikTok showed a distinctive pattern; although it was generally used by about 67% of respondents, it outperformed both Pinterest and Snapchat in the cosmetics sector, capturing around 50.5% usage. This might suggest that TikTok, despite its rapid growth and high engagement rates, is not as favored for more focused content areas such as cosmetics.

A significant disparity was noted with Snapchat, which was used by about 68.9% of the respondents generally but sees a steep drop to 3.9% in cosmetics content engagement. This highlighted Snapchat's role more as a platform for general social interaction rather than a source for cosmetics content.

Further down the line, Facebook and Twitter/X both illustrated minimal interest in cosmetics content relative to their general usage. Facebook saw a decline from 49.5% to about 6.8% in cosmetics content engagement, and Twitter/X is even less significant, dropping to 1% from a general usage of around 15.5%. This could indicate that these platforms are not the go-to sources for cosmetics enthusiasts, possibly due to their layout or the nature of content dissemination which may not be as conducive to cosmetics-related material.

Pinterest also presents a significant discrepancy in usage. While it is utilized by a substantial 71.8% of respondents for general purposes, its usage for cosmetics content dramatically drops to just 14.6%. This stark difference highlights that while Pinterest is highly favored for general content discovery and inspiration, it is considerably less preferred for more specific cosmetics content.

Overall, these observations suggest that while some platforms like Instagram and YouTube are versatile in catering to both broad and specific interests, others like Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter/X have more limited appeal when it comes to specialized content such as cosmetics.
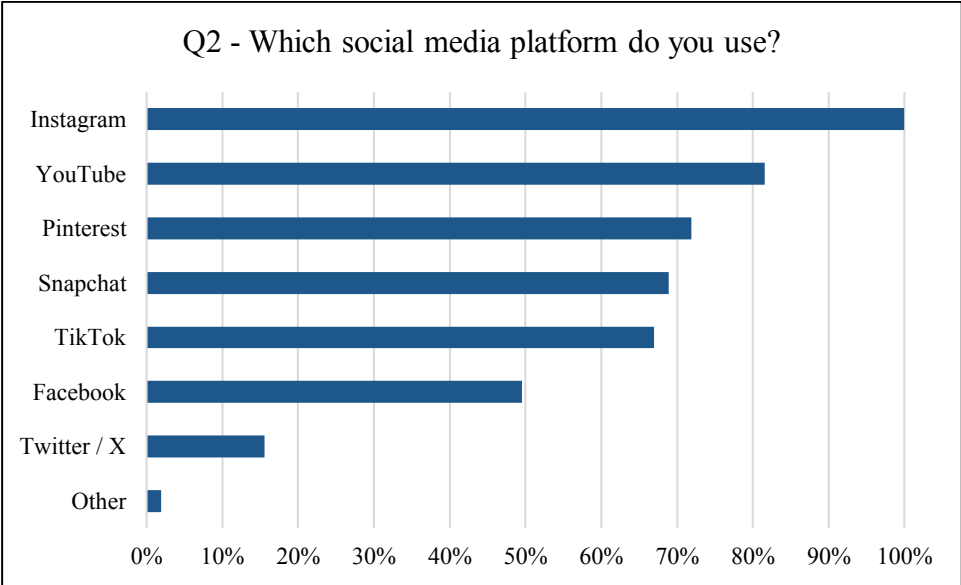
Figure 6: Which social media platforms do you use?
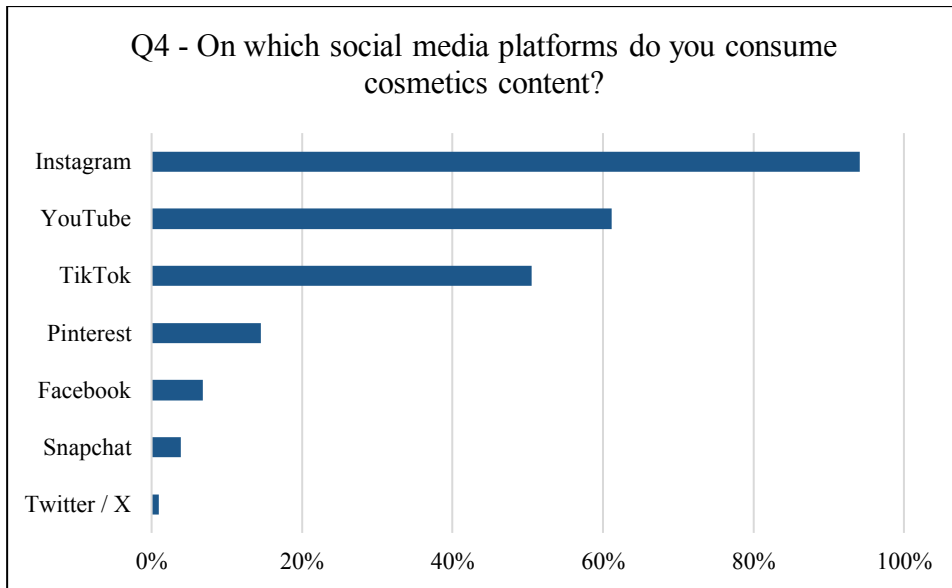
Figure 7: On which social media platforms do you consume cosmetics content?

Figure 8 conclusively reveals that 91.3% of the participants exhibited a strong preference for influencer posts and stories when engaging with cosmetics-related content on social media platforms, while only a marginal 8.7% favored branded content. This striking contrast underscores the paramount relevance and efficacy of influencer marketing within the cosmetics industry.

Figure 8: When consuming cosmetics content on social media, I prefer to look at…

6   Discussion

Having conducted a thorough data analysis to test the proposed relationships within the research model, the focus now shifts to the discussion chapter. This chapter will interpret the empirical findings, compare them with existing literature, and explore their implications, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the study's contributions to the field of influencer marketing.

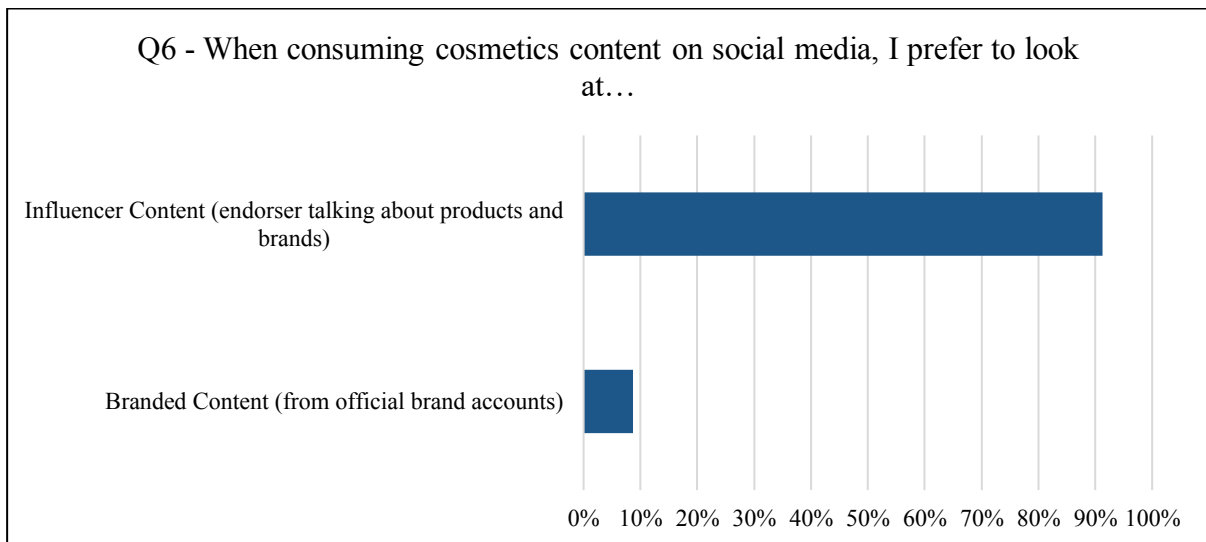The first hypothesis proposed a significant positive relationship between perceived trustworthiness and PSR strength. While positive attributes such as influencer trustworthiness might intuitively seem connected to building strong PSRs, the findings of this research challenge this notion. As explored in the data analysis chapter, no positive significant relationship was found due to the stringent criteria set in this research. However, applying a conventional significance level of 0.05 would have revealed a significant relationship with a moderately strong positive correlation. Aligning with these results, Yuan and Lou's (2020) investigation revealed no significant correlation between trustworthiness and PSR. This diverges from the anticipated outcomes of the attribution theory, which postulates that perceived bias in a source would lead to skepticism and, consequently, weaken PSRs (Gotlieb & Sarel, 2013; Kelley, 1973 cited in Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). This might be because the attribution theory's predictions may not fully capture the complexities of trustworthiness perceptions in the context of social media influencers, suggesting a need for further exploration of this phenomenon.

The second hypothesis suggests a significant positive relationship between perceived influencer expertise and PSR strength. Initially, the connection between these two variables may appear less obvious, especially considering that followers actively engage with content from various sources, indicating a preference for diverse perspectives rather than relying solely on a single authoritative source for expertise (Harkins & Petty, 1987). Moreover, it might be assumed that a PSR can be established with an influencer who lacks expertise in cosmetics but is generally likable to the user. However, a detailed examination through the lens of brand-influencer congruence revealed a moderate positive correlation between an influencer's perceived expertise in cosmetics and the strength of PSRs. Thus, expertise can be established as a significant predictor of PSR strength in the present study, aligning with a robust body of research investigating this facet of influencer-follower dynamics (Ashraf et al., 2023; Rungruangjit, 2022; Yuan & Lou, 2020; Zheng et al., 2022). Notably, while Yuan and Lou (2020) reported incongruent findings, indicating no significant impact of perceived influencer expertise on PSR strength, the overarching evidence in the field supports a statistically significant relationship between these variables. This consensus underscores the validity of the predicted effects of brand-influencer congruity. According to this theoretical framework, the

alignment between a brand and the influencer fosters a deeper connection, as the audience perceives the influencer's endorsements as more personalized and relevant (Chung & Cho, 2017; Munnukka, 2019).

The study at hand also posited in a third hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived attractiveness and PSR. Some may perceive the role of influencers' attractiveness as negligible in forming strong PSRs. After all, influencers are often viewed as ordinary social media users rather than celebrities or models renowned for their physical appearance (Gräve, 2017). Furthermore, while it might be presumed that personal character traits hold greater importance than physical attractiveness in relationship formation, this current study indicates a distinction in the significance of attractiveness between two-sided and one-sided relationship-building. The results show that perceived attractiveness had a significantly positive effect on the PSR between followers and influencers. This supports the predicted effects of the match-up hypothesis, which posits that the alignment between the advertised products and the influencer's attractiveness contributes to the formation of a closer bond, thereby strengthening PSRs (Liu et al., 2023).

This was also found by Yuan and Lou (2020) who examined the same dynamic. Conversely, Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021), who analyzed PSI rather than PSR, found no significant relationship between attractiveness and PSI. If the same stringent criteria used in the current study had been applied to Lawrence and Meivitawanli's (2023) analysis, attractiveness similarly would not have been found to have a significant relationship with PSR. Variances in research outcomes may be attributed to different research contexts, such as the isolated analysis of one particular platform like TikTok in the case of Lawrence and Meivitawanli's (2023) or the industry-specific focus of Yılmazdoğan et al.'s research (2021), who centered their analysis on influencers within the tourism sector. In the cosmetic industry, where visual appeal holds paramount importance, followers gravitate towards influencers who embody the aspirational qualities associated with beauty products (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Schmid & Klimmt, 2011). An attractive influencer serves as a living representation of the desired outcomes of using cosmetic products, thereby augmenting the overall attractiveness of the products themselves (Praxmarer, 2011; Tanpoco et al., 2023). This emphasis on visual allure is central to the persuasive power of cosmetic influencers, where personal appearance plays a significant role in product endorsement. Finally, the results found for the third hypothesis are also in line with social adaptation theory, which suggests that consumers may interpret the inclusion of an attractive endorser in an advertisement as an indication that using the product will enhance their physical attractiveness, thereby providing adaptive information (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990). This suggests that the desire to mirror the influencer's appearance fosters a stronger connection between the influencer and their followers, thereby enhancing the impact of perceived attractiveness on PSR strength, as similarly explored by Yuan and Lou (2020).

The last and fourth hypothesis suggests a significant positive relationship between perceived similarity and PSR strength. While it might also be easily assumed that similarity is an obvious prerequisite for building a one-sided relationship with a cosmetics influencer, followers' engagement and connections with influencers can also stem from a desire for escapism or

entertainment, as noted by Croes and Bartels (2021). In such cases, individuals seek distraction or enjoyment rather than identification or similarity, complicating the presumed natural connection between them. However, the present quantitative study has demonstrated that similarity indeed has a strong positive correlation with PSR within the cosmetics sector. As described by Jacob and Wonneberger (2016), individuals tend to engage more frequently with those who mirror their habits and preferences.

This finding aligns with the results from Lawrence and Meivitawanli's (2023) study on commerce streamers in the cosmetics domain on TikTok, as well as Ashraf et al.'s (2023) study on influencer credibility within the technology sector. However, it is important to note that these studies employed a less stringent significance criterion set at 0.05. Consequently, under the stricter criteria used in the present study, perceived influencer similarity might not have demonstrated significant effects on PSR strength in Ashraf et al.'s (2023) research. One plausible explanation for this disparity lies in the inherent differences between cosmetic and technology content, particularly in terms of relatability. Cosmetic products are intimately linked to personal appearance and identity (Negrin, 2008), prompting followers to seek relatable figures whose appearance, lifestyle, and preferences mirror their own (Jacob & Wonneberger, 2016). This lends support to the anticipated effects of congruity theory in the relationship between influencers and their followers. This theory suggests that a high level of congruence between followers and influencers leads to a deeper emotional connection, ultimately increasing engagement levels and the likelihood of followers acting upon the influencer's endorsements (Venciute et al., 2023). Thus, the findings indicate that witnessing someone akin to themselves achieve desirable results can strengthen PSR bonds. This, in turn, can increase trust in the influencer's persuasive communication efforts, thereby enhancing the likelihood of engagement and product adoption (Faraji-Rad et al., 2015; Porumbu, 2015).

Finally, the present study also examined supplementary survey items intended to provide additional managerial implications. However, the findings unveiled further intriguing insights. Thus, a disparity was discovered between general social media platform usage and platforms specifically for cosmetics content consumption. For instance, while 71.8% of the survey participants reported using Pinterest and 68.9% reported using Snapchat in general, only 14.6% and 3.9% respectively engaged with cosmetics content on these platforms. This stark difference suggests distinct patterns between general usage and engagement with specific content niches. Hence, focusing exclusively on one platform to analyze industry-specific dynamics, such as TikTok in the case of Lawrence and Meivitawanli (2023) in their study of the cosmetics sector, might not be ideal. Examining multiple platforms could have yielded different insights and offered a more comprehensive understanding of the industry landscape.

7 Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, the findings extracted from the preceding results and data analysis are consolidated, shedding light on theoretical implications and managerial applications. Theoretical implications underscore contributions to existing knowledge, while managerial applications provide actionable insights for decision-makers. Limitations of the study are acknowledged, defining the boundaries of the conducted research. Furthermore, potential avenues for future research are delineated, suggesting areas suitable for further exploration in the field.

7.1 Theoretical Implications

An empirical examination of the relationship between influencer credibility and PSRs elucidates the mechanisms through which influencers cultivate connections with their audiences. By demonstrating the influence of the four source credibility factors—attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity—and their effects on PSR strength, this research advances the understanding of the underlying dynamics that drive the effective communication of persuasive messages. Thus, this research contributes unique insights to the academic discourse on source credibility.

The findings of this research validate the relevance of the theories outlined in the theoretical framework chapter for predicting the relationship between the source credibility dimensions and PSR strength.

Notably, however, no significant positive relationship between perceived trustworthiness and PSR under the stringent criteria within the current study was found. This suggests that the attribution theory may not fully capture this intricate dynamic. Consequently, it raises questions about the contemporary relevance of Kelley's (1973) attribution theory, which has been used by marketing researchers like Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) to predict the effects of influencer trustworthiness. In today's rapidly changing digital landscape, where influencers interact with audiences in unique ways, the rigid concepts of attribution theory may fall short in capturing the true impact of influencer trustworthiness on PSRs. Therefore, reevaluating attribution theory in the context of dynamic online interactions is crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of how influencer trustworthiness influences PSRs in modern times.

The observed significant positive relationships between perceived attractiveness and expertise provide empirical support for the match-up hypothesis (Kahle & Homer, 1985) and the brand-influencer congruity theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). These findings not only reaffirm the ongoing applicability of these traditional theories in predicting the formation of these new one-sided relationship dynamics with social media endorsers. This has significant implications for academic research, suggesting that these established theories continue to offer valuable insights into the dynamics of influencer-consumer relationships in the digital age.

The inclusion of similarity as a fourth factor, which has received limited attention in existing literature, enhances the understanding of influencer credibility's constituent elements. The significant positive relationship observed between similarity and PSR suggests that valuable insights may be provided by the influencer-follower congruity theory into the formation and strength of PSRs. Moreover, the results highlight the need for a shift in academic research towards a broader understanding of influencer credibility, beyond traditional dimensions such as attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness.

Overall, the significant positive relationships identified in this study underscore the considerable importance of the three aforementioned source credibility factors, excluding trustworthiness, in predicting the strength of PSRs with influencers. While acknowledging that they may not be the exclusive predictors, these findings emphasize the critical role of source credibility dimensions in shaping the formation of robust PSR bonds. Consequently, when investigating the factors influencing the development of strong PSRs, it is imperative to account for the impact of these factors, as revealed by the findings of this research.

The examination of this phenomenon contributes to a deeper understanding of the distinctiveness of the cosmetics industry. This sector serves as a unique and fertile ground for studying marketing strategies due to its specific characteristics, including a strong emphasis on short-lived product trends driven by a fast-paced environment (Kumar et al., 2006). From a consumer perspective, the cosmetics industry is intricately linked to social life and psychological factors such as self-confidence and sociability, as consumers often seek cosmetic products not only for their functional benefits but also as tools for self-expression, confidence enhancement, and social validation (Cash & Cash, 1982). By investigating influencer credibility and PSRs within this context, the study offers insights into how these phenomena manifest and operate within a market segment marked by intense competition, rapidly shifting consumer preferences, and evolving beauty standards (Othman et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this study contributes to theoretical advancements in influencer marketing research by elucidating the role of the four source credibility dimensions in the formation of PSRs and underscoring its strategic implications for companies operating in the cosmetics industry.

7.2 Managerial Implications

Given the presented results of this study, companies seeking to leverage influencer marketing can capitalize on these findings by strategically selecting influencers who exhibit high perceived expertise in cosmetics, characterized by a profound understanding and skill in cosmetics. Additionally, it is advantageous for companies to select influencers who are perceived as highly attractive, acknowledging that attractiveness transcends mere physical appearance and encompasses traits such as charisma and admirability. Furthermore, companies should carefully consider influencers who share a significant degree of similarity with a brand's target audience in terms of self-identification, interests, and values. While perceived trustworthiness remains a factor to consider, the study underscores that perceived expertise, attractiveness, and similarity are paramount in fostering stronger PSRs between influencers and their followers. Given that influencers who possess these qualities are more likely to cultivate robust PSRs with their followers, they are better positioned to effectively persuade their audience to undertake actions that align with a company's marketing objectives. Therefore, companies should pay particular attention to these characteristics when selecting a suitable influencer for their marketing campaign.

As previously discussed, the relationship between influencer credibility dimensions and strong PSRs is far more intricate and nuanced than commonly presumed. This understanding is crucial for companies and decision-makers. Regarding trustworthiness, the study found no significant positive relationship to PSR. While this does not imply its irrelevance, given the stringent criteria of this study, the findings are mirrored in real-life scenarios. For instance, Kylie Jenner, a social media endorser and cosmetics business owner, maintains a robust fan base of 399 million followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2024a) despite facing exposure for employing scarcity tactics to inflate her sales numbers and encountering similar misinformation allegations (Peterson-Withorn, 2020). This serves as a compelling illustration for decision-makers of the multifaceted impacts of source credibility factors on PSR bonds.

This research has also previously addressed the ambiguous relationship between perceived expertise and PSR. However, the present study revealed a significant relationship between these variables, highlighting the importance of considering an influencer's expertise in cosmetics. This is exemplified by prominent cosmetics influencers on social media, many of whom are industry professionals. For example, Mario Dedivanovic, an accomplished makeup artist with renowned clients like Kim Kardashian, has 13.9 million followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2024b), while Huda, a trained makeup artist and founder of the makeup brand Huda Beauty, has 4.1 million followers on her personal Instagram account (Instagram, 2024c). These follower numbers indicate the substantial impact and influence these individuals wield in the cosmetics industry, potentially contributing to the formation of robust PSRs among their followers. This emphasizes the importance of considering high perceived expertise when choosing a social media endorser for a brand's influencer marketing strategy.

The source credibility dimensions of attractiveness and similarity are inherently subjective, posing challenges in identifying universally applicable examples. However, this subjectivity highlights the critical need for marketers to conduct comprehensive research on their target audience. Understanding what the target group perceives as attractive, along with their interests and values, is essential for identifying suitable influencers. By selecting influencers who align closely with the target group's preferences and are regarded as attractive and similar, marketers can significantly enhance the resonance and impact of their influencer marketing campaigns

In addition to identifying key characteristics for a social media endorser to be perceived as credible, this research provides supplementary findings essential for developing an effective influencer marketing strategy in the cosmetics sector. The managerial supplementary analysis shows there is a substantial difference between generally used social media platforms and those that are used specifically for cosmetics content. Thus, companies and decision-makers can not necessarily base their strategic decisions on which platforms to employ influencer marketing solely on absolute user numbers to maximize reach but need to take the special requirements of the cosmetics industry into consideration.

The present study has evidenced the prominence of Instagram as the leading platform for both general usage and cosmetics-related content consumption, which signifies its immense potential for cosmetics brands. With a strong presence among all respondents as general users and an overwhelming majority of 94.2% for cosmetics content consumption, Instagram emerges as a vital channel for reaching and engaging with the target audience. Managers should prioritize investment in Instagram influencer marketing strategies based on these empirical insights.

YouTube also emerges as a powerful platform for cosmetics content, with a substantial portion of the audience utilizing it for niche content consumption. Its effectiveness in delivering cosmetics-related content suggests that brands should explore partnering with popular social media endorsers on the video-sharing platform.

While TikTok also demonstrates considerable general usage, its performance in the cosmetics sector, surpassing Pinterest and Snapchat but falling short of Instagram and YouTube, indicates its potential as an upcoming platform for cosmetics influencer marketing. Managers should be mindful that TikTok is a fast-growing platform with high user growth rates among all age groups (Meza et al., 2023).

Conversely, platforms like Pinterest, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter/X exhibited limited appeal for cosmetics content despite their comparatively large general usage. This suggests that brands may need to reassess their presence and engagement strategies on these platforms within the cosmetics context. While maintaining a presence for broader brand visibility may be beneficial, allocating resources toward platforms with higher cosmetics content engagement rates could yield better returns.

The research findings highlight the preference for influencer posts and stories over branded content, which underscores the significant role of influencer marketing in the cosmetics

domain. Managers should prioritize cultivating strategic partnerships with influencers who can effectively foster strong PSRs with the desired target audience to convey persuasive messages. This can be achieved by deliberately selecting social media endorsers who exhibit high levels of perceived attractiveness, expertise, and similarity.

7.3   Limitations

This study, while contributing valuable insights to the field, is subject to several limitations that warrant acknowledgment. Firstly, the use of convenience sampling introduces a notable constraint on the generalizability of the findings. Given the non-random selection of participants, the sample may not be fully representative of the broader population under investigation. Consequently, it is recommended to exercise caution when generalizing the findings beyond the scope of the sample.

Geographical limitations also merit consideration. Due to convenience sampling within a specific social network, the participants predominantly exhibited a Western European background. Consequently, the findings of this study may not fully encapsulate the diversity of perspectives present in populations from other regions or cultural contexts. Cultural nuances, norms, and values vary significantly across different geographical locations, influencing individuals' behaviors, attitudes, and responses to various stimuli.

Furthermore, resource and time constraints imposed limitations on the depth and breadth of data collection procedures. These constraints may have influenced the scope of data gathered, potentially impacting the comprehensiveness of the study's outcomes.

Another significant limitation pertains to the homogeneity of the sample composition. The predominance of female participants within the narrow age range of 23 to 25, coupled with the underrepresentation of other demographic groups, notably older individuals and those identifying as male or non-binary, limits the diversity of perspectives encapsulated within the study. Moreover, the relatively small sample size of 103 respondents raises concerns regarding statistical power and may compromise the reliability of the findings.

Additionally, the utilization of pre-existing scales with fixed formulations and wording poses a limitation on the interpretability of results. Alternative measurement instruments or scales may yield divergent outcomes, highlighting the potential influence of instrument selection on survey responses.

7.4   Future Research

Examining influencer credibility through factors beyond the conventional domains of perceived trustworthiness, expertise, similarity, and attractiveness unveils deeper insights into the dynamics of influencer effectiveness. Exploring lesser-known dimensions can reveal additional sources of credibility. For instance, the dimension of perceived attractiveness warrants further investigation, particularly through McGuire's (1985) source attractiveness model. This model broadens the concept of attractiveness beyond physical appearance to include familiarity, likability, and similarity. While similarity has been extensively studied in both this research and related work on influencer credibility, a significant gap remains in the exploration of familiarity and likability within the social media landscape. Addressing these under-researched aspects could provide a more comprehensive understanding of what contributes to an influencer's credibility.

Furthermore, employing qualitative studies presents a promising avenue for uncovering additional factors or elements that contribute to credibility beyond those examined in the current study. Qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis, can provide rich, nuanced insights into how audiences perceive and engage with influencers. These methods can reveal underlying motivations, perceptions, and attitudes that quantitative approaches might overlook. By integrating qualitative findings with existing quantitative data, a more holistic and robust understanding of influencer credibility can be achieved, ultimately enhancing strategies for effective influencer marketing.

In the cosmetic industry, there is a notable preference for influencers over branded content, as found in this present study. Research in this area could offer valuable insights into why consumers tend to gravitate towards influencers as opposed to branded content, despite the latter being directly associated with the product or service. This could warrant a deeper investigation into how social media users build PSR bonds with brands on social media. The implications of this study could inform companies on how they can improve their communication strategies on their own brand accounts in order to foster long-term customer loyalty. When consumers feel a genuine connection with a brand, they are more likely to remain loyal and advocate for them (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

For a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in the cosmetics industry, it is imperative to consider introducing additional variables into the relationship between source credibility and PSR strength. For instance, brand perception can serve as a valuable moderating factor. This variable offers a nuanced lens through which to examine the intricate mechanisms influencing consumer decision-making processes.

Brand perception encompasses consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and opinions about a brand, which are shaped by various factors, including marketing communications, product experiences, and interactions with influencers (Kirsch, 2023). As a moderator, brand perception might moderate the relationship between source credibility and PSR strength by shaping the strength and

direction of the relationship between source credibility and PSR strength under different conditions. For instance, consumers with strong positive brand perceptions may be more receptive to influencer messages, leading to stronger effect of influencer credibility on PSRs, whereas consumers with negative brand perceptions may exhibit resistance or skepticism, diminishing the influence of source credibility on PSR strength.

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Appendix A

English Version

Welcome, and thank you for participating in our survey.

We are Tina and Saskia, and we are pursuing our Master's degrees in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University. As part of our thesis research, we are conducting a survey to explore the dynamics of influencer credibility and parasocial relationships within the cosmetics industry.

Completing the survey will take approximately 4-5 minutes of your time. There are no right or wrong answers; we are interested in your personal perceptions.

The survey is completely anonymous. All data collected will be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us:

Saskia Borgel: sa3474bo-s@student.lu.se
Tina Nguyen: tr0847ng-s@student.lu.se

Your contribution is highly valued, and we appreciate your participation.

Thank you very much in advance.

Saskia & Tina

Filter Question

1. Do you use social media? (messenger platforms not included)
    - Yes
    - No (end of survey)

General Social Media Usage

2. Which social media platforms do you use? *(Multiple can be selected)*
    - Instagram
    - Facebook

- o TikTok
- o YouTube
- o Snapchat
- o Twitter/X
- o Pinterest
- o Other _____

Cosmetics Content on Social Media

The following questions will be asked in context of the cosmetics industry. The cosmetics industry encompasses skincare, haircare, makeup, fragrance, and hygiene products.

Filter Question

3. Do you look at cosmetics content on social media? (influencer as well as brand content)
    - o Yes
    - o No (end of survey)

Cosmetics Content Social Media Platform

4. On which social media platforms do you consume cosmetics content? *(Multiple can be selected)*
    - o Instagram
    - o Facebook
    - o TikTok
    - o YouTube
    - o Snapchat
    - o Twitter/X
    - o Pinterest
    - o Other _____

Filter Question

5. Do you view influencers' content that revolves around cosmetics?
    - o Yes
    - o No (end of survey)

Branded Content vs. Influencer Content

6. When consuming cosmetics content on social media, I prefer to look at...
    - o Branded Content (from official brand accounts)
    - o Influencer Content (endorsers talking about products)

For the following section of the survey, please base your responses on your favorite influencer who incorporates cosmetics-related content into their posts. There are no correct or incorrect answers; simply select the options that best reflect your opinion.

This could be any influencer whose content occasionally or frequently features topics related to makeup, skincare, haircare, fragrance, and hygiene products.

Trustworthiness

Note on the following question: "Dependable" refers to being trustworthy and reliable in different situations, while "reliable" specifically relates to consistently fulfilling duties and obligations.

Please rate the following statements.

7. My selected influencer is dependable.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

8. My selected influencer is honest.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

9. My selected influencer is reliable.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

10. My selected influencer is sincere.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

11. My selected influencer is trustworthy.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

Expertise

Please rate the following statements.

12. My selected influencer is an expert in cosmetics.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

13. My selected influencer is knowledgeable in cosmetics.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

14. My selected influencer is qualified in cosmetics.
    o   Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

15. My selected influencer has experience in cosmetics.

o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

Attractiveness

Please rate the following statements.

16. My selected influencer is attractive.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

17. My selected influencer is charismatic.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

18. My selected influencer is good-looking.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

19. My selected influencer is admirable.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

20. My selected influencer is beautiful.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

Similarity

Please rate the following statements.

21. My selected influencer and I have a lot in common.
    1. Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

22. My selected influencer and I are a lot alike.
    2. Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

23. I can easily identify with my selected influencer.
    3. Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

Parasocial Relationship Strength

Please rate the following statements.

24. My selected influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

25. I look forward to seeing my selected influencer's next post.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

26. I see my selected influencer as natural, down-to-earth person.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

27. If my selected influencer starts another social media channel, I will also follow.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

28. My selected influencer seems to understand the kind of thing I want to know.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

29. If I see a story about my selected influencer in other places, I would want to read it.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

30. I miss seeing my selected influencer when he/she did not post on time.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

31. I would like to meet my selected influencer in person.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

32. If something happens to my selected influencer, I will feel sad.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

33. I would invite my selected influencer to my party.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

34. My selected influencer is the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

35. If my selected influencer lived in my neighborhood, we would be friends.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

36. My selected influencer would fit in well with my group of friends.
    - o Strongly disagree - Strongly agree (7-point Likert-Scale)

Demographic Questions

You're almost done! Before you finish, we kindly ask for some demographic information. They're solely used for statistical purposes and won't be linked to your survey responses.

37. How old are you?

    o Drop-Down (18-99)

38. What gender do you identify with?
    o Female
    o Male
    o Non-binary
    o Other ___
    o Prefer not to say

39. What is your current main occupation?
    o School student
    o University student
    o In an apprenticeship
    o Working full-time
    o Working part-time
    o Not employed
    o Other___

40. What is your highest level of education completed?
    o No formal education
    o Secondary school degree
    o Completed apprenticeship
    o High school degree
    o Bachelor's degree
    o Master's degree
    o Doctorate degree
    o Other____

*End of survey

German Version

Herzlich willkommen und vielen Dank, dass Du an unserer Umfrage teilnimmst.

Wir sind Tina und Saskia und machen unseren Master in International Marketing und Brand Management an der Lund University. Im Rahmen unserer Abschlussarbeit führen wir eine Umfrage durch, um die Dynamik der Glaubwürdigkeit von Influencern und parasozialen Beziehungen innerhalb der Kosmetikindustrie zu untersuchen.

Das Ausfüllen der Umfrage wird etwa 4-5 Minuten Deiner Zeit in Anspruch nehmen. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten; wir sind an deinen persönlichen Wahrnehmungen interessiert.

Die Umfrage ist vollständig anonym. Alle gesammelten Daten werden vertraulich behandelt und ausschließlich zu Forschungszwecken verwendet.

Solltest Du Fragen haben, zögere bitte nicht, uns zu kontaktieren:

Saskia Borgel: sa3474bo-s@student.lu.s
Tina Nguyen: tr0847ng-s@student.lu.se

Wir schätzen deinen Beitrag und Deine Teilnahme sehr.

Vielen Dank im Voraus.
Saskia & Tina

Filterfrage

1. Nutzt Du Social Media? (Messenger Plattformen ausgenommen)
   - o Ja
   - o Nein

Allgemeine Social Media Nutzung

2. Welche Social Media Plattformen nutzt Du? (Messenger Plattformen ausgenommen.)
   - o Instagram
   - o Facebook
   - o TikTok
   - o YouTube
   - o Snapchat
   - o Twitter/X
   - o Pinterest
   - o Andere _____

Kosmetikkontent auf Social Media

Die folgenden Fragen werden im Kontext der Kosmetikindustrie* gestellt.
Die Kosmetikindustrie umfasst Hautpflege, Haarpflege, Make-up, Düfte und Hygieneprodukte.

Filterfrage

3. Schaust Du Dir Beiträge auf Social Media an, die sich um Kosmetik drehen?
   (Influencer- als auch Markenbeiträge)
   - o Ja
   - o Nein

Kosmetikkontent auf Social Media Platformen

4. Auf welchen Social Media Plattformen schaust Du Dir Beiträge an, die von Kosmetik handeln? *(Es können mehrere ausgewählt werden.)*
   o Instagram
   o Facebook
   o TikTok
   o YouTube
   o Snapchat
   o Twitter/X
   o Pinterest
   o Andere _____

Filterfrage

5. Schaust Du Dir Beiträge von Influencern an, die sich um Kosmetik drehen?
   o Ja
   o Nein

Markenbeiträge vs. Influencerbeiträge

6. Wenn ich mir Kosmetik-Beiträge auf Social Media anschaue, bevorzuge ich...
   o Beiträge von Marken (von offiziellen Markenaccounts)
   o Influencerbeiträge (Influencer, die über Produkte und Marken sprechen)

Für den folgenden Abschnitt der Umfrage, basiere bitte Deine Antworten auf Deine/m Lieblingsinfluencer/in, der kosmetikbezogene Inhalte in seinen Beiträgen integriert. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten; wähle einfach die Optionen aus, die am besten Deine Meinung widerspiegeln.

Dies könnte jeder Influencer sein, dessen Inhalte gelegentlich oder häufig Themen rund um Make-up, Hautpflege, Haarpflege, Düfte und Hygieneprodukte umfassen.

Vertrauenswürdigkeit

Anmerkung zur nächsten Frage: "Zuverlässig" bezieht sich darauf, vertrauenswürdig und in verschiedenen Situationen zuverlässig zu sein, während "verlässlich" sich speziell auf das konsequente Erfüllen von Aufgaben und Verpflichtungen bezieht.
Bitte bewerte die folgenden Aussagen.

7. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist verlässlich.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

8. Mein ausgewählter ist ehrlich.

> - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

9. Mein ausgewählter ist zuverlässig.
   - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

10. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist aufrichtig.
    - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

11. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist vertrauenswürdig.
    - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

Expertise

Bitte bewerte die folgenden Aussagen.

12. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist ein Experte auf dem Gebiet der Kosmetik.
    - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

13. Mein ausgewählter Influencer besitzt Kenntnisse im Bereich der Kosmetik.
    - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

14. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist qualifiziert im Bereich der Kosmetik.
    - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

15. Mein ausgewählter Influencer hat Erfahrung im Bereich der Kosemtik.
    - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

Attraktivität

Bitte bewerte die folgenden Aussagen.

16. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist attraktiv.
    - ○ Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

17. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist charismatisch.

o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

18. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist gutaussehend.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

19. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist bewunderswert.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

20. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist schön.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

Ähnlichkeit

Bitte bewerte die folgenden Aussagen.

21. Mein ausgewählter Influencer und ich haben viel gemeinsam.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

22. Mein ausgewählter Influencer und ich sind uns sehr ähnlich.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

23. Ich kann mich leicht mit meinem ausgewählten Influencer identifizieren.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

Parasoziale Beziehung

Bitte bewerte die folgenden Aussagen.

24. Mein ausgewählter Influencer macht es mir leicht, mich wohl zu fühlen, als wäre ich mit einem Freund zusammen.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

25. Ich freue mich darauf, den nächsten Beitrag meines ausgewählten Influencers zu sehen.
   o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

26. Ich sehe meinen ausgewählten Influencer als natürliche, bodenständige Person.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

27. Wenn mein ausgewählter Influencer einen weiteren Social-Media-Kanal startet, werde ich ihm auch folgen.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

28. Mein ausgewählter Influencer scheint zu verstehen, welche Art von Dingen ich wissen möchte.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

29. Wenn ich eine Geschichte über meinen asugewählten Influencer an anderen Orten (bzw. Kommunikationskanälen) sehe, würde ich sie lesen wollen.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

30. Ich vermisse es, meinen ausgewählten Influencer zu sehen, wenn er/sie nicht rechtzeitig gepostet hat.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

31. Ich würde meinen ausgewählten Influencer gerne persönlich treffen.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

32. Wenn meinem ausgewählten Influencer etwas passiert, werde ich traurig sein.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

33. Ich würde meinen ausgewählten Influencer zu meiner Party einladen.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

34. Mein ausgewählter Influencer ist die At von Person, mit der ich gerne spielen oder Zeit verbringen würde.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

35. Wenn mein ausgewählter Influencer in meiner Nachbarschaft leben würde, wären wir Freunde.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

36. Mein ausgewählter Influencer würde gut zu meiner Gruppe von Freunden passen.
    - o Stimme überhaupt nicht zu – Stimme voll und ganz zu (7-Punkte Likert-Skala)

Demografische Fragen

Wir sind fast am Ende! Bevor du abschließt, würden wir Dich gerne noch um einige demografische Informationen bitten. Diese werden ausschließlich zu statistischen Zwecken verwendet und nicht mit Deinen Umfrageantworten verknüpft.

37. Wie alt bist du?
    - o Dropdown-Menu (18-99)

38. Welchem Geschlecht fühlst Du Dich zugehörig?
    - o Männlich
    - o Weiblich
    - o Nicht-binär
    - o Andere_____
    - o Keine Angabe bevorzugt

39. Was ist Deine derzeitige Hauptbeschäftigung?
    - o Schüler/in
    - o Student/in
    - o In Ausbildung
    - o In Teilzeit berufstätig
    - o In Vollzeit berufstätig
    - o Derzeit nicht beschäftigt
    - o Andere_____

40. Was ist Dein höchster Bildungsabschluss?
    - o Kein Schulabschluss
    - o Hauptschul- oder Realschulabschluss
    - o (Fach-) Abitur
    - o Abgeschlossene Ausbildung
    - o Bachelor-Abschluss
    - o Master-Abschluss
    - o Promotion
    - o Andere_____

*Ende der Umfrage