

Too Perfect to Trust?

Beauty Filters and Consumer Responses in
Social Media Influencer Marketing

by

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Abstract

Keywords: beauty filters, short form video, influencer marketing, perceived SMIs authenticity, need for uniqueness, video popularity, purchase intention, social commerce

Purpose: This study investigates how beauty filter usage and video popularity in influencer-led short-form beauty videos influence consumers' purchase intention toward cosmetic products. The study further examines the mediating role of perceived social media influencer (SMI) authenticity and the moderating role of need for uniqueness (NFU).

Main Research Question: How does beauty filter usage and video popularity in influencer-led short-form beauty videos affect consumers' purchase intention toward cosmetic products?

Methodology: The study employed a 2×2 between-subjects factorial experimental design, manipulating both beauty filter usage (with versus without filters) and video popularity (high versus low popularity). A sample of participants was randomly assigned to four experimental conditions for cosmetic promotion videos. The same video footage and audio were used across all conditions, while beauty filters and engagement metrics such as likes, comments, favorites, and shares were manually manipulated. Data were collected through an online survey using validated Likert-scale measurements for perceived SMI authenticity, need for uniqueness, and purchase intention. Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi statistical software to examine direct, mediating, and moderating effects.

Findings: The results showed that beauty filter usage had a significant negative effect on purchase intention. In contrast, video popularity did not significantly influence purchase intention. The findings further revealed that perceived SMI authenticity positively influenced purchase intention and mediated the relationship between beauty filter usage and purchase intention. Additionally, need for uniqueness significantly moderated the relationship between beauty filter usage and perceived authenticity, but not moderated the relationship between video popularity and purchase intention suggesting that consumers with higher NFU reacted more negatively toward filtered influencer content. Overall, the findings indicate that consumers value authenticity and individuality more than visual perfection or popularity in influencer-led cosmetic promotions.

Theoretical and Managerial Contributions: Theoretically, this study extends the literature on beauty filters by shifting the focus from body image and self-perception toward consumer purchase intention in short-form influencer marketing contexts. The study also contributes to influencer marketing, authenticity, signaling theory, social influence theory, social proof theory and need for uniqueness literature by highlighting the tension between visual appeal and credibility in social commerce. Managerially, the findings suggest that brands and influencers should prioritize authenticity, transparency, and realistic product representation

rather than relying heavily on beauty filters or popularity metrics to increase consumer engagement and purchase intention.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The fast-paced growth in social media has created considerable changes in the marketing field, bringing major changes in how businesses communicate with consumers and how they form their consumption decisions (Gündüzyeli, 2025; Zhang & Bhaumik, 2024). It is noteworthy that there is an increase in the use of social media across the globe, and the current number of social media users worldwide is recorded at more than five billion for 2026, and the number is expected to rise to over six billion by 2030 (Statista). This growth reflects broader digital transformation processes, which triggered significant structural and operational shifts, and creating tensions between control and flexibility (Berger-Remy et al., 2021). In regards to firms trying to navigate to the transformation environment, the use of social media becomes an integral aspect of customer interactions and digital marketing efforts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Ashley & Tuten, 2014). Businesses invest substantial funds for marketing resources as social media allows for numerous opportunities for businesses to reach their target market and facilitate the accomplishment of marketing objectives (Jiang, 2023). The effectiveness of the approach can be found in industry data, for example, Ampere Analysis shows that short form video content accounts for over 60%, while 47% is related to influencer video content. According to statistics collected by Wyzowl in 2026, 63% of consumers favor viewing short videos to learn information about products or services, while 82% indicate video content has influence on their buying behavior.

Recently, marketing has been increasingly influenced by visual communication. Visual appeal is an important factor that consumers often rely on emotional and sensory responses when evaluating products (Bloch, 1995). According to Rose (2016), contemporary society is saturated with visual images, which visuality becoming an integral and interconnected part of social life. It is particularly obvious in short form video platforms, where visual narratives are dominant. The cosmetic industry benefits from this visually driven environment particularly. Existing study has pointed out that visual aesthetics lead to favorable affective responses and perceptions of value, consequently increasing purchase intention (Tiwari & Kumari, 2024). Credibility of influencers along with entertaining content in short form video have proven as significant factors for purchase intention (Rizomyliotis et al., 2024; Maharani & Aruan, 2025).

In addition, there is a growing popularity of using beautified applications. For instance, in a survey conducted among young people, over 70% of them reported using AR beauty filters (Šidanin et al., 2023). Nowadays, AR filters gained wide popularity within social media platforms, and the current number of monthly users on Instagram or Facebook counts to 600 million users, while 76% users use them every day on Snapchat (Bhatt, 2020). According to

Sabharwal (2025), AR filters represent a double edged sword in beauty industry, it can increase consumer engagement through virtual try-on, confidence in purchase decision making that increases sales for brands, but can also lead to unrealistic beauty standards. Also, Hussain et al. (2025) studied the impact of beauty filters and recommendations driven by AR on social media in influencing consumers' body image and aesthetic preferences. Additionally, real time beauty filters of modern AR applications allow potential consumers to envision their makeup look effects immediately, making it simpler for their decisions before buying (Dattatray et al., 2025).

The use of beauty filters, not only through AR filters but also by editing tools to enhance beauty, can be widely seen on videos and images on social media. Such tools have become part of social media, where people can share their perfect looks, align with beauty standards such as flawless skin and perfect facial features (Felimban et al., 2025). Although this helps enhance visual appeal and engagement, they also raise questions about realism and the credibility of product-related performance content and the intention to purchase.

1.2 Research Problem

Nowadays, social commerce in platforms like Tiktok or Instagram is not only a place for product distribution but also play an important role in shaping purchase decisions by way of viewing reviews, building trust, and interacting with sellers or influencers (Dzreke & Dzreke, 2025; Kartomo, 2024; Prestyasih & Hati, 2025). Globally, the investments in branded and digital content keep increasing that are expected to reach US\$107 million in 2026 by Statista (Krowinska & Dineva, 2025). They also indicated that about 71% of consumers today are increasingly skeptical about branded communications on digital platforms (Krowinska & Dineva, 2025). Thus, it highlights the tension in digital marketing that while brands are investing more in content, consumers become less trusting of it.

In addition, Zhang et al. (2022) research points out that as influencer marketing and brand content continue to expand, the boundaries between authentic social interaction and commercial persuasion is becoming increasingly blurred. Influencers are expected to appear genuine and truthful when creating visually appealing and commercially effective content. However, in reality, it is quite common that influencers promote cosmetic products with the use of beauty filters and editing techniques in short form video. These filters present the unrealistic images that do not accurately reflect the products' actual effects. It is indicated that filters are frequently used by both brands and influencers to improve visual attractiveness, but often do not disclose this publicly (Pandich, 2024). The undisclosed use of beauty filters may involve a signal, leading them to question the credibility of influencers and product demonstrations. However, visual enhancement can still positively influence perceptions through attractiveness and aesthetic appeal (Amanah & Harahap, 2020; Xing, 2019; Syahputra et al., 2025). Yet, it may still create a complex and potential contradictory effects between visual attractiveness and authenticity that influences consumers' responses (Foster, 2022; Smith et al. 2026).

Today, the boundary between e-commerce and social media content creation is increasingly blurring. On TikTok, there is already a marketing model that allows users to click embedded links directly in videos to make purchases. In this background, social media influencers are driven to create greater demand and more elaborate fantasies. They not only dedicate themselves to polishing video content itself but also leverage emerging video editing technologies and beauty filters to polish their footage. This helps them gain more popularity, secure additional brand collaboration opportunities, and thereby monetize their influence.

The widespread use of beauty filters may reflect a broader phenomenon in consumer culture that people use aspirations and fantasies to stimulate consumption. Just as Disneyland acts as the director of collective fantasy, which has enabled the consumers to experience immersive fantasy and release collective emotions. It allows consumers to escape the efficiency-oriented consumption logic of Fordism, liberating themselves from the iron cage created by the age of mass production and from the disenchanted world created by rationalization (Gabriel, 2005). Similarly, contemporary influencers often create aesthetically perfect lifestyles, build aspirational appearances represented on social media that attract admiration, engagement, and consumer responses (Levin et al., 2025; Peggiani & Lamberti, 2026).

In addition, digital filters usage leads to significant psychological shifts, rising phenomena such as Instagram face and Snapchat dysmorphia (Haines, 2025). Besides, beauty filters increasingly reshape people's perceptions of beauty and influence their expectations for makeup and ideal appearance standards (Pitcher, 2020; Shein, 2021). Furthermore, previous existing research focuses on AR filters, beauty selfies, or edited images in general contexts (Chua & Chang, 2016; Kumar & Agarwal, 2023; Ozimek et al., 2023), or explores the impact of beauty filters on self-perception, body image, and attractiveness evaluation (Andrada, 2025; Ryan-Mosley, 2021).

However, there is little literature that focuses on the effect of beauty enhancement on purchase intentions when social media influencers show recommendations for cosmetic products through short form video environments. In addition, video popularity is often seen as a social proof signal through number of likes or views, but whether this popularity truly drives purchase intentions in the context of cosmetic promotion remains unclear. Moreover, few studies examine whether individual psychological characteristics such as need for uniqueness and cognitive evaluation like perceived SMI authenticity shape response to filtered content.

Thus, this study aims to fill these gaps by contributing to existing literature and focusing on the influence of beauty filter usage and video popularity to purchase intent, with examining the role of perceived SMI authenticity and need for uniqueness. Addressing these gaps will provide practical implications for influencers and marketers in seeking a balance between visual appeal and credibility in digital advertising.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

In social media environments, especially in short-form video platforms, it is common to see that influencers often use filters to enhance their appearance when promoting cosmetic

products. As mentioned above, previous research has mostly focused on AR filters or beautified images in general, while these studies provide valuable insights into visual enhancement and consumer perception, there is limited research on how beauty enhancement editing influences consumer responses when influencers introduce cosmetic products in short-form video content. The primary aim of this study is based on previous study and extends the knowledge in this context by investigating the impact of beauty filter usage and video popularity in short-form video influencer marketing on consumer purchase intention. The study pays particular attention to the mediation role of perceived authenticity and moderator of consumers' need for uniqueness. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions: **How does beauty filter usage and video popularity in influencer-led short-form beauty videos affect consumers' purchase intention toward cosmetic products?**

Specific Research Questions:

- **RQ1:** Does beauty filter usage in influencer-generated short-form beauty videos significantly influence consumers' purchase intention toward cosmetic products?
- **RQ2:** Does video popularity significantly influence consumers' purchase intention toward cosmetic products promoted by social media influencers?
- **RQ3:** Does perceived SMI authenticity mediate the relationship between beauty filter usage and consumers' purchase intention?
- **RQ4:** Does consumers' need for uniqueness moderate the relationship between beauty filters and perceived SMIs authenticity / video popularity and consumers' purchase intention?

To achieve this aim, the study has several key objectives. First, it aims to examine the direct relationship between beauty filter usage and purchase intention, examining whether enhanced visual presentation leads to higher or lower buying intentions. Second, this research intends to examine the influence that video popularity has on purchase intention by understanding whether high engagement rates can enhance purchase behavior. Third, the mediatory role played by perceived SMI authenticity is also explored in this study; and fourth, it will examine the moderating effect of need for uniqueness.

Overall, this research aims to contribute to the literature on influencer marketing, providing both theoretical insights and practical implications for digital marketing strategies.

2 Literature Review

The rapid popularization of the Internet and social media has transformed consumers' decision-making patterns, turning online platforms into the central core of shopping, social interaction and work (Mirsch et al., 2018). Pew Research Center found that 82% of American adults read online reviews before making any purchases (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Accordingly, influencer marketing has gained unprecedented importance in the current digital consumption landscape. Studies have shown that compared with traditional marketing communication, online word-of-mouth is perceived as more accurate, credible and less misleading (Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020; Ozanne et al., 2019; Rynarzewska, 2019).

2.1 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing in which marketers and brands invest in specific influencers to create and promote brand content targeting influencers' followers and brands' target consumers (Yodel, 2017). Then why do brands generally believe that influencer marketing can significantly affect consumer decision-making?

First of all, consumers have a demand for information collection before making consumption decisions. In the current media environment, mass communication channels such as television stations, radio and newspapers are no longer the dominant sources of information for consumers. Instead, consumers tend to exchange information and build social connections through social media platforms or virtual communities (Hair et al., 2010). For instance, social networking sites including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram have replaced traditional media and become vital sources of information for consumers (Nouira & Boukamcha, 2024).

Equipped with abundant and diversified visual presentation functions, these social media platforms have given rise to numerous social media influencers (SMIs). Social media influencers refer to ordinary consumers who gradually accumulate massive followers and gain popularity by virtue of their capability to create and disseminate high-quality content as well as professional expertise in specific fields such as fashion, fitness and lifestyle. As the most influential digital opinion leaders nowadays, they are capable of shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Freberg et al., 2011). In general, brand-related content created by influencers is deemed more organic and authentic, and can connect with potential consumers in a more direct way than brand-generated advertisements (Talavera, Misha, 2015).

Secondly, from a monetary perspective, brands regard investment in influencer marketing as worthwhile expenditure, which indirectly proves that influencer marketing can greatly influence consumers' behaviors and mentality as well as enhance brand reputation. Relevant

reports indicated that in 2018, 39% of marketers planned to increase budgets for influencer marketing, and 19% intended to spend more than 100,000 US dollars on each campaign (Bevilacqua & Del Giudice, 2018).

2.2 Beauty Filter Usage and Purchase Intention

Spears, N., & Singh, S. N. (2004) 's study defines purchase intentions as:

Purchase intentions are an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand.

When focusing on the digital consumption scenario of beauty products, we find that consumers' purchase intention is affected by a complex set of factors.

Firstly, social media platforms feature powerful visual presentation functions that enable ordinary users to create visually appealing video content. Within the beauty industry, visual appeal plays a core role in consumers' purchase decision-making. Studies have confirmed that attractive models are positively associated with higher purchase intention (Kahle & Homer, 1985) and actual purchasing behavior (Caballero & Solomon, 1984). Accordingly, SMIs in beauty industry tend to adopt video and image editing techniques as well as beauty filters to optimize visual presentation when producing brand promotional content. Based on Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973), social media influencers can strategically convey valuable product information to audiences via implicit signals. Meanwhile, elements including moderate beauty filter retouching, editing rhythm, background music and vocal intonation exert pivotal influences in consumption scenarios (Chen et al., 2019).

Furthermore, social shifts have brought about changes in consumer values. Recent market surveys reveal that consumers are 79% more likely to boycott brands over their stances on social issues, and 88% of respondents expect brands to leverage their influence to drive genuine social progress (Jones, 2015). Compared with past consumer values, consumers have shifted their values from pursuing stereotypical perfection and satisfying aesthetic fantasies through consumption to advocating healthy body shapes, natural facial appearances, and emphasizing individuality and authenticity (Shoenberger et al, 2020). Research indicates that consumers tend to hold negative attitudes once they realize promotional images of models have been excessively retouched (Diedrichs & Lee, 2010). Many renowned brands have responded to this trend; for instance, Aerie and other brands have launched social media campaigns featuring unretouched models without digital slimming or flawless beautification, as well as models with diverse body types (Shoenberger et al, 2020).

Therefore, this study argues that filter usage exerts a decisive effect on consumers' willingness to purchase beauty products, and regards filter usage as the independent variable of this research. Current academic research lacks sufficient literature exploring how visual enhancement and retouching in short videos affect purchase intention, and few studies have examined the mechanism of short-video filter usage in consumer decision-making processes.

2.3 Video Popularity and Purchase Intention

Video content in traditional Video-on-Demand (VoD) systems has long been created and supplied by a small number of media producers, such as television stations and advertising agencies. The emergence of User-Generated Content (UGC) has profoundly reshaped the online video market. Today, hundreds of millions of internet users act not only as content consumers but also as content publishers. Characterized by large scale and high dynamics, UGC videos tend to gain fleeting popularity that is difficult to predict (Cha et al., 2009).

Unlike traditional media, short-video platforms feature strong sociality and interactivity (Swani et al., 2017; Wu, 2016), allowing users to engage with advertisements via comments, likes and shares. Frequent user interactions with these ads naturally expand the reach of advertising messages (Wang et al., 2024). It is widely acknowledged that the more attention, evaluations and interactions a video receives, the more popular the public perceives it to be (Scott & Judge, 2009). In the field of brand marketing, de Vries et al. (2012) argued that social interaction metrics, including the number of likes, comments and shares on posts, can reflect a brand's popularity. Accordingly, this study defines the number of likes, comments and shares of videos as video popularity.

On the one hand, popular videos can gain additional exposure simply due to their existing popularity. Many resource-based websites, such as Amazon, YouTube and Apple Music, provide consumers with rankings of top-trending, most-viewed and most-downloaded content (Welbourne & Grant, 2016). In the era of big data, platform recommendation algorithms have become increasingly sophisticated. The reach and popularity of short videos depend not only on content creativity and existing fan bases but also on platform algorithms, whose refined manipulation can substantially influence user perceptions. Currently, numerous studies on short-video popularity focus on predicting video popularity and analyzing the characteristics of popular short videos (Cha et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2026). These studies aim to help creators, platforms and brands leverage popular short videos to capture more audience attention, so as to improve the efficiency of marketing decisions and help increasing purchase intention.

On the other hand, interactions on social media platforms are visible in real time, enabling consumers to instantly assess a video's popularity. This strongly shapes their perceptions of embedded advertisements and the promoted products (Ran et al., 2025). Meanwhile, from the perspective of signaling theory, popularity itself serves as a distinctive signal to consumers. A large number of likes, comments and shares indicate to potential consumers that the content has received positive feedback and extensive engagement from other users. Such social proof signals represent public recognition, which mitigates information asymmetry by drawing on collective judgments (Wang et al., 2024). Prior research has verified that strong popularity cues can enhance consumers' positive attitudes toward brands (Phua & Ahn, 2016) and boost product sales (Bhattacharyya & Bose, 2020).

Conversely, some industry practitioners hold that a higher number of likes does not necessarily translate into tangible outcomes. They pointed out that likes on Facebook carry no inherent value (Seo et al., 2019). Seo et al. (2019) found that when advertising information is

presented with proper disclosure, more likes fail to improve ad credibility and even exert an unintended negative impact on attitudes toward sponsored brands. Agarwal et al. (2025) further demonstrated that like counts have no significant effect on users' ad-click intentions and subsequent consumption decisions.

To sum up, debates over whether a short video has a high amount of likes, comments and shares affect consumers' actual behaviors and attitudes toward sponsored brands have intensified. Multiple factors constrain the relationship between video popularity and consumers' purchase intention, and no unanimous consensus has yet been reached in academic circles.

2.4 Need for Uniqueness and Perceived SMI Authenticity

In addition to video visual characteristics, consumers' personal psychological traits and consumption cognitive attitudes can also constrain purchase intention. For this reason, this study introduces two consumer-oriented moderating variables: perceived SMI authenticity and Need for Uniqueness.

2.4.1 Perceived SMI Authenticity

Unlike traditional celebrities, social media influencers (SMIs) mainly earn income through brand collaboration advertisements. Accordingly, to attract brand attention, they tend to polish their presentations in various ways to achieve better visual effects, improve their overall images among followers, strengthen followers' perceived SMI authenticity, encourage followers to imitate their behaviors and styles, and further prompt followers to purchase and use the products they endorse in daily life.

Referring to the research of Lee (2021), we define perceived SMI authenticity as:

The extent to which consumers perceive SMIs to engage in intrinsically motivated brand endorsements (truthful endorsements).

Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) states that when one party transmits relevant and valuable product information to another, it can substantially reduce uncertainty and facilitate purchases or exchanges (Lu & Chen, 2021). Social media influencers convey important and valuable product information to their audiences through digital content. Studies have demonstrated that senders' strategic use of implicit signals plays a vital role in emotional and unplanned purchasing scenarios (Chen et al., 2019). Given the constraints of time and cognitive resources during decision-making, signals act as cues for rapid information processing and assist consumers in making purchase decisions (Miranda et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2019). Accordingly, content creators need to strategically deploy signals to deliver valuable information, reduce uncertainty and drive purchases (Connelly et al., 2011).

In this regard, product-related information delivered by SMIs is often modified via multiple approaches including beauty filters, editing pace, tone of voice and so on. SMIs aim to optimize presentation effects and shape favorable personal images among followers, so as to enhance perceived SMI authenticity, drive behavioral and stylistic imitation among followers, and motivate them to consume endorsed products in daily life.

Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1961) states that individuals can improve their self-image by imitating others' behaviors. Therefore, influencers expect followers to recognize their authenticity and engage in imitation behaviors. Meanwhile, for ordinary users, imitating favorite SMIs and using their recommended products also facilitates the construction of their self-project. Previous studies have verified that consumers tend to enhance self-image by identifying with social media influencers. Ki & Kim (2019) pointed out that followers are willing to seek out ideal SMIs, imitate their lifestyles and conducts, and consume products promoted by them. In the social media era, consumption is no longer limited to material consumption, but also covers broader content consumption. Corrêa (2020) found that the self-connection and identification established between consumers and social media influencers can raise user engagement and further stimulate their willingness to purchase influencer-endorsed brands. Following authentic and credible SMIs and consuming their endorsed brands help consumers establish a sense of authentic self-identity (Arnould & Price, 2001).

In summary, most existing studies on SMI authenticity mainly concentrate on influencers' advertising influence, forms and outcomes of brand cooperation, as well as the impacts of authenticity on consumer behavior. Nevertheless, research concerning changes in video visual effects brought by video editing tools remains insufficient. It is shown in the studies that video editing techniques can affect consumers' purchase intention, yet whether perceived SMI authenticity exerts any effects on such relationships still remains unexplored.

2.4.2 Need for Uniqueness

Consumers purchase and display material wealth to gain a sense of uniqueness, hence a wide range of marketing strategies designed to enhance consumers' perceived uniqueness have continuously emerged. The degree of desire for differentiation, or counterconformity motivation, varies among individuals and shapes consumer responses. Accordingly, Tian et al.(2001) defines the need for uniqueness (NFU) as:

Consumers' need for uniqueness is defined as the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image.

To avoid homogeneity, consumers tend to lose interest in or discontinue using commonplace products to break away from conventions and reaffirm their uniqueness. This inclination is termed counterconformity motivation (Nail, 1986), which arises when individuals perceive threats to their self-identity, such as feeling overly similar to others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Unlike those driven by independence motivation, counterconformist individuals are influenced by social norms yet behave inconsistently with such norms (Nail, 1986). Tian et al.

(2001) found that resistance to conformity is manifested in seeking emerging innovations, pioneering new fashion trends, and abandoning mainstream popular styles. Scholars have confirmed that consumers with high need for uniqueness experience faster declines in satisfaction with self-expressive products, leading to higher product replacement rates (Workman et al., 2007).

In the social media context, consumers' need for uniqueness is mainly reflected in their preferences for social media influencers. Ceylan & Hayran (2025) demonstrated that low NFU consumers are more willing to purchase a more (less) popular accessory brand when endorsed by a macro(micro)-influencer. However, high NFU consumers' purchase intentions for the endorsed brand are not affected by influencer type.

Against the backdrop of highly effective influencer advertising and technological advances that enable more immersive online viewing experiences, the role of NFU as a personal trait influencing purchase intention has become increasingly prominent. According to Keng et al.(2026) consumers with high NFU tend to pursue unconventional perspectives and niche products, whereas those with low NFU are more inclined to embrace mainstream views. When selecting beauty-related content on social media platforms, users under the influence of NFU prefer niche and distinctive videos rather than homogeneous and mainstream beauty videos modified by identical editing tools.

Literature review indicates that existing studies on NFU primarily focus on consumers' self-identity construction, self-expression and social identification, emphasizing that consumers demonstrate personal uniqueness by purchasing and using niche and unconventional products. However, within the social media domain, current NFU-related research mainly explores consumption behavioral changes resulting from influencer selection, while neglecting the inherent attributes of video content itself.

2.5 Research Gap

Today, influencer marketing plays an increasingly critical role in the beauty industry, and short videos have become a major channel for influencers to recommend beauty products. Influencers, platforms, and brands alike are eager to understand what types of short videos can generate more pronounced marketing effects.

From the perspectives of influencers and platforms, we conducted a detailed literature review focusing on beauty filter usage and video popularity in short videos. The review revealed that existing research lacks investigations into how filter usage affects purchase intention, and there remains ongoing debate regarding whether video popularity has a positive or negative impact on purchase intention.

From the perspective of consumer traits, we further reviewed the literature on consumers' perceived SMIs authenticity and need for uniqueness. Regarding perceived SMI authenticity, prior studies have predominantly examined its role as an independent variable, focusing on its effects on advertising-related outcomes rather than exploring the factors that shape it.

Regarding consumers' need for uniqueness, existing research in social media contexts has paid limited attention to the uniqueness of video content, instead concentrating primarily on the types of influencers consumers choose to follow.

3 Theoretical Frameworks and Hypothesis Development

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks

3.1.1 Signaling Theory

Signaling Theory was proposed by Michael Spence in his 1973 paper. Initially, it focused on the problem of information asymmetry in the labor market, and was later extended to consumption scenarios. Information shapes individuals' decision-making processes, and in the consumer market, the effective information available to people exerts a significant impact on their consumption decisions (Spence, 1973).

Connelly et al. (2011) argued that Signaling Theory explains behaviors arising when two parties (individuals or organizations) possess unequal information. Typically, one party (the sender) decides whether and how to transmit signals, while the other (the receiver) determines how to interpret them. The core of Signaling Theory lies in mitigating information asymmetry between two sides. It posits that the signal sender holds exclusive private information, whereas the receiver lacks such key information.

A signal refers to an observable action or characteristic actively conveyed by the sender, which is generally divided into positive intentional signals and negative unintentional signals. When individuals send signals to external parties, they tend to deliver positive ones to demonstrate their favorable attributes.

After receiving signals successfully, receivers usually send feedback to senders to adjust subsequent signaling strategies. Nevertheless, signals may be weakened for various reasons, such as misleading interference from media noise. For example, press releases act as signals, yet media coverage of these releases may cause potential distortions (Connelly et al., 2011).

3.1.2 Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory was proposed by Kelman in 1958 as a sociological theory, and has since been widely applied in psychology, communication studies, technology and many other fields. Kelman conducted pioneering research on compliance, obedience, negotiation and conflict resolution. In his landmark work *Processes of Opinion Change* (Kelman, 1958), he outlined three fundamental forms of social influence: compliance, identification and internalization (Oliveira et al., 2025).

According to Kelman's theory, compliance, identification and internalization are three basic processes through which individuals accept social influence and integrate it into their lives. Compliance refers to the adjustment of one's behaviors, beliefs or opinions to conform to group norms, driving individuals to meet group expectations at the behavioral level. Identification emerges when individuals associate themselves with a specific group, stemming from perceived similarities with the group or a desire to fit in. In this case, individuals adopt the group's values and behaviors mainly out of the pursuit of social approval and a sense of belonging. Finally, internalization means that individuals genuinely and permanently incorporate group values and norms into their self-identity and value systems. At this stage, social influence is deeply and meaningfully absorbed, leading to genuine changes in attitudes and behaviors (Kelman, 1958).

This study focuses on the identification process within Social Influence Theory. Identification occurs when individuals accept influence to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with others or a group. People tend to imitate the roles of others out of a strong desire to blend into the group.

3.1.3 Social Proof Theory

Social proof theory was popularized by Dr. Robert B. Cialdini in his foundational work on influence. As a specific application of herd mentality, the principle of social proof serves as a fundamental driving force behind conformity behavior, shaping everything from consumption habits to social norms (Cialdini, 1985).

The principle of social proof theory is a psychological phenomenon whereby people assume that others' behaviors reflect the correct course of action in a given situation. Under uncertain circumstances, we instinctively turn to others for cues to determine how to think, feel, and act, and this reliance on collective wisdom acts as a mental shortcut. Studies have shown that social proof can significantly simplify consumers' decision-making processes (Tang & Tsang, 2020).

Social proof theory rests on a simple yet often reliable assumption: if many people are doing something, it is likely the sensible thing to do. We use the behaviors of the majority to validate our own choices, especially when we feel uncertain. Research indicates that messages with more likes are more likely to be perceived as popular and credible. In other words, the number of likes functions as a special type of peripheral information that provides social proof on social online platforms (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

3.2 Hypothesis Development

3.2.1 Beauty Filters and Purchase Intention

It is quite common to use beauty enhancement filters when introducing makeup goods, it can be understood through visual persuasion, attractiveness, in shaping consumer evaluations. Indeed, beauty filters refer to a tool that allows for some form of digital modification of faces by smoothing skin, removing wrinkles, increasing symmetry, resizing facial features, and adjusting lighting conditions. Such filters allow for making appearances fit idealized beauty standards as Instagram face (Haines, 2021), help create a more idealized self-presentation, which can enhance users' satisfaction (Javornik et al., 2021). As a result, such enhancements can make people increase perceived attractiveness and serve as factors affecting their persuading ability. Research has pointed out that AR experiences can increase people's intentions to purchase through psychological responses (Maharani, 2025). The use of filters enhanced by AR such as those on Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok impact user attitudes, brand engagement, and ultimately, the intention to buy a product (Shamsi & Abad, 2023). Moreover, according to the attractiveness halo effect, people who are perceived as more attractive are also judged more favorably in other dimensions, such as credibility and product evaluation and consumer responses (Dion et al., 1972; Holbrook, 1983; Regina & Rina, 2022; Shi et al., 2024). Another study shows that this effect persists in the digital era, where beauty filters constantly to strengthen the association between attractiveness and positive judgments (Gulati et al., 2024). Moreover, research findings indicate that the beautification of the image or selfie can affect the emotional condition of individuals (Tiggemann et al., 2020) and increase their preference for hedonic goods (Chen et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, Kim & Kim, 2021 shows that appearance attractive is not an important factor in building trust in relationship. There is also evidence pointing out several disadvantages associated with beauty filters. For example, digital practices including erasing flaws or altering features are found to negatively impact consumers' attitudes and engagement with brands (Shoenberger et al., 2020). It means that expectations regarding the performance of products may be not true when adding filters. Moreover, one recent study indicates that the use of beauty filters may mislead consumers by exaggerating product outcomes (Shahrin, 2024). Our study focuses on visual results that beauty filters may cause the product outcome shown in the video as unrealistic or digitally enhanced. Thus, the use of beauty filters when introducing cosmetic products is expected to negatively influence purchase intention.

H1: Beauty filter usage has a negative effect on consumer purchase intention.

3.2.2 The Mediation Role of Perceived SMI Authenticity

Influencer marketing is becoming increasingly important, one key aspect is the perceived SMIs authenticity as it plays an important role in building trust. It can be explained through signaling theory that in digital environments characterized by information asymmetry, consumers rely on observable cues to assess credibility (Spence, 1973). Authenticity has been identified as a key ethical dimension in influencer marketing (Wellman et al., 2020), closely linked to trust that shapes people perceptions in affecting their decision for purchasing (Prajapati, 2025; Wijerathna & Wijerathna, 2022; Bruns, 2018). Based on the logic of identification of social influence theory Kelman (1958), people can easily uniformity themselves with influencers, place more trust in their advice, and accept product

recommendations; in contrast, the social link between them with influencers will be decreased when they feel that influencers are no longer authentic.

Moreover, when influencers are perceived as authentic, their recommendations are more persuasive and more likely to lead to purchase intention. For example, it was indicated that the more consumers trusted influencers, the higher their attitude towards products and purchase intentions were (Kim & Kim, 2021). SMIs provide fact based opinions that they need to manage authenticity in commercial partnerships because it can threaten if followers perceive the content is overly promoted (Audrezet et al., 2018). In addition, increasing concerns about credibility of influencers have been noted, as it influences consumers' attitudes toward advertisements and purchase intentions (Sitorus et al., 2024). Influencer-generated content with high perceived value and credibility can strengthen consumer trust and positively influence responses toward branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2018).

Moreover, evidence exists that the use of image editing or digital enhancement technology might reduce authenticity because of unrealistic representation (Zhang et al., 2023). Furthermore, consumer perception of authenticity related to digitally manipulated photos can impact the consumers' reactions to advertisements and promotion efforts (Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Shoenberger et al., 2020). Similarly, application of beauty enhancement filters in short form videos for introduction of cosmetic products can have an impact on the consumers' perception of authenticity in short form videos. If consumers observe such an occurrence in the photos, then it can make them perceive the ads as being dishonest or not genuine. It is reported that perceived dishonesty or lack of sincerity can cause decreased levels of trust in influencers (Reinikainen et al., 2021), which results in lower levels of trust in product/service recommendations, as it is considered a strong driver of purchase intention (Yang, 2018). Therefore, perceived SMIs authenticity can play a mediating role in explaining how consumers interpret the use of beauty filters and purchase intention.

H2a: Beauty filter usage negatively influences perceived SMI authenticity.

H2b: Perceived SMI authenticity positively influences consumers' purchase intention.

H2: Perceived SMI authenticity mediates the relationship between the use of beauty filters and purchase intention toward cosmetic products.

3.2.3 Video Popularity and Purchase Intention

Social media effectively enables users to engage, share ideas, and generate content (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). In social media environments, video popularity including user engagement is commonly reflected through metrics such as likes, views, comments, shares. According to social proof theory; the behavior of the majority can become a reference point to help people form their attitudes and decisions, and it can also create a bandwagon effect (Cialdini, 1985; Rizqah et al., 2025). Existing studies have shown evidence that engagement metrics have significant effect in shaping purchase intention. For example, Ghenie et al. (2026) indicated that short-form video advertising increases purchase intention by flow experience and electronic word-of-mouth in socially interactive content in social commerce. Park et al.

(2007) analyzed that the quality and quantity of online consumer reviews significantly affect purchasing intentions. Social media engagement metrics increase purchase intention as a result of consumers' perceived product popularity and reducing perceived risk (Chaudhary & Gurjar, 2026; Bălășescu et al., 2020). In addition, social media engagement metrics in user engagement act as key indicators of content popularity can serve as a critical mediator between digital marketing activities and purchase intention (Habib et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, there are some studies showing the opposite view. For example, Ha & Phuong, 2026; Rosli et al., 2024; Richard & Guppy, 2014 have found that interactive behaviors such as comments and shares have no significant correlation with purchase intention. More likes do not always equate to better performance, as too many likes can decrease credibility (De Vries, 2019), as social media users today are very discerning, they may suspect that the account owner has paid for illegible likes to boost their popularity. Moreover, De Veirman et al., 2017 examined that popularity indicated by follower count and engagement volume does not equate to genuine persuasive influence.

In the short-video beauty industry, consumers are often exposed to an amount of information and numerous competing product recommendations. Based on signaling theory (Spence, 1973), video popularity can be seen as a signal in the process of decision making. It means when a promoted cosmetic product video is being accepted and popular from many other users, in a condition that people do not have much information about that product, video popularity can act as a positive signal in boosting purchase intention. Therefore, this study anticipates that popularity metrics such as likes, comments, and shares can provide simple heuristics to help viewers quickly assess content quality and product reliability. Highly interactive videos are more likely to be interpreted as useful, entertaining, or trustworthy. Therefore, video popularity is expected to have a positive impact on purchase intention.

H3: Video popularity in short-form beauty videos positively influences consumers' purchase intention toward the promoted cosmetic product.

3.2.4 The Moderator Role of Need for Uniqueness

Existing studies have found that the need for uniqueness influences consumer preferences (Lynn & Harris, 1997). This trait along with motivations for luxury and foreign consumption can affect consumers preferences and purchase intention significantly (Bhaduri & Stanforth, 2016; Kashi, 2013; Lee et al., 2020). A current research also shows that this trait remains relevant in contemporary consumption, including luxury and fashion markets (Alfoqahaa, 2025). The result of Nikhashemi & Delgado-Ballester (2021) show that the need for uniqueness is the influential predictor of brand attitudes and purchase intention. Moreover, need for uniqueness has been shown to moderate the effectiveness of marketing strategies in scarcity appeals and product differentiation (Wang et al., 2022).

Based on the theory of consumer need for uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001), individuals who are characterized by this trait not only prefer to purchase unique goods, but also interpret social cues differ from that of majority consumers. Such people are often more sensitive to stimuli associated with standardization, mass production, and a lack of originality. Hence, in this study, NFU is expected to affect consumer reactions to two types of signal, including self-presentation cues through influencers use of beauty filters and social endorsements cues through video popularity.

Previous study shows that internalized beauty ideals can influence people's ability to recognize images edited with beauty filters (Bravo et al., 2024). Beauty filters often generate uniform visual output, thus reinforcing aesthetic ideals, which include flawless skin, smooth facial structure, etc. Despite the fact that these standards may help people become more attractive, they may negatively affect individuality as they tend to produce a common face across users. According to previous research, AR and beauty filters have been a tool used for self-enhancement, impression management and identity expression on social media (Javornik et al., 2021), while shaping self-perceptions and idealized appearances (Asfand & Shahid, 2025). These motivations may be linked to consumers' need for uniqueness, as such uniqueness signaling may further strengthen audience engagement and indirectly influence purchase intentions toward promoted beauty products. Moreover, research showed that those with stronger uniqueness and self-expression are more likely to show interest in cosmetic enhancements and appearance modifications (Gillen & Dunaev, 2017; Vally et al., 2020), potentially in ways that reflect personal identity rather than conformity. This suggests that such consumers may prefer more authentic or personalized representations rather than heavily filtered images.

H4a: Need for uniqueness moderates the relationship between beauty filter usage and perceived SMI authenticity, such that the negative effect becomes stronger among consumers with higher NFU.

Video popularity is measured by using the number of views, likes, comments, and shares on social media. According to the theory of social proof (Cialdini, 1985), people tend to take cues from the actions of others to evaluate information about quality and credibility. In such a case, an audience tends to perceive higher value in a video when it gains lots of engagement. Besides, based on signaling theory (Spence, 1973), video popularity can be a signal in social recognition of the product to boost purchase intent; yet, people's interpretation of popularity signals can vary depending on personal traits like NFU. For example, when being asked to justify decisions, individuals with a high need for uniqueness are more likely to prefer unconventional options and resist mainstream or widely popular choices (Simonson & Nowlis, 2000). Therefore, this study suggests that NFU plays a moderating role in the relationship between video popularity and purchase intention.

H4b: Need for uniqueness moderates the relationship between video popularity and purchase intention, such that the positive effect becomes weaker among consumers with higher NFU.

3.3 Research Model

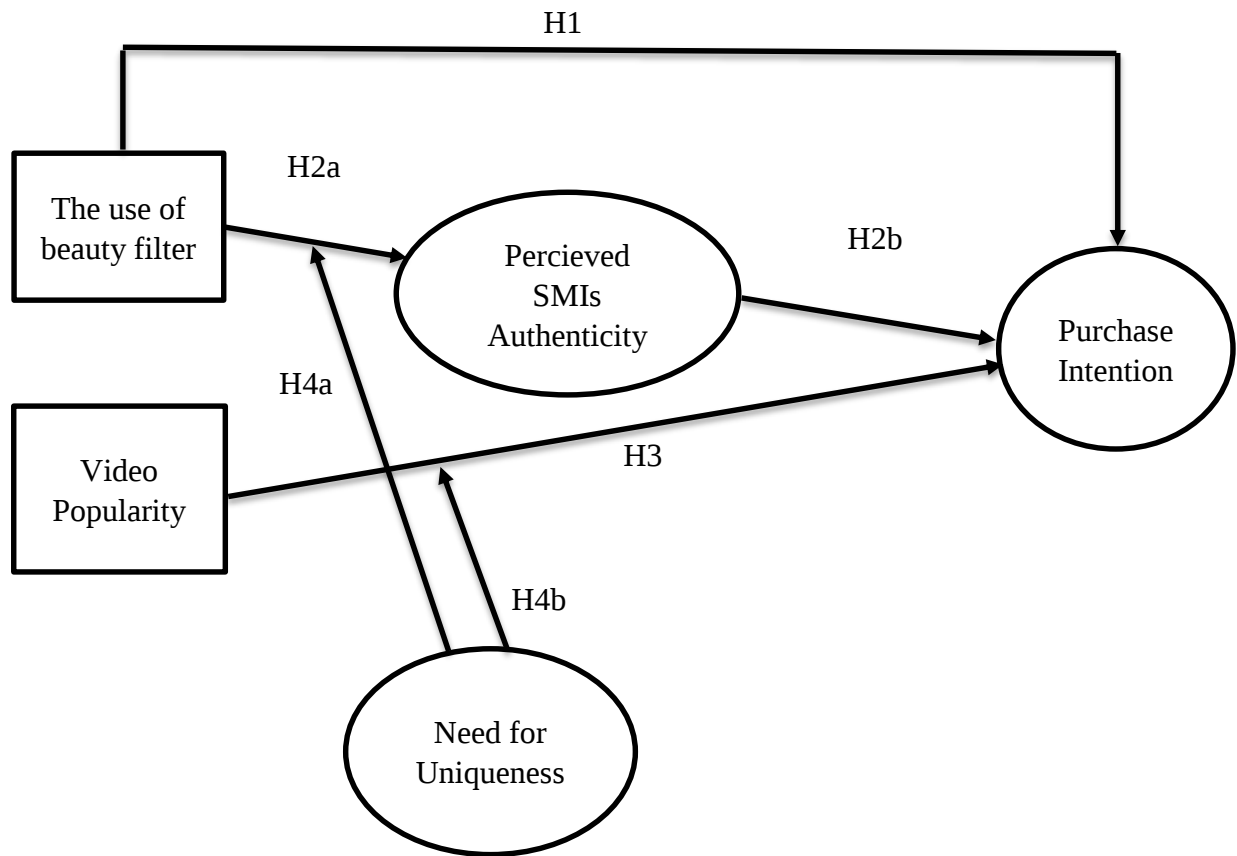


Figure 1 Research Model

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Philosophy

This study is grounded in the research philosophy of realist ontology. Realism holds that there exists a single yet complex truth in the empirical world, which can be gradually unveiled through objective research methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This perspective aligns with positivist epistemology, asserting that facts exist independently of researchers' subjective perspectives (Aliyu et al., 2014).

Adopting a deductive research approach, this study first constructs a theoretical model via literature review, defines independent variables, dependent variables and moderating variables, and further identifies corresponding scales and measurement items for these variables. This conforms to the characteristics of quantitative research, which enables the transformation of theoretical constructs into measurement instruments to facilitate systematic data collection and analysis.

Starting from beauty filter usage, this research aims to explore the effects of beauty filter usage and video popularity on perceived SMI authenticity and consumers' purchase intention, as well as how consumers' need for uniqueness moderates these effects. Focusing on variables related to consumers' personal psychological traits and consumption cognitive attitudes, this study conducts variable measurement at the individual level, thereby adopting a quantitative research strategy methodologically.

In consideration of the above rationales, this study adopts quantitative methods to collect empirical data and test the hypothesized model. Primary consumer data are collected through the design and distribution of structured questionnaires.

4.2 Research Approach

This study adopts a quantitative approach, which relies on numerical data and tables, with statistical analysis as its core method. The quantitative approach was chosen to measure the influence of beauty filters and the popularity of the video on purchase intention for cosmetic products in new media such as TikTok. Specifically, this study employs a pretest-posttest control group design to examine cause-and-effect relationships among the variables. In pretest-posttest control group research, researchers randomly assign participants into experimental and control groups. After administering a unified pretest, they actively manipulate the independent variable to deliver experimental treatments to the experimental

group while leaving the control group untreated. A posttest is conducted in the final stage, and causal relationships are verified through inter-group differences.

4.3 Experimental Design

Based on the requirements of this study, beauty filter usage and video popularity were set as the independent variables, need for uniqueness as the moderating variables, perceived SMI authenticity as mediator, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. This study employed a 2 (beauty filter usage : yes, no) $\times$ 2 (video popularity: high, low) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to the four different treatment conditions to examine the main effects and interaction effects of these two variables.

For the selection of experimental stimuli, we recruited influencer marketing videos featuring foundation, a mainstream beauty product, from TikTok, with each video lasting approximately 35 seconds. The video duration was fixed at around 35 seconds to avoid participants losing focus or patience while viewing longer clips. This prevents inadequate attention to the stimuli or incomplete video viewing, thereby enhancing the rigor and reliability of the experiment. Furthermore, foundation was chosen because it is one of the most prevalent and widely recognized beauty items. This selection rules out potential confounding effects arising from participants' unfamiliarity with the advertised products.

In the four experimental conditions, we used the same video footage and audio as the baseline stimulus. We manually applied beauty filters and manipulated the metrics of likes, comments, favorites and shares. The beauty filter was set to its maximum intensity to ensure that participants could clearly perceive its usage. A substantial disparity was created in engagement metrics across groups. Specifically, the high-popularity condition was configured with 68.6K likes, over 400 comments, more than 9,000 favorites and over 3,000 shares. In contrast, the low-popularity condition was set to 69 likes, 2 comments, 36 favorites and 4 shares. The detailed settings of the four groups are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Configuration of four experimental groups

Note. This figure presents the manipulation of beauty filter intensity and video popularity across four groups. High popularity and low popularity were set with distinct numbers of likes, comments, favorites and shares.

We manually applied beauty filters to manipulate the "filter usage" condition with editing tools by removing acne, brightening and smoothing skin tone, and concealing blemishes. As a manipulation check, participants were asked to indicate whether the video they had watched used a beauty filter.

For the independent variable video popularity, we manipulated it by adjusting the displayed numbers of likes, comments and shares on the right side of the videos. Compared with the usage of beauty filters, this manipulation is more intuitive and enables participants to clearly distinguish between high and low volume levels. Therefore, we argue that the manipulation of video popularity is highly salient and cannot be overlooked. For this reason, we did not include a manipulation check for this variable.

4.4 Operationalization and Measurement

The questionnaire items were adapted from previous literature, including 3 items for purchase intention (Duffett, 2015), 5 items for need for uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001), and 4 items for perceived SMI authenticity (Lee & Eastin, 2021).

Table 4.1 below provides an overview of the operationalization used to build the questionnaire for this study. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1 Tables of variables

Variable	Item	Type of measurement	Source
Purchase intention	I am likely to buy this product. I definitely would buy this product. I am probably going to buy this product.	7-point Likert scale	(Duffett, R. G. 2015). Facebook advertising's influence on intention-to-purchase and purchase amongst Millennials.
Need for uniqueness	I stop watching cosmetic products promoted through beautification editing when they become popular with the general public. I avoid cosmetic products promoted through beauty-filtered videos that are bought by the average consumer. When beauty-filtered cosmetic videos become too popular, I watch it less. When beauty-filtered cosmetic videos become extremely popular, I lose interest in them.	7-point Likert scale	(Tian, K. T., Bearden, W. O., & Hunter, G. L., 2001) Consumers' need for uniqueness: Scale development and validation.

	I dislike cosmetic products promoted through beauty-filtered bought by everyone.		
Perceived SMI authenticity	Although she posts video ads, she gives realistic demonstrations of the products. The influencer's video gives a very honest representation of brands and products. The visual results shown by the influencer in this video are consistent with her genuine experience. I believe the influencer is showing the true performance of the product without exaggeration.	7-point Likert scale	(Lee, J. A., & Eastin, M. S., 2021) Perceived authenticity of social media influencers: scale development and validation.

All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Likert scales are widely used to measure respondents' level of agreement with statements. The seven options are very strongly disagree, strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree, and very strongly agree corresponding to scores ranging from 1 to 7. (Likert et al.,1934)

4.5 Data Collection Method

Data were collected via an online questionnaire, which was systematically distributed to a minimum of 200 target respondents. We distributed paid questionnaires via the Credamo platform. This platform was selected for its user-friendly interface and comprehensive functions, which support structured questionnaire design and data management. It enables efficient data collection and facilitates paid survey distribution. In addition, Credamo provides globally verified real-name samples with data quality meeting academic standards, making it well-suited for conducting quantitative surveys targeting social media users at home and abroad.

These participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals aged 18–45 years old who watch short videos for more than half an hour on average per day.

4.6 Data Analysis Methods

Data management and statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi software.

First, reliability analysis was performed to examine the internal consistency of the multi-item scales measuring each construct. Both Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω coefficients for all scales met the acceptable thresholds, indicating satisfactory reliability. Interaction terms between each independent variable and the centered moderators were then computed for the subsequent moderation analyses.

Second, Linear regression was conducted to test the direct effects of filter usage on consumers' purchase intention. Purchase intention was entered as the dependent variable, while filter usage and video popularity were included as predictors.

We then employed different linear regression methods to examine the hypothesized mediation and moderation models.

4.6.1 Moderation Model Analysis Methods

According to Baron & Kenny (1986), a moderator is defined as:

In general terms, a moderator is a qualitative (e.g., sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g., level of reward) variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable.

Therefore, in this experiment, we took the need for uniqueness (NFU) as the moderator variable, which moderates the main effects of video popularity on purchase intention and of filter usage on perceived SMI authenticity.

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), the linear hypothesis is tested by adding the product term of the moderator and the dichotomous independent variable to the regression equation.

Therefore, we first regressed purchase intention on video popularity and NFU separately, and then performed a regression incorporating the interaction term of video popularity and NFU. A significant coefficient of this interaction term, while controlling for video popularity and NFU, indicates the presence of a moderating effect. Similarly, we regressed perceived SMI authenticity on filter usage and NFU separately, followed by a regression including the interaction term of filter usage and NFU. A significant coefficient of this interaction term, while controlling for filter usage and NFU, suggests a significant moderating effect.

4.6.2 Mediation Model Analysis Methods

According to Baron & Kenny(1986), a moderator is defined as:

A variable functions as a mediator when it meets the following conditions: (a) variations in levels of the independent variable significantly account for variations in the presumed mediator, (b) variations in the mediator significantly account for variations in the dependent variable, and (c) when Paths a and b are controlled, a previously significant relation between the independent and dependent variables is no longer significant, with the strongest demonstration of mediation occurring when Path c is zero.

Therefore, in this experiment, we regard perceived SMI authenticity as the mediating variable and develop a mediation model to examine its mediating effect between filter usage and purchase intention.

According to Baron & Kenny(1986), to test for mediation, we estimate the three following regression equations: first, regressing perceived SMI authenticity on the filter usage; second, regressing the purchase intention on filter usage; and third, regressing the purchase intention on both filter usage and purchase intention.

5 Analysis

5.1 Descriptives

Table 2 Descriptives results

	filter usage	popularity	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
PI	0	1	50	5.17	5.67	1.46	1.00	7.00
		0	50	5.10	5.33	1.34	1.00	7.00
	1	1	57	4.12	4.00	1.67	1.00	7.00
		0	52	3.79	3.67	1.43	1.33	6.67
NFU	0	1	50	4.98	5.40	1.59	1.40	7.00
		0	50	4.98	5.00	1.13	2.20	7.00
	1	1	57	4.31	4.80	1.46	1.00	6.60
		0	52	4.63	5.00	1.42	1.40	7.00
SMI auth	0	1	50	5.46	5.75	1.15	2.50	7.00
		0	50	5.32	5.75	1.14	1.50	7.00
	1	1	57	4.27	4.25	1.51	1.25	7.00
		0	52	4.03	4.00	1.39	1.75	7.00

This presents descriptive statistics of three key variables: Purchase Intention (PI), Uniqueness Need (NFU), and Perceived SMI Authenticity (SMI auth) across two types of experiment: filter type used and video popularity. The overall number of observations made in each sample varies from 50 to 57.

Participants who were subjected to the videos that had no filters with high popular reported ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.46$), followed by those in the non-filtered and low popularity condition ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.34$). In contrast, participants exposed to beauty-filtered videos showed lower

purchase intention, with means of 4.12 (SD = 1.67) under high popularity and 3.79 (SD = 1.43) under low popularity.

For perceived SMI authenticity, participants in the non-filter conditions reported higher authenticity perceptions (high popularity: $M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.15$; low popularity: $M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.14$) compared to those in the beauty filter conditions (high popularity: $M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.51$; low popularity: $M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.39$). For need for uniqueness, mean scores are ranging from 4.31 to 4.98. Participants in non-filter conditions showed slightly higher levels of need for uniqueness than those exposed to beauty-filtered videos. Regarding video popularity, groups with high popularity tend to have slightly higher mean PI and SMI authenticity than groups with low popularity, but the difference is not significant. Therefore, the description shows that the influence of beauty filters seems more pronounced than that of video popularity.

5.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

5.2.1 Purchase intention

Table 3 Purchase Intention Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
scale	0.940	0.942

The reliability analysis showed internal consistency for the purchase intention scale, with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.940$ and McDonald's $\omega = 0.942$ ($> .70$), indicating that the measurement items were highly reliable.

5.2.2 Need for uniqueness

Table 4 Need for Uniqueness Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
scale	0.927	0.928

The need for uniqueness (NFU) scale demonstrated excellent reliability, with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.927$ and McDonald's $\omega = 0.928$ ($> .70$), indicating high internal consistency among the measurement items.

5.2.3 Perceived SMIs authenticity

Table 5 Perceived SMIs authenticity Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
scale	0.933	0.934

The perceived authenticity scale demonstrated excellent reliability, with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.933$ and McDonald's $\omega = 0.934$, indicating high internal consistency among the measurement items.

5.3 Structural Model Assessment

5.3.1 Direct effects: beauty filter usage and purchase intention

Table 6 Regression Analysis for Direct Effect Model(Model Fit Measures)

Overall Model Test							
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.369	0.136	0.132	32.7	1	207	<.001

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=209

Table 7 Regression Analysis for Direct Effect Model(Model Coefficients)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept ^a	5.14	0.148	34.66	<.001	
filter usage:					
1 – 0	-1.17	0.205	-5.72	<.001	-0.737

^a Represents reference level

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the direct effect of beauty filter usage on purchase intention. The overall model was significant, $F(1, 207) = 32.70$, $p < .001$, indicating that beauty filter usage significantly predicted purchase intention. The model explained 13.6% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .136$, adjusted $R^2 = .132$).

The coefficient results showed that beauty filter usage had a significant negative effect on purchase intention ($B = -1.17$, $SE = 0.205$, $t = -5.72$, $p < .001$, $\beta = -0.737$). This indicates that participants exposed to beauty-filtered videos reported significantly lower purchase intention than those exposed to non-filtered videos. Therefore, H1 was supported.

5.3.2 Direct effects: video popularity and purchase intention

Table 8 Regression Analysis for Direct Effect Model (Model Fit Measures)

Overall Model Test							
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.0554	0.00307	-0.00175	0.637	1	207	0.426

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=209

Table 9 Regression Analysis for Direct Effect Model (Model Coefficients)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept^a	4.611	0.154	29.948	<.001	
popularity:					
0 – 1	-0.176	0.220	-0.798	0.426	-0.111

^a Represents reference level

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the direct effect of video popularity on purchase intention. The overall model was not significant, $F(1, 207) = 0.637$, $p = .426$, indicating that video popularity did not significantly predict purchase intention. The model explained only 0.3% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .003$), suggesting very weak explanatory power.

The coefficient results showed that video popularity had a non-significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = -0.111$, $SE = 0.220$, $t = -0.798$, $p = .426$). This indicates that participants exposed to high-popularity and low-popularity videos did not significantly differ in their purchase intention. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

5.3.3 Mediation effects of perceived SMIs authenticity

Table 10 Results for mediation effects of perceived SMI authenticity

95% C.I. (a)

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	z	p
Indirect	filter usage1 ⇒ SMI auth ⇒ PI	-0.991	0.1605	-1.324	-0.695	-0.3120	-6.18	<.001
	filter usage1 ⇒ SMI auth	-1.229	0.1807	-1.584	-0.868	-0.4258	-6.80	<.001
	SMI auth ⇒ PI	0.807	0.0548	0.655	0.936	0.7327	14.72	<.001
Direct	filter usage1 ⇒ PI	-0.182	0.1582	-0.584	0.162	-0.0573	-1.15	0.250
Total	filter usage1 ⇒ PI	-1.173	0.2047	-1.577	-0.767	-0.3693	-5.73	<.001

Note. Confidence intervals computed with method: Bias corrected bootstrap

Note. Betas are completely standardized effect sizes

We use GLM mediation analysis model to analyze whether perceived SMI authenticity mediates the relationship between beauty filter usage and purchase intention, following the logic of Baron & Kenny's (1986) mediation framework. The findings indicated that the use of beauty filters had a significant negative impact on perceived SMI authenticity ($B = -1.229$, $SE = 0.1807$, $z = -6.80$, $p < .001$) (H2a). While perceived SMI authenticity had a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($B = 0.807$, $SE = 0.0548$, $z = 14.72$, $p < .001$) (H2b).

The mediation effect of beauty filters usage on purchase intention was found to be significant ($B = -0.991$, $SE = 0.1605$, 95% CI $[-1.324, -0.695]$, $p < .001$). Because the interval did not include zero value, the mediation effect was statistically significant. It means that consumers who used beauty filters felt less SMI authenticity, and their purchase intention dropped. The direct effect of beauty filters on purchase intention was insignificant once controlling for perceived SMI authenticity ($B = -0.182$, $SE = 0.1582$, $p = .250$). However, the total effect remained significant ($B = -1.173$, $SE = 0.2047$, $p < .001$). Therefore, perceived SMI authenticity shows a full mediation of the relationship between beauty filter usage and purchase intention. Thus, H2 was supported. This means that the negative effect of beauty filter usage on purchase intention can be explained through the decrease in perceived SMI authenticity.

5.3.4 Moderation effects: beauty filterxNFU

Table 11 Results for moderation effects of need for uniqueness model 1

Overall Model Test							
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.431	0.185	0.178	23.5	2	206	<.001
2	0.465	0.216	0.205	18.8	3	205	<.001

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=209

Table 12 Results for moderation effects of need for uniqueness model 1(ANOVA Test)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
filter usage	80.52	1	80.52	46.86	<.001
NFU	1.82	1	1.82	1.06	0.304
Residuals	353.95	206	1.72		

Note. Type 3 sum of squares

Table 13 Results for moderation effects of need for uniqueness model 1(Model Coefficients)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept^a	5.7161	0.3472	16.46	<.001	
filter usage:					
1 – 0	-1.2636	0.1846	-6.85	<.001	-0.8742
NFU	-0.0665	0.0646	-1.03	0.304	-0.0659

^a Represents reference level

The moderation analysis was conducted through linear regression to examine whether need for uniqueness moderates the relationship between beauty filter usage and perceived SMI authenticity with 2 model. In Model 1, beauty filter usage and NFU were entered as predictors. The model was significant, $F(2, 206) = 23.5$, $p < .001$, explaining 18.5% of the variance in perceived SMI authenticity ($R^2 = .185$). Beauty filter usage had a significant negative effect on perceived SMI authenticity ($B = -1.2636$, $SE = 0.1846$, $t = -6.85$, $p < .001$), while NFU was not significant ($B = -0.0665$, $p = .304$).

Table 14 Results for moderation effects of filterXnfu and SMI auth model 2

Comparison							
Model	Model	ΔR^2	F	df1	df2	p	
1	- 2	0.0307	8.04	1	205	0.005	

Table 15 Results for moderation effects of filterXnfu and SMI auth(ANOVA Test)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	
filter usage	0.849	1	0.849	0.511	0.476	
NFU	3.214	1	3.214	1.934	0.166	
filterXnfu	13.350	1	13.350	8.035	0.005	
Residuals	340.603	205	1.661			

Note. Type 3 sum of squares

Table 16 Results for moderation effects of filterXnfu and SMI auth(Model Coefficients)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept ^a	4.732	0.4870	9.717	<.001	
filter usage:					
1 – 0	0.452	0.6317	0.715	0.476	0.312
NFU	0.131	0.0943	1.391	0.166	0.130
filterXnfu	-0.362	0.1276	-2.835	0.005	-0.616

^a Represents reference level

In Model 2, the interaction term between beauty filter usage and NFU was added. The model remained significant, $F(3, 205) = 18.8$, $p < .001$, and explained 21.6% of the variance in perceived SMI authenticity ($R^2 = .216$). The addition of the interaction term significantly improved the model fit, $\Delta R^2 = .0307$, $F(1, 205) = 8.04$, $p = .005$. This indicates that the interaction between beauty filter usage and NFU significantly contributed to explaining perceived SMI authenticity.

The coefficient results showed that the interaction effect between beauty filter usage and NFU was significant and negative ($B = -0.362$, $SE = 0.1276$, $t = -2.835$, $p = .005$). This suggests that NFU significantly moderates the relationship between beauty filter usage and perceived

SMI authenticity. The negative effect of beauty filter usage on perceived authenticity becomes stronger among consumers with higher levels of NFU. Therefore, H4a was supported.

5.3.5 Moderation effects: video popularityxNFU

Table 17 Results for moderation effects model 1(Model Fit Measures)

Overall Model Test							
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.0692	0.00479	-0.00487	0.495	2	206	0.610
2	0.1054	0.01112	-0.00335	0.768	3	205	0.513

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=209

Table 18 Results for moderation effects model 1(Model Comparisons)

Comparison							
Model	Model	ΔR ²	F	df1	df2	p	
1	- 2	0.00633	1.31	1	205	0.253	

Table 19 Results for moderation effects model 1(ANOVA Test)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
popularity	1.464	1	1.464	0.575	0.449
NFU	0.904	1	0.904	0.355	0.552
Residuals	524.046	206	2.544		

Note. Type 3 sum of squares

Table 20 Results for moderation effects model 1(Model Coefficients)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept ^a	4.8239	0.3896	12.383	<.001	
popularity:					
0 – 1	-0.1678	0.2211	-0.759	0.449	-0.1054

NFU	-0.0462	0.0774	-0.596	0.552	-0.0415
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^a Represents reference level

The analysis was conducted to examine whether need for uniqueness moderates the relationship of video popularity on purchase intention. Video popularity and NFU were put forward as predictors in Model 1. The results of the analysis showed that this model was insignificant, $F(2, 206) = 0.495$, $p = .610$, and accounted for a very small percentage of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .00479$). Video popularity ($B = -0.1678$, $SE = 0.2211$, $t = -0.759$, $p = .449$) and NFU ($B = -0.0462$, $SE = 0.0774$, $t = -0.596$, $p = .552$) did not influence purchase intention significantly.

Table 21 Results for moderation effects model 2(ANOVA Test)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
popularity	4.385	1	4.385	1.726	0.190
NFU	0.669	1	0.669	0.263	0.608
popXnfu	3.334	1	3.334	1.313	0.253
Residuals	520.712	205	2.540		

Note. Type 3 sum of squares

Table 22 Results for moderation effects model 2(Model Coefficients)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept^a	5.1565	0.486	10.618	<.001	
popularity:					
0 – 1	-1.0240	0.779	-1.314	0.190	-0.6436
NFU	0.0630	0.123	0.513	0.608	0.0566
popXnfu	-0.1811	0.158	-1.146	0.253	-0.2922

^a Represents reference level

In Model 2, the interaction term between video popularity and NFU was added. The result remained non-significant, $F(3, 205) = 0.768$, $p = .513$, and it accounted for 1.11% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .01112$). A comparison of models demonstrated that the addition of interaction terms did not make any difference to model fitting, $\Delta R^2 = .00633$, $F(1, 205) = 1.31$, $p = .253$.

Furthermore, the results of the coefficients confirmed that the interaction effect between video popularity and NFU was $B = -0.1811$, $SE = 0.158$, $t = -1.146$, $p = .253$. It shows that the

moderator role of NFU on the effect of video popularity on purchase intention was insignificant. Therefore, H4b was not supported.

5.4 Summary of hypothesis testing

Table 23 Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Result	Decision
H1	Beauty filter usage → Purchase intention	B = -1.17, p < .001	Supported
H2a	Beauty filter usage → Perceived SMI authenticity	B = -1.229, p < .001	Supported
H2b	Perceived SMI authenticity → Purchase intention	B = 0.807, p < .001	Supported
H2	Beauty filter usage → Perceived SMI authenticity → Purchase intention	Indirect effect = -0.991, 95% CI [-1.324, -0.695], p < .001	Supported
H3	Video popularity → Purchase intention	Interaction B = -0.176, p = .426	Not supported
H4a	NFU moderates Beauty filter usage → Perceived SMI authenticity	B = -0.362, p = .005	Supported
H4b	NFU moderates Video popularity → Purchase intention	Interaction B = -0.181, p = .253	Not supported

Overall, the results reveal that the use of beauty filters had a significant negative impact on purchase intention and perceived SMI authenticity, while popularity of the video content did not influence purchase intention. Perceived SMI authenticity also had a significant positive effect on purchase intention and fully mediated the relationship between beauty filter usage and purchase intention. Besides, the need for uniqueness acted as a moderator of the link between beauty filter use and perceived SMI authenticity. However, it failed to act as a moderator between video popularity and purchase intention. Further discussion will be conducted in the next part.

6 Discussion

This study aims to explore the influence of beauty filter use and video popularity on consumer purchase intention in the context of social media influencer marketing. Simultaneously, the study examines the mediating role of perceived SMI authenticity and the moderating role of need for uniqueness. The study results showed that beauty filter usage had a significant negative impact on purchase intention ($B = -1.17, p < .001$), while video popularity did not significantly affect purchase intention ($B = -0.176, p = .426$). Furthermore, perceived authenticity plays a full mediation role between beauty filters and purchase intention, while need for uniqueness moderates the relationship between beauty filters and perceived authenticity, but does not moderate the influence of video popularity on purchase intention. These findings suggest that factors related to authenticity of the SMI's persona have a stronger influence than popularity or desire for unique identity in shaping purchase intention.

6.1 The influence of beauty filters on purchase intention

It can be seen from the results obtained during the research that excessive use of beauty filters has a significant negative effect on the purchase intention ($B = -1.17, t = -5.72, p < .001$), proving the validity of the hypothesis H1.

The results imply that people become distrustful about the information provided if they find influencers applying too much beauty filters, leading to reduced purchasing intentions. The rationale behind such a negative impact might be that beauty filters make a greater gap between the real product or the person on the video shown by the influencer, which makes it less credible. It is opposite with the opinion that visually attractive may lead to increase in customer interests and purchases (Javornik et al., 2021; Regina & Rina, 2022; Shi et al., 2024; Shamsi & Abad, 2023). Instead, it resonates with findings that overly edited can have negative impacts on users' engagement and product outcomes such as (Shoenberger et al., 2020; Shahrin, 2024). When purchasing a cosmetic product, people often rely on facial features, skin tone, makeup, and the product effectiveness to assess product quality, so if they see that these features have been edited, they will question the efficacy of the product that doesn't its actual effectiveness. Therefore, instead of increasing purchase intention, beauty filters can make viewers feel that the content is unnatural and less trustworthy.

Moreover, fantasy and aspiration stimulate consumption, but results show that beauty filters actually reduce purchase intention, so maybe the strategy of building an "idealized fantasy" isn't effective in a context where consumers are increasingly aware of digital editing.

Consumers may have shifted from being attracted to perfect images to prioritizing more authentic content visuals. This implies that in modern social commerce, aspiration marketing

may be losing its effectiveness if it exceeds acceptable thresholds regarding authenticity. Fantasy-creating tools like beauty filters don't always boost consumption and can diminish the intention to buy.

6.2 The influence of video popularity on purchase intention

This study found that the popularity of video had no significant effect on purchase intention ($B = -0.176$, $p = .426$), hence hypothesis H3 was not supported. This finding goes against past research where it is found that user engagement acts as key indicators and increase purchase intentions (Habib et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2017; Chaudhary & Gurjar, 2026). Or consumers often tend to rely on group behavior to make decisions according to social proof of Cialdini, 1985. However, this result is consistent with several previous studies suggesting that social media engagement metrics do not always directly influence purchase intention (Ha & Phuong, 2026; Rosli et al., 2024; Richard & Guppy, 2014). Studies by Seo et al. (2019) found that when advertising messages are presented in a clearly disclosed format, higher numbers of “likes” do not exert a positive effect on advertising credibility. Similarly, Agarwal et al. (2025) demonstrated that like counts fail to influence users’ decisions to click on advertisements, and thus do not guide their consumption choices.

One possible explanation is that, given the prominent brand and product name cues in our experimental stimuli, we speculate that participants recognized the content as advertising or brand-sponsored information, and were therefore not influenced by video likes, comments, or shares when forming their judgments of the advertising messages.

Another possible explanation is that today's consumers are well aware of what viral content looks like on social media and no longer judge product quality solely based on the number of likes, shares, comments of the video. Instead, in cosmetics products, users may prioritize visual demonstrations, personal experience, skin result, makeup outcome, creator appearance, product demonstration, and perceived product effectiveness over popularity signals when evaluating beauty-related content.

Another reason could be related to the characteristics of short-form video platforms like TikTok. Unlike e-commerce platforms like Alibaba or other shopping websites, where people may spend time reading reviews and comments, and compare popularity before making a purchase, short-form video users tend to watch quickly, fast scrolling, low cognitive processing, and engage in rapid and passive scrolling behaviors. In this process, they become too familiar and do not pay much attention to the number of likes, comments, or shares that appeared alongside the video.

Furthermore, people are increasingly aware that the popularity of a video does not necessarily reflect the credibility of the influencer or the quality of the product. Videos on short-form platforms are likely to have many views because of recommendation algorithms, paid advertising, and fleeting trends. Additionally, metrics like likes, views, shares can be bought

or obtained from bots, fake accounts, or spam. Thus, consumers may be skeptical of popularity signals and not consider them reliable evidence to form a purchase intention. Therefore, we suggest that for cosmetic products, the perceived quality of the content and the authenticity of the influencer may be more important than the popularity of the video.

6.3 The mediation role of Perceived SMI Authenticity

The findings that the role played by the perceived SMI authenticity acts as a mediator when it comes to the effect that the use of beauty filters has on purchase intention. It is observed that there is a significant negative effect of using beauty filters on perceived SMI authenticity and there is a significant positive effect of perceived SMI authenticity on purchase intention ($B = -0.991$, $SE = 0.1605$, 95% CI $[-1.324, -0.695]$, $p < .001$).

As can be seen from the literature and prior research, authenticity is a crucial factor in influencer marketing nowadays (Wellman et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Audrezet et al., 2018). The findings of our analysis reflect the current tendency toward a preference for authentic content, as well as unedited images and reviews on social networks, especially in the field of cosmetics, where product efficiency depends directly on its performance. At the same time, modern technologies like AI and filters are widely used on platforms including TikTok and Instagram. This makes consumers more skeptical of advertisements. Thus, it can be stated that excessive use of filters reduces the efficiency of the advertising process.

From a signaling theory (Spence, 1973) perspective, authenticity is a signal that helps consumers assess the trustworthiness of an influencer, so the authenticity signal is weakened when using beauty filters, leading consumers to have less faith in the product. From social influence theory (Kelman, 1958) perspective, consumers can be influenced by influencers through the identification process. However, identification is only strong when the influencer is perceived as authentic and trustworthy. When beauty filters reduce authenticity, the connection between the viewer and the influencer weakens, so reducing the likelihood to accept the product recommendations.

Prior studies have studied visual enhancement influence perceptions (Zhang et al., 2023; Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Shoenberger et al., 2020) discussed the tension between visual attractiveness and authenticity (Foster, 2022; Smith et al., 2026). This study extends existing research and demonstrates that authenticity not only exerts a direct effect on purchase intention, but also alters consumers' responses to edited visual content. Furthermore, mediation results showed that the direct impact of beauty filters on purchase intention became negligible after incorporating perceived SMI authenticity into the model, while the indirect impact remained statistically significant. Therefore, from the data presented above, we can conclude that SMI authenticity is an important factor in interpreting the relationship between beauty filters and purchase intention. It means that beauty filters don't necessarily reduce purchase intention directly, but rather diminish the intention to buy because they make consumers perceive the influencer as less authentic.

The findings have several implications for cosmetics firms and influencers. Despite the fact that beauty filters add value to attractiveness, at the same time, it lowers their level of authenticity. Hence, influencers should consider using more natural imagery and be more honest when showing the effect from a cosmetic product. As for cosmetics companies, it might be more beneficial to collaborate with authentic influencers rather than creating overly perfect images.

6.4 The moderator role of NFU

The results showed that NFU played a significant moderating role in the relationship between beauty filter usage and perceived SMI authenticity ($B = -0.362$, $p = .005$), thus supporting hypothesis H4a.

Since the regression coefficients for the variables NFU and BF are negative and statistically significant, an explanation can be that the higher the need for uniqueness, the more negative the impact of beauty filters on perceived authenticity. In this case, those consumers who appreciate uniqueness will perceive any content created with the help of filters as artificial. As a justification for such behavior, it is necessary to refer to the theory of Snyder & Fromkin, 1980. According to their theory, people who feel the need for uniqueness prefer not to follow the general social norms but to demonstrate their personality through uniqueness and individuality. In the context of influencer marketing, the use of beauty filters contributes to the emergence of identical beauty ideals, and people with high NFU consider them to be too much standard.

In addition, beauty filters can be interpreted as signals of retouching, lack of transparency based on signaling theory (Spence, 1973). People with high NFU values authenticity and individuality, so they are more sensitive to this signal. Those with high level NFU are sensitive of being original, so they do not prefer beauty filters that erase individual actual facial features. Based on social influence theory of identification (Kelman, 1958), people accept the influence of others because they feel a connection or want to maintain a meaningful relationship with that person. When influencers use overly obvious filters, consumers with high NFU may feel that the influencer is no longer expressing their true self. This reduces their ability to connect with the influencer, thereby decreasing perceived authenticity.

Previous studies have primarily focused on the impact of beauty filters on body image or self-perception such as Kumar & Agarwal, 2023; Ozimek et al., 2023; Andrada, 2025; Ryan-Mosley, 2021, and retouched content (Diedrichs & Lee, 2010; Shoenberger et al, 2020). The current study expands on the literature by demonstrating that the effects of beauty filters are not uniform across consumer groups but depend on the level of NFU.

On the other hand, the result of H4b shows that NFU does not have an influence on the association between video popularity and purchase intention ($p = .253$). This implies that irrespective of the consumer having high or low differentiated needs, the popularity of the video does not have any effect on the purchase intention. A possible reason for this could be that consumers are used to viral content on social media and are no longer concerned about

likes, shares, or views. As discussed above that these metrics can be influenced by algorithms, fake accounts, bot, etc. and people's fast scrolling behavior, so even for individuals with high NFU, video popularity may not be a significant enough factor to trigger a reaction against mainstreaming popular content. In addition, video popularity does not necessarily equate to product popularity, so people with high NFU may not view video popularity as a sign that the product is too mainstream.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Key findings

This study aims to examine the influence of beauty filter use and video popularity on purchase intention in the context of influencer-promoted cosmetic product advertising on short-form video platforms, investigating the mediating role of perceived SMI authenticity and the moderating role of the need for uniqueness.

Our study shows that using beauty filters has a strong negative influence on the perceived authenticity of the influencer promoting cosmetics. This means that people tend to perceive the influencer as less authentic when an influencer uses filters through a promotional cosmetics video. Our results are relevant to the research problem since our study confirms the effect of transparency and ethics in the process of digital advertisement. When beauty filters are used but not explicitly disclosed (Pandich, 2024), consumers may feel the content has been manipulated or overly idealized. As a consequence, the signal may lead consumers to suspect the commercial nature of the influencer's efforts and to doubt the reliability of the claims made (Spence, 1973).

Moreover, the study findings are also indicative of the current paradox of social commerce when consumers become more critical of branded content even as influencer marketing becomes more popular. Our findings indicate that better visual aesthetics does not equally lead to increased persuasion; on the contrary, too much editing may undermine the consumer's faith in the content. This answers the research problem that beauty filters can both enhance aesthetic appeal and reduce the credibility of advertising content, creating a contradictory impact on consumer response. This helps explain why investment in influencer marketing is increasing but consumer trust tends to decrease (Krowinska & Dineva, 2025). Also help clarify the research gap regarding the increasingly blurred lines between authentic social interaction and commercial persuasion intent in influencer marketing (Zhang et al., 2022). It also contributes to expanding the debate on the role of fantasy and aspiration in stimulating consumption (Gabriel, 2005; Levin et al., 2025; Peggiani & Lamberti, 2026). This finding suggests that in the context of consumers becoming increasingly skeptical of edited content, authenticity may be more important than perfect imagery for converting aspiration into purchase intention, and it also questions the assumption that visual perfection leads to positive marketing results (Amanah & Harahap, 2020; Xing, 2019; Syahputra et al., 2025).

In relation to the individual factors, the results showed that the NFU had a substantial impact on the connection between beauty filters and perceived authenticity. Such finding fit with Snyder & Fromkin (1980) that individuals who have a higher need to showcase their uniqueness have negative attitudes towards content that utilizes beauty filters. This is empirical proof for research gaps related to individual psychometrics as a factor such as NFU

influencing the reaction towards beauty filters. At the same time, the results also support the assumption that the creation of uniform beauty standards by beauty filters may conflict with the desire for individuality among consumers with high NFU.

Video Popularity was not found to have any significant impact on purchase intention. This implies that likes, comments, or any other levels of popularity associated with videos is not sufficient enough for influencing the purchasing behavior of the consumer with respect to cosmetics promotion. These findings imply that consumers in the current scenario give more importance to the authenticity of the information rather than the popularity associated with it. This helps to answer the question of how influential personalities use editing technology for gaining popularity and commercializing themselves.

In addition to that, the current study makes an important contribution by helping fill the research gaps that have existed in literature concerning beauty filters. Most of the previous research conducted was based on AR filters, edited selfies, or effects of beauty filters on body image and self-image perception (Andrada, 2025; Ryan-Mosley, 2021). In contrast, the current study changes the focal point to the purchase intention of consumers in the context of cosmetic marketing on social media platforms.

Overall, our research responds to the primary research questions through demonstrating that usage of beauty filters and video popularity do not affect consumers' purchase intention in the same way. For RQ1, usage of beauty filters in influencer-generated short-form videos is significantly associated with negative effects on consumers' purchase intention towards cosmetics products. Second, for RQ2, video popularity had no significant impact on purchase intention. Third, the result for RQ3 indicated that perceived SMI authenticity fully mediated the relationship between beauty filter usage and purchase intention; hence, beauty filters reduced purchase intention due to lowering perceived SMI authenticity. Finally, regarding RQ4, it could be stated that need for uniqueness significantly moderated the relationship between beauty filter usage and perceived SMI authenticity. In contrast, need for uniqueness had no significant moderating effect on the relationship between video popularity and purchase intention.

7.2 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literatures on influencer marketing by expanding our understanding of how beauty filters and video popularity influence purchase intention in the context of promoting cosmetics on short-video platforms. The results extend Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) by showing that the use of beauty filters does not necessarily serve as a positive signal about the quality or attractiveness of a product. Conversely, beauty filters may be interpreted by consumers as a signal of inauthenticity, thereby reducing purchase intention. This suggests that in the context of social commerce and influencer marketing, authenticity may become a more important signal than visual enhancement when consumers evaluate cosmetic advertising content.

This research contributes to Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 1985) and Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958) by showing that video popularity does not significantly influence purchase intention in the context of short-form beauty videos. While these theories suggest that mass recognition can drive consumer behavior, the research results indicate that popularity signals such as views or likes may not be strong enough to influence purchase intention for cosmetic products. In addition, our research verifies that consumers' perceived SMI authenticity exerts a significant influence on purchase intention, as purchasing products recommended by influencers is regarded as a form of behavioral imitation. Prior studies have indicated that such behavior helps consumers develop a sense of identification with authenticity (Arnould & Price, 2001).

This study expands the literature on Consumer Need for Uniqueness (Tian et al, 2001) by demonstrating that individual psychological traits influence how consumers react to content using beauty filters. The results show that individuals with high NFU tend to underestimate the authenticity of influencers when appearance editing is present, highlighting that responses to influencer marketing are not uniform across consumer groups. This contributes to previous research that has been limited in examining the role of NFU in the context of influencer-led beauty promotion on short-video platforms.

7.3 Managerial implications

There are several management implications that can be drawn from our research results. Firstly, the evidence on how the application of beauty filters leads to decreased purchase intentions can be interpreted as a sign for caution when applying these filters by business entities and social media influencers. Even though beauty filters can help enhance the attractiveness, their excessive usage may seem dishonest to customers. This would not only result in people not wanting to purchase products because of misleading advertisement but also in damaging company reputation.

Secondly, the findings indicate that the perceived SMI authenticity has a positive impact on purchase intention, which indicates that it is important for influencers and firms to strive towards authenticity rather than being obsessed with perfection or professionalism alone. Therefore, influencers should consider using more natural and honest images by achieving authenticity like sharing their real experiences when showcasing the effectiveness of cosmetic products. In turn, it would be more beneficial for cosmetic companies to cooperate with authentic SMIs, so it can increase trust and improve promotional effectiveness for the brands. In addition, although the finding that video popularity has no significant effect on purchase intent, business needs to look at other considerations in addition to popularity such as credibility, brand relevance, and the ability to build genuine connections with followers when choosing influencers for their marketing campaigns.

Finally, the need for uniqueness findings reveal that consumers react differently to content using beauty filters. Hence, marketers must consider using proper customer segmentation strategies. For people who seek individuality and uniqueness, using authentic images and

natural photos will be far more impactful than ideal photos and those which match the mainstream definition of beauty.

7.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

In this research, our study focuses on cosmetic advertising content on short-form video platforms; therefore, the results may not fully reflect consumer behavior in other product categories such as fashion, food, or technology. Future studies could consider more to expand in product contexts.

In addition, we measure beauty filter usage under conditions of filter use and non-use. Yet, in reality, beauty filters may have different degrees from little editing to strong beautification or noticeable changes to facial features. Future studies could differentiate filter intensity levels, such as low, medium, and high filter usage, to examine whether different levels of editing produce different impacts on perceived authenticity, trust, and purchase intention.

Moreover, this study examines the role of perceived SMI authenticity and need for uniqueness in explaining consumer reaction. Further research could consider other personal traits such as advertising skepticism, self-esteem, appearance comparison tendency, materialism, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, or social media literacy. Our research primarily assesses purchase intention rather than actual buying behavior. Nowadays, social commerce allows users to purchase products directly from videos, studying actual buying behavior or behavioral data like click-through on digital platforms could yield more realistic results.

Another limitation of our study relates to the design of the manipulation check. While it was expected that the experimental conditions would show great differences in interaction variables like number of likes (68.6K versus 69), the manipulation check item in the survey only checked whether the participants noticed whether beauty filters were used, but not their perception regarding the video's popularity. As it was expected that such an enormous difference in the number of likes, comments, favorites, and shares would ensure that the participants notice the difference in the conditions. However, because it did not measure perceived popularity, it cannot be definitively stated that all participants interpreted this manipulation correctly according to the study's intent. Future studies should include separate manipulation check questions for both beauty filter usage and perceived video popularity to increase the internal validity of the experimental design.

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Declaration of AI use

AI was used in the early stages of the project when we brainstormed topics for the assignment and discussed different ideas that could be relevant and interesting to explore further. Later, AI was also used to translate texts into English from sources written in the authors' native languages. Additionally, AI was used to correct grammatical errors, mainly with the help of Grammarly and Doubao.

Appendix A

Filtered beauty

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this academic study. We are researching digital advertising and consumer behavior, specifically focusing on how the use of beauty filters on cosmetic advertisements in short-video formats (such as TikTok and Instagram Reels) influence consumer perceptions.

Instructions:

This survey consists of three main parts: a short video clip, a few questions about your perception of the content, and basic demographic information.

Please watch the video clip carefully before answering the questions.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We are interested in your honest opinions and feelings.

Privacy and Ethics:

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

All responses will remain anonymous and will be used strictly for academic research purposes.

The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

By clicking "Next", you acknowledge that you are between 18 and 45 years old and consent to participate in this study.

Thank you for your valuable time and contribution!

1. Demographics

(1) What is your age?

A . Under 18 (End of survey)

B . 18 – 24

C. 25 – 30

D . 31 – 35

E . 36 – 40

F . 41 – 45

G . Over 45 (End of survey)

(2) On average, how much time do you spend daily watching short-form videos(e.g., TikTok, IG Reels)?

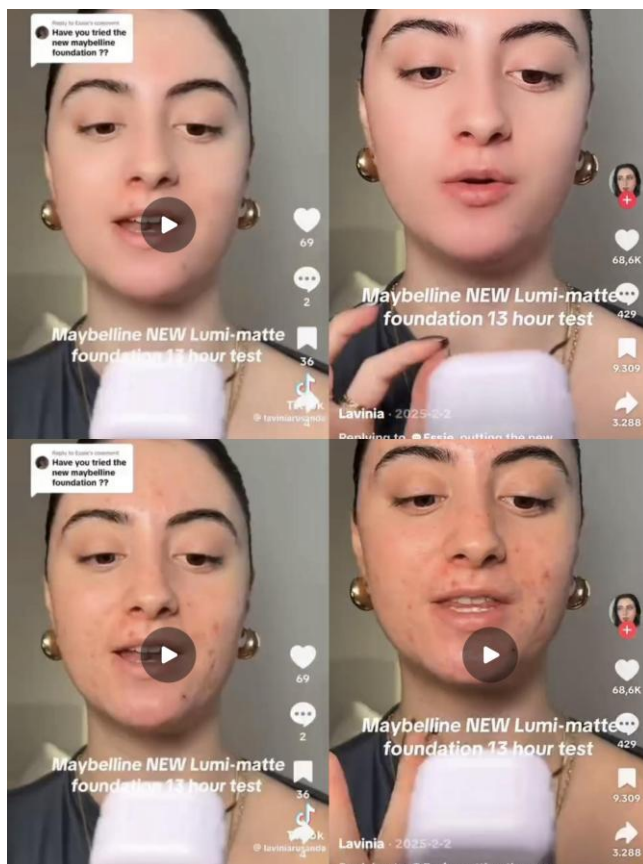
A . Less than 30 minutes

B . 30 minutes - 1 hour

C . 1 - 2 hours

D . More than 2 hours

Showing the video



<https://youtube.com/shorts/gImkqGcyG1c?feature=share>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/8VnWBRzyRrQ?feature=share>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/lMUQb8Q2LcY?feature=share>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/yCzD521RjAk?feature=share>

2. Do you think the video you just watched used filters (such as skin smoothing, color correction, beautification, etc.)?

A. Filters were used (the video has obvious editing/beautification effects)

B. No filters used (the video is original and unedited)

3. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the video you just watched. (1=Very strongly disagree, 2=Strongly disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree, 7=Very strongly agree):

(1) I am likely to buy this product.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(2) I definitely would buy this product.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(3) I am probably going to buy this product.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the video you just watched. (1=Very strongly disagree, 2=Strongly disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree, 7=Very strongly agree):

(1) I stop watching cosmetic products promoted through beautification editing when they become popular with the general public.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(2) I avoid cosmetic products promoted through beauty-filtered videos that are bought by the average consumer.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(3) When beauty-filtered cosmetic videos become too popular, I watch it less.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(4) When beauty-filtered cosmetic videos become extremely popular, I lose interest in them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(5) I dislike cosmetic products promoted through beauty-filtered content bought by everyone.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the video you just watched. (1=Very strongly disagree, 2=Strongly disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree, 7=Very strongly agree):

(1) Although she posts video ads, she gives realistic demonstrations of the products.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(2) The influencer's video gives a very honest representation of brands and products.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(3) The visual results shown by the influencer in this video are consistent with her genuine experience.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(4) I believe the influencer is showing the true performance of the product without exaggeration.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7