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The Impact of Influence Marketing on the Consumption of Beauty Products on Generation Z

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Master in International Management

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Department of Marketing, Strategy and Operations

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the result of a long year of effort and work. For me, this is more than a paper. It is the living proof that when you work hard to follow your dreams, you can achieve them. I could say it was easy for me to do this research, but it would be a lie. This was one of the most challenging projects that I ever done, but I did it, and now I feel so emotional to finally close this chapter of my life.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the impact of influencer marketing on Generation Z's consumption of beauty products, particularly examining the factors that drive brand loyalty and purchase intentions. As digital natives, Generation Z engages extensively with social media, making influencer marketing a powerful strategy for reaching this demographic in the competitive beauty industry.

The purpose of this study is to understand how specific influencer characteristics affect Generation Z consumers' attitudes toward beauty brands and their purchasing behaviors.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to provide comprehensive insights into these dynamics. An online survey targeted Generation Z respondents who used social media platforms. Data were analyzed using SPSS and Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) to explore complex, non-linear relationships between influencer attributes and consumer outcomes.

The findings indicate that perceived value, brand affection, and trust in macro influencers significantly influence Generation Z's brand loyalty and purchase intentions. Macro influencers, characterized by relatability and niche expertise, were especially effective in fostering brand loyalty among Generation Z consumers, who value authenticity and a sense of personal connection. Conversely, while mega influencers garnered high visibility, they had a moderate impact on purchase intentions, underscoring Generation Z's preference for influencers they perceive as trustworthy and relatable.

This research contributes original insights by applying ANN to identify the relative importance of each influencer characteristic, advancing the understanding of consumer engagement within influencer marketing.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Beauty Industry, Brand Loyalty, Purchase Intentions, Social Media Engagement.

JEL Classification System: M31 Marketing, M37 Advertising

Resumo

Esta dissertação explora o impacto do marketing de influência no consumo de produtos de beleza pela Geração Z, examinando os fatores que impulsionam a lealdade à marca e as intenções de compra. Como nativos digitais, a Geração Z utiliza amplamente as redes sociais, tornando o marketing de influência uma estratégia essencial para alcançar este segmento na indústria da beleza, cada vez mais competitiva.

O objetivo deste estudo é compreender como as características específicas dos influenciadores afetam as atitudes dos consumidores da Geração Z em relação às marcas de beleza e aos seus comportamentos de compra.

Para obter uma visão abrangente, foi adotada uma abordagem de métodos mistos, com um questionário online direcionado a respondentes da Geração Z que utilizam redes sociais. Os dados foram analisados com SPSS e Redes Neurais Artificiais (ANN) para explorar relações complexas e não lineares entre atributos dos influenciadores e as respostas dos consumidores.

Os resultados indicam que o valor percebido, a afeição pela marca e a confiança em macro influenciadores influenciam significativamente a lealdade à marca e as intenções de compra da Geração Z. Macro influenciadores, caracterizados pela proximidade e especialização, foram eficazes em promover a lealdade à marca, ao passo que Mega influenciadores, apesar da visibilidade, tiveram um impacto moderado nas intenções de compra. Isso reforça a preferência da Geração Z por influenciadores considerados autênticos e confiáveis.

Esta investigação oferece insights originais ao aplicar ANN para identificar a importância de cada característica do influenciador, aprofundando a compreensão do envolvimento do consumidor no contexto do marketing de influência.

Palavras-chave: Marketing de Influência, Geração Z, Indústria da Beleza, Lealdade à Marca, Intenções de Compra, Envolvimento nas Redes Sociais.

Classificação JEL: M31 Marketing, M37 Publicidade

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Glossary

Gen Z - Generation Z

ANN - Artificial Neural Network

eWOM - Word Of Mouth

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextualization and definition of the research problem

The advent of digital technology and social media has fundamentally transformed marketing strategies, particularly in the beauty industry, where influencer marketing has emerged as a pivotal tool for engaging Generation Z consumers. This dissertation investigates the impact of influencer marketing on the consumption of beauty products among Generation Z, a demographic characterized by its digital nativity and unique consumption behaviors. Generation Z, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, has grown up in an era dominated by the internet and social media, which has significantly shaped their purchasing decisions and brand interactions (Guo, Yang, & Zhao, 2023; Fatima, 2023; Ashdaq, Alam, Aris, & Mandasari, 2023).

Influencer marketing leverages the credibility and relatability of social media personalities to foster connections with consumers. Research indicates that the perceived credibility of influencers positively affects purchasing intentions among Generation Z, highlighting the importance of trust in this marketing approach (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Luu, 2022; Haque, Ali, Dhanraj, Bala, & Bajaj, 2023). As brands increasingly shift their focus toward relationship marketing, understanding how to cultivate long-lasting connections with this demographic becomes essential (Monzocillo, 2022).

Furthermore, engagement with influencers—through likes, comments, and shares—serves as a critical metric for assessing the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior. High levels of engagement can enhance the perceived value of the influencer's recommendations, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase (Sahu & Karnuta, 2022; Haque, Ali, Dhanraj, Bala, & Bajaj, 2023). The interactive nature of social media platforms allows for a two-way communication channel, enabling brands to cultivate relationships with consumers that extend beyond mere transactional interactions (Miah, Hossain, Shikder, & Saha, 2022; Gupta, 2021).

This dissertation investigates how the interactive nature of social media enhances the appeal of influencer marketing by facilitating real-time engagement and feedback, which shapes consumer intentions and behaviors. Specifically, it examines how influencer marketing strategies affect Generation Z's beauty consumption patterns, exploring the intricate relationships between consumer attitudes, influencer credibility,

and engagement. By understanding these dynamics, the study provides insights into how these factors collectively influence brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Generation Z in the beauty industry.

This research paper will explore these methods, employing a mixed-methods approach to analyze how consumer attitudes towards influencers, their perceived credibility, and the nature of engagement with these influencers influence brand loyalty and purchasing decisions in the beauty sector. By understanding these relationships, the study aims to provide actionable insights for marketers seeking to effectively engage Generation Z consumers in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

In the context of the rapidly evolving beauty industry, this dissertation focuses on the impact of influencer marketing on the consumption of beauty products among Generation Z. This demographic, characterized by its digital savviness and unique consumption patterns, represents a significant market segment for beauty brands. The study aims to investigate how consumer attitudes towards influencers, the perceived credibility of these influencers, and the level of engagement with them influence brand loyalty and purchase intentions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for marketers seeking to effectively reach and resonate with Generation Z consumers, who are increasingly turning to social media for product recommendations and brand interactions (Rahardja & Kuncara, 2023; Jun & Jisu, 2020).

The beauty industry is particularly susceptible to the effects of influencer marketing, as consumers often seek authenticity and relatability in their purchasing decisions. Research indicates that the credibility of influencers significantly affects consumer attitudes and behaviors, with higher credibility leading to increased trust and, consequently, greater brand loyalty (Mim , Jai, & Lee, 2022; Jalaludin, Dirgantari, Hurriyati, & Harisandi, 2023). Furthermore, the interactive nature of social media platforms allows influencers to engage directly with their followers, fostering a sense of community and co-creation that can enhance consumer attachment to brands (Huang, Zhu, Hao, & Deng, 2022; Rather, Hollebeek, VO-THANH, Ramkissoon, & Leppiman, 2022). This engagement cultivates emotional connections that can translate into long-term loyalty and advocacy for the brand (Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang, & Soutar, 2020).

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform marketing strategies that are not only effective but also resonate with the values of a generation that is

increasingly skeptical of traditional advertising methods. By examining the nuances of influencer marketing in the beauty industry, this study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of consumer behavior in the digital age, offering actionable insights for brands looking to thrive in a competitive marketplace (Islam & Hussain, 2023; Winarko, Benning, & Pannindriya, 2021).

1.2. Practical relevance

The practical relevance of this study lies in its potential to provide valuable insights for marketers and brand managers operating within the beauty industry, particularly in their efforts to engage Generation Z consumers through influencer marketing. As this demographic increasingly relies on social media for product discovery and brand interaction, understanding the nuances of how influencer marketing affects consumer attitudes, credibility perceptions, and engagement levels becomes essential for developing effective marketing strategies (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

The findings of this research will not only contribute to the academic discourse surrounding influencer marketing but will also offer actionable recommendations for practitioners aiming to enhance brand loyalty and purchase intentions among this influential consumer group.

In recent years, influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant force in shaping consumer behavior, particularly among younger audiences. The ability of influencers to create authentic connections with their followers can significantly impact brand perceptions and consumer decision-making processes (Stubb, Nyström, & Colliander, 2019). By examining the interplay between consumer attitudes towards influencers, their credibility, and the level of engagement with these influencers, this study aims to elucidate the mechanisms that drive brand loyalty in the beauty sector. Such insights are crucial for brands seeking to cultivate long-lasting relationships with Generation Z, who are known for their discerning nature and preference for authenticity in marketing communications (Tjandrawibawa, 2020).

Moreover, the beauty industry is characterized by intense competition and rapidly changing consumer preferences, making it imperative for brands to adopt innovative marketing strategies that resonate with their target audience. This research will highlight the importance of selecting the right influencers based on their credibility and alignment with brand values, as well as the impact of engagement strategies on consumer loyalty

(Wilis & Faik, 2022). By identifying the key factors that influence purchase intentions, this study will provide brands with a framework for optimizing their influencer marketing campaigns, ultimately leading to improved consumer engagement and increased sales.

Additionally, the findings of this dissertation will have broader implications for the field of marketing by contributing to the understanding of how social media dynamics shape consumer behavior. As brands increasingly leverage digital platforms to reach their audiences, the insights gained from this research will be instrumental in guiding marketing strategies that effectively harness the power of influencer marketing (Monzocillo, 2022). By focusing on the specific context of beauty products and Generation Z consumers, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature and offers practical solutions for brands navigating the complexities of the digital marketplace.

In summary, the practical relevance of this study is underscored by its potential to inform marketing practices within the beauty industry, enhance brand loyalty among Generation Z consumers, and contribute to the broader understanding of influencer marketing dynamics. By exploring the relationships between consumer attitudes, influencer credibility, and engagement, this research aims to equip marketers with the knowledge and tools necessary to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019).

1.3. Research Aim and Research Question

This dissertation aims to examine the relationship between influencer marketing strategies and Generation Z's consumption patterns within the beauty industry. Specifically, it seeks to explore how influencers impact brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Generation Z, focusing on the various factors that make certain influencers more effective than others. By analyzing the characteristics that make influencer endorsements more or less effective, this research will contribute to a better understanding of how beauty brands can tailor their marketing strategies to meet the preferences and values of Generation Z.

This study not only aims to identify the factors that drive loyalty and purchase decisions but also seeks to deepen industry insight into the evolving consumer landscape, where the power of influence plays an increasingly dominant role.

With Generation Z's increased use of social media and reliance on influencer recommendations, brands face a unique challenge in effectively targeting this generation. While Generation Z is receptive to influencer endorsements, their loyalty and purchase decisions are often influenced by a nuanced mix of factors that include the perceived authenticity of influencers, their level of expertise or authority in the beauty space, and the nature of their engagement with followers. However, there is limited research that specifically addresses which of these factors most significantly impact brand loyalty and purchase intentions within this demographic. This presents a key challenge for beauty brands: understanding not just the importance of influencer marketing but also the specific elements that make these endorsements effective in building sustained loyalty and encouraging purchase decisions. Without this understanding, brands risk missing a crucial opportunity to connect meaningfully with Generation Z, potentially losing ground to competitors that more effectively harness the power of influence in their marketing strategies.

Considering these factors, this study aims to address the following question: *What are the most important factors within influencer marketing that drive brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers in the beauty industry?*

1.4. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters, of which the first chapter is the introduction, where the subject is introduced, and the objectives are described. The second chapter presents the literature review on the issues underlying the study. The following chapter contains the conceptual model and research hypotheses. The fourth chapter a contextualization of the study, including market data and statistics.

In the fifth chapter, the methodology used in the study is presented, such as the type of study, the sample, the data collection methods, the scales used to measure the constructs, and the procedures used during data processing. The sixth chapter relates to the analysis of the results, where the sample is characterized, the data is analyzed, and the research hypotheses are validated. Finally, the seventh and last chapter expresses the study's conclusions, theoretical contributions, limitations, and future research suggestions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Influence Marketing

2.1.1. Defining Influence Marketing

Influencer marketing has emerged as a pivotal strategy in contemporary advertising, leveraging the reach and credibility of individuals with substantial followings on social media platforms. This marketing approach capitalizes on the trust and rapport that influencers have cultivated with their audiences, allowing brands to connect with potential consumers in a more authentic and engaging manner. The essence of influencer marketing lies in its ability to harness the influence of these individuals to sway consumer behavior, thereby driving brand awareness, engagement, and ultimately, sales.

The impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior is profound. Research indicates that influencer marketing significantly affects how consumers perceive brands and make purchasing decisions. For instance, a study highlighted that 92% of marketers found influencer marketing effective in enhancing brand visibility and consumer engagement (Silalahi, 2021). This effectiveness is attributed to the perceived authenticity of influencers, who often share personal experiences and recommendations, making their endorsements appear more genuine compared to traditional advertising methods (Angraini, 2023). Furthermore, influencers serve as opinion leaders, guiding consumer choices and preferences, particularly in niche markets (Zak & Hasprova, 2020).

Moreover, the dynamics of influencer marketing are influenced by various factors, including the type of influencer (macro vs. micro), the nature of the product, and the platform used for promotion. Micro-influencers, for example, often boast higher engagement rates and stronger connections with their followers, making them particularly effective for brands targeting specific demographics (Silalahi, 2021). Additionally, the effectiveness of influencer marketing can be contingent upon the alignment between the influencer's persona and the brand's values, as mismatched collaborations can lead to consumer skepticism and diminished brand loyalty (Gökerik, 2024).

The rise of social media has further amplified the relevance of influencer marketing. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become breeding grounds for influencer-driven campaigns, with brands increasingly investing in partnerships with influencers to tap into their extensive reach and engagement capabilities (Haenlein, et al.,

2020). This shift has transformed influencer marketing into a multi-billion-dollar industry, underscoring its significance in modern marketing strategies (Haenlein, et al., 2020). However, brands must navigate challenges such as consumer cynicism and the potential for perceived inauthenticity, which can arise from overly commercialized content (Gökerik, 2024).

Influencer marketing capitalizes on the concept of word-of-mouth in the digital age, where influencers act as opinion leaders who can significantly influence the attitudes, decisions, and behaviors of their followers (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). By engaging influencers to endorse products through their social media platforms, brands aim to tap into the influencers' extensive social networks, maximizing the diffusion of information and potentially reaching a large audience (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

As brands continue to abandon traditional advertising techniques, efforts are increasingly focused on these influencers to endorse their products among their followers and beyond. These endorsements are likely to be interpreted as highly credible electronic Word Of Mouth (eWOM) rather than paid advertising as they are often seamlessly woven into the daily narratives influencers post on their Instagram accounts (Abidin , 2016).

2.1.2. Conceptual Framework

In developing a conceptual framework for influencer marketing, it is essential to consider influencers, target audience, content creation, and brand partnerships (Hugh et al., 2022). Influencer marketing is transitioning towards long-term partnerships between influencers and brands, focusing on credibility and co-creation (Hugh, Dolan, Harrigan, & Gray, 2022).

The strategic utilization of social media influencers significantly impacts commercialization and brand partnerships, requiring a structured approach to effectively leverage influencers (Hudders, De Jans, & De Veirman, 2020).

Understanding the mechanisms of influencer marketing and the strategic deployment of influencers can enhance brand partnerships and content creation strategies.

2.2. Influence Effectiveness

2.2.1 Metrics of Effectiveness

Influencer marketing campaigns are evaluated using various metrics to measure their effectiveness. These metrics include engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments (Fang & Wang, 2022). Additionally, the reach and number of interactions of social media influencers are commonly used as success metrics in influencer marketing campaigns (Gräve, 2019). Return on Investment (ROI) is another crucial metric that 70% of companies and agencies measure to assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns (Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

Moreover, the impact of marketing activities is increasingly being measured to understand the strategic value of the data collected (Spiller & Tuten, 2015). Metrics such as campaign awareness, receptivity, and campaign outcomes are essential markers of an effective campaign (Guillory, et al., 2022). Furthermore, the use of diagnostic and interactive marketing metrics plays a significant role in developing a firm's market-sensing capability (Liang, Frösén, & Gao, 2023). In evaluating influencer marketing campaigns, it is important to consider metrics that assess platform and material performance, as well as how campaign outcomes and impacts are reported (Harding, Pérez-Escamilla, Carroll, Aryeetey, & Lasisi).

Overall, the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns can be assessed through a combination of engagement metrics, ROI, reach, interactions, and market-sensing capabilities. By utilizing these metrics, marketers can gain insights into the performance and impact of their influencer marketing strategies.

2.2.2. Influencer-Brand Fit

In influencer marketing, the concept of influencer-brand fit plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of campaigns. Influencer-brand fit refers to the alignment between the influencer's image, values, and audience with the brand's identity and target market. Research has shown that influencer-brand fit positively influences consumer responses, including purchase intentions (Hawkins & Saleem, 2024). The congruence between the influencer's narrative and the branded product being promoted is essential for driving favorable consumer attitudes and behaviors (Hawkins & Saleem, 2024).

Moreover, the fit between a cause and a brand has been found to impact consumer attitudes and behaviors. Studies have highlighted that cause-brand fit positively influences consumer identification with the brand's virtual community, leading to enhanced consumer citizenship behavior (Deng, Jiang, & Fan, 2021). Additionally, a high brand-cause fit enhances consumer attitudes towards the company or brand, positively affecting the brand's image (Campelos & Silva, 2021).

The effectiveness of influencer-brand fit extends to brand extensions as well. When there is perceived fit between the brand and its extension, it strengthens the product brand image and positively influences consumer evaluations, ultimately impacting the parent brand's customer equity (Martínez & de Chernatony, 2004; Shao, Zhang, & Chen, 2015). Furthermore, the fit between partners' brand images in brand alliances influences consumer perceptions and attitudes towards the alliance (Riley, Charlton, & Wason, 2015).

Overall, influencer-brand fit is a critical factor in the success of influencer marketing campaigns. It influences consumer responses, attitudes, and behaviors, impacting brand image, customer equity, and purchase intentions. Ensuring a strong alignment between influencers and brands can enhance campaign effectiveness and drive positive outcomes.

The alignment between influencer-brand fit is crucial for the success of marketing campaigns. Research has shown that a strong fit between the influencer and the brand enhances consumer responses and attitudes towards the campaign, positively impacting consumer behavior, including purchase intentions (Wies, Bleier, & Edeling, 2022). This alignment influences the credibility of the campaign, strengthening consumer perceptions of the brand and the associated cause (Woo, Childs, & Kim, 2020).

Additionally, the fit between the cause being promoted and the brand's sphere of activity is essential for consumer engagement and positive word-of-mouth about the campaign (Handa & Gupta, 2020). Studies have indicated that a high perceived brand-cause fit can positively influence consumer buying choices and enhance consumer perceptions of the brand (Chéron, Kohlbacher, & Kusuma, 2012). Moreover, the fit between a firm's associations and a sponsored cause can reinforce the firm's positioning, influence liking for the sponsorship, and bolster the firm's equity (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns is also influenced by the match between influencers and the target audience of the brand. Campaigns that utilize social influencers aligned with the brand's goals and target audience generate more engaging content and reach a wider audience (Kostygina, et al., 2020). This alignment ensures that the influencer's message resonates with the audience, leading to increased campaign effectiveness.

In conclusion, ensuring a strong fit between influencers and brands is critical for enhancing the performance and outcomes of marketing campaigns. It impacts consumer responses, attitudes, and behaviors, ultimately influencing brand credibility, consumer engagement, and campaign effectiveness.

2.2.3. Types of influencers and their effectiveness

To explore the types of influencers and their effectiveness, it is essential to consider various factors that influence the success of influencer partnerships. The type of influencer can significantly impact the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. Different types of influencers, such as celebrity influencers, mega-influencers, macro-influencers, micro-influencers, and nano-influencers, have varying levels of reach, engagement, and impact on their audiences (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, & Thrassou, 2021). For instance, a study found that sports celebrities are the most effective endorsers in increasing consumers' purchase intentions compared to company managers and peer consumers (Von Felbert & Breuer, 2020).

The effectiveness of influencer partnerships is also influenced by the alignment between the influencer type and the brand's image and target market. Research suggests that the match between the influencer's persona, values, and audience demographics with the brand's identity positively impacts consumer responses and attitudes towards the brand, leading to increased trust and engagement. Additionally, the credibility of the influencer and the perceived authenticity of their endorsements play a crucial role in influencing consumer purchase intentions and behavior (Munnukka, Uusitalo, & Toivonen, 2016).

Moreover, the type of product being promoted can also influence the effectiveness of influencer partnerships. Studies have shown that the type of product endorsed by

influencers can impact consumer perceptions and purchase intentions. For example, the endorsement effectiveness of virtual influencers can vary based on the type of product being promoted (Liu, 2024). Additionally, the use of humor or fear appeals in social advertising can have differential effects on changing audience beliefs and behavioral intentions, depending on the type of appeal used (Raišienė, Wymer, & Dirginčienė, 2021).

In conclusion, the type of influencer, the alignment between the influencer and the brand, the credibility and authenticity of the influencer, and the type of product being promoted all play significant roles in determining the effectiveness of influencer partnerships. Marketers need to carefully consider these factors when selecting influencers for their campaigns to maximize the impact and success of their marketing efforts.

2.3. Consumer Behavior in the beauty Industry

2.3.1. Perceived Value and Benefits

The beauty industry has witnessed significant transformations in consumer behavior, particularly in relation to perceived value and the benefits associated with beauty products. This literature review synthesizes recent findings on how perceived value influences consumer decisions within the beauty sector, highlighting the role of social media, sustainability, and changing consumer attitudes.

Perceived value in the beauty industry is often shaped by the influence of key opinion leaders (KOLs) and social media influencers. Research indicates that KOLs' evaluation posts significantly affect consumers' purchasing willingness, with perceived value acting as a mediating factor in this relationship (Yao, 2023). Consumers are increasingly influenced by the recommendations of beauty influencers, who are perceived as credible sources of information. However, the commercialization of influencer endorsements can lead to skepticism, prompting consumers to reassess the perceived value of the products being promoted (Yao, 2023). This dynamic underscores the importance of authenticity in influencer marketing, as consumers are more likely to engage with brands that align with their values and expectations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further altered consumer behavior in the beauty industry, emphasizing the importance of self-care and personal grooming during times of social isolation. Studies have shown that consumers increasingly view beauty products as essential for self-management and well-being, leading to a heightened focus on the perceived benefits of these products (Kim & Kwon, 2022). As consumers navigate the complexities of the pandemic, their desire for skin beauty has intensified, driving demand for products that promise safety and efficacy (Kim & Kwon, 2022). This shift highlights the need for brands to communicate the perceived value of their offerings effectively, particularly in terms of health and safety.

Sustainability has also emerged as a critical factor influencing perceived value in the beauty industry. Consumers are increasingly aware of environmental issues and are seeking products that align with their values regarding sustainability (Pop, Saplacan, & Alt, 2020; Yang , 2024). Research indicates that a significant portion of consumers prioritize eco-friendly and sustainable features when selecting beauty products, with many expressing a preference for organic and vegan ingredients (Pop, Saplacan, & Alt, 2020). This trend reflects a broader societal shift towards sustainability, where consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that demonstrate environmental responsibility (Yang , 2024). Brands that successfully communicate their commitment to sustainability can enhance their perceived value and foster stronger consumer loyalty.

Moreover, the aesthetic appeal of beauty products and the overall shopping experience contribute significantly to perceived value. The use of augmented reality (AR) applications in beauty product marketing has been shown to enhance consumer engagement and perceived value by providing immersive experiences that allow consumers to visualize products before purchase. This aligns with findings that suggest consumers are more likely to purchase products that they perceive as aesthetically pleasing and aligned with their personal identity. The integration of technology in the shopping experience not only enhances perceived value but also meets the evolving expectations of tech-savvy consumers.

In conclusion, perceived value plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior in the beauty industry. The influence of KOLs, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emphasis on sustainability, and the aesthetic appeal of products all contribute to how consumers assess the value of beauty offerings. As the industry continues to evolve,

understanding these dynamics will be essential for brands aiming to effectively engage with consumers and drive purchasing decisions.

2.3.2. Brand Loyalty and Brand Relationships

The perceived value and benefits of consumer behavior in the beauty industry have garnered significant attention in recent literature, particularly as the industry evolves in response to changing consumer preferences and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Perceived value, defined as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on what is received and what is given, plays a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions within this sector. This literature review synthesizes key findings from various studies to elucidate the relationship between perceived value and consumer behavior in the beauty industry.

One of the primary dimensions of perceived value in the beauty industry is the influence of key opinion leaders (KOLs) and social media influencers. Research indicates that KOLs' evaluation posts significantly affect consumers' purchasing willingness, with perceived value acting as a mediator in this relationship (Yao, 2023). Consumers are increasingly reliant on the recommendations of influencers, who are perceived as trustworthy sources of information. However, the commercialization of these endorsements can lead to skepticism among consumers, necessitating a reevaluation of the perceived value of the products being promoted (Yao, 2023). This highlights the dual role of influencers in shaping consumer perceptions while also raising concerns about authenticity and trustworthiness in marketing communications.

The rise of the metaverse and the increasing emphasis on sustainability have also transformed consumer behavior in the beauty industry. As consumers become more health-conscious and environmentally aware, their purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by the perceived safety and sustainability of beauty products (Lee & Kwon, The significant transformation of life into health and beauty in metaverse era, 2022; Lee & Kwon, Good ingredients from foods to vegan cosmetics after COVID-19 pandemic, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend, prompting consumers to prioritize products that align with their values regarding health and safety. This shift has led to a growing demand for "clean" beauty products, which are perceived as safer and more environmentally friendly, further emphasizing the importance of perceived value in

consumer decision-making processes (Lee & Kwon, The significant transformation of life into health and beauty in metaverse era, 2022).

Moreover, the aesthetic appeal of beauty products and the overall shopping experience significantly contribute to perceived value. Studies have shown that consumers place high importance on the visual and experiential aspects of beauty products, which can enhance their perceived value and influence purchase intentions (Wang, Ko, & Wang , 2021; Tandela, Rahmad, Girsang, Girsang, & Syahputri, 2023). For instance, the use of augmented reality (AR) applications in beauty product marketing has been shown to enhance consumer engagement and perceived value by providing interactive and immersive experiences (Wang, Ko, & Wang , 2021). This aligns with findings that suggest consumers are more likely to purchase products that they perceive as aesthetically pleasing and aligned with their personal identity (Goia, Lima, & Barros, 2018).

Additionally, the impact of consumer innovativeness and brand image on perceived value cannot be overlooked. Research indicates that consumers who view themselves as innovative are more likely to seek out new beauty products and brands, which can enhance their perceived value of these offerings (Zulwarni, Octavia, & Dahmiri, 2022). Furthermore, a strong brand image can significantly elevate perceived value, as consumers often associate reputable brands with higher quality and reliability (Zulwarni, Octavia, & Dahmiri, 2022). This relationship underscores the importance of brand positioning and marketing strategies in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors in the beauty industry.

In conclusion, perceived value is a multifaceted construct that significantly influences consumer behavior in the beauty industry. The interplay between influencer marketing, sustainability, aesthetic appeal, and brand image shapes how consumers assess the value of beauty products. As the industry continues to evolve, understanding these dynamics will be crucial for brands aiming to effectively engage with consumers and drive purchasing decisions.

2.4. Generation Z

2.4.1 Demographic Overview of Generation Z

The demographic overview of Generation Z (Gen Z), typically defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, reveals a cohort that is markedly distinct from previous generations in various aspects, including their social behaviors, political engagement, educational preferences, and technological adeptness. This literature review synthesizes recent research findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's demographic characteristics and their implications for society.

Gen Z is characterized by its unprecedented exposure to digital technology and social media from a young age. This digital immersion has shaped their social interactions and communication styles, making them the first true digital natives. Kullolli emphasizes that Gen Z's engagement with social media is not only frequent but also marked by a unique adaptability to the evolving landscape of these platforms, which has fostered a significant increase in users among younger demographics (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023). This adaptability is crucial as it reflects their ability to navigate complex digital environments, which is a defining trait of this generation.

2.4.2. Attitudes Toward Influencer Marketing

Gen Z's engagement with influencer marketing is deeply intertwined with their digital upbringing. As digital natives, they are accustomed to consuming content through social media platforms, where influencers play a pivotal role in shaping their perceptions of brands and products. Liu emphasizes that Gen Z consumers often seek authentic and honest commentary from influencers, valuing their opinions as credible sources of information about products and brands (Liu Y. , 2023). This desire for authenticity is echoed by Pozharliev, who argue that influencers are perceived as online opinion leaders whose authority can significantly affect consumer attitudes and purchase decisions (Pozharliev, Rossi, & Angelis, 2022).

The importance of authenticity is further underscored by Erwin, who notes that Gen Z prioritizes transparency in influencer endorsements, viewing it as a critical factor in building trust (Erwin, Saununu, & Rukmana, 2023).

Moreover, the type of influencers that resonate with Gen Z is noteworthy. Tjandrawibawa's research indicates that micro-influencers, who typically have smaller but more engaged followings, are often more effective in fostering brand awareness among Gen Z than their macro counterparts (Tjandrawibawa, 2020). This finding aligns with the notion that Gen Z values personal connections and relatability, which micro-influencers can provide more readily than larger influencers who may be perceived as less accessible. This preference for micro-influencers is further supported by Nadanyiova, who highlights the importance of selecting influencers whose follower demographics align closely with the target audience to maximize engagement and impact (Nadanyiova & Sujanska, 2023).

The motivational drivers behind Gen Z's engagement with influencer marketing are multifaceted. Florenthal's study reveals that young consumers are motivated by a combination of entertainment, information, and social interaction when engaging with brands on social media (Florenthal, 2019). This suggests that brands must not only focus on promotional content but also create engaging and interactive experiences that resonate with Gen Z's desire for connection and community. Additionally, Singh emphasizes the significance of emotional appeal and storytelling in content marketing aimed at Gen Z, suggesting that brands should leverage these elements to foster deeper connections with this audience (Singh, 2023).

Furthermore, the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's purchasing decisions is profound. Djafarova and Bowes highlight that Instagram, as a primary platform for fashion inspiration, significantly influences impulse purchases among Gen Z consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). This aligns with the findings of Pinto and Paramita, who argue that influencer marketing can enhance brand loyalty through its effects on purchase intention, particularly when influencers are perceived as credible and relatable (Pinto & Paramita, 2021). The interplay between influencer credibility and consumer trust is critical, as Lou and Yuan demonstrate that the perceived value of influencer messages directly affects consumer trust in branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

2.4.2. Impact on the Beauty Industry

Gen Z's relationship with beauty products is heavily influenced by their digital nativity and the pervasive role of social media in their lives. As noted by Widari, the rapid

dissemination of fashion trends through social media platforms significantly heightens Gen Z's shopping desires, with public figures and influencers playing a crucial role in shaping their perceptions of beauty products (Widari, Aliffiati, & Indra, 2023).

This is further supported by Dalziel and Klerk, who emphasize that this generational segment actively engages with various media sources, making it essential for marketers to integrate diverse media strategies when promoting beauty products (Dalziel & Klerk, 2021). The reliance on social media for beauty inspiration is underscored by Djafarova and Bowes, who found that platforms like Instagram serve as primary sources for fashion and beauty trends, leading to impulse purchases among Gen Z consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

The authenticity and relatability of influencers are critical factors, as Gen Z consumers tend to favor influencers who they perceive as genuine and trustworthy (Shi, 2024).

Sustainability and ethical considerations are also paramount for Gen Z consumers. As noted by Rathore et al., there is a growing public concern regarding the environmental impact of beauty products, leading to a shift towards sustainable brands (Rathore, Schuler, & Park, 2023). This trend is echoed in the work of Shim, who highlights that both Millennials and Gen Z are increasingly prioritizing safety, ethicality, and sustainability attributes in their cosmetic purchases (Shim, et al., 2024). Brands that fail to address these concerns risk alienating a significant portion of the Gen Z market.

In addition to sustainability, the aesthetic appeal of beauty products plays a crucial role in influencing Gen Z's purchasing decisions. Sahu and Karnuta emphasize that storytelling and visual aesthetics are vital components of digital marketing strategies aimed at attracting this demographic (Sahu & Karnuta, 2022). The integration of visually appealing content, particularly through influencer partnerships, is essential for engaging Gen Z consumers who are drawn to brands that resonate with their values and lifestyle.

In conclusion, Generation Z is significantly impacting the beauty industry through their unique preferences, behaviors, and values. Their reliance on social media, the influence of beauty influencers, and a strong emphasis on sustainability and ethical consumption are reshaping marketing strategies within the sector. Brands that wish to connect with this demographic must prioritize authenticity, visual appeal, and ethical considerations to effectively engage and retain Gen Z consumers.

3. Conceptual Model and Research hypotheses

Based on the above literature Review, this study's hypotheses are formulated around the relationship between various influencer marketing constructs, such as brand affection, perceived value, similarity, expertise, and trust, engagement with influencers and their impacts on brand loyalty and purchase intentions within Generation Z's engagement with the beauty industry, and the hypothesis are determined as follows:

H₁: Brand Affection has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Brand affection, or the emotional attachment consumers feel toward a brand, is a powerful driver of both loyalty and intention to purchase. For Generation Z, emotional connections often play a pivotal role in their decision-making processes, particularly when brands prioritize values of authenticity and relatability (Rahardja & Kuncara, 2023). Studies have shown that, in an age of digital interaction, these affective bonds enhance loyalty by deepening consumer commitment to brands that feel genuine and resonate with personal values. Thus, brand affection is anticipated to increase Generation Z's brand loyalty and positively influence their intentions to purchase.

H₂: Perceived value has a positive impact on (a) Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Perceived value reflects the consumer's assessment of the overall benefits of a product relative to its cost. For Generation Z, perceived value is not only about monetary worth but also about alignment with ethical values, quality standards, and sustainability - an aspect that beauty brands have increasingly embraced (Pop, Saplacan, & Alt, 2020; Yang , 2024). This generation's focus on value-driven purchases means that high perceived value in beauty products is likely to foster a strong sense of brand loyalty and stimulate purchase intentions, as brands that deliver on quality, ethics, and environmental responsibility appeal to their priorities.

H₃: Similarity has a positive impact on (a) Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Similarity between influencers and followers strengthens relatability, a key factor in Generation Z's perception of influencer trustworthiness. When influencers share characteristics, lifestyles, or values with their audience, they create a sense of shared

identity, fostering deeper connections that are crucial for long-term loyalty (Liu Y. , 2023; Pozharliev, Rossi, & Angelis, 2022). This similarity aligns with Generation Z's preference for influencers who embody transparency and relatability, reinforcing those influencers who “feel like them” or “represent their values” have a stronger pull on brand loyalty and purchase intentions.

H4: Expertise has a positive impact on (a) Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Expertise in beauty products, particularly in areas like skincare and makeup, is valued highly by Generation Z. This group often seeks influencers with proven knowledge or credentials, as they perceive expert influencers as more credible and authoritative (Monzocillo, 2022). Expertise not only boosts the influencer's trustworthiness but also positively influences the perceived quality of product recommendations. For brands, this translates into enhanced loyalty from consumers who see the brand as credible by association, as well as a greater likelihood of purchase, given the influencer's role as a trusted authority in the beauty industry.

H5: Trust in mega influencers has a positive impact on (a) Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Mega influencers, such as Kylie Jenner and Huda Kattan, possess substantial reach and established credibility in the beauty industry. Their influence stems from their celebrity status and perceived authority in beauty, which fosters a sense of trust among followers (Tjandrawibawa, 2020). Generation Z, while often skeptical of traditional advertisements, tends to respond positively to trusted, high-profile influencers when they perceive endorsements as authentic. The reach of these influencers enables brands to enhance loyalty by building on the trust these figures command, as well as increase purchase intentions driven by their high visibility and brand associations.

H6: Trust in macro influencers has a positive impact on (a) Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Macro influencers, such as Bretman Rock and Tati Westbrook, appeal to Generation Z audiences through their specialized yet approachable personas. Known for their niche focus and authenticity, macro influencers are often considered more relatable than mega influencers, creating closer connections with their audience (Von Felbert &

Breuer, 2020). Trust in macro influencers arises from the combination of perceived expertise and accessibility, which enhances brand loyalty and purchasing intentions, especially in audiences that value authentic influencer-brand relationships.

H7: Interaction with posts has a positive impact on (a) Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Engagement with influencer posts, such as liking, commenting, or sharing, is a strong indicator of brand loyalty. Such interactions often create a “community effect,” wherein followers feel part of a collective that shares similar interests and values (Miah, Hossain, Shikder, & Saha, 2022). For Generation Z, active engagement reflects a personal investment in the brand, deepening emotional connections that increase loyalty. The more frequently they interact with an influencer’s posts, the more likely they are to develop positive purchase intentions toward the associated brands, seeing the influencer as a credible source for product recommendations.

H8: Interaction with social media has a positive impact on (a) Brand Loyalty and (b) Purchase Intentions

Generation Z values social media interactions that feel direct and reciprocal, as these engagements foster inclusivity and direct connection with brands (Guillory, et al., 2022). By enabling followers to interact in real-time, brands create a two-way communication channel that supports lasting loyalty and purchase intentions. For this generation, social media is not just a place to receive information but also a platform for feedback and co-creation, which strengthens loyalty through personalized engagement and increases purchase intentions by making followers feel integral to the brand community.

Having the literature and the empirical studies in consideration a conceptual model was developed including the research hypothesis for the study, as shown in Fig. 3.1.

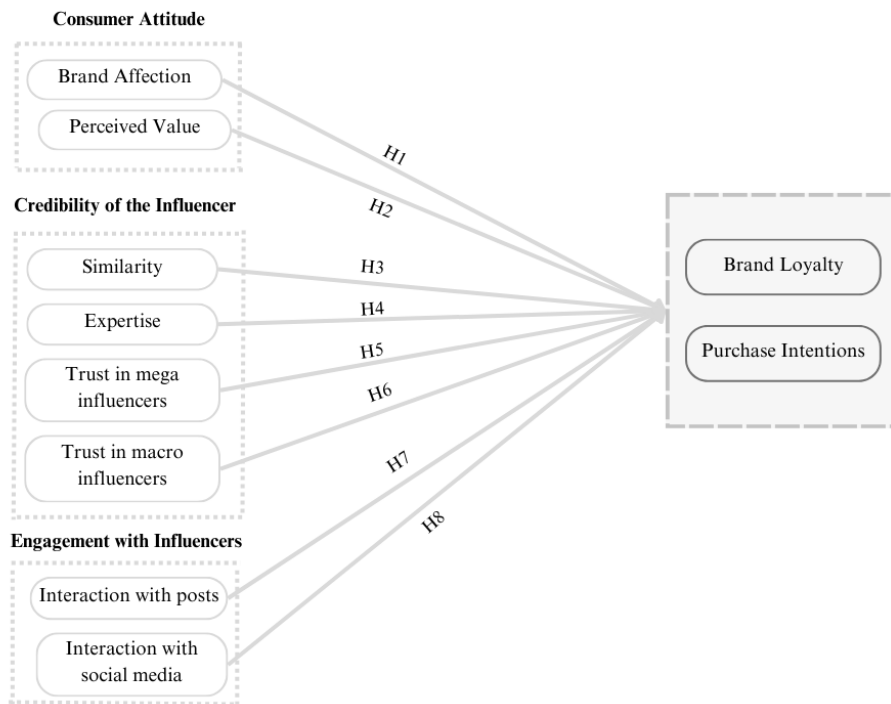


Fig 3.1. Conceptual Model
Source: Own Elaboration

4. Contextualization of the study

4.1. Gen Z, Social Media, and Beauty Industry

This study examines how influence marketing impacts the consumption of beauty products among Generation Z, focusing on several key areas related to brand loyalty, consumer attitudes, credibility of influencers, and engagement with social media. The data collected by the survey were mainly collected in Portugal.

The beauty market is a broad and evolving business that includes many products such as skincare, makeup, haircare, fragrances, and personal care items. The industry in consumer goods is particularly resilient, continually expanding because of its capacity to respond to cultural trends, technical innovations, and variations in consumer behavior. In recent years, the beauty industry experienced substantial transformations due to the emergence of digital marketing, the impact of social media, and evolving customer preferences, especially among younger demographics such as Generation Z and Millennials.

Generation Z, commonly referred to as Gen Z, represents the demographic group born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, more specifically, those born between 1997 and 2012. Currently, they are generally in their teenage years to mid-twenties, constituting a substantial demographic influence, particularly in technology, consumer behavior, and culture. Gen Z, having been raised in the digital era, is the new generation that is genuinely "digitally native," extensively engaged with online platforms, social media, and emerging technology from an early age.

According to March 2023 data, in a survey conducted among consumers worldwide, towards beauty brands, 54% of Gen Z respondents claimed that they shop around for products offering the best value, 46% of Gen Z are willing to pay more for beauty products from a sustainable brand, 45% of Gen Z would stop using a beauty brand if they felt it was not inclusive or socially responsible, 44% of Gen Z are willing to pay more for high-quality beauty products. On the other hand, only 23% of Gen Z believe that premium beauty products are truly effective, and similarly, 23% of Gen Z state that they

Consumer attitudes towards beauty brands worldwide as of March 2023, by generation

Consumer attitudes towards beauty brands 2023, by generation

Statement	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby boomers
I shop around for products offering the best value	54%	53%	46%	40%
I am willing to pay more to buy beauty products from a sustainable brand	46%	56%	36%	25%
I would stop using a beauty brand if I felt it was not inclusive or socially responsible	45%	50%	34%	24%
I am willing to pay more for high-quality beauty products	44%	57%	40%	30%
Only premium beauty products are truly effective	23%	34%	20%	12%
I only buy beauty products on promotion/discount	23%	28%	20%	13%

Description: In a survey conducted in March 2023 among consumers worldwide, 46 percent of Gen Z respondents claimed that they were willing to pay more to buy beauty products from a sustainable beauty brand. For comparison, only 25 percent of Baby boomers stated the same. Moreover, 57 percent of Millennials were willing to pay more for a high-quality beauty product, as compared to 44 percent of their younger Gen Z counterparts. [Read more](#)
Notes: worldwide; March 2023; 1,947 Gen Z; 4,333 Millennials; 3,952 Gen X; 1,778 Boomers; 18-64 years
Source: McKinsey & Company; The Business of Fashion

statista

*Fig. 4.1.1. Consumer Attitudes toward beauty brands worldwide.
Source: Statista*

only buy beauty products when they are on promotion or discount, has shown on Fig. 4.1.1 (Statista, 2023).

According to these statistics, a considerable portion of Generation Z prioritizes product quality and ethical considerations over brand exclusivity or luxury status, highlighting their focus on value, sustainability, and social responsibility when making purchases of beauty products.

As a buyers who learned of or bought a new product from an influencer in 2022, worldwide, 48% of Gen Z consumers have learned about a new product or brand from a social media influencer in the past six months and 32% of Gen Z consumers have purchased the new product or brand they learned about from a social media influencer within the same time period, as shown in Fig. 4.1.2 (Statista, 2022).

Share of consumers who learned about a new product or brand from an influencer and who purchased it in the past six months worldwide as of 2022, by generation

Buyers who learned of/bought a new product from an influencer 2022, by generation

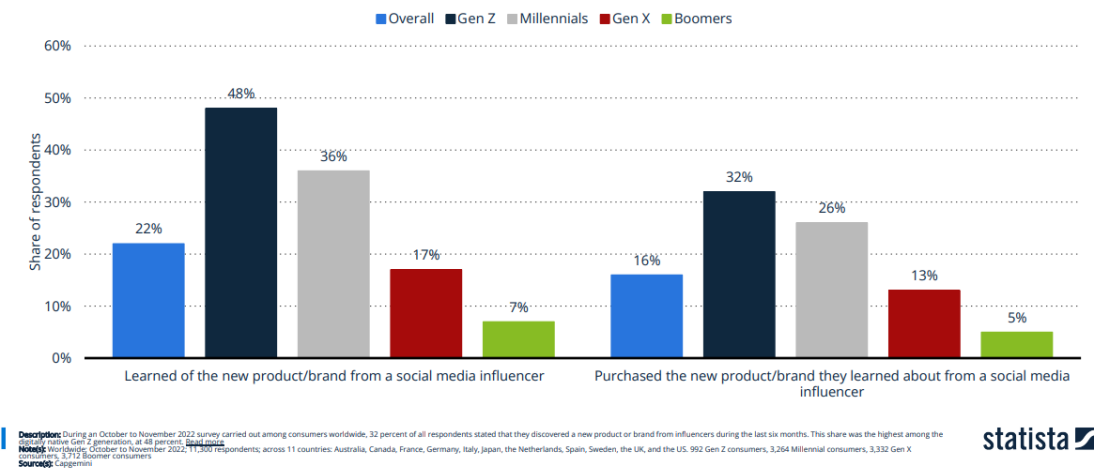


Fig. 4.1.2. Share of consumers who learned about a new product or brand from an influencer.
Source: Statista

Comparing with the other generations, such as Gen Z, Millennials and Baby Boomers, Gen Z has the highest percentage among all the generations surveyed, which indicates a strong influence of social media influencers on Gen Z's product discovery and purchasing behavior.

According to 2022 data, value for money, mental well-being, and individualism are top priorities for Generation Z when it comes to beauty regimens. Gen Z is drawn to holistic beauty, such as skincare and wellness goods, and is influenced by outside forces while concentrating on self-expression. They defy conventional notions of beauty and look for social responsibility, affordability, and authenticity in beauty brands. In response, companies are launching more diverse, inclusive advertising campaigns and releasing goods that prioritize identity expression and well-being (Euromonitor International, 2022).

Based on 2022 data, Generation Z, which comprises over 23% of the world's population, views beauty as a way to express themselves and promote wellbeing. This generation favors simple daily routines and dramatic cosmetics for major events. With a focus on clean beauty and sustainability, they regularly participate in user-generated content on Instagram and TikTok. Beauty companies must effectively use social commerce and influencer collaborations, give transparency, and blend digital and physical experiences in order to appeal to Generation Z (Euromonitor International, 2023)

4.2. Beauty Influencers

Beauty influencers frequently fall into categories according to the number of people who follow them, and each group has distinct functions for companies, particularly with regard to audience engagement and reach. Based on their impact and number of followers, beauty influencers can be divided into four categories: nano, micro, macro, and mega.

Nano influencers, from 1.000 to 10.000 followers, have small but highly engaged audiences. They are often seen as relatable and authentic, making them ideal for niche products or local campaigns. Micro influencers, who have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers, focus on specific domains, such as skincare or cosmetic tips, and keep up a high level of interaction with their followers. Macro influencers, who have between 100,000 and one million followers, are more polished and professional and have a wider audience. They collaborate with bigger brands, and although they have a larger audience, their highly marketed material may result in lower engagement rates than smaller influencers. Mega influencers, from over 1.000.000 followers, are often celebrities or highly recognized personalities. They offer massive global reach but tend to have lower engagement because of their broader, less personal audience (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024).

5. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed to examine the relationship between influencer marketing factors and their impact on brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Generation Z in the beauty industry.

5.1. Target Population and Sampling

The target population for this study is Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, off which uses social media platforms. The relevance of this population to the current study lies in their reliance on social media platforms, not only for entertainment and social connection but also for product discovery and validation, positioning them as ideal respondents for exploring the impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty and purchase intentions.

This study employed a convenience sampling approach, where respondents were selected based on ease of access and availability through digital channels. This method allowed for efficient data collection from Generation Z participants who were actively engaged on social media platforms and readily accessible within the researcher's network. Although convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, it was appropriate for this exploratory study due to time and resource constraints. The sample effectively represents the demographic of interest, providing valuable insights into Generation Z's interaction with influencer marketing in the beauty industry.

5.2. Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data with visual stimuli, allowing for an in-depth analysis of how specific influencer characteristics contribute to consumer loyalty and purchasing decisions. This method analyzes how an independent variable affects the depend variable.

The research design was based on quantitative primary research. Primary data was collected using an online survey, conducted in Qualtrics, focus on the variables mentioned in the study.

The scales for the constructs (Engagement with influencers – Interaction with social media and Interaction with posts, Credibility of Influencers – Expertise, Trust and Similarity, Consumer Attitudes – Perceived Value and Brand Affection, Purchase Intentions and Brand Loyalty) were adapted from (Onofrei, Filieri, & Kennedy, 2021), (De Sousa Pereira, Cardoso, Canavarro, Figueiredo, & Garcia, 2023), (Hugh, Dolan, Harrigan, & Gray, 2022), (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010), (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014), (Liu, Lin, & Zhao, 2024) and (Shin, Im, Jung, & Severt, 2017).

The online survey was segmented into 10 sections. The first part considers the characterization of each respondent, with questions about demographics, social media usage intensity, and regularity of beauty products purchase.

The second and third part of the survey were to understand the engagement respondents had with influencers. The second part has about interaction with social media, with 4 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This scale was adopted from the study of (Onofrei, Filieri, & Kennedy, 2021), from “Social media interactions, purchase intention, and behavioural engagement: The mediating role of source and content factors”. The third part was about interaction with posts, composed of 3 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This scale was adapted from the same study of (Onofrei, Filieri, & Kennedy, 2021).

Both these two parts aimed to understand the engagement of the respondent with the influencers.

The fourth, fifth and sixth part of the survey were to understand the credibility of the influencers.

The fourth and sixth part, Expertise and Similarity, was composed with 4 and 3 questions, correspondingly. All of these questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Both these scales were adapted from the same study of (Hugh, Dolan, Harrigan, & Gray, 2022), from “Influencer marketing effectiveness: the mechanisms that matter”

The sixth part was about Trust, and it was composed with 12 questions. Those 12 were 3 questions for a total of 4 influencers that were selected for this study, and the 3 questions were asked for each one of them in order to understand the trust in mega and macro influencers. These 3 questions were adapted from the study of (De Sousa Pereira, Cardoso, Canavarro, Figueiredo, & Garcia, 2023) from “Digital Influencers’ Attributes and Perceived Characterizations and Their Impact on Purchase Intentions”.

The seventh and eighth part of the survey were about the Consumer Attitudes.

The seventh part, Perceived Value, consisted in 3 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This scale was adapted from the study of (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010), from “Resistance to Brand Switching when a Radically New Brand is Introduced: A Social Identity Theory Perspective”.

The eighth part, Brand Affection, consisted in 4 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This scale was adapted from the study of (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014), from “Consumer brand engagement in social Media: conceptualization, scale development and validation”.

The ninth part of the survey were about the Purchase Intentions. This consisted in 5 questions, each one of them rated on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This scale was adapted from the study of (Shim, et al., 2024) and (Liu, Lin, & Zhao, 2024), from “The theory of planned behavior and the norm activation model approach to consumer behavior regarding organic menus” and from “A pricing strategy of dual-channel supply chain considering online reviews and in-sale service”.

The tenth part of the survey were about the Brand Loyalty consisted in 3 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This scale was adapted from the study of (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014), from “Consumer brand engagement in social Media: conceptualization, scale development and validation”.

Construct	Item		Source
Engagement with Influencer - Interaction with social media (ISM)	ISM1	I follow social media influencers to search information about beauty products	(Onofrei, Filieri, & Kennedy, 2021)
	ISM2	I follow social media influencers to see their experiences and tips with beauty products	
	ISM3	I follow social media influencers to see their reviews about beauty products	
	ISM4	I follow social media influencers to see their recommendations of beauty products	
Engagement with Influencer - Interaction with posts (IP)	IP1	After you see a post on social media from an influencer, you click the 'like' button	(Onofrei, Filieri, & Kennedy, 2021)
	IP2	After you see a post on social media from an influencer, you comment on it	
	IP3	After you see a post on social media from an influencer, you share it with or friends or family.	
Credibility of the Influencer - Expertise (E)	E1	Do you believe that influencer is an expert on the field?	(Hugh, Dolan, Harrigan, & Gray, 2022)
	E2	Do you think that influencer is sufficiently experienced on the matter?	
	E3	Do you consider that influencer to have a lot of knowledge about beauty products?	
	E4	Do you believe that influencer is competent in making assertion about beauty products?	
Credibility of the Influencer - Trust (T)	T_KJ1	Do you feel that Kylie Jenner is honest?	(De Sousa Pereira, Cardoso, Canavarro, Figueiredo, & Garcia, 2023)
	T_KJ2	Do you consider that Kylie Jenner is trustworthy?	
	T_KJ3	Do you feel that Kylie Jenner is truthful?	
	T_HK1	Do you feel that Huda Kattan is honest?	
	T_HK2	Do you consider that Huda Kattan is trustworthy?	
	T_HK3	Do you feel that Huda Kattan is truthful?	
	T_BR1	Do you feel that Bretman Rock is honest?	
	T_BR2	Do you consider that Bretman Rock is trustworthy?	
	T_BR3	Do you feel that Bretman Rock is truthful?	
	T_TW1	Do you feel that Tati Westbrook is honest?	
Credibility of the Influencer - Similarity (S)	S1	Do you believe that influencer and you have a lot in common?	(Hugh, Dolan, Harrigan, & Gray, 2022)
	S2	Do you think that influencer and you are a lot alike?	
	S3	Can you identify and relay with that influencer?	
Consumer Attitudes - Perceived Value (CA_PV)	CA_PV1	That products are worth purchasing.	(Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010)
	CA_PV2	All things considered (such as price, time, and effort) those products are a good buy.	
	CA_PV3	Compared with other products, purchasing beauty products recommended buy an influencer is good value for our money.	
	CA_PV4	When you use those products, do you feel you are getting your money worth?	
Consumer Attitudes - Brand Affection (CA_BA)	CA_BA1	Do you feel very positive when using that brand?	(Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014)
	CA_BA2	Using that brand makes you happy?	
	CA_BA3	Do you feel good when using that brand?	
	CA_BA4	Are you proud to use that brand?	
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	Do you plan to purchase a beauty product promoted by an influencer?	(Shim, et al., 2024; Liu, Lin, & Zhao, 2024)
	PI2	Do you intend to purchase a beauty product promoted by an influencer?	
	PI3	Will you do your best to purchase a beauty product promoted by an influencer?	
	PI4	The next time you buy a beauty product, you will prioritize the ones that are promoted by an influencer.	
	PI5	Would you recommend your family and friends to buy a product what you saw an influencer promote?	
Brand Loyalty (BL)	BL1	It makes sense to you to use that product instead of any other product from another brand, even if they are the same?	(Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014)
	BL2	Even if another brand has the same features as that product, would you prefer to use that product (the one that was recommended)?	
	BL3	If there is another brand as good as that one, would you prefer to use the one that was promoted?	

*Fig 5.2.1 Research Desing
Source: Own Elaboration*

5.3. Stimuli Selection

In the survey, visual stimuli were incorporated to measure respondents' perceptions of trust toward influencers from different tiers. Specifically, images of well-known influencers were used to represent both mega influencers and macro influencers, allowing respondents to provide insights on their perceived trustworthiness and influence on beauty product purchasing decisions.

To represent mega influencers, an image of Kylie Jenner and Huda Kattan (Huda Beauty) were selected. Both are globally recognized figures with massive followings (over 1 million), making them ideal examples of influencers with large reach and significant brand partnerships. Their status and visibility make them widely recognizable, allowing respondents to assess their level of trust toward these types of influencers.

To represent macro influencers, an image of Bretman Rock and Tati Westbrook were chosen. These influencers have substantial, but more niche followings (from 100.000 thousand to 1 million) and are known for their specific content related to beauty and lifestyle. Their inclusion aimed to capture how respondents perceive the credibility of influencers with a more focused audience but still significant reach.

These visual cues were used to prompt respondents to evaluate their trust in influencers at different levels, helping to explore how influencer tier affects consumer attitudes in the beauty market.

5.4. Data collection

The survey was structured to take around 10 minutes to complete. A pilot test was done by 5 people, with the aim of accessing possible problems related to the interpretation of the questions, structuring of the survey, suggestions for improvement, among other. After being tested, the data collection took place on September 2024.

There was a total of 200 valid responses, considering that, respondents who did not belong to Generation Z and/or who did not use social media platforms were not taken into consideration.

5.5. Data Treatment

Various statistical methods were used to obtain the results and analyze and interpret the data, using the IBM SPSS statistical software, as shown in next chapter: Data presentation and discussion of results.

First, a descriptive analysis was performed to describe and characterize the sample. Next, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed using Bartlett's Test, KMO, Cronbach's Alpha, and % of Explained Variance to validate the constructs present in the study. Then, to analyze the relationship between variables, this study employed an Artificial Neural Network (ANN), which provided both a Network Diagram of interactions and a Normalized Importance Graph of predictor variables. The ANN model was selected for its ability to capture complex, non-linear relationships and to illustrate the relative importance of each factor influencing Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions among Generation Z consumers. Unlike linear models, ANN can identify intricate patterns and interactions between variables, making it a powerful tool for analyzing the dynamics of influencer marketing factors. The flexibility of ANN to adapt to various input-output structures aligns well with the exploratory nature of this research.

6. Data presentation and discussion of results

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis conducted to address the research question: *What are the most important factors within influencer marketing that drive brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers in the beauty industry?* To explore these relationships, this chapter systematically examines the demographic and behavioral profile of the sample, evaluates the reliability and validity of the model variables, and applies Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) to analyze key influencer marketing factors influencing Generation Z's brand loyalty and purchase intentions.

This section opens with a detailed profile of the sample, offering insights into the demographic distribution, social media usage, trust in micro and nano influencers and beauty products purchase intensity characteristics of respondents. Following this, a descriptive analysis of model variables is conducted to assess reliability and validity, providing assurance that the measurement instruments accurately capture the intended constructs. The core analysis utilizes ANN to examine the variables' relationships, identifying which factors within influencer marketing most significantly impact brand loyalty and purchase intentions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings, setting the stage for conclusions and recommendations for the subsequent chapter.

The number of total valid responses for the survey was 200, although the number of answers to individual questions may differ.

6.1. Sample Profile

6.1.1. Demographics

Out of the 271 total respondents, 77.5% identified as female, representing the majority of participants. Male respondents accounted for 19.2% of the sample, while a small portion, 1.8%, preferred not to disclose their gender, as shown in Fig. 6.1.1.1.

This gender distribution aligns with existing research that indicates a high level of interest and participation among female consumers in beauty-related content and influencer marketing. This predominance of female respondents is likely to provide insights into the

influencer marketing preferences and behaviors among women in Generation Z, a key demographic for the beauty industry.

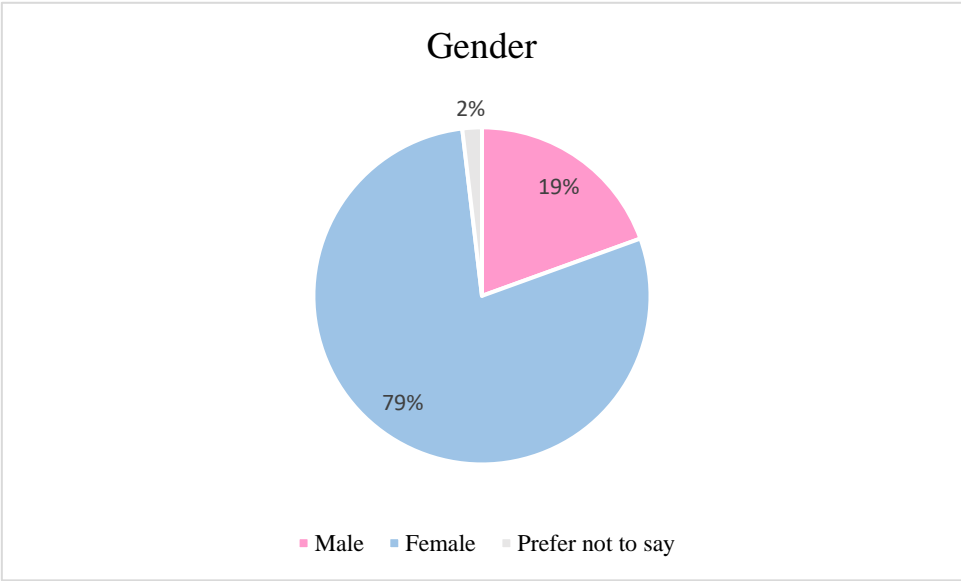


Fig. 6.1.1.1. Gender of Respondents
Source: Own Elaboration

6.1.2. Social Media Usage Intensity and Beauty Products Purchase Frequency

This section analysis provides valuable insights into the social media platforms favored by Generation Z, the frequency with which they engage with these platforms, and their purchasing frequency of beauty products. Understanding these patterns is essential to contextualize the influence that social media and influencer marketing may have on this demographic, especially in terms of brand loyalty and purchase intentions.

Respondents were asked what social media platforms they used regularly.

The most popular social media platforms among the sample are Instagram (100%), followed by TikTok (100%) and Twitter (100%). Every respondent indicated using these platforms regularly, which suggests a strong preference for visual and short-form content.

However, 35 participants indicated using other platforms, as shown in Fig. 6.1.2.1.



Fig. 6.1.2.1 Other social media respondents use
Source: Own elaboration

This shows that, while Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter are predominant, some respondents diversify their social media consumption across platforms that may cater to different content types or purposes.

Respondents were asked about their frequency of Social Media Use.

The majority of respondents are highly engaged with social media, with 88.39% using it multiple times a day, as shown in Fig 6.1.2.2. This implies that social media is an integral part of their daily routine, and they are likely to be frequently exposed to influencer content.

A smaller percentage, 6.37%, use social media once a day, and an even smaller fraction use it only a few times a week or rarely. This suggests that a vast majority are active daily, indicating a strong potential for influencer marketing impact.

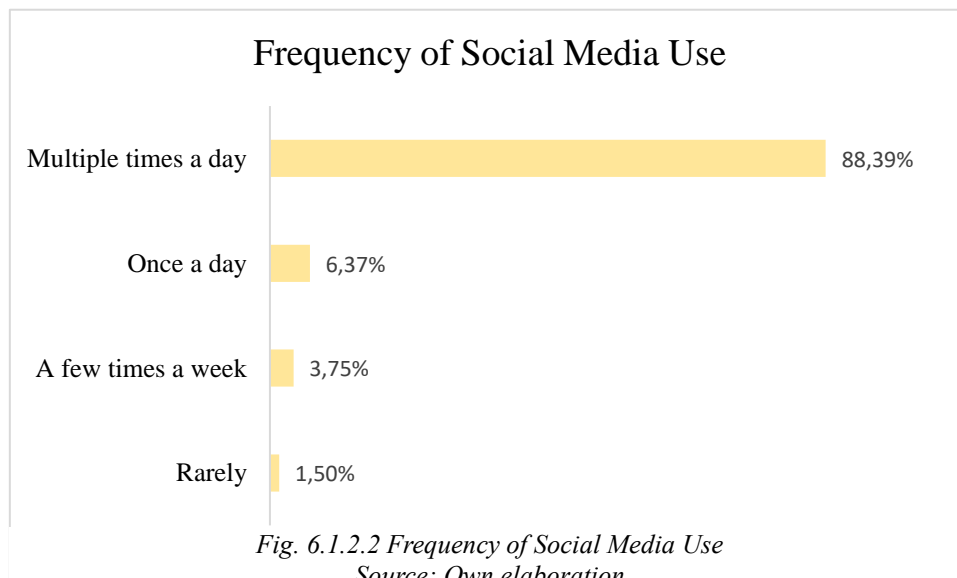


Fig. 6.1.2.2 Frequency of Social Media Use
Source: Own elaboration

Respondents were asked about their Beauty Product Purchasing Frequency.

Regarding beauty product purchasing habits, the sample shows a variety of purchasing frequencies, as shown in Fig 6.1.2.3.

- 33.71% purchase beauty products every 2-3 months, indicating regular but moderate consumption.
- 28.79% buy beauty products monthly, which might be reflective of a higher engagement or interest in beauty products among some respondents.
- 14.02% purchase every 6 months, and 15.15% purchase only once a year, indicating occasional buyers.
- A small portion, 8.33%, purchases weekly, which suggests a segment of highly engaged beauty consumers likely responsive to regular beauty product marketing.

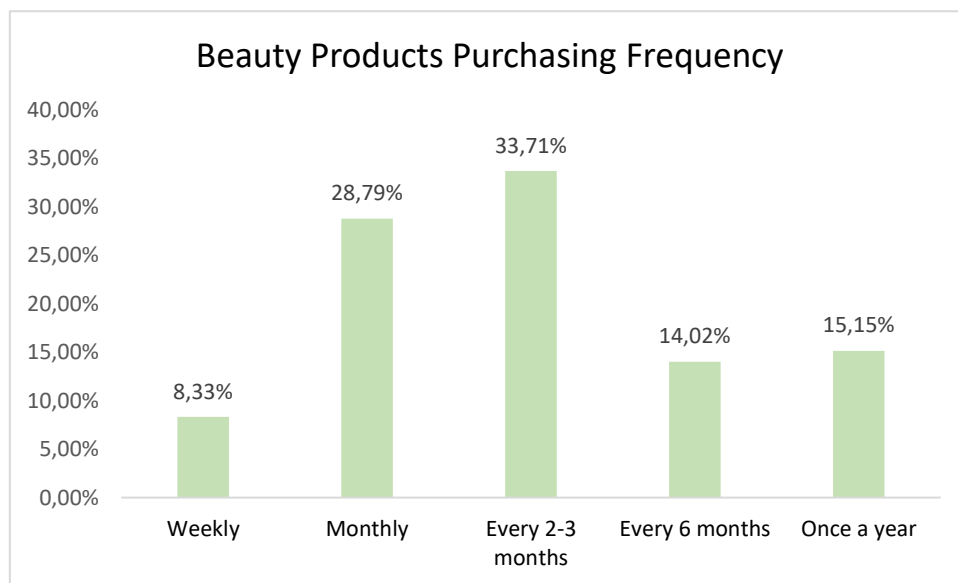


Fig. 6.1.2.3 Beauty Products Purchasing Frequency
Source: Own elaboration

Given the high frequency of social media use and the regular purchasing patterns, this data suggests that Generation Z is likely highly susceptible to influence marketing, especially on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. These platforms should be a primary focus for brands looking to reach this demographic.

6.1.3. Trust in Micro and Nano Influencers

The respondents were asked about their Trustworthiness in Micro (10.000 - 100.000 followers) and Nano Influencers (1.000 - 10.000 followers). This analysis aims to understand the role that smaller influencer plays in building trust among Generation Z consumers in the beauty industry.

Regarding Micro Influencers, from a total of 271 respondents, 217 provided valid responses regarding their trust in micro beauty influencers. The analysis reveals that the respondents are nearly evenly split in their views, since 108 respondents (49.8% of valid responses) trust Micro Influencers and 109 respondents (50.2% of valid responses) do not trust Micro Influencers., as shown in Fig. 6.1.3.1.

The marginal difference in responses highlights a nuanced perspective among Generation Z consumers. The nearly equal distribution of "Yes" and "No" responses indicates that while some respondents find influencers in this follower range credible, others may still approach them with skepticism. This balance might suggest that micro influencers are perceived as more authentic than larger influencers but may still face scrutiny over perceived intentions or commercialism.

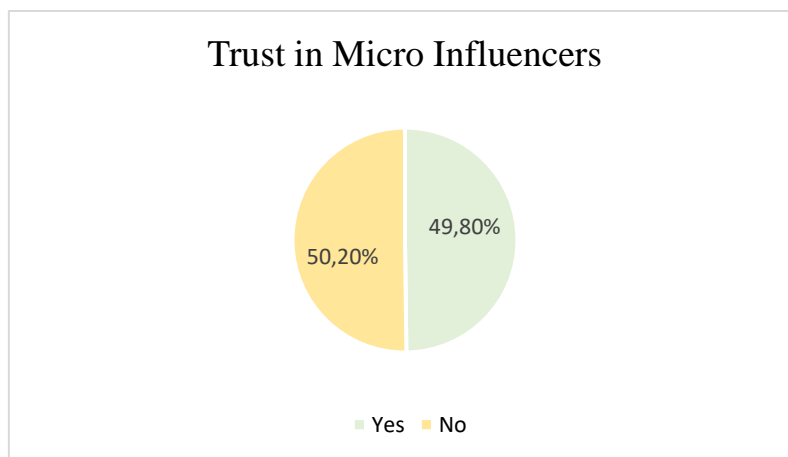


Fig. 6.1.3.1 Respondents Trust in Micro Influencers
Source: Own elaboration

Now, regarding Nano Influencers, similarly to micro influencers, 217 valid responses were gathered for perceptions of nano influencers. However, unlike the micro influencer group, the majority of respondents showed a tendency towards mistrust. 93 respondents (42.9% of valid responses) trust Nano Influencers and 124 respondents (57.1% of valid responses) do not trust Nano Influencers as shown in Fig. 6.1.3.2.

This finding suggests that nano influencers are perceived as less trustworthy compared to micro influencers. While nano influencers typically have smaller, more niche audiences and are often thought to bring a high level of personal engagement, respondents may still view their impact as limited in scale or their authenticity as questionable.

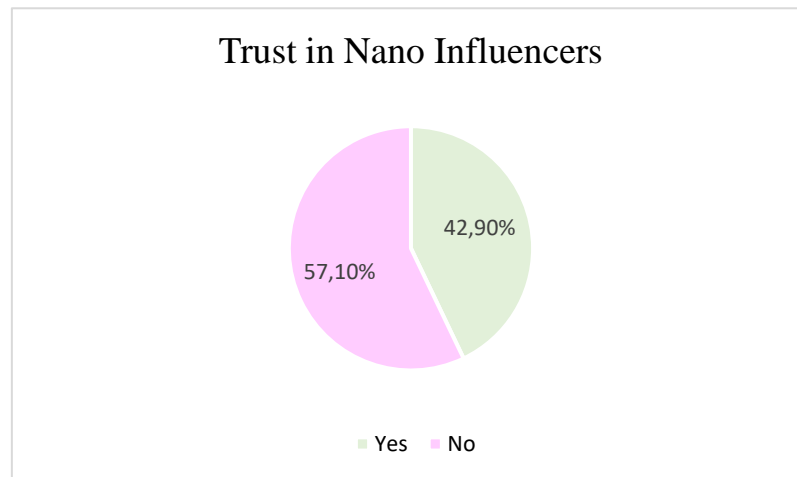


Fig. 6.1.3.2 Respondents Trust in Nano Influencers
Source: Own elaboration

6.2. Reliability and Validity Test

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the reliability and validity of the scales used in the research. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, which measures internal consistency, while construct validity was examined using factor loadings, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and the total variance explained by each factor. These analyses ensure that the scales used to measure constructs are consistent and accurately capture the intended dimensions of influence marketing's impact on Generation Z's beauty product consumption.

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure and is assessed through Cronbach's alpha in this study. A Cronbach's alpha value above 0.7 is generally considered acceptable, while values above 0.8 indicate good reliability, and values above 0.9 suggest excellent reliability. The table presents Cronbach's alpha values for each construct, highlighting strong internal consistency across most constructs, with only one exception.

The Brand Loyalty (BL) construct, measured through three items (BL1, BL2, and BL3), shows a high Cronbach's alpha of 0.903. This suggests that the items used to measure

brand loyalty are highly consistent, indicating that Generation Z respondents view loyalty as a cohesive concept, influenced by their exposure to influencer marketing.

Comprising five items (PI1 to PI5), the Purchase Intention (PI) scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.917. This high reliability score suggests that the scale effectively captures respondents' intentions to purchase beauty products based on influencer marketing. A reliable measure of purchase intention is critical in understanding how exposure to influencers might translate into actionable consumer behavior.

For Consumer Attitudes - Brand Affection (CA_BA), the scale includes four items (CA_BA1 to CA_BA4) and demonstrates high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.906. Brand affection reflects emotional attachment, which is crucial in consumer-brand relationships. The high reliability of this construct supports its consistency in measuring the positive feelings and attachment respondents associate with brands promoted by influencers.

The Consumer Attitudes - Perceived Value (CA_PV) construct, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.924, is based on four items (CA_PV1 to CA_PV4). This indicates a strong consistency in measuring the perceived value of products endorsed by influencers, suggesting that Generation Z views influencer-endorsed products as valuable due to perceived quality or relevance.

Credibility of the Influencer - Similarity (S) dimension of influencer credibility is measured through three items (S1 to S3), yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.918. This high reliability indicates that Generation Z perceives similarity with influencers as a reliable dimension of trustworthiness, which aligns with existing literature on the role of perceived similarity in social influence.

The construct Credibility of the Influencer - Trust (T) is broken into sub-components, all displaying high reliability, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.968 to 0.976. Trust in influencers is one of the most crucial factors influencing consumer behavior, and the high reliability scores reinforce its importance in shaping attitudes and purchase intentions within the target demographic.

Credibility of the Influencer - Expertise (E): With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.912, the Expertise scale confirms the reliability of this measure. Expertise reflects respondents'

perception of influencers' knowledge and authority in the beauty industry, an essential element for fostering credibility among Generation Z consumers.

Engagement with Influencer - Interaction with Posts (IP) construct has a relatively low Cronbach's alpha of 0.694, suggesting moderate reliability. Given that this value is slightly below the 0.7 threshold, it may indicate some variability in how respondents interpret engagement through direct interaction with influencer posts. This could suggest a less consistent impact of post interactions, warranting further investigation or scale refinement.

Engagement with Influencer - Interaction with Social Media (ISM) scale shows a very high Cronbach's alpha of 0.953, indicating strong reliability. High engagement through broader social media interactions implies that respondents consistently recognize various types of interactions beyond simple post engagement, such as comments, shares, and other platform-specific interactions.

Overall, the high Cronbach's alpha values for the majority of the constructs support the measures' internal consistency, indicating the validity and dependability of the constructs employed to evaluate the influence of influencer marketing.

Construct validity ensures that a scale measures the theoretical concept it intends to measure. In this study, construct validity was assessed through factor loadings, KMO measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and total variance explained. Together, these metrics provide evidence that the constructs are valid representations of their intended dimensions.

Factor loadings for each item within the constructs are uniformly high, mostly exceeding 0.8. High loadings indicate that individual items are strongly associated with their underlying constructs, supporting convergent validity. The items within the Brand Loyalty (BL) construct have loadings ranging from 0.904 to 0.922, demonstrating that each item is a reliable indicator of brand loyalty.

Similarly, items in the Purchase Intention (PI) construct display loadings between 0.834 and 0.902, reinforcing their strong alignment with the overall construct. High factor loadings across all constructs enhance the validity of the scales, ensuring that the measured items accurately capture the constructs they represent.

The KMO measure tests the sampling adequacy for factor analysis. In this study, KMO values are all above 0.7, which is considered acceptable and indicates that the data are suitable for factor analysis: Brand Loyalty (KMO = 0.75), Purchase Intention (KMO = 0.81), Consumer Attitudes - Brand Affection (KMO = 0.83), and Consumer Attitudes - Perceived Value (KMO = 0.83) all meet this requirement.

Credibility of the Influencer constructs also display adequate KMO values, with Similarity at 0.76, Trust ranging from 0.76 to 0.78, and Expertise at 0.85.

Engagement constructs show more variability, with Interaction with Posts at 0.67 (lower but still acceptable), and Interaction with social media at a high 0.85.

These KMO values support the factorability of the data, reinforcing that the sampling and constructs are appropriate for examining the intended dimensions.

Bartlett's test assesses whether the correlation matrix is significantly different from an identity matrix, indicating that correlations between items are suitable for factor analysis. All constructs exhibit highly significant Bartlett's test results ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the variables are adequately correlated.

Brand Loyalty ($\chi^2 = 377.40$, $p < 0.001$), Purchase Intention ($\chi^2 = 827.53$, $p < 0.001$), and other constructs all pass this test, supporting the construct validity of the scales.

High total variance explained for each construct suggests that the factors account for a substantial amount of the variance, further supporting construct validity.

Brand Loyalty explains 83.75% of the variance, indicating that the items collectively capture most of the variance related to loyalty. Purchase Intention accounts for 75.20% of the variance, reflecting its strength in capturing respondents' intention to purchase products. Consumer Attitudes constructs, Credibility of the Influencer constructs, and Engagement constructs also explain high percentages of variance, with Engagement with Social Media explaining 87.62%. The lower variance explained for Interaction with Posts (62.27%) aligns with its lower reliability, suggesting that this construct may benefit from further refinement to better capture engagement.

The combined results of Cronbach's alpha, KMO measure, Bartlett's test, and variance explained support the reliability and validity of the majority of the constructs used in this study. Most constructs display high internal consistency, strong factor loadings, adequate KMO values, and significant Bartlett's test results, which confirm their

construct validity. However, the Interaction with Posts construct may require further refinement, as it has slightly lower reliability and variance explained. This indicates that while the current scales are largely effective in measuring the dimensions of influencer marketing, specific engagement constructs could benefit from further development to ensure consistency across all items. Both Reliability and Validity Testing are shown on Annex B.

Following reliability and validity testing, the mean scores for each construct were calculated, as shown Annex C. These mean values provide an overall indication of how strongly each construct resonates with the respondents and allow us to identify which factors have the greatest influence on Generation Z's attitudes and behaviors regarding beauty products promoted by influencers. Interpreting the mean scores helps in understanding which aspects of influencer marketing are most significant to this demographic.

Higher mean scores indicate stronger agreement or perception of importance for a particular construct, whereas lower mean scores suggest less emphasis or relevance. Standard deviations also help us understand the variability of responses within each construct, with lower values indicating more consistency among respondents.

6.3. Model Testing – Artificial Neural Network

The artificial neural network (ANN), a subset of machine learning techniques, served as the basis for the indirect approach used in the current study. One way to think of ANNs is as a simplified representation of the human mind (Brochado, Veríssimo, & Lupu, 2024).

To test the hypotheses in this study, an Artificial Neural Network (ANN) model was constructed using SPSS. The purpose of using an ANN is to analyze complex relationships between multiple independent variables and dependent variables. ANNs are particularly valuable for capturing nonlinear relationships and interactions that may not be readily apparent in traditional statistical models. This ANN model was designed to predict key outcomes, namely, Brand Loyalty (BL) and Purchase Intention (PI), based on several input variables.

The ANN model consists of three primary layers: the input layer, the hidden layer, and the output layer.

The input layer includes the independent variables (predictors) in the model: BA: Brand Affection, PV: Perceived Value, S: Similarity, E: Expertise, IP: Interaction with Posts, ISM: Interaction with Social Media, TMI: Trust in Macro Influencers and TLI: Trust in Micro Influencers.

These inputs represent factors related to influencer credibility, consumer engagement, and consumer attitudes, which are hypothesized to influence Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention.

The model includes a hidden layer with five hidden neurons, denoted as H(1:1) to H(1:5) in the diagram, shown in the Annexes. Each hidden neuron processes the inputs through weighted connections and applies an activation function to introduce nonlinearity into the model. The hyperbolic tangent function (tanh) was used as the activation function in the hidden layer, which helps the network model both positive and negative relationships between variables. The tanh function is commonly used in neural networks as it provides a smoother output range (-1 to 1), making it suitable for identifying subtle variations in patterns.

The output layer consists of two nodes, representing the two dependent variables—Brand Loyalty (BL) and Purchase Intention (PI). The identity function is used as the activation function in the output layer, which means the output is a linear combination of the inputs from the hidden layer. This function is appropriate here because it allows the network to produce continuous outputs that can be interpreted as predicted levels of BL and PI based on the input variables.

After doing this, the Normalized Importance was calculated in SPSS, as shown in Fig. 6.3.1.

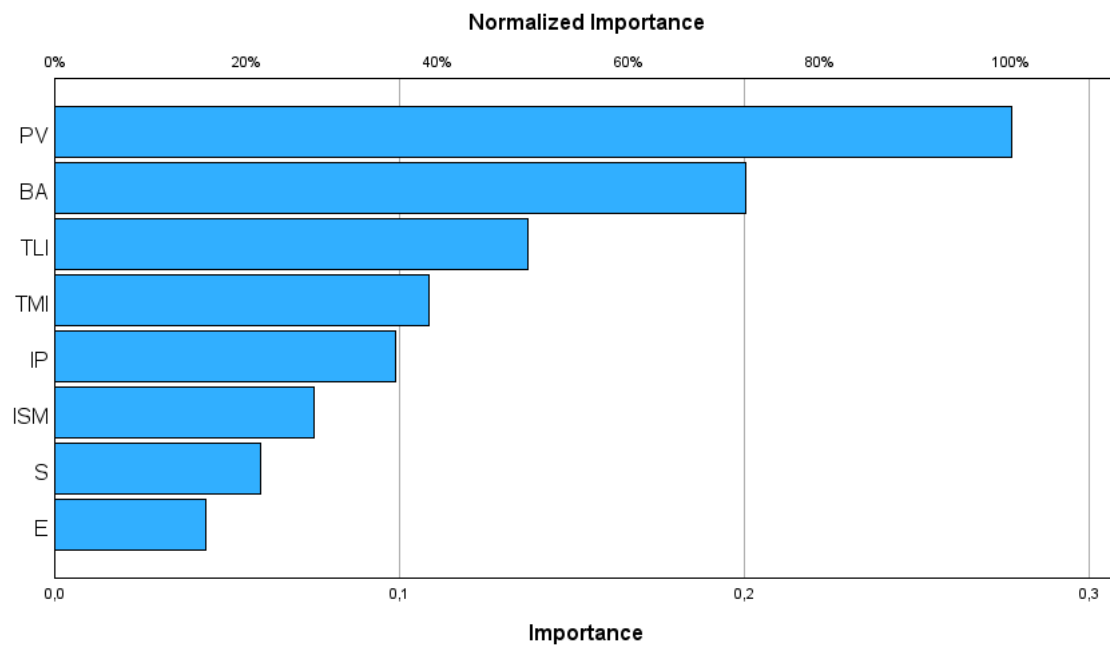


Fig. 6.3.1 Normalized Importance between variables
Source: Own elaboration

This analysis shows the different variables and their relative importance for Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions.

Variables with the highest normalized score were considered the most significant predictors of the dependent variables. Hypotheses were accepted if the related variables showed substantial predictive importance. Predictions generated by the ANN model were analyzed for alignment with the theoretical expectations outlined in the hypotheses.

Hypotheses were accepted if the corresponding variables had significant normalized importance scores and aligned predictions. The results of the ANN analysis were presented visually to enhance interpretability. The normalized importance graph highlighted the relative contribution of each predictor variable to brand loyalty and purchase intentions. Each hypothesis in the study was assessed based on the outputs of the ANN model

PV (Perceived Value) has the highest importance score, close to 1.0, suggesting it's the most significant factor. BA (Brand Awareness) follows, with a high importance score but lower than PV. TLI (Trust in Macro Influencers) holds a middle position, showing moderate importance. TMI (Trust in Mega Influencers) and IP (Influencer Perceived Integrity) have slightly lower values than TLI. ISM (Interaction with Social Media), S (Similarity), and E (Expertise) show decreasing importance, with Expertise having the lowest importance score.

Having in account the literature review and the Normalized Importance graph, here is an analysis of each hypothesis, previously mentioned.

H1: Brand Affection has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Validation: Brand affection is an emotional bond that deepens commitment to brands, especially when brands align with personal values of authenticity and relatability (Rahardja & Kuncara, 2023). The normalized importance chart shows Brand Affection (BA) as a significant factor, second only to Perceived Value, supporting this hypothesis. H1 is validated.

H2: Perceived Value has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Validation: The literature suggests that perceived value includes aspects like ethical alignment and product quality, which are highly valued by Generation Z (Pop, Saplacan, & Alt, 2020; Yang, 2024). With Perceived Value (PV) showing the highest importance in the chart, this aligns with your findings on how Generation Z seeks value-driven purchases. H2 is validated.

H3: Similarity has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Rejection: Similarity is discussed in the literature as a factor that fosters relatability and trust (Liu Y., 2023; Pozharliev, Rossi, & Angelis, 2022). However, in the normalized importance chart, Similarity (S) has a low score, indicating it may not be a significant influence. H3 is rejected.

H4: Expertise has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Rejection: Expertise is noted in the literature as important for credibility (Monzocillo, 2022), but it ranks lowest on the normalized importance chart. This discrepancy suggests that while expertise contributes to perceived credibility, it may not strongly drive loyalty or purchase intentions. H4 is rejected.

H5: Trust in Mega Influencers has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Partial Validation: The literature review states that mega influencers, possess significant reach and credibility, which can enhance loyalty if perceived as authentic

(Tjandrawibawa, 2020). The chart shows Trust in Mega Influencers (TMI) with moderate importance, indicating some impact, but not as much as other factors. H5 is partially validated.

H6: Trust in Macro Influencers has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Validation: Your review highlights macro influencers as accessible and relatable, making them effective at fostering loyalty (Von Felbert & Breuer, 2020). The normalized importance chart shows Trust in Macro Influencers (TLI) as an influential factor, supporting this hypothesis. H6 is validated.

H7: Interaction with Posts has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Partial Validation: Engagement through likes, comments, and shares enhances community feel and loyalty, per the literature (Miah, Hossain, Shikder, & Saha, 2022). Interaction with Posts (IP) has a moderate score in the chart, indicating it has some relevance but is not a leading factor. H7 is partially validated.

H8: Interaction with Social Media has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

Rejection: Although literature suggests that real-time interactions foster inclusivity and loyalty (Guillory, et al., 2022), Interaction with Social Media (ISM) shows lower importance in the chart. H8 is rejected.

This analysis, grounded in both empirical data and the literature, suggests that factors like Perceived Value, Brand Affection, and Trust in Macro Influencers are more impactful, while elements like Similarity, Expertise, and Interaction with Social Media may be less influential in driving brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Generation Z in the beauty industry.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Summary of the results

This research investigated the impact of various influencer marketing factors on Generation Z's brand loyalty and purchase intentions within the beauty industry, addressing a critical need for brands to understand what drives meaningful engagement with this demographic.

The findings reveal that Perceived Value (PV) was the most influential factor, underscoring the importance of value-driven marketing. For Generation Z, perceived value encompasses both the quality of the product and alignment with personal and ethical values, including sustainability, which has grown increasingly central to this cohort's purchasing decisions. The strong emphasis on perceived value suggests that this generation is not only seeking functional benefits from beauty products but is also highly motivated by brand ethics and sustainability, echoing the literature on Generation Z's values-based approach to consumption. Brands that effectively communicate these values are therefore more likely to foster loyalty and drive purchase intentions among young consumers who prioritize impact and authenticity.

Following Perceived Value, Brand Affection (BA) emerged as a critical factor in building loyalty and encouraging purchases. This aligns with existing literature indicating that emotional connections with a brand—facilitated by influencers who portray genuine brand relationships—create lasting bonds with consumers. The high ranking of brand affection suggests that Generation Z is responsive to influencer content that conveys not only product attributes but also a deep, authentic connection with the brand. Influencers who express genuine enthusiasm and loyalty towards beauty products may therefore enhance consumers' emotional connections with the brand, fostering greater loyalty and purchase intent.

Trust in Macro Influencers (TLI) was also found to have significant importance, demonstrating the effectiveness of macro influencers, who are often seen as more approachable and relatable than mega influencers. These influencers appeal to Generation Z's desire for transparency and relatability, acting as accessible figures who can share meaningful product insights without overwhelming followers with celebrity status. This finding suggests that brands looking to build trust and loyalty should consider

partnerships with influencers who, while possessing a substantial following, maintain a strong, authentic connection with their audience.

In contrast, Similarity (S) and Expertise (E) showed limited impact on brand loyalty and purchase intentions in this context. While traditional marketing emphasizes influencer similarity to foster relatability, this study's findings challenge this view, suggesting that Generation Z does not necessarily require influencers to mirror their lifestyles or characteristics to feel connected to them. Similarly, although expertise is generally valued for credibility, it may not be a primary driver for purchasing decisions in the beauty industry, where visual appeal and emotional resonance with the influencer appear to hold more sway. These insights may indicate a shift in Generation Z's approach to influencers: rather than relying on perceived expertise or similarity, they focus on the influencer's ability to present authentic value and establish a sincere connection to the brand.

The results of this study confirm that the most important factors within influencer marketing that drive brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers in the beauty industry are Perceived Value, Brand Affection, and Trust in Macro Influencers. These findings suggest that Generation Z consumers prioritize influencers and brands that align with their personal values, offer authentic emotional connections, and maintain relatable personas, solidifying these factors as essential for effective influencer marketing strategies in the beauty industry.

7.2. Limitations of the study

While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations.

Firstly, the use of a convenience sampling approach limits the generalizability of the findings. Participants were selected based on ease of access and availability, which means the sample may not fully represent the broader Generation Z population. Future research could benefit from adopting a probabilistic sampling method to ensure a more diverse and representative sample, allowing for broader applicability of the findings.

Additionally, the study's exclusive focus on the beauty industry may constrain the extent to which these insights apply across other consumer sectors. Different industries, particularly those outside of personal care and lifestyle, may yield varying results as

consumer motivations and perceptions of influencer credibility may differ. For example, industries such as technology or health might place greater emphasis on expertise and functionality over emotional connection, suggesting a need for more industry-specific studies to understand how influencer marketing impacts other sectors.

The reliance on self-reported data introduces another limitation, as participants may not always provide responses that accurately reflect their behavior, due to social desirability or recall biases. Although self-reporting is a common method in consumer research, future studies could enhance reliability by integrating observational or experimental methods, which would reduce potential biases by capturing real-time interactions and behaviors related to influencer engagement.

Finally, the study's sample was drawn from a single-country context (Portugal), which may limit the findings' cross-cultural generalizability. Generation Z's perceptions and values can vary significantly across cultural contexts, and attitudes toward influencer marketing, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions may differ internationally. To strengthen the cultural relevance of the findings, future research could incorporate cross-national comparisons, enabling a broader understanding of how these factors operate within diverse demographic and cultural landscapes.

7.3. Suggestions for future research

Future research on influencer marketing targeting Generation Z could take several directions to build on the insights provided by this study.

First, incorporating longitudinal research designs would allow for tracking changes in brand loyalty and purchase intentions over time, providing insights into how enduring or fluctuating these influences are. Such studies would also be beneficial for identifying whether certain influencer attributes gain or lose importance as Generation Z consumers age and as new social and digital trends emerge.

Another avenue for future research is to expand the scope beyond the beauty industry to examine the relative importance of influencer attributes in other sectors, such as technology, fashion, health, and wellness. By comparing influencer effectiveness across different industries, researchers could uncover whether factors such as perceived

value, brand affection, and trust remain as impactful, or if other elements—such as technical expertise or product functionality—become more influential in certain contexts.

Finally, the inclusion of experimental methodologies could provide more objective assessments of influencer impact by minimizing self-report biases. For instance, an experimental study could measure actual engagement and purchasing behavior in response to influencer content, offering a more precise understanding of influencer marketing effectiveness. Further research might also explore advanced analytical techniques, such as machine learning models, to analyze large-scale social media data, offering a more granular view of how specific influencer strategies correlate with consumer engagement and purchase behaviors.

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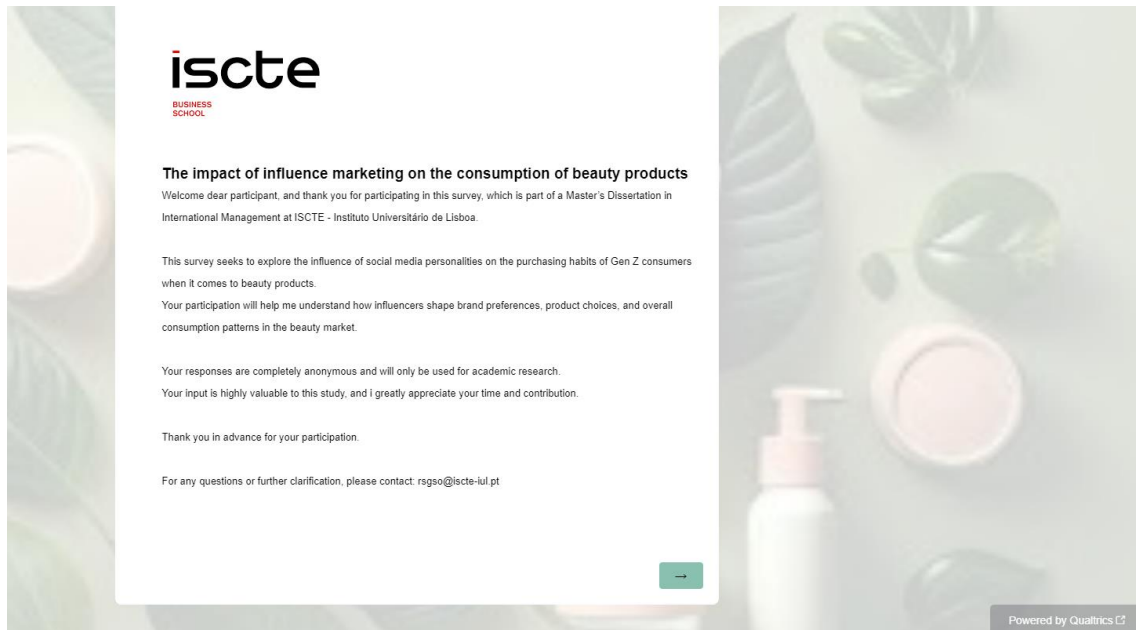
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Annexes

Annex A: Survey Questions



The image shows the first screen of a survey. It features a background image of various beauty products like a pink jar, a white pump bottle, and a green jar, along with some green leaves. In the center, there is a white box containing the ISCTE Business School logo and the survey title. The text is as follows:

iscte
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

The impact of influence marketing on the consumption of beauty products

Welcome dear participant, and thank you for participating in this survey, which is part of a Master's Dissertation in International Management at ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa.

This survey seeks to explore the influence of social media personalities on the purchasing habits of Gen Z consumers when it comes to beauty products.

Your participation will help me understand how influencers shape brand preferences, product choices, and overall consumption patterns in the beauty market.

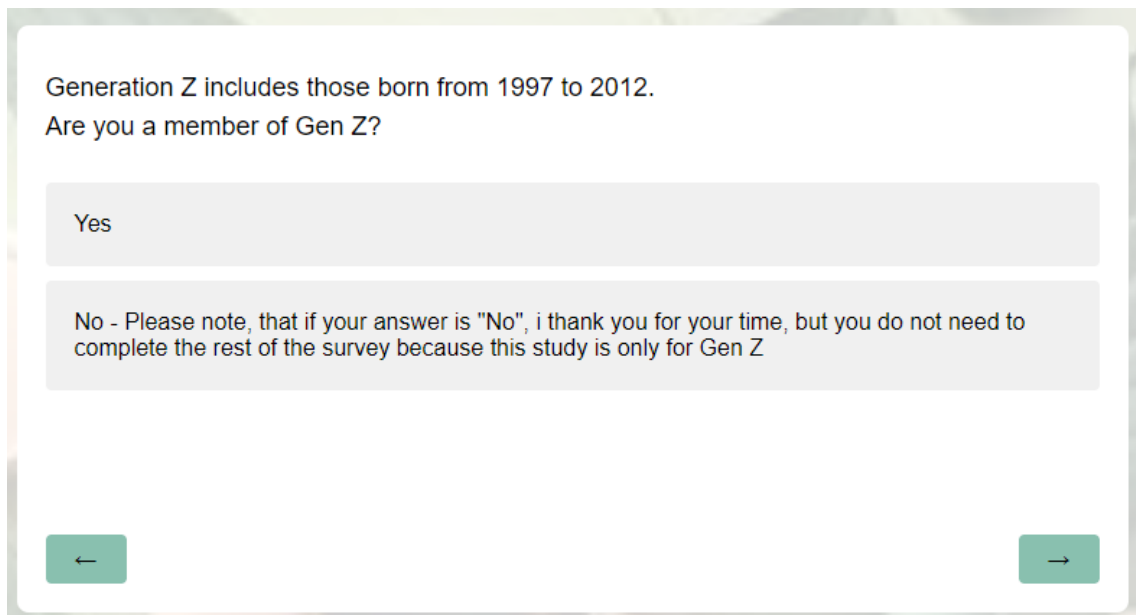
Your responses are completely anonymous and will only be used for academic research.

Your input is highly valuable to this study, and I greatly appreciate your time and contribution.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

For any questions or further clarification, please contact: rsgso@iscte-lul.pt

At the bottom right of the white box is a green button with a right arrow. At the bottom right of the entire screen is a small grey box that says "Powered by Qualtrics" with a logo.



The image shows the second screen of the survey. It has the same background as the first screen. The text on the screen is:

Generation Z includes those born from 1997 to 2012.
Are you a member of Gen Z?

Below the text, there are two light grey rectangular buttons. The first button contains the text "Yes". The second button contains the text "No - Please note, that if your answer is 'No', i thank you for your time, but you do not need to complete the rest of the survey because this study is only for Gen Z".

At the bottom left of the white box is a green button with a left arrow. At the bottom right of the white box is a green button with a right arrow.

Do you use any social media platforms?

Yes

No - Please note, that if your answer is "No", i thank you for your time, but you do not need to complete the rest of the survey because this study is only for Gen Z social media users



Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)

Instagram

Twitter

TikTok

Other

If you answer other in the previous question, please specify



How often do you use social media?

Rarely

A few times a week

Once a day

Multiple times a day

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Prefer not to say



How often do you purchase beauty products?

Weekly

Monthly

Every 2-3 months

Every 6 months

Once a year



I follow social media influencers to search information about beauty products

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

I follow social media influencers to see their experiences and tips with beauty products

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

I follow social media influencers to see their reviews about beauty products

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

I follow social media influencers to see their recommendations of beauty products

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

After you see a post on social media from an influencer, you click the 'like' button



Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

After you see a post on social media from an influencer, you comment on it



Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

After you see a post on social media from an influencer, you share it with or friends or family.

 Share

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree



When you think about an influencer you follow on social media from the beauty world

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you believe that influencer is an expert on the field?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you think that influencer is sufficiently experienced on the matter?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you consider that influencer to have a lot of knowledge about beauty products?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe that influencer is competent in making assertion about beauty products?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



The following questions are about mega beauty influencers, which are, personalities with over 1 million followers, and have a significant impact on their audience. For this survey, i have selected two of them to guide your responses.



Kylie Jenner



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you feel that Kylie Jenner is honest?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you consider that Kylie Jenner is trustworthy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you feel that Kylie Jenner is truthful?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



HUDA KATTAN (Also known as Huda Beauty)



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you feel that Huda Kattan is honest?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you consider that Huda Kattan is trustworthy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you feel that Huda Kattan is truthful?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



The following questions are about macro beauty influencers, which are, personalities with 100,000 to 1 million followers, and have a significant impact on their audience. For this survey, i have selected two of them to guide your responses.



BRETMAN ROCK



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you feel that Bretman Rock is honest?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you consider that Bretman Rock is trustworthy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you feel that Bretman Rock is truthful?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



TATI WESTBROOK



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you feel that Tati Westbrook is honest?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you consider that Tati Westbrook is trustworthy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you feel that Tati Westbrook is truthful?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Micro beauty influencers are personalities with 10,000 to 100,000 followers.

Do you feel that influencers with this numbers are trustful?

Yes

No

If you answer "yes" in the previous question, can you tell me a name for a micro influencer that comes to your mind?

Nano beauty influencers are personalities with 1,000 to 10,000 followers.

Do you feel that influencers with this numbers are trustful?

Yes

No

If you answer "yes" in the previous question, can you tell me a name for a nano-influencer that comes to your mind?

When you think about an influencer you follow on social media from the beauty world,

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you believe that influencer and you have a lot in common?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you think that influencer and you are a lot alike?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Can you identify and relay with that influencer?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



When you think about the value that a beauty product promoted by a influencer has,

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
That products are worth purchasing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All things considered (such as price, time, and effort) those products are a good buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compared with other products, purchasing beauty products recommended buy an influencer is good value for our money.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When you use those products, do you feel you are getting your money worth?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



When you use a product/products from a brand that an influencer promoted,

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you feel very positive when using that brand?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using that brand makes you happy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you feel good when using that brand?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you proud to use that brand?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Do you plan to purchase a beauty product promoted by an influencer?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

Do you intend to purchase a beauty product promoted by an influencer?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

Will you do your best to purchase a beauty product promoted by an influencer?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

The next time you buy a beauty product, you will prioritize the ones that are promoted by an influencer.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree

Would you recommend your family and friends to buy a product that you saw an influencer promote?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly Agree



When you use a beauty product/products from a brand that an influencer promoted

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Undecided

Agree

Strongly
Agree

It makes sense to you to use that product instead of any other product from another brand, even if they are the same?

☐☐☐☐☐

Even if another brand has the same features as that product, would you prefer to use that product (the one that was recommended)?

☐☐☐☐☐

If there is another brand as good as that one, would you prefer to use the one that was promoted?

☐☐☐☐☐

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

Annex B: Reliability and Validity Testing

Variable	Item	Mean	Loading	KMO, Bartlet	Total variance explained	Alpha de Cronbach
Brand Loyalty (BL)	BL1	3	0,904	KMO=0,75; Bartley test ($\chi^2=377,40^{***}$)	83,75%	0,903
	BL2	3	0,919			
	BL3	3	0,922			
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	3	0,868	KMO=0,81; Bartley test ($\chi^2=827,53^{***}$)	75,20%	0,917
	PI2	4	0,902			
	PI3	3	0,834			
	PI4	3	0,869			
	PI5	3	0,861			
Consumer Attitudes - Brand Affection (CA_BA)	CA_BA1	4	0,857	KMO=0,83; Bartley test ($\chi^2=527,91^{***}$)	70,02%	0,906
	CA_BA2	4	0,892			
	CA_BA3	4	0,881			
	CA_BA4	3	0,903			
Consumer Attitudes - Perceived Value (CA_PV)	CA_PV1	3	0,834	KMO=0,83; Bartley test ($\chi^2=698,394^{***}$)	81,77%	0,924
	CA_PV2	3	0,951			
	CA_PV3	3	0,945			
	CA_PV4	3	0,883			
Credibility of the Influencer - Similarity (S)	S1	3	0,928	KMO=0,76; Bartley test ($\chi^2=463,84^{***}$)	86,00%	0,918
	S2	3	0,919			
	S3	3	0,935			
Credibility of the Influencer - Trust (T)	T_TW1	3	0,953	KMO=0,76; Bartley test ($\chi^2=894,29^{***}$)	93,98%	0,968
	T_TW2	3	0,976			
	T_TW3	3	0,979			
	T_BR1	3	0,970	KMO=0,77; Bartley test ($\chi^2=987,33^{***}$)	95,53%	0,976
	T_BR2	3	0,983			
	T_BR3	3	0,979			
	T_HK1	3	0,969	KMO=0,78; Bartley test ($\chi^2=941,02^{***}$)	95,01%	0,974
	T_HK2	3	0,980			
	T_HK3	3	0,976			
	T_KJ1	3	0,942	KMO=0,77; Bartley test ($\chi^2=676,21^{***}$)	90,57%	0,947
	T_KJ2	3	0,955			
	T_KJ3	3	0,959			
Credibility of the Influencer - Expertise (E)	E1	3	0,873	KMO=0,85; Bartley test ($\chi^2=637,71^{***}$)	79,18%	0,912
	E2	3	0,903			
	E3	3	0,900			
	E4	3	0,884			
Engagement with Influencer - Interaction with posts (IP)	IP1	4	0,798	KMO=0,67; Bartley test ($\chi^2=126,00^{***}$)	62,27%	0,694
	IP2	2	0,808			
	IP3	3	0,760			
Engagement with Influencer - Interaction with social media (ISM)	ISM1	4	0,928	KMO=0,85; Bartley test ($\chi^2=1058,85^{***}$)	87,62%	0,953
	ISM2	4	0,943			
	ISM3	4	0,934			
	ISM4	4	0,940			

Annex C: Mean scores for each construct

	Mean	Standard Deviation
BL	2,98	1,07
PI	2,99	1,05
BA	3,45	0,89
PV	3,23	0,92
S	3,03	1,08
TTW	3,04	0,90
TBR	3,12	0,89
THK	3,25	0,96
TKJ	2,88	1,07
E	3,16	0,99
IP	2,71	0,94
ISM	3,31	1,24
TMI	3,07	0,89
TLI	3,08	0,82