

# The Power of Influencer Authenticity in Setting Expectations Before Product Use. An experimental study in the beauty sector

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates whether (and how) perceived influencer authenticity affects consumers' ex-ante expectations in the beauty domain, focusing on the constructs of anticipated satisfaction and expected hedonic adaptation, and whether this influence may vary depending on the product type being endorsed by such influencers.

A randomized 2x2 scenario-based survey (on a sample of 233 Italian people, ages 18 to 35 and using TikTok or Instagram, actively) manipulated influencer authenticity (high vs. low) and product type (short-term vs. long-term effect products). Analyses included reliability checks, independent-samples t-tests, two-way ANOVA, PCA, a PROCESS (Model 4) mediation test and a linear regression model.

Findings show that higher perceived authenticity significantly increases anticipated satisfaction; authenticity also lowers expected hedonic adaptation; and product type does not moderate these effects (authenticity acts as a general heuristic across product categories). Results of the mediation analysis indicate a full indirect path from authenticity to willingness to pay through anticipated satisfaction, suggesting that authenticity translates to economic value as well. The study concludes that, overall, authenticity shapes both the intensity and perceived durability of expected satisfaction. Some psychographic heterogeneity among consumers emerged too.

Managerially, brands and creators should treat authenticity as a non-negotiable criterion, use transparent and coherent storytelling and tailor campaigns and contents to audience psychology. Limitations (scenario design, self-reported measure, geographical selection of the sample) motivate further cross-cultural field studies.

**Title:** The Power of Influencer Authenticity in Setting Expectations Before Product Use. An experimental study in the beauty sector

**Keywords:** influencer authenticity, anticipated satisfaction, hedonic adaptation, beauty sector, influencers, willingness to pay, mediation, scenario experiment, psychographics.

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## **RESUMO**

Esta tese investiga se a autenticidade percebida dos influenciadores afeta as expectativas ex ante dos consumidores no setor da beleza, com foco na satisfação antecipada e na adaptação hedônica esperada, e se essa influência varia conforme o tipo de produto promovido.

Foi conduzido um inquérito experimental 2×2, baseado em cenários e aleatorizado, com 233 participantes italianos (18–35 anos), utilizadores ativos de TikTok ou Instagram. A manipulação envolveu a autenticidade do influenciador (alta vs. baixa) e o tipo de produto (efeito de curto vs. longo prazo). As análises incluíram verificações de fiabilidade, testes t, ANOVA bifatorial, análise de componentes principais, mediação PROCESS (Modelo 4) e regressão linear.

Os resultados indicam que maior autenticidade percebida aumenta significativamente a satisfação antecipada e reduz a adaptação hedônica esperada. O tipo de produto não exerce efeito moderador, sugerindo que a autenticidade funciona como uma heurística transversal entre categorias. A mediação revela um efeito indireto total da autenticidade sobre a disposição a pagar via satisfação antecipada, evidenciando que autenticidade também gera valor económico. Além disso, surgiram diferenças psicográficas entre consumidores quanto à sensibilidade à autenticidade.

Do ponto de vista de gestão, marcas e criadores devem considerar a autenticidade como critério central, utilizando storytelling transparente e coerente e ajustando conteúdos à psicologia do público.

As principais limitações relacionam-se ao uso de cenários, medidas de auto-relato e restrição geográfica da amostra. Estudos futuros devem explorar metodologias de campo e contextos culturais diversos.

**Título:** O Poder da Autenticidade dos Influenciadores na Definição de Expectativas Antes do Uso do Produto. Um estudo experimental no setor da Beleza

**Palavras-chave:** autenticidade dos influenciadores, satisfação antecipada, adaptação hedônica, setor da beleza, influenciadores, disposição a pagar, mediação, experiência baseada em cenários, psicográficos.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has become the main “place” where consumers find, assess, and choose beauty products. In this context, social media influencers (SMIs) frequently serve as intermediaries between brands and audiences online. However, the effectiveness of influencer endorsements seems to rely on an important concept: the one of perceived authenticity. While prior research has linked authenticity to credibility and purchase intention, much less is known about how authenticity shapes consumers’ emotional expectations before use (specifically, the satisfaction they anticipate and how long they believe that satisfaction will last).

This thesis investigates the role of influencer authenticity in the beauty domain, focusing on two interrelated psychological outcomes: anticipated satisfaction and expected hedonic adaptation. Beauty is a fascinating context: products are related to individual identity, and consumers regularly rely on vicarious experiences to predict how they will feel. At the same time, beauty products differ temporally in what they promise: some deliver immediate, visible effects (e.g., make-up), while others claim progressive, longer-term benefits (e.g., skincare). These features make beauty an ideal setting to study how authenticity informs both the intensity and the expected durability of consumer satisfaction.

The research is guided by three hypotheses: (H1) higher perceived influencer authenticity increases anticipated satisfaction; (H2) this effect is stronger for long-term than for short-term products; and (H3) higher perceived authenticity reduces expected hedonic adaptation, meaning consumers believe satisfaction will fade more slowly. To test these hypotheses, a scenario-based survey experiment with a 2×2 design was conducted, manipulating influencer authenticity (high vs. low) and product type (short-term vs. long-term effects). Respondents evaluated anticipated satisfaction and expected adaptation immediately after exposure, allowing clean identification of how source cues and product temporalities shape affective forecasts.

This study contributes in three ways. First, the focus is on ex-ante expectations rather than outcomes post-use, positioning anticipated satisfaction at the center of how authenticity works. Second, it brings time into the picture by looking at how long people think that feeling will last (expected hedonic adaptation) rather than only whether they expect to feel good at all. Third, by comparing different product types, it clarifies whether authenticity functions as a general heuristic

or interacts with product temporality. Beyond academic implications, the results and findings of the study have been translated into some practical implications for both brands and creators.

# **CHAPTER 1: INFLUENCER AUTHENTICITY AND CONSUMER REACTIONS IN BEAUTY**

## **1.1 INFLUENCER AUTHENTICITY AND CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS**

### **1.1.1 Conceptualizing Influencer Authenticity**

The concept of influencer authenticity refers to the perceived trustworthiness and sincerity of content creators. It is derived from the sociological idea of being “true to oneself”: in the instance of influencers, this means creating and sharing content as driven by internal passion rather than purely commercial motives (Jha et al., 2025). In marketing terms, authentic content is expected to be “unbiased, original, and trustable” (Moulard et al., 2025). Practically, for followers, this aligns with their view of influencers who share honest opinions and genuine experiences. Researchers note that authenticity involves intrinsically motivated behaviors (Audrezet et al., 2020); therefore, influencers who produce and publish content for enjoyment (rather than just for profit or gains) are seen as authentic. As Audrezet et al. (2020) observe, authenticity in social media is a matter of what is true, genuine, or real. In short, consumers perceive an influencer as authentic when they appear genuine, passionate, and driven by personal interest rather than other incentives, such as money.

### **1.1.2 Key Dimensions of Authenticity**

Studies have identified different aspects of influencer authenticity. Passionate authenticity refers to content driven by intrinsic motivation and passion. Influencers who express passionate authenticity will only accept partnerships that align with their personal identity and creativity, creating intrinsically satisfying content that resonates with their true selves (Audrezet et al., 2020; Jha et al., 2025). Transparent authenticity, on the other hand, emphasizes honesty when it comes to commercial relationships. This includes providing information based on fact, clearly disclosing sponsorships, and publishing unedited content (Audrezet et al., 2020). Transparent strategies are utilized when influencers truthfully and fully disclose their brand partnerships or when influencers provide their personal opinions when asked to share. These kinds of strategies are fundamental as they allow influencers to maintain moral integrity. Together, these two dimensions act as the pillars under which influencers manage their authenticity, both on a personal level and in terms of ethical transparency.

Beyond this influencer-specific framework, there are other broader theories of authenticity from consumer research that provide additional conceptual layers. Grayson and Martinec (2004) proposed a seminal typology that distinguishes between indexical and iconic authenticity. Indexical authenticity is based on evidence that something is the “real thing”, it points to a direct, verifiable connection with reality; in the case of influencers, this might involve showing actual product usage, daily routines, or long-term commitment to certain brands. Iconic authenticity is instead based on symbolic resemblance, it refers to something that looks or feels authentic, even without direct proof; for influencers, this could involve visually or stylistically matching audience expectations for authenticity, even if the endorsement is paid. This dual lens helps explain why some followers may value personal storytelling (indexical) while others respond to symbolic cues like aesthetic coherence or lifestyle alignment (iconic).

In addition to these typologies, Napoli et al. (2014) outline four dimensions of brand authenticity that are highly transferable to personal brands (such as, in fact, influencers): continuity (being consistent over time), credibility (delivering honest and believable content), integrity (adhering to personal and brand values), and symbolism (offering emotional or cultural meaning beyond functional value). These traits reinforce both passionate and transparent authenticity, especially in long-term influencer-brand collaborations.

Finally, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) state that authenticity emerges when consumers perceive originality, commitment to values, high quality, honesty in storytelling, and passion. In followers’ perceptions, these elements closely correspond to how they evaluate the credibility and emotional resonance of influencers. This becomes even more significant in the beauty and lifestyle contexts, where self-expression and subjective judgment are central.

Taken together, these frameworks show that influencer authenticity is not at all a monolithic construct. Rather, it encompasses multiple dimensions: motivational (passion), ethical (transparency), evidential (indexical), symbolic (iconic), and value-based (integrity, continuity). Recognizing these layers is essential to understanding how and why consumers respond to influencers and their product endorsements, particularly in domains where personal relevance and emotional appeal are central to the consumption experience.

### 1.1.3 Authenticity, Trust, and Consumer Attitudes

Perceived authenticity plays an important role in defining how consumers view, trust and consequently respond to influencers. Research consistently shows that authentic influencers generate greater trust and credibility. For instance, consumers place a premium on authenticity in influencer-brand partnerships, with authenticity serving as a key driver of trust and credibility (AlFarraj et al., 2021). On the contrary, when influencers do not appear genuine (e.g., by concealing sponsorships), consumer trust diminishes. Authenticity also creates stronger emotional connections: genuine content fosters parasocial bonds, leading followers to see the influencer as more honest, and stimulating a sense of familiarity and intimacy, as if followers personally knew influencers (Moulard et al., 2025; Jha et al., 2025). This, in turn, creates higher trust in both the influencer and the endorsed brand (Jha et al., 2025). In sum, authenticity builds trust in the influencer and leads to more favorable brand evaluations.

The key effects of influencer authenticity on consumer perceptions include enhanced trust and credibility, stronger emotional engagement, and more persuasive impact. Collectively, these effects ultimately raise the likelihood of positive attitudes and behaviors toward the endorsed product.

### 1.1.4 Empirical Evidence: Credibility, Satisfaction, Purchase Intent

Empirical research supports and confirms the positive effects of perceived authenticity on a range of consumer outcomes, particularly source credibility, emotional engagement, and purchase intentions. First, authenticity enhances perceived credibility. Liu and Zheng (2024) find that followers are more likely to perceive both the influencer and the endorsed brand as credible when the influencer is seen as authentic. This is largely due to the formation of parasocial relationships (which are stronger when influencers seem intrinsically motivated): the sense of familiarity and intimacy followers feel with influencers. These relationships also serve as a bridge between influencer and brand: consumers transfer trust in the influencer to the product being endorsed.

Second, authentic content increases emotional engagement with both the message and the messenger. Lou and Yuan (2019) show that perceived authenticity and credibility in influencer communication reduce consumers' perception of persuasive intent, enhancing emotional engagement and trust. When followers feel aligned with the influencer's values, they become more open, less skeptical, and more responsive to the promoted product. Finally, authenticity positively influences behavioral intent. Studies consistently report that consumers are more likely to consider

purchasing a product when it is endorsed by someone they perceive as authentic. Audrezet et al. (2020) emphasize that when influencers are seen as honest and consistent, their recommendations carry more persuasive power. Followers tend to view these endorsements not as commercial messages, but as genuine advice from a trusted peer. This can result in higher purchase intentions and greater brand loyalty over time.

Together, these findings support the idea that authenticity is crucial to effective influencer marketing. It not only reinforces the influencer's role as a credible source but also enhances consumers' emotional investment in the content and increases their willingness to act on the endorsement.

#### 1.1.5 Authenticity in the Beauty and Skincare Context

In the beauty and skincare sector, authenticity is especially critical given the intimate and evaluative nature of the products. Consumers often look for credible, experience-based recommendations when evaluating beauty products that directly affect their appearance and self-image. Authenticity is thus a vital contributor to increasing the level of trust both in the influencer and the efficacy of the product being promoted. Audrezet et al. (2020) emphasize that authenticity is essential in beauty, fashion, and lifestyle content. Macheka et al. (2023) found that influencers' trustworthiness and credibility significantly affect young women's purchase intentions for beauty products. In practice, an authentic beauty endorsement may involve the influencer transparently demonstrating product usage and discussing results honestly. Conversely, breaches in authenticity (such as endorsing a product outside the influencer's usual content or failing to disclose sponsorship) can diminish the perceived value of the product and generate skepticism (Audrezet et al., 2020). Therefore, passionate and transparent authenticity are particularly effective in the beauty context, where there is a growing opportunity for followers to have confidence in influencers and to really believe the product will bring the desired effects.

### 1.2 ANTICIPATED SATISFACTION AND HEDONIC ADAPTATION

#### 1.2.1 Defining Anticipated Satisfaction

Anticipated satisfaction refers to the consumer's forecast of how much pleasure or fulfillment they expect to derive from a future consumption experience. Unlike actual satisfaction, which is measured after the product is used, anticipated satisfaction is forward-looking and serves as a key

input in decision-making processes (Bagozzi et al., 2014). This construct is grounded in the concept of affective forecasting: how individuals predict their emotional states in response to future events. In consumer contexts, anticipated satisfaction plays a crucial role: individuals choose products not just for their utility but for the pleasure they expect to derive from those products (Shiv & Huber, 2000). Indeed, the predictive role of anticipated satisfaction turns out to be particularly salient in the context of consumer choice. Bagozzi et al. (2014) argue that consumers are motivated by desires to experience certain emotional states, and anticipated satisfaction acts as a mediating variable between product attributes and purchase intentions. Shiv and Huber's (2000) experimental evidence supports this view: when consumers expect greater satisfaction from a hedonic option (for example, a chocolate cake), they are more likely to choose it (even over more functional alternatives). Their findings highlight the emotional component of consumer choices, especially when the anticipated outcome is pleasurable. Similarly, Wilson and Gilbert (2003) emphasize that consumers' predictions about how good something will feel are key to decision processes, even if these predictions are often flawed or wrong.

#### 1.2.2 The Accuracy of Affective Forecasts and the Impact Bias

Despite its importance, anticipated satisfaction is often subject to systematic bias. Several studies in psychology and consumer behavior have shown that people tend to overestimate the intensity and duration of their emotional responses to future events, a phenomenon known as the *impact bias* (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). This bias is driven by various mechanisms, such as focalism (overweighting the focal event relative to other life events) and immune neglect (failure to recognize the power of one's own psychological coping mechanisms). Morewedge, Gilbert, and Wilson (2007) further explain that affective forecasts are biased because people tend to rely on unrepresentative memories: people often recall atypically positive or negative past experiences, which distort their expectations for the future. This tendency to recall emotionally charged events inflates anticipated satisfaction or dissatisfaction, even when prior experiences suggest more moderate outcomes.

#### 1.2.4 Application to Beauty Product Consumption

In beauty-related decision-making, anticipated satisfaction is especially influential. Beauty products are deeply tied to symbolic and affective goals, such as presenting oneself in a way that improves self-esteem or simply makes one feel better emotionally. Consumers do not merely assess

objective attributes like price or ingredients; they also consider how the product will make them feel: whether consuming a specific product implies an increase in confidence, attractiveness or empowerment. Research in hedonic adaptation and anticipated emotions (e.g., Loewenstein & Schkade, 1999) suggests that consumers tend to expect long-term satisfaction from emotionally meaningful purchases. However, this expectation may not match the actual trajectory of emotional responses over time. This discrepancy is particularly relevant in beauty, where users may expect continued satisfaction from a product that promises transformative or lasting results (e.g., anti-aging serum), even though hedonic responses often diminish after the initial use.

As such, anticipated satisfaction may act as a key mechanism through which perceived influencer authenticity shapes consumer behavior. When consumers trust an influencer and believe in their sincerity, their forecasted enjoyment or benefit from using the recommended beauty product increases. This mechanism may also feed into beliefs about the durability of satisfaction: a consumer might assume that if an authentic influencer truly enjoys and continues to use a product, they themselves will derive not just initial excitement but longer-lasting emotional benefit.

### 1.3 INTERACTION BETWEEN AUTHENTICITY, SATISFACTION AND TIME

The relationship between influencer authenticity, anticipated satisfaction, and temporal expectations represents a critical yet underexplored dimension in consumer behavior research. This section synthesizes theories of affective forecasting and hedonic adaptation with emerging work on influencer marketing to develop a framework for understanding how authenticity shapes both immediate and long-term satisfaction expectations, particularly within the beauty sector. These interactions illuminate why consumers might expect satisfaction to endure longer when products are endorsed by authentic influencers, especially for certain product types.

#### 1.3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Temporal Satisfaction

As discussed in earlier sections, consumer satisfaction is shaped not only by actual experiences but also by expectations (expectations that are often distorted by psychological biases). Research on affective forecasting highlights two types of distortions, as previously mentioned too: impact bias, the tendency to overestimate future emotional intensity and duration, and immune neglect, the failure to anticipate one's own coping mechanisms (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). These biases are particularly relevant in the beauty domain, where emotional expectations play a central role in product evaluations.

Building on this, the theory of hedonic adaptation (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999) shows that even when a product initially fulfills expectations, its emotional impact typically fades with repeated use. However, adaptation is not inevitable. For example, Nelson et al. (2009) found that consumption variety or interruptions can delay adaptation and prolong perceived enjoyment. This suggests that factors external to the product (such as social context or endorsement characteristics) could influence how consumers mentally project satisfaction over time.

What remains largely unexplored in this literature is the role of influencer authenticity in shaping temporal satisfaction expectations. Could the credibility and sincerity of an influencer serve as a psychological cue that disrupts adaptation or strengthens anticipated longevity of pleasure? This research aims to fill this gap by investigating how authenticity interacts with product type (short-term vs. long-term effects) to influence both anticipated satisfaction and expected hedonic adaptation.

### 1.3.2 Authenticity as a Moderator of Satisfaction Trajectories

Emerging evidence suggests that influencer authenticity may significantly alter consumers' expectations about satisfaction duration through several distinct mechanisms. Authentic influencers, characterized by their perceived genuineness and intrinsic motivation (Audrezet et al., 2020), communicate and convey greater trust in their product endorsements (Jha et al., 2021). This trust extends to temporal claims, making consumers more likely to believe that a product's benefits will persist over time (suggesting that perceived authenticity could reduce expectations of hedonic adaptation).

Galak et al.'s (2012) work on "slow hedonic adaptation" provides a theoretical foundation for this effect. Their findings demonstrate that certain consumption patterns and narratives can delay satiation by maintaining psychological engagement. When applied to influencer marketing, authentic storytelling and consistent, passion-driven content may serve this same function: creating an expectation of prolonged satisfaction. This is particularly relevant for self-expressive products like beauty items, where Atakan et al. (2014) showed that identity-relevant purchases resist adaptation more effectively than utilitarian ones. Together, these findings suggest that authentic influencer content may uniquely contribute to anticipated satisfaction.

The emotional engagement fostered by authentic influencers further reinforces this effect. As Chugani et al. (2015) established in their study of romantic satisfaction, experiences framed as

meaningful and identity-relevant are perceived as more durable in their emotional impact. Translated to the beauty context, when consumers perceive an influencer is truly interested in a product's transformational possibility, they are more likely to anticipate long-term gratification, supporting the hypothesis about authenticity's effect on temporal expectations.

### 1.3.3 Product-Type Differences: Immediate vs. Long-Term Results

The interaction between authenticity and temporal expectations becomes particularly nuanced when examining different product categories within the beauty sector. For products promising immediate results (e.g., makeup, temporary face or hair treatments), the effect of authenticity on anticipated satisfaction duration appears constrained by the product's inherent temporality. Richins' (2013) work on material possessions versus experiences helps explain this condition: while authentic endorsements may enhance initial anticipated satisfaction, the short-lived nature of these products' effects limits their long-term emotional impact.

Conversely, for products marketed as delivering long-term benefits (e.g., anti-aging skincare), authenticity plays a more substantial role in shaping temporal expectations. Chugani et al.'s (2015) distinction between "durable" and "experiential" purchases suggests that when influencers authentically endorse products with gradual effects (especially through personal "journeys") they effectively frame the product as a durable investment in self-improvement. This framing significantly enhances consumers' beliefs in lasting value (Audrezet et al., 2020).

The beauty industry's unique characteristics amplify these effects. Unlike many consumer goods, beauty products are intimately tied to personal identity and self-perception (Atakan et al., 2014). When authentic influencers (already perceived as trustworthy and relatable (Jha et al., 2021)) endorse products that promise lasting changes to appearance or self-confidence, they tap into powerful self-transformational narratives that naturally extend consumers' anticipated satisfaction timelines. This explains why the authenticity effect should be particularly strong for long-term beauty products compared to their short-term counterparts.

### 1.3.4 Hedonic Adaptation in Beauty: The Role of Authenticity

The beauty industry provides unique opportunities to explore how authenticity affects adaptation expectations. Patrick et al.'s (2007) research shows that high-involvement products like beauty items are especially prone to overestimating how long satisfaction will last. However, authentic

influencer endorsements may reduce this through what Nelson et al. (2009) describe as disruptions of the adaptation process. In practice, authentic beauty influencers employ strategies that likely affect adaptation expectations:

- Narrative continuity: ongoing product use documentation creates expectations of cumulative benefits (Galak et al., 2012)
- Transformational framing: positioning products as life-changing taps into identity-relevant consumption (Atakan et al., 2014)
- Community building: continued conversation about a product keeps it salient and top-of-mind

As a whole, these strategies suggest that authentic influencers may create a "buffer" against expected adaptation, particularly in beauty, where transformation narratives have a uniquely powerful psychological weight (Richins, 2013).

#### 1.4 RESEARCH GAP AND CONTRIBUTIONS

If it is true that prior studies have focused on the connection between influencer authenticity and consumer trust, credibility and purchase intentions, less is known about its role in shaping anticipated satisfaction, especially in relation to product-specific temporal expectations. Most research in influencer marketing treats satisfaction as an immediate outcome, without considering how authenticity might influence consumers' expectations about how long this satisfaction will endure. At the same time, theories of affective forecasting and hedonic adaptation explain why consumers may often miscalculate future emotional experiences but they rarely consider external cues, such as authenticity of SMIs, and how these cues can mitigate expectations. This gap is particularly relevant for the beauty sector, where products vary in the timing of their promised effect: some of them offer instant visual results (makeup), while other promise a gradual transformation (anti-aging skincare). This thesis addresses these gaps by investigating:

1. Whether perceived influencer authenticity enhances anticipated satisfaction;
2. Whether this effect is stronger for products with long-term outcome;
3. Whether authenticity also reduces hedonic adaptation.

In doing so, this study is trying to contribute with new insights into the intersection of influencer marketing and temporal consumer psychology, positioning authenticity as a key variable not only

in terms of consumers' choice but also in terms of their future product experiences (anticipated satisfaction and hedonic adaptation).

## **CHAPTER 2: DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

### **2.1 Introduction to the research hypotheses**

This chapter introduces the hypotheses that guide the study, linking the theoretical framework developed so far to the empirical investigation. The question central to this research is whether the perceived authenticity of a social media influencer can shape consumers' emotional expectations of a beauty product, both in terms of the initial satisfaction they anticipate and how long they believe the satisfaction will last (we are dealing with anticipated satisfaction and not actual satisfaction as this study imagines a specific situation and consumers' potential reaction). Moreover, a second key dimension is whether these effects depend on the type of product (items with immediate visible results versus those promising gradual benefits over time).

Previous research highlights authenticity as one of the most powerful drivers of influencer effectiveness (Audrezet et al., 2020; Jha et al., 2025; Lee & Eastin, 2021). At the same time, studies on consumer affective forecasting show that anticipated satisfaction is a core mechanism in purchase decisions, especially in hedonic categories (Shiv & Huber, 2000; Wang et al., 2009). Work on hedonic adaptation further suggests that expectations are not just about how good a product will feel initially, but also whether that feeling will fade or continue over time (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999; Yu et al., 2016).

Given these premises, the hypotheses developed test the link between perceived influencer authenticity and anticipated satisfaction, examine how product type moderates this effect and explore whether authenticity can influence expectations of hedonic adaptation.

### **2.2 Influencer authenticity and anticipated satisfaction**

The first hypothesis examines whether influencers perceived as more authentic can increase the anticipated satisfaction consumers associate with a beauty product. Authenticity in influencer marketing is closely tied to perceptions of transparency and intrinsic motivation: these strengthen trust and emotional connection (Audrezet et al., 2020; Jha et al., 2025; Lee & Eastin, 2021). When followers believe an influencer's recommendation reflect genuine experience rather than purely commercial purpose, they are more likely to view the product positively and expect it to deliver more enjoyment and value.

Research on source credibility consistently shows that trust and perceived authenticity enhance persuasive impact and shape expectations before consumption (AlFarraj et al., 2021; Duffek et al., 2025). In beauty, where products are inherently hedonic and closely tied to self-image, these effects are even stronger: recommendations perceived as authentic can create stronger emotional engagement and raise expectations of personal benefit (Ünalmiş et al., 2024; Macheka et al., 2024).

Based on this evidence, the first hypothesis proposes that higher perceived influencer authenticity will lead to higher anticipated satisfaction with the recommended beauty product:

*H1: Influencers perceived as more authentic will lead to higher anticipated satisfaction with beauty products*

### 2.3 Product type as a moderator

The second hypothesis explores whether the impact of perceived influencer authenticity on anticipated satisfaction changes depending on the type of beauty product that is endorsed. Beauty products vary significantly in how and when their effects are experienced: some, like makeup, deliver immediate results, while others, such as skincare products, promise gradual results over time. This distinction is not purely related to the functional nature of products, but it is also psychological, as it influences how consumers form expectations.

Research on consumer identity and product evaluation suggests that products promising long-term transformation often carry greater emotional weight and are more closely tied to self-perception (Atakan et al., 2014; Richins, 2013). When such products are endorsed by influencers perceived as highly authentic, consumers are likely to trust the recommendation more and to project higher levels of anticipated satisfaction, even before seeing tangible results. On the other hand, for short-term products, outcomes are more immediate and verifiable, so consumers themselves can evaluate products and rely on their own trial. In this sense, they may carry less emotional impact. Authenticity still has a role but it may be that its incremental value over direct experience is smaller. This may limit the extent to which authenticity amplifies satisfaction expectations.

Building on this, the second hypothesis proposes that the effect of influencer authenticity will be stronger for long-term effect beauty products than for those with immediate results:

*H2: The effect of influencer authenticity on anticipated satisfaction will be stronger for long-term effect beauty products than for short-term effect beauty products*

## 2.4 Authenticity and expected hedonic adaptation

The third hypothesis focuses on hedonic adaptation: the idea that the emotional satisfaction derived from a product tends to fade away as time goes by. This psychological mechanism is well-documented: after an initial boost in enjoyment, consumers gradually return to a baseline level of satisfaction, especially with repeated use (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999; Wilson & Gilbert, 2009). However, recent studies suggest that certain factors can slow down this process, such as personal involvement, emotional salience, or the way a product is introduced and contextualized (Chugani & Irwin, 2020; Yu et al., 2016).

In the context of influencer marketing, perceived authenticity may play a similar role. When consumers believe the influencer genuinely uses and values the product, this can shape not only their initial expectations, but also their belief that satisfaction will last longer. Authentic recommendations may activate stronger emotional narratives or personal relevance, which can reduce the anticipated speed of hedonic decline (Morewedge et al., 2005; Shiv & Huber, 2000).

For this reason, the third hypothesis suggests that higher perceived authenticity will reduce the expected rate of hedonic adaptation:

*H3: Higher perceived authenticity will reduce expected hedonic adaptation, meaning consumers will believe satisfaction will last longer*

## 2.5 From hypotheses to experimental design

Together, these hypotheses lay the foundation for the experimental design developed in the next chapter. By examining how perceived influencer authenticity affects both anticipated satisfaction and hedonic adaptation (and how this relationship is shaped by the type of product endorsed), this research aims to discover deeper psychological mechanisms behind influencer effectiveness in the beauty domain. The following chapters detail how these hypotheses were tested through a survey experiment and what insights emerged from the analysis.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the study used to test the hypotheses introduced in the previous section. The study was designed as a scenario-based survey experiment aimed at investigating how perceived influencer authenticity affects anticipated satisfaction and expected hedonic adaptation in the beauty sector.

The chapter describes the research approach, the definition of the target population, the questionnaire structure and the experimental procedures employed. It also explains the rationale behind the choice of method and the steps taken to ensure data reliability and validity.

### **3.2 Research design**

The theoretical constructs of perceived authenticity, anticipated satisfaction, and hedonic adaptation, widely discussed in consumer behavior and influencer marketing literature, can find concrete application in this questionnaire. For the specific purpose of this research, no further qualitative research was conducted, but the survey was based on the prior academic research on these topics.

The experiment adopts a randomized scenario-based structure with four conditions (A/B/C/D testing), combining two levels of influencer authenticity (high vs. low) and two product types (immediate vs. long-term effect). It is a 2x2 (2 authenticity x 2 product type) between-subjects factorial design.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four scenarios, ensuring experimental control and minimizing bias. This structure allows the isolation of both main and interaction effects between influencer characteristics and product attributes on the dependent variables. Using scenario-based vignettes provides a realistic context that reflects typical online interactions with beauty influencers while maintaining internal validity through controlled manipulations.

The main objective is to test whether the perceived authenticity of a social media influencer can affect consumers' emotional expectations and perceived longevity of satisfaction, particularly in relation to different types of beauty products.

### 3.3 Target population and sampling

To ensure the relevance and validity of the findings, it was essential to clearly define the target population for my study. The selected target reflects the group which is most likely to provide meaningful insights for the research questions and to capture how influencer marketing operates in the beauty sector. Indeed, the focus is on young adults (both men and women) aged between 18 and 35 years old, who are active users of Instagram or TikTok (necessary requisite to complete the questionnaire as these are the platforms where most influencer contents are published and displayed). The lower age of 18 was chosen to comply with ethical and data protection standards, while the upper limit reflects the segment most engaged with beauty and skincare content online.

Recent market research underlines the influence of social media creators on beauty consumption in Italy, especially among younger audiences. A survey conducted by BVA Doxa for Mondadori Media estimates that approximately 28 million Italians (about 76% of the population aged 16 to 65) follow at least one influencer, and 46% have purchased a product recommended by a creator at least once (BVA Doxa, 2024). Data from Cosmetica Italia, the national cosmetics industry association, confirms the growing weight of digital channels and influencer marketing in shaping beauty purchases, highlighting how online recommendations increasingly drive consumer choices (Cosmetica Italia, 2024). Complementary industry reports further indicate that the beauty sector accounts for roughly 25% of influencer marketing investments in Italy, with a clear trend towards greater transparency and authenticity in brand–creator collaborations (Factory Communication, 2024; Koniqa, 2024). Additional findings suggest that over 40% of Italian Gen Z consumers have bought a beauty product following the advice of an influencer or expert, reinforcing the direct impact of digital creators on this demographic (BVA Doxa, 2024; Kolsquare, 2024). Together, these data points support focusing on Millennials and Gen Z as the key segment for investigating the relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer expectations in the beauty domain.

To ensure representativeness and proper weighting of the sample, the size of the Italian population within the age range 18-35 was quantified using the most recent data from ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica), as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Table 1 reports the population breakdown, taking into consideration both female and male genders and dividing the target into three age cohorts for a clearer vision and understanding (18-23, 24-29, 30-35).

	Age Cohorts			
Gender	18-23	24-29	30-35	TOTAL
Female	1.698.035	1.734.378	1.875.518	5.307.931
Male	1.856.397	1.929.245	1.987.293	5.772.935
Total	3.554.432	3.663.623	3.862.811	11.080.866

Table 1– Italian population by age cohort and gender. Source: ISTAT January 1st, 2025

Based on such quantification, the following percentages were computed to represent the proportion of each age group within the target population. Table 2 shows the relative weight of each cohort as a percentage of the total target population.

	Age Cohorts			
Gender	18-23	24-29	30-35	TOTAL
Female	15.32%	15.65%	16.93%	47.90%
Male	16.75%	17.41%	17.93%	52.10%
Total	32.08%	33.06%	34.86%	100%

Table 2- Stratification scheme constructed based on Italian population by age cohort and gender. Source: ISTAT January 1st, 2025

### 3.4 Questionnaire setup

The questionnaire was designed to translate the experimental framework into a structured survey instrument and to capture all relevant constructs for the analysis. It was implemented on the QualtricsXM platform and organized into multiple named sections so to ensure a logical flow and a clear separation between the experimental manipulation, the main questions and the background information questions.

The following table (Table 3) summarizes all the questions asked to participants, together with the content of each question/block of questions and the type.

Question number	Content	Type of question
Q0	Introduction to the survey	Text
Q1-Q2	Preliminary target questions (yes/no)	Single choice
Scenarios	Scenario exposure: respondents randomly saw only one of four scenarios combining influencer authenticity (high vs low) and product type (immediate vs long-term)	Descriptive text (randomized block)
Q3-Q5	Manipulation check: to verify which scenario respondents were exposed to	Single choice

Question number	Content	Type of question
Q6-Q7	Dependent variables: items measuring anticipated satisfaction and hedonic adaptation	Matrix scale (Likert 1-10)
Q8-Q17	Spending: questions to measure WTP and buying preferences and reasons	Open numeric entry Single choice Multiple choice
Q18-Q22	Habits: questions to understand frequency of purchase in the last 3-6 months and to test the impact of influencer opinions on beauty choices	Single choice Likert scale (1-10)
Q23	Psychographics	Matrix scale (Likert 1-10)
Q24-Q29	Demographics	Open numeric entry Single choice

Table 3– Summary of the questionnaire

Now each specific section will be explored and explained in further detail ([cf. Appendix p.43](#)).

The survey begins with an introductory text (Q0) explaining the purpose of the study and ensuring informed consent. Two preliminary questions (Q1 and Q2) follow, used to verify that respondents met both criteria needed to be an eligible participant to the study:

- Being an Italian aged between 18 and 35 years old
- Being an active user of TikTok or Instagram (the two social platforms most relevant for influencer marketing in the beauty sector)

Following, there is the experimental block, where participants were exposed to one of four different scenarios. Each vignette combined two variables central to the research: the perceived authenticity of the influencer (high vs low) and the type of product endorsed (immediate vs long-term effect). The scenarios were written to resemble a realistic situation where a certain type of social media influencer recommends a product to followers.

To avoid bias and ensure comparability across conditions, the assignment of scenarios was fully randomized by the QualtricsXM platform. Each respondent viewed only one version. The choice to use short vignettes was due to their potential to evoke a plausible social media interaction while maintaining experimental control over the key variables.

This structure creates a 2×2 framework with four distinct experimental conditions, allowing the study to examine both the individual and combined effects of influencer authenticity and product

type on participants' anticipated satisfaction and their expectations about how long that satisfaction might last.

Immediately after viewing the scenario, participants were presented with a short set of questions (from Q3 to Q5) with the purpose of verifying the experimental manipulations were correctly perceived. This section consisted of three simple questions referring to specific details mentioned in the scenario:

- whether Giulia (the influencer of the scenario) always declares her sponsorships (yes/no)
- whether the product recommended was a mascara or not (yes/no)
- the extent to which she interacts with her followers (rarely/often)

Because these questions referred to concrete elements of the text, they functioned as an attention and comprehension check rather than capturing subjective perceptions.

Following the manipulation check, participants were asked to respond to two questions (Q6-Q7) designed to measure the study's core dependent variables: anticipated satisfaction and expected hedonic adaptation. These questions were placed immediately after the scenario exposure to capture participants' spontaneous reactions before any potential memory decay or external influence.

Anticipated satisfaction was measured using three items asking participants to evaluate the level of satisfaction, happiness with their choice, and degree to which the product would meet their expectations if they were to use the item recommended in the scenario. Expected hedonic adaptation was captured with three items assessing whether participants believed the enjoyment from the product would diminish over time or, conversely, whether the satisfaction would remain stable after repeated use. All statements were rated on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 10 = strongly agree), which provided a wide range of responses and allowed for a more detailed measurement of individual differences.

These two measures translate the theoretical constructs identified in the literature into practical variables for testing the hypotheses. Anticipated satisfaction connects directly to affective forecasting in consumer behavior, while the hedonic adaptation item captures participants' expectations of durability, a critical element for understanding how influencer authenticity might shape perceptions of long-term product value.

The next block of the questionnaire focused on spending attitudes and willingness to pay for beauty products (Q8-Q17). Participants were first asked to indicate the maximum price they would be willing to spend for the product presented in the scenario, using an open-ended numeric field. Additional questions explored willingness to pay for the two different product types under analysis, to allow comparisons across typologies.

This section also included items on preferred purchase channels (e.g., supermarket, pharmacy, online, or beauty stores) and the reasons behind these preferences. Combining scenario-specific WTP with general spending attitudes may provide additional insights into how perceived influencer authenticity and product type may translate into actual purchase intentions.

The questionnaire also included a block of questions (Q18-Q22) aimed at understanding participants' purchasing habits and the role of influencers in shaping their behaviors. Respondents were asked to state how frequently they had bought beauty products in the last 3–6 months, both in general and specifically for short-term effect products and long-term effect products. This section also explored the degree to which influencer recommendations have an impact on purchase decisions, by asking both about the frequency of purchases made following influencer advice and the perceived importance of influencers' opinions when choosing beauty products. These questions provide a behavioral baseline for understanding not only actual purchasing patterns, but also the extent to which social media influence translates into concrete consumer choices.

The questionnaire also included a set of six items (Q23) designed to capture broader lifestyle traits and attitudes relevant to beauty consumption and online engagement. Participants were asked to rate statements related to how curious they think they are, the interest in discovering new products for personal care, the extent to which they follow beauty trends and their tendency to be influenced by people perceived as similar to themselves. Additional questions assessed the extent to which they follow beauty influencers and how easily they are engaged by emotional or personal online content.

All statements were measured using a 10-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true, 10 = completely true). These questions provided a psychographic profile of respondents, offering useful context for interpreting the main results and controlling for individual differences in attitudes and behavior.

Lastly, the questionnaire ended with a short demographic section (Q24-Q29) to gather basic background information. Participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, income bracket, education and region of residence.

Placing these questions at the end minimized potential bias in earlier responses and helped ensure a smooth flow throughout the survey. The demographic data were primarily used to describe the sample and to check alignment with the target population identified in the sampling plan.

### 3.5 Sample

The data collection process for this research relied on a multi-channel distribution strategy to ensure both reach and relevance within the target demographic. This means that the survey was distributed through personal and professional network. This included sharing the survey link via WhatsApp messages, Instagram stories and on LinkedIn. These social media are particularly aligned with the target population, especially with part of it: Generation Z.

To expand the outreach even further, the questionnaire was also shared through Prolific, an online research platform that helps researchers recruit participants for online research, setting also specific criteria (such as age ranges, nationality, spoken languages). Through Prolific, Italian participants in the 18-35 age range, using social media (Instagram/TikTok) were recruited.

In total, 339 responses were collected. However, some responses had to be excluded:

- 12 incomplete responses were removed;
- 24 potential bot responses (signaled by Qualtrics XM) were removed;
- 15 answers were removed as their total questionnaire completion time was below 120 seconds. This threshold was adopted to ensure quality data, under the assumption that respondents completing the survey in less than 120 seconds were likely to have proceeded too quickly to provide meaningful insights;
- 16 answers were excluded as participants failed the manipulation checks;
- 23 responses were excluded due to being straightliners, defined as respondents who selected the same answer across all items, indicating a lack of genuine engagement (Kahle, 1994).

Adopting a stratified sampling approach, which involves dividing the sample into subgroups based on relevant characteristics and adjusting their proportions accordingly (Kahle, 1994), it was clear there had been some oversampling and undersampling. Therefore, some answers had to be further eliminated to ensure representativeness of the sample with respect to the Italian population aged 18 to 35. After the elimination of additional 16 responses in various age groups and gender, the final number of valid responses was 233.

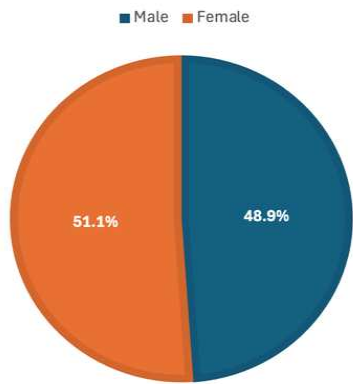


Figure 1- Gender split

An analysis of the initial dataset revealed a slight gender imbalance, with a higher proportion of female respondents (51.1% of female versus 48.9% of male). Such result was expected due to the topics treated in this research, which tend to be more closely aligned with female interests.

The details of the final sample distribution are as follows:

### Gender \* Age Groups Crosstabulation

		Age Groups			Total	
		18-23	24-29	30-35		
Gender	Male	Count	31	41	42	114
		% of Total	13.3%	17.6%	18.0%	48.9%
	Female	Count	38	42	39	119
		% of Total	16.3%	18.0%	16.7%	51.1%
Total		Count	69	83	81	233
		% of Total	29.6%	35.6%	34.8%	100.0%

Table 4- Contingency table Gender x Age Groups

The final gender distribution across the four scenarios was relatively even. Female participants accounted for approximately 51.9% in scenario A, 44.1% in scenario B, 52.6% in scenario C and 55.6% in scenario D. Male participants were the remaining 48.1%, 55.9%, 47.4% and 48.9%, respectively. Despite the minor variations across groups, the gender proportions were sufficiently balanced to support unbiased comparisons between conditions.

### Gender \* scenario Crosstabulation

		scenario				Total	
		A	B	C	D		
Gender	Male	Count	26	33	27	28	114
		% within scenario	48.1%	55.9%	47.4%	44.4%	48.9%
	Female	Count	28	26	30	35	119
		% within scenario	51.9%	44.1%	52.6%	55.6%	51.1%
Total		Count	54	59	57	63	233
		% within scenario	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5- Contingency table Gender x scenario

Most people in the sample are workers (56.7%), with a minor presence of students (36.9%) and a clear minority of unemployed (6.4%). Moreover, almost half of the sample (49.8%) declared earning <20000 €; the second most voted option was the income bracket 20000-50000 €, with 35.6% of respondents, while fewer people are earning more (11.6% of respondents voted 35000-50000 € while only 3% the option >50000 €).

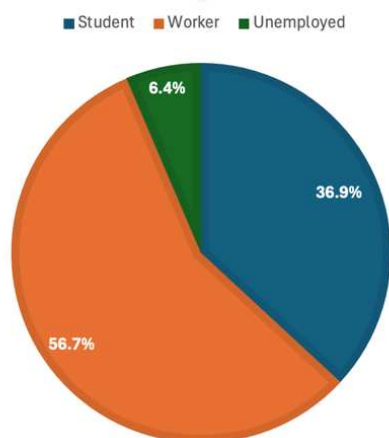


Figure 2- Occupation Split

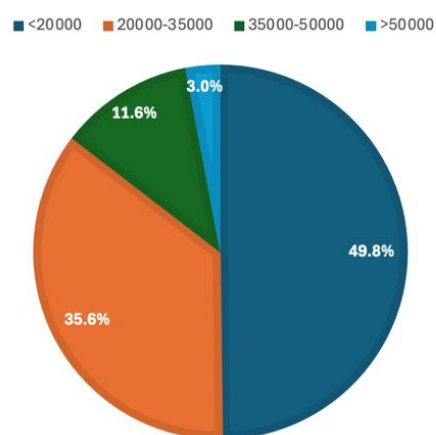


Figure 3- Income Distribution

Looking instead at the distribution per geographical area, respondents are almost evenly distributed if we consider aggregating the islands (Sicily and Sardinia) to the south of Italy. Indeed, the percentages would be: 37% from the north, 33% from the center and 30% from the south (south + islands).

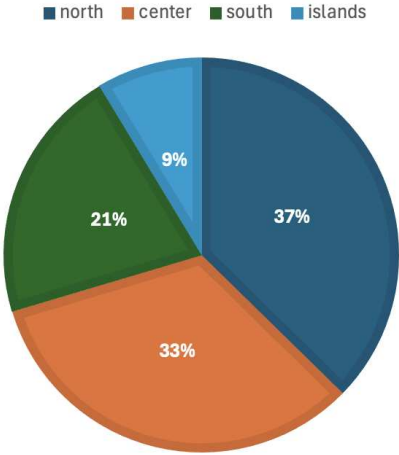


Figure 4- Regional Distribution

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Hypotheses testing was conducted using the SPSS statistical software. Depending on the nature of the variables and the research questions, different statistical techniques were applied. Preliminary analyses were used to contextualize the sample and explore first associations among variables, followed by t-tests and ANOVAs to assess mean differences across conditions. To further deepen the research, a mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS, an SPSS extension program created by Andrew F. Hayes. Lastly, a regression analysis was conducted to explore some more complex relationships among variables.

### 4.1 Preliminary analyses

Before testing the hypotheses, some analyses were conducted to provide an overview of the sample characteristics and explore the initial patterns among key variables. Such analyses offered insights into participants' preferences, behaviors, and psychological profiles, useful to give context and interpretation to the following hypotheses testing.

Regarding purchasing preferences, participants reported a clear preference for acquiring beauty and skincare products in specialized shops (61.8% for short-term products and 51.5% for long-term products), followed by online channels. Pharmacies and supermarkets were less common choices, indicating that respondents tend to prefer retail contexts offering either expert advice or a wide range of choices. However, worth noting that a higher percentage of respondents prefers to buy long-term effect products (such as skincare) in pharmacies, with respect to the % reported for the same channel for short-term effect products (17.2% versus 6%, respectively).

Regarding products' purchase after an influencer recommendation (in the last 3-6 months), more than half of the sample declared they have bought something based on a recommendation at least once. This suggests that influencer-driven purchases are a relevant component of current consumer behavior in this category, though not dominant.

Some other analyses also revealed interesting associations between the willingness to pay for the product presented in the scenario and other variables. Respondents exposed to high-authenticity influencer scenarios reported a significantly higher WTP (for the product presented in the scenario) compared to those in the low-authenticity condition (mean = 21.58 versus 15.02,  $p = .003$ ). This indicates that authenticity may play a role not only in shaping perceptions but also in influencing

the perceived economic value of a product. Willingness to pay also showed a positive correlation with the aggregated measure of anticipated satisfaction ( $r = 0.317, p < .001$ ), suggesting that participants expecting greater satisfaction were also willing to spend more money on the product (i.e., the willingness to pay for the product presented in the scenario). This relationship supports the idea that economy and emotional evaluations are intertwined in consumer decision-making.

Psychographic variables revealed additional meaningful patterns. All six questions related to lifestyle were correlated with anticipated satisfaction to various degrees, with the strongest associations emerging from following beauty trends ( $r = 0.280, p < .001$ ), tendency to discover new beauty products ( $r = 0.187, p = .004$ ) and susceptibility to influencer content ( $r = 0.226, p < .001$ ). In other words, people who are more curious about beauty, follow trends, and are more influenced by social media tend to anticipate more satisfaction from a product endorsed by an influencer. Willingness to pay also correlated significantly with some psychographic measures, most notably curiosity and tendency to discover new products, suggesting that exploratory and socially driven consumers may attribute more monetary value to endorsed products.

Finally, the importance given to influencer opinions was moderately correlated with the willingness to pay related to the scenario ( $r = 0.238, p < .001$ ). In other words, participants who considered influencer opinions to be more important when choosing beauty products tended to report higher willingness to pay for the scenario product.

#### 4.2 Hypothesis 1 Testing

To test H1, which examined whether different levels of perceived influencer authenticity affected anticipated satisfaction, it was first necessary to construct a composite measure of anticipated satisfaction. This variable was calculated from three 10-point Likert items designed to measure the satisfaction respondents expected to experience when using the product. Before computing the average score across items, internal consistency was assessed with a reliability analysis. Results indicated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.828$ . This confirmed the three items could be aggregated into a single mean score representing each participant's anticipated satisfaction.

## Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.828	3

Table 6- Reliability Statistics

The independent variable was the level of perceived authenticity, determined by the experimental scenario to which participants were assigned. Scenarios figuring high authenticity were named “high” while those figuring low authenticity were named “low”, resulting in a binary variable called authenticity, with 113 individuals in the high group and 120 in the low group.

Given that the independent variable was categorical with two levels and the dependent variable was quantitative, the most appropriate test for comparing group means was the independent-samples t-test. Indeed, with two groups, the t-test is mathematically equivalent to a one-way ANOVA but is preferred as it is specifically designed for two-group comparisons and provides direct estimates of effect size. A one-way ANOVA was also conducted, yielding identical inferential results.

The t-test indicated a statistically significant difference in anticipated satisfaction between the high and low authenticity groups ( $p < .001$ , with the two means being 5.98 for the high authenticity group and 3.79 for the low authenticity group), with a large effect size as Cohen’s  $d = 1.38$ ).

		Independent Samples Test							
		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p				
anticipated_satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	10.493	231	<.001	<.001	2.18196	.20794	1.77225	2.59167
	Equal variances not assumed	10.432	217.056	<.001	<.001	2.18196	.20917	1.76970	2.59421

Table 7- Independent Samples Test

		Independent Samples Effect Sizes				
		Standardizer <sup>a</sup>	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval		
				Lower	Upper	
anticipated_satisfaction	Cohen's d	1.58635	1.375	1.088	1.660	
	Hedges' correction	1.59152	1.371	1.085	1.655	
	Glass's delta	1.42813	1.528	1.204	1.848	

Table 8- Independent Samples Effect Sizes

This confirms that participants exposed to high authenticity scenarios reported higher levels of anticipated satisfaction, supporting H1. This finding is also consistent with the preliminary analyses, where anticipated satisfaction was found to be positively associated with several psychographic traits such as trend-following, discovery of new products and susceptibility to influencer content. Taken together, these results show that while individual predispositions already shape expectations of satisfaction, perceived authenticity has a strong and independent effect that enhances consumer evaluations.

### 4.3 Hypothesis 2 Testing

To examine whether the effect of perceived influencer authenticity on anticipated satisfaction varies according to the type of beauty product, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The model included authenticity (high versus low) and product type (short-term versus long-term) as between-subjects factors, and the anticipated satisfaction score as the dependent variable.

The results revealed a significant main effect of authenticity ( $F(1,229) = 109.28, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .323$ ) indicating that participants exposed to highly authentic influencers reported substantially higher anticipated satisfaction compared to those in the low-authenticity condition. The main effect of product type was not significant ( $F(1, 229) = 0.92, p = .338$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .004$ ), suggesting no overall difference in anticipated satisfaction between products with immediate effect and products with progressive effect. The interaction between authenticity and product type was also not significant ( $F(1, 229) < 0.001, p = .994$ , partial  $\eta^2 < 0.001$ ), indicating that the influence of authenticity on anticipated satisfaction does not differ depending on whether the product has immediate or long-term effects.

### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: anticipated\_satisfaction

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	279.413 <sup>a</sup>	3	93.138	36.839	<.001	.326
Intercept	5554.469	1	5554.469	2196.949	<.001	.906
authenticity	276.293	1	276.293	109.282	<.001	.323
product_type	2.335	1	2.335	.924	.338	.004
authenticity * product_type	.000	1	.000	.000	.994	.000
Error	578.973	229	2.528			
Total	6345.111	233				
Corrected Total	858.385	232				

a. R Squared = .326 (Adjusted R Squared = .317)

Table 9- Test of Between-Subjects Effects

As illustrated in the following interaction plot (Figure 5), the lines for the two different product types are almost parallel, with both showing a consistent drop in satisfaction from high to low authenticity. This pattern confirms the absence of an interaction effect, indicating that the positive influence of authenticity is equally strong for both product types.

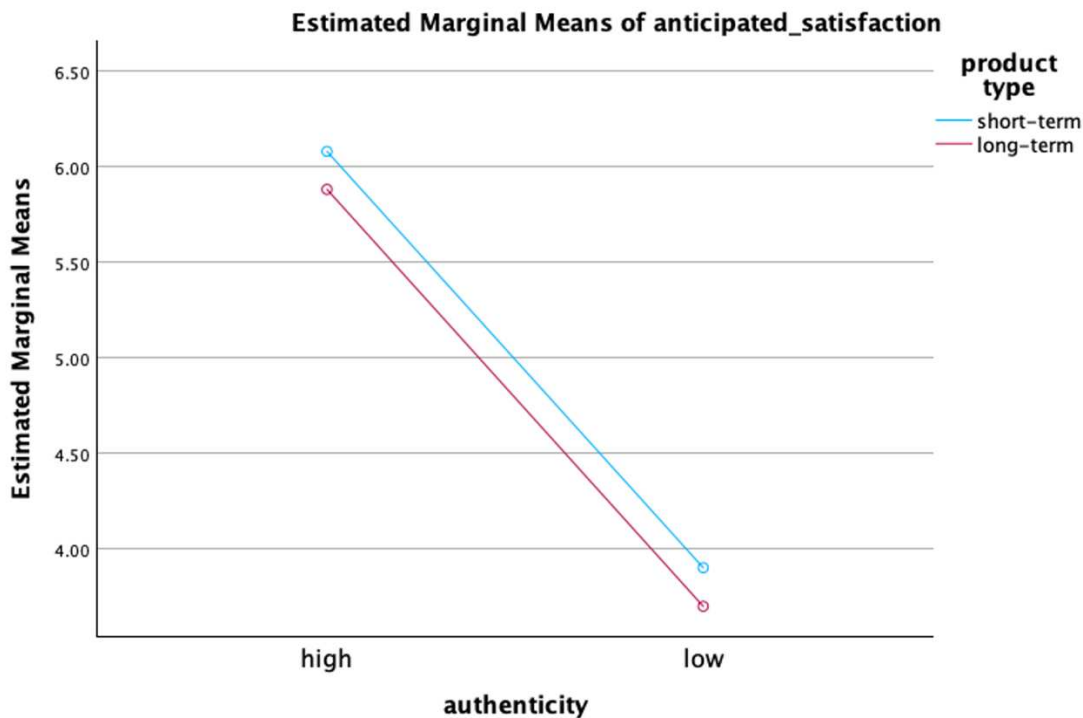


Figure 5- Estimates Marginal Means of anticipated\_satisfaction

These findings indicate that authenticity is a much stronger determinant of anticipated satisfaction than product type. This is consistent with the preliminary analyses, which showed that willingness to pay was significantly associated with anticipated satisfaction but did not vary between short-term and long-term products. In other words, authenticity appears to influence consumer expectations independently of whether the product deliver immediate or delayed results.

#### 4.4 Hypothesis 3 Testing

Hypothesis 3 states that higher perceived authenticity causes individuals to think that their satisfaction will last longer. Before testing this, the items measuring expected hedonic adaptation had to be aligned in the direction of interpretation. Therefore, the item “*I believe the pleasure I would get from using this product would decrease quickly over time*” was reverse-coded, as it was posed in an opposite way with respect to the other two items of this section. This transformation allowed higher scores to consistently indicate lower anticipated hedonic adaptation (the expectation that satisfaction would last longer), making the scale conceptually consistent across items.

Subsequently, a reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the three items. The initial Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was 0.669, which falls slightly below the conventional threshold of 0.70 for acceptable reliability. The *Corrected Item – Total Correlation* values indicated that the reserved item correlated weakly with the other items (0.265) and the *Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted* showed that removing this item would increase reliability to 0.848.

**Item–Total Statistics**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Time_2	9.7682	12.136	.648	.337
Time_3	9.7639	13.655	.580	.448
Time_1Reverse	9.5494	16.792	.265	.848

*Table 10- Item-Total Statistics*

Given this evidence, the reversed item was excluded from the aggregated measure, and the expected hedonic adaptation score was computed as the mean of the other two items. This decision ensured a more consistent scale.

Then, to examine the effect of perceived authenticity on expected hedonic adaptation, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The independent variable was authenticity, with two levels (high versus low) and the dependent variable was the expected hedonic adaptation score, computed as the mean of the two questionnaire items (the reversed one was eventually excluded).

The results indicated a statistically significant difference in expected hedonic adaptation between the two groups ( $p < .001$ ), with participants exposed to high authenticity scenario reporting higher expected hedonic adaptation (mean = 5.53) compared to those in the low-authenticity condition (mean = 4.07). This mean difference of 1.46 was also associated with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.76$ ), suggesting that the magnitude of this difference is not only statistically significant, but also meaningful.

		Independent Samples Test							
		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p				
expected_hedonic_adaptation	Equal variances assumed	5.806	231	<.001	<.001	1.45988	.25143	.96449	1.95528
	Equal variances not assumed	5.800	228.820	<.001	<.001	1.45988	.25172	.96390	1.95586

Table 11- Independent Samples Test

		Independent Samples Effect Sizes			
		Standardizer <sup>a</sup>	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
expected_hedonic_adaptation	Cohen's d	1.91811	.761	.494	1.026
	Hedges' correction	1.92437	.759	.493	1.023
	Glass's delta	1.88307	.775	.499	1.049

Table 12- Independent Samples Effect Sizes

These results align with the prediction that higher perceived authenticity reduces anticipated rate of hedonic adaptation, as participants expected their satisfaction with the product to endure for a longer period when the endorsement was perceived as more genuine. This outcome is also in line with the preliminary analyses, which showed that expected hedonic adaptation was linked to anticipated satisfaction and, indirectly, to willingness to pay.

Furthermore, to mirror the factorial design of the experiment, a 2x2 between-subjects ANOVA with authenticity and product type, predicting expected hedonic adaptation, was also run. Levene's test was non-significant ( $p > .05$ ).

### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: expected\_hedonic\_adaptation

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	128.639 <sup>a</sup>	3	42.880	11.617	<.001	.132
Intercept	5354.080	1	5354.080	1450.504	<.001	.864
product_type	1.859	1	1.859	.504	.479	.002
authenticity	121.983	1	121.983	33.047	<.001	.126
product_type * authenticity	2.611	1	2.611	.707	.401	.003
Error	845.282	229	3.691			
Total	6285.750	233				
Corrected Total	973.921	232				

a. R Squared = .132 (Adjusted R Squared = .121)

Table 13- Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

The analysis showed a clear main effect of authenticity,  $F(1, 229) = 33.047, p < .001, \eta^2 = .126$ : respondents in the high-authenticity condition reported higher expected adaptation than those in the low-authenticity condition (estimated marginal means  $M = 5.526$  vs.  $4.076$ ; mean difference =  $1.449$ , 95% CI [ $0.953, 1.946$ ]). The main effect of product type was not significant,  $F(1, 229) = 0.510, p = .479, \eta^2 = .002$  (short-term  $M = 4.891$ ; long-term  $M = 4.712$ ), and the interaction was also not significant,  $F(1, 229) = 3.047, p = .082, \eta^2 = .013$ .

The interaction plot (Figure 6) visually confirms that authenticity consistently increases expected satisfaction durability across both product types. While the effect appears slightly stronger for long-term products, the lines remain broadly parallel, aligning with the non-significant interaction result.

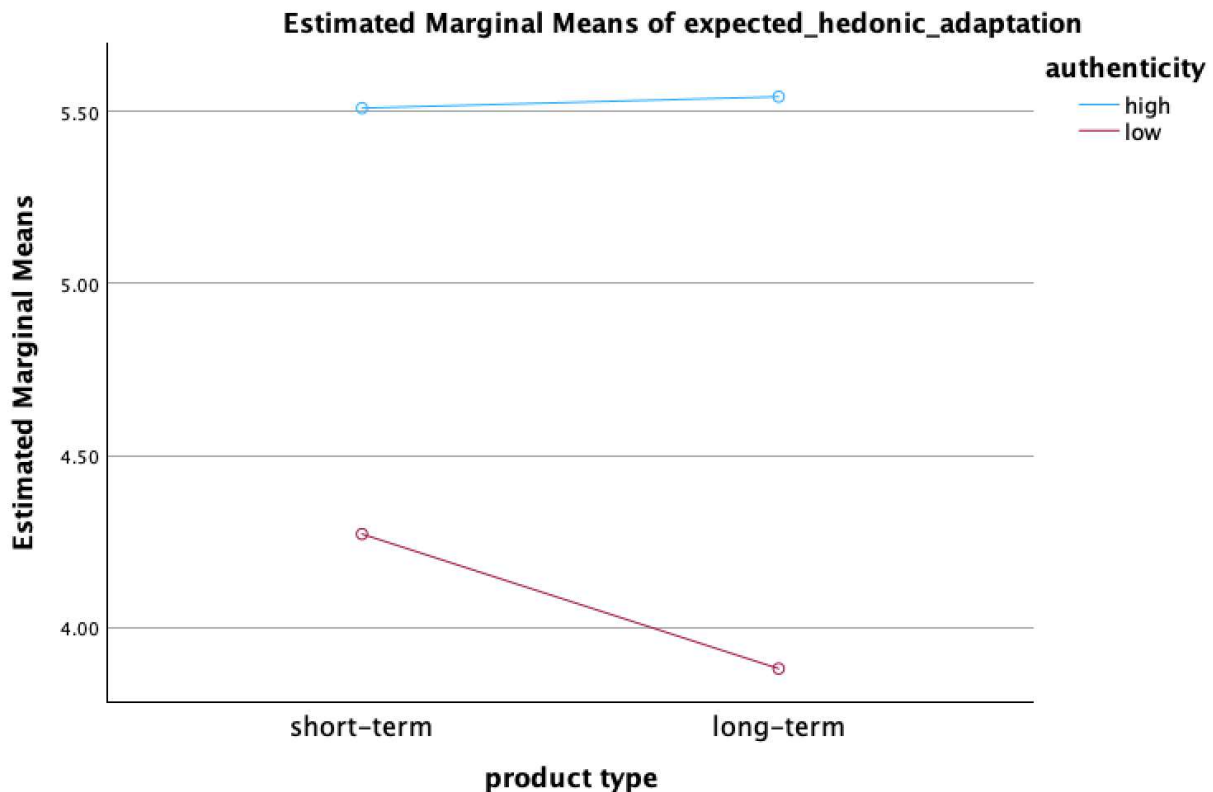


Figure 6- Estimates Marginal Means of expected\_hedonic\_adaptation

Taken together, these results reinforce H3: higher perceived authenticity is associated with slower expected hedonic adaptation (i.e., satisfaction is expected to last longer), and this effect does not depend on whether the product promises immediate or gradual results (suggesting that authenticity operates as a general heuristic when consumers form durability expectations).

#### 4.4.1 Mediation Analysis

To further explore the mechanisms behind the relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer responses, an additional mediation analysis was conducted. The rationale for this test is that authenticity may not directly increase how much people are willing to pay for a product. Instead, its effect is likely to work indirectly, through psychological processes such as anticipated satisfaction. Previous research has shown that when consumers expect higher enjoyment or satisfaction from a product, they also tend to value it more and are willing to spend more money on it (Morewedge et al., 2005; Shiv & Huber, 2000). Therefore, anticipated satisfaction can be seen as a bridge between authenticity and willingness to pay: authentic endorsement raises satisfaction expectations, and these expectations, in turn, drive higher willingness to pay.

The analysis was carried out using PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4, Hayes, 2022), with authenticity as the independent variable (X), anticipated satisfaction as the mediator (M) and willingness to pay as the dependent variable (Y). Results confirmed the expectations.

OUTCOME VARIABLE:  
antsatis

Model Summary							
	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.5681	.3228	2.5165	110.1031	1.0000	231.0000	.0000
Model							
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
constant	5.9764	.1492	40.0480	.0000	5.6824	6.2704	
authen	-2.1820	.2079	-10.4930	.0000	-2.5917	-1.7722	

Table 14- Regression Results for the Mediator Anticipated Satisfaction

First of all, authenticity had a significant effect on anticipated satisfaction ( $b = -2.18$ ,  $SE = 0.21$ ,  $t = -10.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that participants exposed to scenarios with authentic influencer reported higher satisfaction expectations (the negative sign is due to coding, with low authenticity coded as 1).

OUTCOME VARIABLE:  
WTP1

Model Summary							
	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.3173	.1007	257.5329	12.8769	2.0000	230.0000	.0000
Model							
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
constant	5.6469	4.2547	1.3272	.1858	-2.7363	14.0301	
authen	-.7431	2.5562	-.2907	.7715	-5.7798	4.2935	
antsatis	2.6652	.6656	4.0042	.0001	1.3537	3.9766	

Table 15- Regression Results for the Dependent Variable (WTP)

Secondly, anticipated satisfaction significantly predicted willingness to pay ( $b = 2.67$ ,  $SE = 0.67$ ,  $t = 4.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Worth noting that the direct effect of authenticity on willingness to pay was not significant, whereas the indirect effect via anticipated satisfaction was significant ( $b = -5.82$ , 95% CI [-9.53, -2.69]).

\*\*\*\*\* DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y \*\*\*\*\*

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-.7431	2.5562	-.2907	.7715	-5.7798	4.2935

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
antsatis	-5.8153	1.7580	-9.5260	-2.6993

Table 16- Direct and Indirect Effects of Authenticity on WTP

These findings reveal a case of full mediation, where the influence of authenticity on willingness to pay is entirely mediated through anticipated satisfaction. In other words, authenticity increases the belief that satisfaction will endure, and this expectation drives consumers' WTP more for the product. This builds on top of H3: not only does authenticity reduce the expected rate of hedonic adaptation, but it also exerts its economic impact indirectly, by reinforcing the durability and intensity of satisfaction expectations.

#### 4.5 Exploratory analyses

To gain a deeper understanding of how individuals' psychographic traits influence the relationships between perceived influencer authenticity and anticipated satisfaction, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The goal was to move beyond the effects tested in the hypotheses section and explore whether certain psychological dispositions moderate the impact of authenticity on consumer expectations.

Initially, the six psychographic variables were included in the regression model. However, including them all raised issues of multicollinearity and complexity. To address this and to simplify the model without losing interpretative richness, a factor analysis was carried out, with the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method and applying a Varimax rotation. This dimensionality reduction technique allowed to identify two latent factors that summarized the underlying structure of the items:

- Factor 1 (influencer orientation) grouped together items related to receptiveness towards influencers and their content (following and being influenced by beauty influencers, emotional engagement with their content and reliance on their opinions).

- Factor 2 (exploratory orientation) captured personal inclinations towards curiosity, product discovery and trend-following behaviors.

These two factors were saved as variables and used in the regression model. The model was built having as dependent variable DV = anticipated satisfaction and as independent variable IV = authenticity (coded as 0 = high and 1 = low). In addition, the two factors were included in the IVs list, together with two interaction terms: authenticity x influencer orientation and authenticity x exploratory orientation. Interaction terms were created and included in the model to explore potential moderation effects, that is, to assess whether the impact of perceived authenticity on anticipated satisfaction changes depending on individuals' levels of influencer orientation and exploratory orientation. Including these interaction items allows the model to account not only for the main effects of each variable, but also for how their combination may shape consumer responses.

The results showed that the overall model was statistically significant ( $F(5,224) = 32.436, p < .001$ ) and explained 42% of the variance in anticipated satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.420$ ).

Here follows a detailed interpretation of all the model coefficients:

- Authenticity ( $B = -2.084, p < .001$ ): the authenticity variables was coded as 0 = high and 1 = low. The negative coefficient means that participants exposed to a low authenticity scenario reported significantly lower anticipated satisfaction compared to those in a high authenticity scenario. Specifically, participants exposed to a low-authenticity scenario reported, on average, 2.084 points less of anticipated satisfaction compared to those in the high-authenticity condition, holding all else constant. The effect is strong and statistically significant, confirming what was already found in testing H1.
- Influencer orientation (factor 1) ( $B = 0.757, p < .001$ ): this coefficient indicates that, independently of the authenticity condition, participants who are more receptive to influencer content tend to expect higher satisfaction from the product. This effect is statistically significant and positive, suggesting that those with a stronger influencer orientation are generally more positively inclined toward beauty product recommendations.
- Exploratory orientation (factor 2) ( $B = 0.282, p = .047$ ): this factor also has a (slightly) significant and positive coefficient, meaning that individuals who are more curious and open to the discovery of new products tend to report higher anticipated satisfaction,

regardless of the authenticity level of the influencer. This supports the idea that exploratory consumers are more enthusiastic overall.

- Interaction: authenticity x influencer orientation ( $B = -0.647, p = .001$ ): this significant interaction effect shows that the negative impact of low authenticity on anticipated satisfaction is even stronger for people who are highly oriented toward influencers. In other words, the more someone values influencer content, the more they are affected when authenticity is lacking. This is a key finding, as it reveals differential sensitivity to authenticity based on psychographic traits.
- Interaction: authenticity x exploratory orientation ( $B = -0.04, p = .837$ ): this interaction is not statistically significant, suggesting that exploratory orientation does not meaningfully change the effect of authenticity on anticipated satisfaction. People who are more curious or trend-oriented report higher satisfaction overall (as shown by the main effect) but their reaction to authenticity does not significantly differ from others.

The intercept ( $B = 5.876, p < .001$ ) represents the predicted value of anticipated satisfaction when all predictors are zero. It reflects the baseline level of anticipated satisfaction for an average individual exposed to the high-authenticity scenario (high = 0). The predicted level of satisfaction is 5.876: participants who are average in terms of psychographic traits and who are exposed to high authentic influencers tend to report a predicted satisfaction level of 5.876 on a 10-point scale. This value represents a moderately positive baseline level of expected satisfaction, before any other effects are applied.

In summary, the linear regression model provided insights into how influencer authenticity and individual psychographic traits shape anticipated satisfaction. The significant interaction between authenticity and influencer orientation suggests that authenticity matters most to those who are already receptive to influencer content. For exploratory consumers, it is different: while they report higher satisfaction overall, their response does not significantly depend on the level of authenticity. These findings confirm that influencers should align their strategies not only with the content presented but also with the psychological orientation of the target audience.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

### 5.1 Discussion of the results

The findings of this study revealed a complex relationship between perceived influencer authenticity, anticipated satisfaction, temporal expectations and consumer valuation of beauty products.

Firstly, the results demonstrated that authenticity strongly (and significantly) enhances anticipated satisfaction. Participants exposed to the high-authenticity scenarios reported significantly higher levels of anticipated satisfaction than those exposed to the low-authenticity scenarios. This effect was confirmed both by the hypothesis testing and by the regression analysis conducted, highlighting the robustness of the relationship. These results are consistent with previous research which conceptualizes authenticity as rooted in intrinsic motivation and transparency (Audrezet et al., 2020; Jha et al., 2025) and which demonstrates that authentic content fosters credibility, trust and emotional engagement (AlFarrai et al., 2021; Liu & Zheng, 2024). By confirming hypothesis 1, the study extends these insights to anticipated satisfaction, showing that authenticity not only influences credibility and intention to purchase, as found in previous work, but also shapes consumers' affective forecasts before product usage. This suggests that consumers expect products recommended by authentic influencers to deliver more enjoyment, strengthening the notion of anticipated satisfaction as a core mechanism in decision making (Shiv & Huber, 2000; Bagozzi et al., 2014).

In contrast, hypothesis 2 was not supported. The analysis revealed that there are no significant interactions between authenticity and product type: the positive effect of authenticity on anticipated satisfaction is equally strong for both short-term and long-term products. While the literature suggested that authenticity would be particularly powerful for long-term effect products (as these tend to be more identity-related and to have a higher transformational potential) (Atakan et al., 2014; Richins, 2013), the results indicate that consumers seem to rely on authenticity as a general shortcut when forming expectations. In other words, before actually experiencing the product, they focus primarily on whether the influencer appears genuine and trustworthy, rather than on whether the product is supposed to deliver immediate or gradual results. This suggests that authenticity works as a universal sign of reliability, guiding expectations across product types in a similar way. Consumers' affective forecasts are mainly anchored on the source of information rather than the

inherent characteristics of the product: this nuance had not been empirically demonstrated in previous influencer research.

Furthermore, the findings supported hypothesis 3, showing that perceived influencer authenticity significantly reduces the expected rate of hedonic adaptation. Respondents in the high-authenticity condition were more likely to believe that their satisfaction with the product would last longer over time compared to those exposed to the low-authenticity condition. This result extends the literature on hedonic adaptation, which traditionally emphasizes that, inevitably, with repeated consumption the emotional returns may diminish (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Prior studies have identified mechanisms such as consumption variety or interruptions as solutions to this problem, so as factors that could slow down adaptation. This research adds a new dimension by showing that a communicative cue (perceived authenticity) can also shape consumers' expectations of satisfaction evolutions. When an influencer appears as genuine and motivated by internal factors rather than external ones (such as money), consumers not only expect greater enjoyment but also believe that this enjoyment will persist over time. This demonstrates that authenticity can function as a psychological "buffer" against expected adaptation, a role not previously attributed to influencer characteristics in the consumer behavior literature.

An additional mediation analysis showed that the effect of authenticity on willingness to pay (for the product presented in the scenario) was fully mediated by anticipated satisfaction. Authenticity did not directly have an impact on monetary evaluation; however, it strongly enhanced anticipated satisfaction, which in turn predicted significantly willingness to pay. This indicates that the economic power of authenticity does not operate directly but is translated through consumers' emotional forecasts. These findings are aligned with research showing that anticipated satisfaction serves as a bridge between product attributes and behavioral intentions (Shiv & Huber, 2000; Morewedge et al., 2005) but extend this to demonstrate its role in explaining how authenticity acquires commercial relevance too. In practical terms, authenticity raises expectations of future enjoyment, and it is precisely this feeling of enhanced expectation that makes consumers more willing to invest financially in the product. By highlighting the indirect nature of this pathway, the study contributes a new understanding of how psychological mechanisms mediate between authenticity perceptions and economic outcomes.

Lastly, the multiple linear regression analysis provided further insights into the heterogeneity of consumer responses. Two psychographic orientations were identified as relevant traits: influencer orientation and exploratory orientation. The former, defined by receptiveness to influencer content and reliance on their opinions, not only predicted higher anticipated satisfaction but also interacted significantly with authenticity. In particular, individuals with a strong influencer orientation were disproportionately penalized when exposed to low-authenticity conditions, reporting way lower satisfaction than other groups. This suggests that authenticity matters most for those who are already embedded in influencer culture: its absence creates a particularly sharp disconfirmation for this segment. On the contrary, exploratory orientation, reflecting curiosity and trend-seeking behaviors, was associated with higher anticipated satisfaction overall but did not moderate the effect of authenticity. Exploratory consumers appear to be enthusiastic regardless of authenticity cues, indicating that their positive disposition towards novelty may set aside concerns about source credibility. These findings build on prior research that tended to treat individual dispositions as broadly amplifying the impact of influencer marketing (Audrezet et al., 2020; Moulard et al., 2025). Instead, they suggest that authenticity interacts asymmetrically with consumer characteristics: it is especially crucial for those who value influencers highly.

Taken together, these results yield several interesting insights. The lack of support for hypothesis 2 challenges the assumption that authenticity is particularly salient for long-term effect products, revealing instead its role as a general heuristic that dominates across product types and categories. The confirmation of hypothesis 3 introduces a new perspective on hedonic adaptation by identifying authenticity (a social and communicative aspect) as a factor capable of shaping expectations about the duration of satisfaction, an effect previously attributed mainly to product or contextual features. The mediation analysis further shows that the economic impact of authenticity is entirely mediated through anticipated satisfaction, underscoring the centrality of this psychological mechanism in translating authenticity into monetary value. Finally, the exploratory regression results highlight that consumer responses are not homogeneous: authenticity is most critical for individuals more oriented toward influencers.

These contributions refine the understanding of influencer authenticity, showing that its impact goes far beyond trust and credibility, the dimensions most often emphasized in prior research. Authenticity emerges not only as a key driver of consumers' immediate expectations of enjoyment

but also as a factor that shapes how long they believe those feelings will last. In this way, authenticity does not simply affect whether consumers are convinced by an endorsement but fundamentally influences the way they mentally simulate their future experiences with a product. By demonstrating that authenticity shapes not only how strongly consumers expect to benefit from a product but also how enduring they believe this benefit will be, the study highlights authenticity as a key element in consumers' mental simulations of future use. This underscores its broader role in shaping affective forecasts and connects it directly to both psychological evaluations and economic outcomes in the beauty domain.

## 5.2 Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings of this research provide some guidance for both beauty brands and influencers in shaping their communication and marketing strategies, respectively. While previous literature has often highlighted authenticity as a driver of credibility and trust, this study demonstrates that its implications go well beyond these established outcomes. Authenticity directly shapes consumers' expectations about the intensity and duration of their satisfaction and, indirectly, their willingness to pay. These results suggest that both brands and influencers can act on multiple levels to enhance the impact of endorsements, and that authenticity should be managed not as an optional but as a central strategic lever.

### 5.2.1 Implications for beauty brands

For beauty brands, the results highlight clear priorities in how influencer collaborations should be designed and managed. The following implications focus on the strategic choices that companies can adopt to fully leverage authenticity in their campaigns.

1. *Selecting influencers based on authenticity.* One of the clearest implications for beauty brands is the need to prioritize authenticity when choosing influencers to collaborate with. The results show that consumers exposed to authentic endorsements report significantly higher anticipated satisfaction compared to those exposed to the low-authenticity context. Therefore, working with influencers perceived as genuine and transparent about their partnerships and collaborations is more valuable than relying solely on reach, followers or engagement metrics. A macro influencer with millions of followers but little perceived authenticity may eventually contribute less to the consumer's emotional reactions than a smaller influencer with a more authentic perceived image. This suggests, for brands, selecting more carefully potential influencers,

assessing the consistency of their contents, the transparency of sponsorship disclosure and the alignment of brand values.

2. *Applying authenticity across all product categories.* Another implication concerns the finding that authenticity had the same effects across short and long-term beauty products. In fact, consumers relied on authenticity equally when imagining satisfaction with different product types. This implies that authenticity may not be context-specific, but rather may be a universal signal of reliability. Therefore, it should be treated as a non-negotiable feature of all influencer campaigns, regardless of the product being endorsed. Even for products that deliver immediate results, consumers care about the authenticity of the source. Brands should consider adopting authenticity as a transversal selection criterion across the entire product portfolio, rather than reserving it for campaigns involving transformational or identity-relevant products.

3. *Storytelling.* The research also showed that authenticity shapes, in addition to satisfaction itself, also its expected duration. Consumers exposed to authentic influencers believed that satisfaction would fade less quickly over time, while those exposed to low-authenticity endorsements expected enjoyment to decline rapidly. This has an important managerial implication: authenticity can be used to support brand narratives about long-lasting benefits of products. For categories such as skincare or anti-aging products, authenticity provides a powerful tool to strengthen consumer belief that results will endure. Campaigns can therefore be designed to emphasize continuity and consistency of product use, showing, as an example, influencers documenting their journey and progress over time. By doing so, brands reinforce the perception of durability, which the findings show is strongly connected to consumer expectations.

4. *Turning anticipated satisfaction into economic value.* The mediation analysis conducted revealed that authenticity does not directly increase consumers' willingness to pay but operates indirectly through anticipated satisfaction. This means that brands should not expect authenticity itself to justify premium pricing or higher sales but should instead focus on how authenticity can enhance the emotional expectations surrounding the product. In practice, brands should build campaigns that highlight the enjoyment, the empowerment and the confidence consumers are likely to feel when using the product, as communicated by a real authentic influencer. These emotional forecasts, once strong enough, are what translate into a greater willingness to pay. Therefore, positioning campaigns around authentic storytelling that highlights

both immediate pleasure and longer-term emotional value can directly support pricing strategies and justify premium prices in a very competitive market.

### 5.2.2 Implications for influencers

For influencers, the results underline the importance of how authenticity is communicated and maintained over time. The following points illustrate how creators can keep their credibility and enhance the impact of endorsements.

1. *Cultivating transparency and coherence.* For influencers themselves, the results show the central importance of being transparent in their work. Authenticity for them comes in two ways: personal passion about what they are sharing and clear disclosure and consistency. Followers respond negatively when they perceive hidden sponsorships or incoherence between the influencer's usual content and the endorsed product. The evidence that authenticity directly raises anticipated satisfaction and reduces expectations of rapid hedonic decline means that influencers should prioritize collaborations that align with their values and communicate openly about them. This does not only save their reputation but also maximizes their effectiveness for brand partners.

2. *Documenting product use over time.* Another managerial implication for influencers is the value of continuity in storytelling. The study showed that authenticity makes consumers believe their satisfaction will last longer. One way influencers can reinforce this perception is by documenting product use over time, sharing updates, progress or routines rather than limiting endorsements to one-off posts. This kind of narrative, which aligns with the concept of indexical authenticity, helps followers believe that the influencer satisfaction, and consequently their own too, will persist. For influencers, adopting such strategies increases credibility while simultaneously enhancing the projected duration of consumer satisfaction.

3. *Aligning with values and identity.* Finally, influencers should recognize that authenticity is perceived not only in individual posts but across their entire personal brand. Followers evaluate authenticity based on continuity, coherence and integrity. Endorsing products that are not aligned with these values risks ruining credibility and, as this study shows, reducing anticipated satisfaction and willingness to pay. To maximize their effectiveness, influencers should thus align partnerships with their interests and lifestyle, ensuring that endorsements feel like natural extensions of their identity rather than externally imposed promotions. In the beauty sector in particular, where self-expression and identity are central, this alignment is crucial for maintaining audience trust and maximizing the psychological and economic value of endorsements.

### 5.3 Limitations

The study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the data were collected through a survey experiment based on hypothetical scenarios rather than actual product use. While this design allowed for control and comparability, it reduced the validity of the findings, since participants could only imagine their satisfaction and adaptation rather than experiencing them directly. Moreover, the data were gathered all at the same time, so it was not possible to observe how observations may vary over time (only expectations of satisfaction and its duration could be measured, not actual satisfaction or actual duration). Second, the study relied on self-reported measures, which are inherently exposed to biases (such as social desirability), and may not perfectly capture the psychological mechanisms at play. Third, the sample was composed mainly of young adults, limiting the diversity of perspectives across age groups and potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of beauty consumers (even if it is also true that young adults are those mainly active on social media). Similarly, the study was also focused on a specific cultural context; in other markets, perception of authenticity and role of influencers may be different. Fourth, the study focused exclusively on the beauty sector, where identity and emotional value are salient. Therefore, the results may not be transferable to other categories, such as food or technology, where different product attributes might shape anticipated satisfaction. Lastly, this research measured expectations, not actual satisfaction after product use. There may be a gap between anticipated and actual satisfaction, not taken into account. Likewise, adaptation was only investigated as ex-ante expectation, rather than as a process observed over time. It remains uncertain to what extent these forecasts align with consumers' actual experiences.

## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis examined how perceived influencer authenticity shapes consumers' expectations in the beauty domain, focusing on anticipated satisfaction and expected hedonic adaptation. Building on work about source credibility, affective forecasting, and adaptation, the study compared short-term (e.g., make-up) and long-term (e.g., skincare) product types and tested whether authenticity changes not only how good people expect to feel, but also how long they expect that feeling to last. Three findings stand out. First, authenticity emerged as a powerful driver of anticipated satisfaction: participants exposed to high-authenticity scenarios expected to feel significantly more satisfied than those exposed to low-authenticity scenarios. Second, authenticity also affected the time dimension: when the influencer appeared authentic, respondents believed their satisfaction would fade more slowly (evidence that authenticity shapes expectations about durability, not just intensity). Third, the comparison between product types did not yield an interaction: authenticity mattered equally for short- and long-term products. Before using a product, consumers tend to generally rely on the credibility of the source, rather than on the product's promised rate of results. The study also clarifies how authenticity translates into economic value. Authenticity did not directly raise willingness to pay (WTP) for the product featured in the scenario; instead, its effect was fully mediated by anticipated satisfaction. Basically, people are willing to spend more on products as the satisfaction they expect increases (thanks to an authentic endorsement). In addition, individual differences mattered: people with a stronger "influencer orientation" reported higher anticipated satisfaction overall and were especially sensitive to low authenticity.

Taken together, the results suggest practical guidelines for beauty brands and creators. Among others, in particular: view authenticity as a non-negotiable selection criterion across categories, not only for long-horizon products; build transparent, consistent narratives that show product use over time to make lasting benefits believable; and tailor campaigns to audience psychology.

Like any scenario-based survey, this research captures ex-ante expectations rather than observed experiences. The sample focuses on Italian consumers aged 18–35, and measures were self-reported. Future work could track actual satisfaction, test field campaigns with real creator content, and examine authenticity cues (e.g., disclosure style, narrative continuity, community interaction) across platforms and cultures. Despite these limits, the central message is clear: authenticity does not just influence persuasion. It shapes how consumers mentally simulate both the peak and the persistence of enjoyment. In a crowded beauty market, partnerships with a real fit, honest

communication, and steady storytelling are most likely to raise expectations (and keep them credible over time).

## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire design

#### Preliminary questions

**Q1:** Are you Italian, and aged between 18 and 35?

- Yes
- No

**Q2:** Do you use TikTok/Instagram?

- Yes
- No

#### Scenarios

Please carefully read the short scenario below and then answer the following questions about the described situation.

*One random scenario out of the following four:*

#### **(High authenticity + short-term effect product):**

Giulia is a highly followed beauty influencer. She passionately shares real and personal experiences with the beauty products she uses, always clearly stating when a product is sponsored. She often interacts with followers by replying to their questions. Recently, she recommended a volumizing mascara, saying that it immediately makes eyelashes look fuller and more defined.

#### **(High authenticity + long-term effect product):**

Giulia is a highly followed beauty influencer. She passionately shares real and personal experiences with the beauty products she uses, always clearly stating when a product is sponsored. She often interacts with followers by replying to their questions. Recently, she recommended an anti-aging serum, saying that it visibly reduces wrinkles after a few weeks of consistent use.

#### **(Low authenticity + short-term effect product):**

Giulia is a highly followed beauty influencer. She promotes many products using standard, impersonal texts, without indicating whether the content is sponsored. She rarely interacts with her followers. Recently, she recommended a volumizing mascara, saying that it immediately makes eyelashes look fuller and more defined.

**(Low authenticity + long-term effect product):**

Giulia is a highly followed beauty influencer. She promotes many products using standard, impersonal texts, without indicating whether the content is sponsored. She rarely interacts with her followers. Recently, she recommended an anti-aging serum, saying that it visibly reduces wrinkles after a few weeks of consistent use.

**Section 1: Manipulation check**

**Q3:** Does Giulia always disclose sponsorships?

- Yes
- No

**Q4:** Is the product recommended by Giulia a mascara?

- Yes
- No

**Q5:** Does Giulia actively interact with her followers?

- Yes
- No

**Section 2: anticipated satisfaction**

**Q6:** Indicate how much you agree with the following statements (scale from 1 to 10):

- I think that using this product would give me great satisfaction.
- I believe I would be happy with my choice if I purchased this product.
- I expect this product to fully meet my expectations.

**Section 3: hedonic adaptation**

**Q7:** Indicate how much you agree with the following statements (scale from 1 to 10):

- I believe that the pleasure I would feel from using this product would quickly diminish over time.
- I expect the satisfaction from this product to last over time.
- I think I would continue to be satisfied even after many uses.

#### **Section 4: spending and purchase preferences**

**Q8:** How much would you be willing to spend (€) for the product recommended by Giulia in the scenario you read? (open-ended)

**Q9:** Thinking of a short-term effect beauty product (e.g., a mascara), from a mid-range brand sold in perfumeries, what is the maximum price you would be willing to pay (€)? (open-ended)

**Q10:** Thinking of the same product sold in supermarkets, what is the maximum price you would be willing to pay (€)? (open-ended)

**Q11:** Where would you prefer to purchase a short-term effect beauty product? (single choice)

- Perfume store / Supermarket / Online / Pharmacy

**Q12:** Why? (multiple choice)

- Affordable price
- Trust in the store
- Staff recommendation
- More pleasant shopping experience
- Better assortment
- Fast delivery (online)
- Personal habit

**Q13:** Now thinking of a long-term or progressive-effect beauty product (e.g., a face serum), again from a mid-range brand sold in perfumeries:

**Q14:** What is the maximum price you would be willing to pay (€)? (open-ended)

**Q15:** Thinking of the same product sold in pharmacies, what is the maximum price you would be willing to pay (€)? (open-ended)

**Q16:** Where would you prefer to purchase a long-term effect beauty product? (single choice)

- Perfume store / Supermarket / Online / Pharmacy

**Q17:** Why? (multiple choice)

- Affordable price
- Trust in the store
- Staff recommendation
- More pleasant shopping experience
- Better assortment
- Fast delivery (online)
- Personal habit

### **Section 5: habits**

**Q18:** In the last 3–6 months, how often have you purchased beauty products?

- Never / Once / 2–3 times / 4–5 times / More than 5 times

**Q19:** In the last 3–6 months, have you ever purchased a beauty product based on influencer recommendations?

- Never / Once / 2–3 times / 4–5 times / More than 5 times

**Q20:** When choosing a beauty product, how important is the opinion of influencers you follow?

- Scale from 1 (= not at all important) to 10 (= very important)

**Q21:** In the last 3–6 months, how often have you purchased short-term effect beauty products (e.g., make-up)?

- Never / Once / 2–3 times / 4–5 times / More than 5 times

**Q22:** In the last 3–6 months, how often have you purchased long-term effect beauty products (e.g., skincare, anti-aging)?

- Never / Once / 2–3 times / 4–5 times / More than 5 times

### **Section 6: psychographics**

**Q23:** Indicate how much you identify with the following statements from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all true and 10 = completely true:

- I consider myself a curious person.
- I enjoy discovering new personal care products.
- I follow trends in the beauty and skincare sector.
- I prefer to buy products recommended by people I consider similar to me.
- I follow influencers who talk about beauty and skincare.
- I am easily engaged by emotional or personal content I see online.

### **Section 7: demographics**

**Q24:** What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

**Q25:** How old are you? (open-ended)

**Q26:** What is your highest level of education?

- Secondary school diploma
- University degree or equivalent

**Q27:** What is your annual gross income?

- < €20,000

- €20,000–35,000
- €35,000–50,000
- €50,000

**Q28:** What is your current occupation?

- Student
- Worker
- Retired
- Unemployed

**Q29:** Please indicate your region of origin (drop-down menu).

### Purchase\_Preference

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Specialized shop	144	61.8	61.8	61.8
	Supermarket	11	4.7	4.7	66.5
	Online	64	27.5	27.5	94.0
	Pharmacy	14	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	233	100.0	100.0	

Table 17- Frequency distribution for purchase preference for short-term beauty products

### Purchase\_preference2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Specialized shop	120	51.5	51.5	51.5
	Supermarket	9	3.9	3.9	55.4
	Online	64	27.5	27.5	82.8
	Pharmacy	40	17.2	17.2	100.0
	Total	233	100.0	100.0	

Table 18- Frequency distribution for purchase preference for long-term beauty products

### RecommendedPurchase

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	116	49.8	49.8	49.8
	Once	83	35.6	35.6	85.4
	Two/three times	29	12.4	12.4	97.9
	Four/five times	4	1.7	1.7	99.6
	More than five times	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	233	100.0	100.0	

Table 19- Frequency distribution of purchases following influencer recommendations

## Correlations

		WTP1	ImportanceInfluencerOpinion
WTP1	Pearson Correlation	1	.283**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	233	233
ImportanceInfluencerOpinion	Pearson Correlation	.283**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	233	233

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 20- Correlation between willingness to pay (WTP) and importance of influencer opinions

		Correlations						
		anticipated_satisfaction	Curiosity	Discovery_Newproducts	Trend	PeerRecommendations	Influencer_beauty	InfluencerContent
anticipated_satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.130*	.187**	.280**	.191**	.202**	.226**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.048	.004	<.001	.003	.002	<.001
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
Curiosity	Pearson Correlation	.130*	1	.296**	.119	.139*	.190**	.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048		<.001	.070	.034	.004	.581
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
Discovery_Newproducts	Pearson Correlation	.187**	.296**	1	.622**	.453**	.550**	.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	.100
	N	232	232	232	230	232	232	232
Trend	Pearson Correlation	.280**	.119	.622**	1	.450**	.638**	.398**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.070	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	231	231	230	231	231	231	231
PeerRecommendations	Pearson Correlation	.191**	.139*	.453**	.450**	1	.496**	.296**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.034	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
Influencer_beauty	Pearson Correlation	.202**	.190**	.550**	.638**	.496**	1	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.004	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
InfluencerContent	Pearson Correlation	.226**	.036	.108	.398**	.296**	.501**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.581	.100	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 21- Correlation matrix of anticipated satisfaction and psychographic variables

**Correlations**

		WTP1	Curiosity	Discovery_Newproducts	Trend	PeerRecommendations	Influencer_beauty	InfluencerContent
WTP1	Pearson Correlation	1	-.098	-.082	.139*	.039	.154*	.201**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.136	.213	.035	.554	.019	.002
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
Curiosity	Pearson Correlation	-.098	1	.296**	.119	.139*	.190**	.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.136		<.001	.070	.034	.004	.581
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
Discovery_Newproducts	Pearson Correlation	-.082	.296**	1	.622**	.453**	.550**	.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.213	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	.100
	N	232	232	232	230	232	232	232
Trend	Pearson Correlation	.139*	.119	.622**	1	.450**	.638**	.398**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.035	.070	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	231	231	230	231	231	231	231
PeerRecommendations	Pearson Correlation	.039	.139*	.453**	.450**	1	.496**	.296**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.554	.034	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
Influencer_beauty	Pearson Correlation	.154*	.190**	.550**	.638**	.496**	1	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.004	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233
InfluencerContent	Pearson Correlation	.201**	.036	.108	.398**	.296**	.501**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.581	.100	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	233	233	232	231	233	233	233

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
 \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 22- Correlation matrix of willingness to pay related to the scenario (WTP) and psychographic variables

### KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.802
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1252.833
	df	66
	Sig.	<.001

Table 23- KMO and Bartlett's Test

## Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
ImportanceInfluencerOpinion	1.000	.696
Curiosity	1.000	.486
Discovery_Newproducts	1.000	.762
Trend	1.000	.696
PeerRecommendations	1.000	.454
Influencer_beauty	1.000	.755
InfluencerContent	1.000	.691
Satisfaction_1	1.000	.666
Satisfaction_2	1.000	.661
Satisfaction_3	1.000	.673
Time_2	1.000	.632
Time_3	1.000	.716

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 24- Communalities

Component	Total Variance Explained								
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.325	36.040	36.040	4.325	36.040	36.040	3.265	27.211	27.211
2	2.331	19.429	55.469	2.331	19.429	55.469	2.895	24.125	51.336
3	1.232	10.266	65.734	1.232	10.266	65.734	1.728	14.399	65.734
4	.863	7.190	72.924						
5	.798	6.650	79.575						
6	.578	4.815	84.389						
7	.457	3.804	88.194						
8	.379	3.162	91.355						
9	.315	2.625	93.981						
10	.258	2.146	96.127						
11	.245	2.039	98.166						
12	.220	1.834	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 25- Total Variance Explained

### Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>

	Component		
	1	2	3
Time_3	.832		
Satisfaction_3	.809		
Satisfaction_1	.785		
Time_2	.781		
Satisfaction_2	.771		
ImportanceInfluencerOpinion		.818	
InfluencerContent		.790	
Influencer_beauty		.784	
Trend		.703	.425
PeerRecommendations		.512	.425
Discovery_Newproducts			.793
Curiosity			.688

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

*Table 26- Rotated Component Matrix*

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