

## Effectiveness of Social Media Influencers in Brand Purchase Intention

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**[Abstract]** In an age where the internet is ubiquitous through platforms like Twitter and blogs, “social media influencers” have become a potent new type of third-party ad agency, swaying consumers’ opinions and decisions to buy a product or service. The concept of a “social media influencer” was first explored in the realm of advertising, specifically to generate excitement about products in markets that target a young audience and increase their social media footprint. Instead of advertising to a broad audience, influencer marketing concentrates on persuading influential people to spread a brand’s message to the desired demographic. Advertisers employ influencers as a means of spreading their messages to consumers. The literature review formed the basis for the conclusion that businesses are moving away from using famous people to promote their products in favor of bloggers and Instagram stars. The efficiency of using social media influencers in brand purchase intention is not well-researched in the Indian context; a latent gap exists to be explored. Influencers are a recent development in the field of social media. Even though western countries have set precedence on different aspects of social media influencers, such as measuring the effectiveness of SMIs on other platforms or celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising and how SMIs are the new celebrity endorsers both from the theoretical and empirical orientations. Moreover, the proposed conceptual paper towards setting a research proposition on using SMI for brand promotion in the Indian context is broken down into two objectives; first, to examine the relationship between consumers’ utilitarian personalities about their attitudes towards SMIs and, second, to study the role of social media influencers in building consumer attitudes towards brand purchases.

**[Keywords]** social media influencers, brand purchase intention, bloggers, utilitarian, instafamous

### Introduction

The media and advertising landscape are both ever-evolving entities. Tracy (2008) predicted the impact of Web 2.0 on advertising popularly using the title “New social Web 2.0.” The number of people using social networks and social media has increased by more than 100% in the last five years. The boom of digitalization is constantly growing with time. The average time spent per day consuming digital media increased from 5 hours and 37 minutes to 6 hours and 45 minutes from 2012 to 2018. The focus of influencer marketing is on the use of influential people to spread a brand’s message to a specific audience. Instead of marketing your product or service directly to many potential customers, you pay influencers to get the word out for you. Influencers are a recent development in social media, so there is a need to research the respective topic. Social media influencers have emerged as potential endorsers in recent times with theirs. Their ability to generate hashtags is effective and more efficient than other marketing tactics (such as celebrity endorsement). Celebrity endorsement was the original form of influencer marketing. Still, in the digital era, social media bolsters the rise of social media influencers with a niche audience that can often offer more value to brands. Inviting social media influencers like bloggers with tens of thousands of followers on their social media channels as their brand’s ambassadors is a central tenet of influencer marketing agencies. Successful businesses expand their online visibility by forming partnerships with social media giants like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. They effectively employ social media influencers to disseminate information about their products and the latest deals to their online followers.

Social media influencers (SMI) are becoming a “crucial marketing strategy” for Indian brands. Even though the West has established a precedent for SMIs, Indian businesses are only now beginning to explore this digital goldmine. According to a recent survey, Instagram was the most popular platform for social media influencers in 2018–2019. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, YouTube, Quora, TikTok, Blogging, and Snapchat follow this. In addition, more than 500 brand guardians were polled for the study, including top ad agencies and startups, as well as creatives like blogs, YouTube channels, Tweet influencers, and Instagram influencers. More than half of those surveyed identified “better reach and engagement” as the primary benefit of investing in influencer marketing. As of 2018, most businesses allocated between 5% and 7% of their marketing budgets to online influencers. The percentage of companies that intend to increase their spending on social media influencer marketing rose to 73% in 2019, up from 60% the year before. As a result, we can observe that brands love social media influencers because they can create trends and encourage their followers to buy the products they promote.

This research further seeks to understand the notion of social media influencers by measuring the effectiveness of SMI for brand promotion in the Indian context, using various variables, such as consumers’ utilitarian personality, attitudes towards the brand, and SMI’s credibility. Based on these parameters, we will be evaluating the impact of social media influencers on promoting different brands and examining the relationship between consumers’ utilitarian personalities with regards to their attitudes toward SMIs.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the relationship between consumers’ utilitarian personality (source characteristics) concerning their attitudes toward SMIs.
2. To study the role of social media influencers in building consumers’ attitudes toward brand purchase.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Concept of Social Media Influencers***

Millions of people follow influencers on social media sites like Instagram and YouTube because of the content they produce and curate about a specific topic (Chapple & Cownie 2017); Mediakix 2017). A school of thought sees social media influencers (SMIs) as nothing more than competitors who might even be hostile to a brand or organization (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). Still, others see the value in forming partnerships with SMIs to increase brand awareness and sales. There is a growing body of scholarly work exploring the value of influencer marketing and the processes at play in the influence of influencers on consumers’ reactions to brands. Evidence from studies conducted by Lee and Watkins (2016), for instance, indicates that vloggers have a significant impact on viewers’ intent to purchase the (luxury) brands that are featured in those videos.

Influencers are the glue that holds a brand together with its target audience. According to Freberg (2010), the success of social media influencers is vitally essential to brands; therefore, technology has been developed to identify and track influencers’ relevance to a brand or organization. This technology tracks the number of hits on a blog, times a blog is shared, likes and comments, and followers. These points are pivotal aspects of a social media influencer’s success (Freberg, 2010). According to Ledbetter (2017), “When one person tries to persuade another to do something, it sets off a chain reaction that can alter the nature of their relationship.” Buyer (2016) addressed that the success of the influencer marketing phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that influencers enjoy a great deal of social clout and credibility

due to their openness and honesty with consumers (Ledbetter, 2017). Compared to traditional marketing, which primarily aims at reaching a large number of people, influencers can instead reach specific subsets of the population that would otherwise be unreachable (Ledbetter, 2017).

### ***Enablers of Social Media Influencers***

According to their participation in the platform's informational production and consumption, social media users occupy various roles within each platform (Shoo; Muntinga et al., 2011; Austin et al., 2012; Li, 2016; Ge & Gretzel, 2018).

The vast majority of social media users can be categorized into two broad groups: those who actively participate in the platform and those who don't participate, who are considered passive users. When it comes to social media, "active users are the creators, critics, collectors, and joiners," as opposed to "passive users," who merely observe the action from within the platform (Li, 2016). Moreno et al. (2015) highlight that one subset of social media users is referred to as "influencers," and they are identified as "opinion leaders who can use their digital platforms to diffuse information and actually impact the attitudes and actions of their viewers." Social media influencers aren't just people who amass many followers on Instagram because they're famous or because they can post a picture of their abs after drinking a nuclear-powered protein shake and get 10,000 likes; instead, they're people who have an impact on their audience.

### ***Current Literature on Social Media Influencers (SMIs)***

According to Hayes and Carr (2015), Johnson and Kaye (2015); Djafarova and Rushworth (2017); Ge and Gretzel (2018) address the first area of study looks at how social media influencers (SMIs) interact with their followers and other members of the social media community, often comparing the information shared by SMIs on social media to that which is disseminated through more traditional means of communication.

The second field of research examines how social media influencers (SMIs) and organizations interact, emphasizing the latter's management of its relationships with SMIs (Jin & Liu, 2010); Pang et al., 2016; Ong & Ito, 2019).

The third area of study that has emerged in the last few years is SMIs' unique personalities. To comprehensively describe the prominent personality characteristics of SMIs, (Freberg et al., 2011) used a California Q-sort method. Other studies have also looked into how social media influencers (SMIs) use self-branding and "micro-celebrity" to get ahead (Wiedmann et al., 2010; Khamis et al., 2017). Even after the expanding body of literature on SMIs, management researchers have paid scant attention to the question of how these influential people can be recognized and evaluated. Quite often, the number of a person's posts, followers, pageviews, or connections is a surrogate for their actual impact in a given field (Himmelboim et al., 2014; Agostino & Arnaboldi, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

### ***Different Factors, which have been Grouped Below, Contribute to the Impact of Social Media Influencers***

Influence of Source Characteristics Includes:

**Product Knowledge.** Knowledge, as defined by Turban et al. (2001), comprises "facts that have been arranged and analyzed to provide comprehension, experience, further learning, and competence as applied to a specific business situation or method. While product knowledge, according to Lin and Lin (2007), is "consumers' attitudes and impressions of a product, including their own previous experiences with the product. Similarly, Putri's (2009) research found that consumer product knowledge substantially impacts

purchase decisions.

**Sense of Style and Admiration.** According to Haidt and Seder (2019), as an emotion, admiration for one's sense of style is often thought of as being uniquely human. Theoretically, admiration as a social emotion is tied to how followers view and interact with those they look up to (Smith, 2000) and, in a broader context, how it promotes collaborative education amongst teams (Fessler & Haley, 2003).

**SMIs Credibility.** Expertise is a crucial component of credibility because it establishes the speaker's or writer's authority. Expertise refers to the degree to which a speaker is familiar with or qualified to discuss a particular subject (Hovlnad, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). It has been argued by O'reilly et al. (2016) that the expert knowledge of the source is the first thing to be established when evaluating the credibility and that if this expertise is discovered to be absent, the investigation of the source's credibility will be abandoned.

**Trustworthiness.** To be credible, others must believe that what you say and do are reliable, and to be trustworthy, others must believe that you are reliable (Admin,2014). Hovland et al. (1953) state, "if you believe the source has good reasons for telling the truth, you can have more faith in what they say." Copeland et al. (2011) say that a source is considered trustworthy if seen as truthful and credible. This means that users are more inclined to build trust and listen to this source than a source that is not seen as reliable.

**Attractiveness.** Various facets of attractiveness have been addressed as a character trait of SMI brand building, as seen in the literature review. In their article "The Attractiveness of the Source and Its Influence on Persuasiveness," Nune et al. (2018) talk about the importance of the source's attractiveness to the persuasiveness of a message. It appears that content-generating bloggers have more sway than their non-producing counterparts.

**Similarity.** According to Poyry et al. (2019) consumers are more likely to connect with SMIs who share their interests and values than social media celebrities who don't feel relatable. Schouten et al.(2020) also reach the same conclusion, saying that individuals are prepared to relate better to influencers than celebs because of the greater realism with which they can draw comparisons.

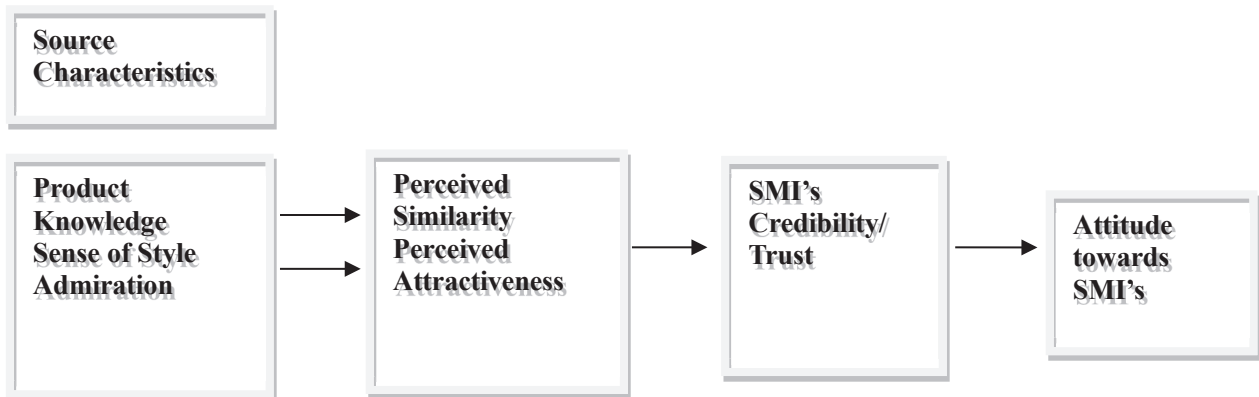
### **Proposed Conceptual Framework**

#### **Consumers' Personality Traits (Source Characteristics) Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Social Media Influencers**

To better understand how to match consumers' utilitarian personalities (product knowledge, admiration, and sense of style) with various SMIs and their attributes, we have adapted Model-1 from the source mentioned earlier (i.e., similarity or attractiveness). SMIs' credibility for that product and, ultimately, their attitudes will be affected because it will serve as the basis for consumers to use their practical personalities (CUP) to determine which SMI characteristics are most important.

*Source: Silvera, D. H., & Austad, B. (2004). Factors predicting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement advertisements. European Journal of Marketing.*

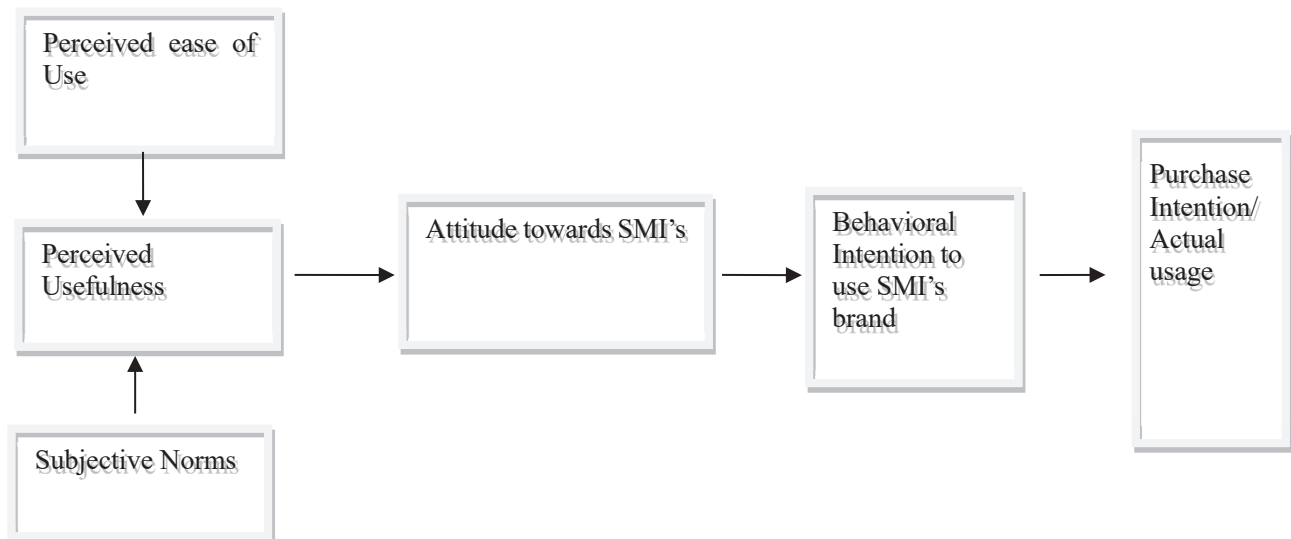
**Figure 1**  
*Proposed Conceptual Framework*



***Role of SMI in Building Consumer’s Attitude Towards the Brand Purchase***

Incorporating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), we have developed Model 2 to illustrate how various factors influence consumers’ openness to and enjoyment of SMIs when making purchases or engaging in other brand uses. Since the TAM is a widely used model, it is deployed to the study’s context by adding the following variables: subjective norm (SN), behavioral intention (BI), attitude toward using (ATT), social media influencers, and consumers’ purchase intention or actual brand usage to perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU).

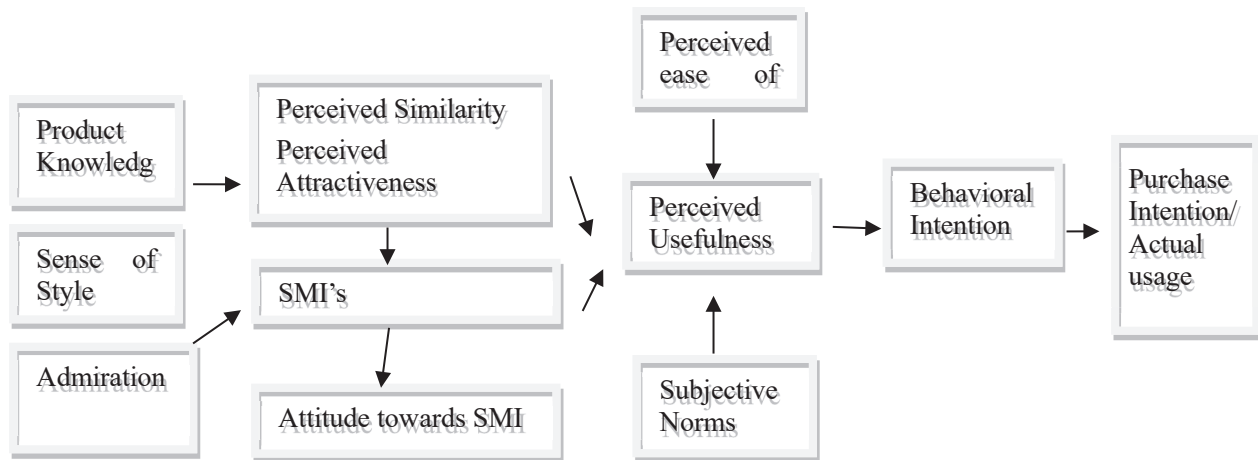
**Figure 2**  
*Role of SMI in Building Consumer’s Attitude Towards the Brand Purchase*



***Integrated Conceptual Model***

We have created an integrated theoretical model from the two models above. This conceptual framework model includes items that are pertinent to prior studies.

**Figure 3**  
*Integrated Conceptual Model*



### Hypotheses

Davis's (1986) "Technology Acceptance Model" (TAM) is a popular framework for understanding how people will react to new technologies. Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) are the two significant factors that make up the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and determine whether a person will adopt a new piece of technology (Davis, 1986; Liu et al., 2010). Using PEOU and PU as independent variables and the system under study as the dependent variable, Davis (1989) performed several tests to verify TAM. Liu et al. (2010) say that TAM can only provide an overarching picture of an individual's attitude toward new technologies. This study employs the TAM approach, used in various settings by previous researchers, to demonstrate how different variables affect consumers' perceptions of and engagement with a product or brand.

The above models led to the formation of following hypothesis: Hypothesis 4.1- There is a significant influence of (source characteristics) product knowledge, sense of style and admiration concerning consumer's attitudes towards social media influencers (SMI). Hypothesis 4.2- There is a significant influence on consumers' attitudes toward purchase intention/actual usage.

#### *Perceived Usefulness (PU)*

According to Sun et al. (2009), a person's level of PU is defined as "the degree to which that individual anticipates that the use of a specific system will improve his or her performance at work." As a result, it is linked to the idea that people's productivity increases when they use technology (Liu et al., 2010). To facilitate this research, PU has established the following relationships with social media influencers: It indicates how well a social media user thinks social media will help them achieves the goal of using social media as part of the creative process (Rauniar et al., 2014). Therefore, it is presumed that PU considers SMIs when deciding whether to make a purchase based on a recommendation made by a social media influencer. In light of this, the hypothesis is stated as follows:

H4.2.1- Perceived Usefulness has a significant influence on Attitude toward SMIs.

#### Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)

Numerous studies show that people are more likely to adopt new technologies when they perceive that using them will not strain their already busy schedules (Davis,1986; Liu et al., 2010). As stated by Sun et al. (2009), a user's perception of the effortlessness of a system is known as the "perceived ease of use"

(PEU). Like PU's impact on PEU, PEU can significantly impact perceived usefulness. This leads to the hypothesis mentioned below.

H4.2.2 There is a significant influence of Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) on Perceived Usefulness (PU).

Subjective Norm (SN) The term "social norm" (SN) refers to "a person's view that the majority of people important to him believe he should or should not perform the behavior in question," as stated by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). According to Venkatesh and Davis (2000), the reason someone acts in a way that is out of character is because of SN, which eventually results from social influence and peer pressure. Multiple studies have shown that SN is a precursor to behavior intention (BI) (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Ramayah et al., 2009). This leads to the hypothesis mentioned below.

H4.2.3 There is a significant influence of Subjective Norm on Perceived Usefulness (PU).

Behavior Intention (BI) Foreseeing future actions and motivations is a typical application of the theory of reasoned action. Behavior intention (BI) is the central tenet of the theory developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The TRA defines behavior intention (BI) as "the moves an individual takes before engaging in an atypical behavior." As a result, BI affects behavior, provided the individual believes there is a connection between the outcome and the chosen actions (Lie et al., 2005). This leads to the hypothesis mentioned below.

H4.2.4 There is a significant influence of behavioral intention to use SMIs brand on purchase intention/actual usage.

Attitude Toward using the SMIs Brand

Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) highlighted that the prior studies had assumed that ATT has some effect on behavior intention (BI). To put it another way, the variable ATT is influenced in some way by each factor above, including PEU, PU, BI, and SN; behavior is not ATT. This leads to the hypothesis mentioned below.

H4.2.5 There is a significant influence of attitude toward SMIs on behavioral intention to use SMI brands.

### **Research Methodology**

An extensive survey of literature was used to design the study's constructs, with the resulting categories being the idea of social media influencers and the indicators of social media influencers. The independent, interdependent variables, product knowledge, sense of style and admiration, SMI credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity, were unearthed while searching the body of knowledge for the influence of source characteristics.

The Technology Acceptance Model was the integrative model towards assessing the purchase intention and the actual usage of the consumers using the findings of the preceding model 1, i.e. consumers' personality traits (source characteristics), perceptions (Model 1), and mindset towards social media influencers (Model 2), which forms the basis of continuance for the TAM for the integrative model as a proposed model for the study. The proposed two sets of hypotheses will serve as a foundation for comprehending the concept, and the results will contribute to existing knowledge about the function of social media influencers.

### **Expected Contribution of the Study**

From the above paper, we can conclude that the cost of communication or promotion through SMIs is much less, with a high return on investment (ROI) for the companies if we see it from an economic point of view.

Second, for researchers, our paper will add or create a new body of knowledge that will help them do their research or can be the basis of further research work. Third, social media influencers will aid in attempting to convince and encourage consumers to purchase eco or habitat-friendly products in a country like India, where there is a growing awareness of environmental issues. The results of our research will also help marketing experts develop and implement effective influencer marketing techniques.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Social media influencers are a recent development in social media, which is quickly becoming a critical marketing tool for businesses worldwide. The start-ups seem too keen on employing the strategy considering the limitations of funds they have to face and the low cost associated with SMI. Further, traditional celebrity endorsers are also losing their charm, owing to the excessive use and high cost associated with them. In this scenario, brand promotion and brand purchase through SMIs also seem viable options for big businesses. However, this requires concrete evidence on whether SMIs are equally, if not more, effective than celebrity endorsers. The study not only proposes to answer this question, the relationship between consumers' utilitarian personality (source characteristics) with regard to their attitudes toward SMIs, but also seeks to explain the idea of social media influencers in building consumer's attitudes toward brand purchases.

In addition, marketing firms' use of SMIs is still in its early stages in the Indian context. Still, it is forecasted to develop much faster due to the meteoric rise in social media use. Despite this, research on SMI's effectiveness in India is scarce as compared to western countries, which have set precedence on this topic

### **Research and Contextual Implications for Managers**

The findings of this study will aid marketing professionals in developing and implementing effective influencer marketing strategies. First, according to this study, we are matching the source characteristics of the consumers with SMI's qualities of credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness; it was SMI's content concerning consumers' personalities that drove consumer traffic and triggered their attitude towards SMIs. These results are helpful for merchants and promoters, since they shed light on which aspects of SMIs are most important to highlight and exploit. The number of SMI's followers isn't necessarily indicative of their marketing potential; instead, brands (retailers or marketers) should prioritize how well their target audience's values and interests align with those of the SMI. Thus, the notoriety of SMIs does not necessarily imply that they can impact the product selections of targeted customers. Therefore, brands should, instead, evaluate the content of SMIs in light of how they stack up against consumers' personalities in terms of how attractive (or visually appealing), expert (or experienced, or qualified), and informative they appear to be.

Second, we found that the opinions of social media influencers can affect consumers' perceptions and, ultimately, their decisions to buy a particular brand. Companies (or retailers or marketers) can form partnerships with various SMIs for influencer marketing, with the goals varying from raising awareness of a corporate campaign or event online to promoting a newly released product through influencer advertising. Ultimately, consumers' desire to be like SMIs drove them to try one of the products, brands, or services featured on or recommended by these influencers.

To counteract this, businesses employing social media influencers must ensure that the SMIs they select for influencer marketing have the taste, new fad opinions, and sense of fashion, as well as the



likeability and knowledge of products and the latest trend, the more likely they are to spark their intended audience and trigger the consumer's desire to look or be more like people.

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