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EMPRESAS**

**The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Customers' Purchase
Process in the Beauty and Fashion Industry in Palestine**

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Chapter 1. GENERAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction

Nowadays, businesses are facing significant challenges in the environment where they operate due to more digitalization. Consequently, customers' purchase behavior has changed drastically. For example, customers now have more information and therefore are less dependent on traditional selling approaches (Minsky & Quesenberry, 2016). In addition, some studies have shown that more than 75 percent of total buyers have minimal interaction with sales representatives (Adamson et al., 2012). Moreover, an increasing number of buyers depend on digital technologies, especially social media, in their purchase process (Giamanco & Gregoire, 2012). Finally, more than 80 percent of buyers, according to a buyer survey, said that social media contents have an influence on their purchase decisions (Minsky & Quesenberry, 2016).

These major changes in customers' purchase behavior have put significant pressure on traditional sales companies and their salespeople as well. Scholars and academics, as a result, have started to study social media selling as one of the modern selling approaches. In this context, social media selling can be defined as a proficient selling technique based on the power of social media (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Minsky and Quesenberry (2016) emphasize that social selling is the approach of using social media to research, prospect, network, and build relations by sharing content and providing answers to questions.

Social media influencers are relatively a new phenomenon in the arena of social selling. In this regard, social media influencers are defined as independent third-party users of the internet who shape the attitudes of their fans and followers via the use of social media such as blogs, tweets and so on (Freberg et al., 2011). They are also defined as persons who use social media as a tool for making fans and followers and influencing them (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Although social media influencers are a recent concept, many empirical studies have emphasized their role in marketing and promotion. Specifically, they play a major role in delivering a brand's message to followers (De Veirman et al., 2017), publishing product information and promotions

to their audience (Alalwan, 2017), increasing brand awareness (Hughes et al., 2019), improving brand image (Casaló et al., 2018), generating product engagement (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019), raising the intention to purchase (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019), and enhancing brand loyalty (Kamboj, 2018).

In light of the theoretical and practical need to extend the research on the potential impact of social media influencers as online leaders, this study aims primarily to examine the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine.

1.2 Problem statement

In spite of the increasing interest in and importance of social media for marketing and advertising purposes recently, studies on social media marketing are still rare, especially in the field of social media influencers. Accordingly, there is a significant need for more research regarding the impact of social media marketing activities on the purchase process.

Therefore, the main idea of this study is to examine the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine.

In particular, the study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. Do social media influencers affect the need recognition phase of the purchase process?
2. Do social media influencers affect the information search phase of the purchase process?
3. Do social media influencers affect the alternatives evaluation phase of the purchase process?
4. Do social media influencers affect the actual purchase phase of the purchase process?
5. Do social media influencers affect the post-purchase evaluation phase of the purchase process?

1.3 Importance study

This study derives its importance from the following points:

- The internet in general and social media in particular have changed the way both customers and marketers communicate nowadays.
- Many companies do not realize the importance and the role of social media influence in the purchase process. Therefore, marketers need to utilize the power of social media in their marketing efforts.
- Social media influencers play an increasing role in the field of marketing including, among other roles, delivering brand messages to their audience (Smart Insights, 2017), publishing promotions to their followers (Markethub, 2016), and updating them with the latest information (Liu et al., 2012).
- Recently, social media influencers have been considered as one of the most efficient and effective promotional marketing techniques compared to traditional marketing approaches (Harrison, 2017; Patel, 2016; & Talaverna, 2015).

Despite the importance and the role of social media influencers in the field of marketing and advertising, there is a lack of studies on social media influencers (Godey et al., 2016) in general and their impact on the purchase process.

1.4 Objectives of study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine. However, the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the impact of social media influencers on the need recognition phase of the purchase process.

2. To investigate the impact of social media influencers on the information search phase of the purchase process.
3. To investigate the impact of social media influencers on the alternative's evaluation phase of the purchase process.
4. To investigate the impact of social media influencers on the actual purchase phase of the purchase process.
5. To investigate the impact of social media influencers on the post-purchase evaluation phase of the purchase process.

1.5 Hypotheses of study

In order to examine the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine, the following hypotheses are tested:

1. Social media influencers positively affect the need recognition phase of the purchase process.
2. Social media influencers positively affect the information search phase of the purchase process.
3. Social media influencers positively affect the alternatives evaluation phase of the purchase process.
4. Social media influencers positively affect the actual purchase phase of the purchase process.
5. Social media influencers positively affect the post-purchase evaluation phase of the purchase process.

1.6 Definition of key terms

Below are the definitions of key terms used in the study. They have been used as keywords for the literature review.

- **Social Media:**

Applications based on the internet that help users share opinions, perceptions, experiences, viewpoints, and so on (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009).

- **Social Selling:**

Applying digital marketing techniques at the level of salespersons. It uses digital social channels for connecting with and engaging followers in the purchase journey to build long-term business relations (Ancillaia et al., 2019).

- **Social Media Influencers:**

Dynamic third-party users of the internet who shape the attitudes of their followers via the use of social media activities such as blogs, tweets, likes, shares, and so on (Freberg et al., 2011).

- **Purchase Process:**

The different phases that consumers go through in their buying decision-making process (Belch & Belch, 2003). The five phases of this process are: (1) need recognition, (2) information searches, (3) alternatives evaluation, (4) actual purchase, and (5) post-purchase evaluation (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010). These five phases will be explained later.

1.7 Organization of study

This thesis consists of six chapters as follows:

Chapter One: General Framework.

Chapter Two: Literature Review.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the most important literature on the topic of the study. Specifically, the first section of this chapter describes the literature review protocol whereas the second section reviews previous empirical studies.

2.1 Description of literature review protocol

As mentioned previously, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine. Thus, the aim of this literature review is to document the most relevant published work from secondary sources of data on the impact of social media influencers on each stage of customers' purchase process and particularly in the beauty and fashion industry.

To be included in the review, the interest of a specified study should be on any of the following areas: (1) investigating the impact of social media influencers on customers' purchase intent, purchase behavior, or purchase process, (2) exploring the impact of social media influencers on promoting products, and (3) analyzing attributes of social media influencers and reasons behind their actions. Conversely, any study that does not focus on any of these three areas is excluded.

Two primary search methods are used to conduct literature review. The first one is electronic online databases such as JSTORE, ScienceDirect, Academia, Research Gate, and Scopus. The second one is hand searching from different journals, including from others, the Journal of Business Review, the Journal of Advertising, the Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, and the Journal of Global Fashion Marketing.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the literature review process consisted of six stages: (1) drafting of literature review protocol, (2) searching for relevant literature, (3) data extraction, (4) appraisal of literature extracted, and finally (5) writing literature review.

In this context, it is useful to say that the search process starts with identifying the key words. The key words that are used in the search process are Social Media, Social Media Influencers, Purchase Process, Purchase Behavior, and Fashion and Beauty Industry. Then, the search results are

narrowed and refined using the advanced search tool. Next, the research results are extracted and saved. Finally, content analysis of articles is used to decide which to be excluded and which to be included in the final literature.

The literature review process is shown in Figure 1.

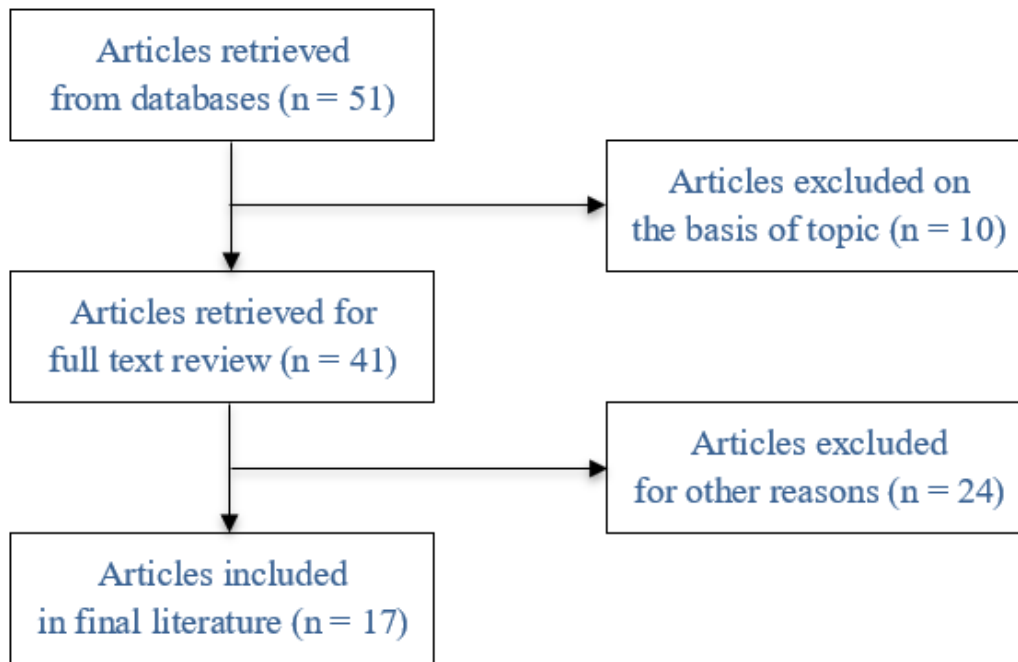


Figure 1: Literature Review Process

Source: own elaboration.

2.2 Previous Empirical Studies

In this section, the most important previous empirical studies regarding the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process are reviewed. These studies are chronologically arranged from the most recent to the least.

Starting from Lithuania, Cernikovaite (2019) investigated the impact of social media influencers on the customer purchase behavior. The analytical descriptive research approach is used. Primary data are collected from a sample of 297 social media users in the country using an online questionnaire. Data are analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The findings of the study indicate that the majority of respondents use social media to search for information, comments, and feedback before they make their decisions to buy a product or a service. Additionally, influencers' recommendations, comments, and feedback about specific products are the most important influences in changing purchase behavior.

Phung and Qin (2018) carried out an international study to explore the impact of influencers on promoting beauty products. In addition, the researchers analyzed customers' review behavior, favored characteristics of influencers, and reasons behind their actions. They used quantitative and qualitative research design. The primary data are collected, using a questionnaire, from a convenient sample of 190 students in international universities.

The findings of the study confirm that influencers are more efficient in the beauty industry, particularly when they are viewed as truthful. Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate that influencers have an effect on consumers usually in the stages of information search and alternatives evaluation.

In Malaysia, Zain et al. (2018) investigated the effect of fashion bloggers on the pre-purchase phase of the purchase process for online fashion products among female customers. The researchers adopted the qualitative research design using content analysis of customers' comments on two Malaysian fashion bloggers' Instagram accounts during and interviews with 16 female customers.

The findings of the study indicate that Malaysian fashion bloggers have a significant effect on their followers in three specific areas: (1) way of life, (2) ethics, and (3) style of fashion. Specifically, followers are directed towards the trend of combining Western and Islamic components of fashion. The findings also confirm that bloggers' accounts are tools of online community where followers can interact and get advice from other followers and from bloggers as well.

In Jordan, Al-Zyoud (2018) investigated the effect of social media marketing on purchasing behavior of Jordanian female customers. The researcher adopted the analytical descriptive research design. Data are collected, using a questionnaire, from a convenient sample of 400 female customers in Jordan. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis are utilized to analyze data.

The findings of the study indicate that social media marketing significantly affect purchasing behavior of female customers in Jordan. In addition, the findings indicate that variety seeking is the most significant variable among purchasing behavior dimensions.

Sudha and Sheena (2017) investigated the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the fashion industry in India. The analytical descriptive research design is adopted. The researchers collected the primary data through an online questionnaire directed to 200 women in different regions using judgmental and snow bowling sampling techniques. Data collected are analyzed using statistical tools including the Chi-Square test and the one-way ANOVA. These statistical tests are carried out using the SPSS software.

The results of the study indicate that customers tend, in the early phases of the purchase process, to recognize the product need by following social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and so on. Also, customers use blogs to search for information on the product they consider buying. In addition, blogs increase the level of communication that customers conduct before they actually buy. Finally, customers use blogs to validate the buying decisions they have already made.

In Finland, Emmi-Julia and Miina (2017) explored the influence of female lifestyle YouTubers on their followers' purchase behavior, their decision-making process, and the factors that influence their purchase behavior. The researchers adopted the qualitative research design. Data are collected using interviews from a sample of eight female lifestyle YouTubers' followers aged 16-23. The respondents are asked about their purchase behavior, their perceptions on YouTubers, and their influence on them.

The findings of the study reveal that trust with YouTubers is an important determinant of the followers' purchase behavior. Specifically, when trust with YouTubers is realized, trust with products is also realized. In addition, YouTubers are perceived as a valuable tool to market products. They are the key marketing channel that influences followers' purchase decisions. Furthermore, nearly all the purchases are on the basis of wants instead of needs. The effect of YouTubers is significant that some followers change products they were initially going to buy to others that YouTubers endorsed.

Paco and Oliveira (2017) assessed the importance of influence marketing in the fashion and beauty industry and its impact on customers' purchase behavior. The analytical descriptive research design is used. The questionnaire instrument is utilized to collect the primary data from a sample 362 fashion and beauty followers in social media. Statistical techniques including descriptive statistics, correlations, and the Mann-Whitney U test are used in data analysis.

The findings of the study indicate that influence marketing has a significant effect on purchase intents, behaviors, and perceptions on fashion and beauty. In addition, customers have positive views towards blogs, regardless of their age. Finally, the desire to stay in touch with the trends and to search for information are among the incentives that lead customers to follow fashion and beauty blogs.

Gashi (2017) investigated the impact of social media influencers on the different phases of the buying decision process. The researcher used the qualitative research design. Data are collected from two focus groups consisting of 11 participants. Data collected are analyzed using a content analysis technique.

The findings of the study confirm that social media influencers significantly affect each phase of the buying decision process. Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate that the features of social media influencers that affect the different phases of the buying process are: (1) content, (2) experience, (3) attractiveness, (4) social status, and (5) trust.

Lisichkova and Othman (2017) analyzed the key attributes of influencers that affect online buying intentions of customers. The researchers adopted the qualitative research design. Primary data are collected using interviews with two focus groups consisting of 12 customers from different countries. Data are analyzed using the content analysis technique.

The main findings of the study indicate that the key attributes of influencers that affect online buying intentions of customers are: (1) authenticity, (2) trustworthiness, (3) credibility, (4) legitimacy, (5) expertise, and (6) honesty. Moreover, the findings of the study show that the other two variables, in addition to the attributes of influencers, that influence online buying intentions of customers are price and recommendations.

Lim et al. (2017) examined the effect of social media influencers on buying intent with customer attitude as a mediation variable in Malaysia. The researchers adopted the analytical descriptive research design. The four features of social media influencers that are investigated are: (1) credibility, (2) attractiveness, (3) product match-up, and (4) meaning transfer. Primary data are gathered from 200 participants using the purposive sampling technique. Data are analyzed using structural equation modeling techniques.

The findings of the study confirmed that the features of attractiveness, product match-up, and meaning transfer have a significant effect on the buying intent of customers. By contrast, credibility has no significant effect on buying intent. Finally, the findings of the study confirmed the mediation role of customer attitude in the relationship between social media influencers and buying intent.

In Spain, Navarro and López-Rúa (2016) carried out an empirical study to analyze the impact of blogs on the customers' purchase process in the fashion industry. The researchers used the qualitative research method. The content analysis technique is utilized. The primary data are collected using interviews with 24 individuals.

The findings of the study confirm that fashion blogs are used mainly to get information. The findings also indicate that the most important attributes of fashion blogs are: (1) type of information, (2) frequency of blogs, (3) probability to learn something new, and finally (4) attractiveness of blogs. Additionally, the findings confirm that fashion blogs have a significant impact on customers' buying process of fashion products, especially in the three phases of need recognition, information search, and alternatives evaluation. Finally, the findings confirm that what bloggers wear or endorse has a significant influence on their attitude toward the brand and their purchase decision.

In Saudi Arabia, Khatib (2016) examined the effect of social media features on the purchase decision process of consumers in Aseer district and whether this effect varies at the different phases of this process. The analytical descriptive research design is used. Data are collected, using a questionnaire, from a convenient sample of 310 customers. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis are used to analyze the primary data.

The findings of the study indicate that social media has a different effect on the customers' buying process according to different phases of that process. Specifically, social media has the greatest effect on the post-purchase phase followed by the actual purchase phase.

Zietek (2016) investigated the features of influencer marketing in the fashion industry. The researcher adopted the qualitative research method. Primary data is collected using interviews with four professionals in fashion influencer marketing.

The findings of the study indicate that the key features of influencer marketing are: (1) authenticity, (2) long-run relationships, (3) co-creation, and finally (4) micro influencers. Moreover, the findings of the study indicate that the sub features of influencer marketing include: (1) brand fit, (2) exclusivity, (3) visual language, (4) passion, (5) trust, and (6) price.

Yogesh and Yesha (2014) conducted an experimental study to evaluate the effect of using social media on the five phases of the buying process of social media users in Mumbai, India. The researchers adopted the quantitative research method. The primary data are collected, using an online questionnaire, from 134 social media users in Mumbai. Statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, T-test, and ANOVA are used to analyze data.

The findings of the study indicate that social media is mostly used in the phase of information search due to convenience, effectiveness, and credibility. In addition, reviews and opinions in social media have a significant influence on the purchase process of social media users. There is no variance in the influence of social media due to customer demographics. Finally, the trend to share their post-purchase feedback is unexpectedly low.

In Thailand, Vonglek (2014) explored the role that social media influencers play in shaping customers' buying behavior in the cosmetics industry. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research designs is adopted. Primary data are collected using interviews and questionnaires. 10 and 100 female participants in Bangkok are chosen, using the convenient sampling technique, to participate in the interviews and to respond to the questionnaires, respectively. Data analysis is carried out using the SPSS software.

The findings of the study confirm that four features of social media influencers are significant to customers who consider buying products online: (1) trust, (2) experience, (3) attractiveness, and (4) information provided. However, the link between these features and actual purchase is not significant. In addition, social media influencers are perceived as one of the most important sources of information in the cosmetics and beauty industry. Finally, the findings of the study confirm that social media influencers affect customers' buying behavior in such a way that their spending on cosmetics and beauty products is typically made on the basis of recommendations made by those influencers.

In Norway, Halvorsen et al. (2013) carried out a study to explore if fashion blogs can be used as a marketing channel to affect customer behavior in the fashion industry. The qualitative research design is adopted whereby the content analysis technique is used in data analysis. Data are collected using interviews with bloggers, followers, and companies in the fashion industry.

The findings of the study reveal that blog ads provide companies with a valuable tool to market their products. In addition, the findings confirm that fashion blogs significantly affect customers' behavior since they have the ability to build strong relations between blogs and their followers.

Finally, Penttala and Saarela (2012) investigated the impact of blogs on the purchase behavior of young women in the fashion industry in Finland. The researchers adopted the qualitative research design utilizing content analysis as a data analysis method. Primary data are gathered, using interviews, from a purposive sample of 10 females.

The findings of the study indicate that customers who actively follow blogs when purchasing fashion products usually interact with bloggers and other customers before and after the actual purchase. The findings of the study also confirm that those customers perceive blogs as important tools that help them collect product information, view opinions, and get ideas for future purchases.

Summary of Literature Review

Author (Year)	Country	Sector	Factors Analyzed
Cernikovaite (2019)	Lithuania	All Sectors	1. Influencer marketing 2. Customer purchase behavior
Phung & Qin (2018)	Multi- countries	Beauty	1. Social media influencers 2. Promotion of beauty products 3. Customers' review behavior 4. Characteristics of influencers
Zain et al. (2018)	Malaysia	Fashion	1. Fashion bloggers 2. Pre-purchase phase
Al-Zyoud (2018)	Jordan	Fashion	1. Social media marketing 2. Purchase behavior of customers
Sudha & Sheena (2017)	India	Fashion	1. Social media influencers 2. Customers' purchase process
Emmi-Julia & Miina (2017)	Finland	All Sectors	1. Female lifestyle YouTubers 2. Followers' purchase behavior 3. Decision-making process
Paco & Oliveira (2017)	Multi- countries	Fashion & Beauty	1. Influence marketing 2. Customers' purchase behavior
Gashi (2017)	Sweden	All Sectors	1. Social media influencers 2. Buying decision process
Lisichkova & Othman (2017)	Sweden	All Sectors	1. Attributes of influencers 2. Online buying intentions
Lim et al. (2017)	Malaysia	All Sectors	1. Social media influencers 2. Buying intent 3. Customer attitude

Navarro & López-Rúa (2016)	Spain	Fashion	1. Blogs 2. Customers' purchase process
Khatib (2016)	Saudi Arabia	All Sectors	1. Social media features 2. Purchase decision process
Zietek (2016)	Sweden	Fashion	1. Features of influencer marketing
Yogesh & Yesha (2014)	India	All Sectors	1. Using social media 2. Five phases of buying process
Vonglek (2014)	Thailand	Cosmetics	1. Social media influencers 2. Customers' buying behavior
Halvorsen et al. (2013)	Norway	Fashion	1. Blogs as a marketing channel 2. Customer behavior
Penttala & Saarela (2012)	Finland	Fashion	1. Blogs 2. Purchase behavior of women

Table 1: Summary of Literature Review

Source: Researcher's own elaboration from different authors.

Chapter 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Social media

The term “social media” must be clearly defined in order to understand its influence on consumer behavior in general, and particularly in the beauty and fashion industry. In this context, it is worth noting that there are many terms which are interchangeably used to describe social media such as social software, social websites, social communication platforms, social communication services, social networking sites, and social networking.

Despite the fact that there is no formal and generally accepted definition of social media among researchers and scholars (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), social media can be simply defined as a group of apps and technologies that are Internet-based (Sago, 2015). Kohli et al. (2014) defined social media as a network through which web-based content on different fields can be shared among users.

According to Kaplan and Heinlein (2010), social media can be defined as web-based apps that allow the creation of user-produced content. In addition, social media can be defined as applications based on the Internet that help users share opinions, perceptions, experiences, viewpoints, and so on (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009).

Generally, people use social media for different purposes including, among others, documenting and publishing their experiences, making blogs to share their opinions, exchanging content with others, looking for people, and communicating with them (Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

In the field of business, companies use social media as a marketing tool in order to directly communicate with consumers, promote brand awareness and image, strengthen customer relationships, and ultimately increase their sales (Godey et al., 2016; Neti, 2015).

3.2 Social media influencers

Before defining “social media influencer”, it is necessary to say that an “influencer” is defined as a dynamic person who has a huge influence on his or her surroundings due to intellectual capacity (Kotler & Keller, 2009). According to Brown and Hayes (2008), an influencer refers to an independent party who greatly affects the consumer’s buying behavior but is not responsible for it.

According to Chae (2018), social media influencers refer to people who attract and retain followers on social media sites. They are also defined as third-party endorsers who have established significant social media followers by sharing details about their lives, experiences, and views through comments, photos, videos, and so on (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Similarly, Forsyth (2015) says that social media influencers are individuals who shape the virtual society and put the standards of its members through their great social capital. Social media influencers are individuals who use social media sites to influence customers when making their purchase decisions (Singh et al., 2012).

Wong (2014) defines social media influencers as individuals who are viewed as experts in each topic and therefore, they attract and influence their followers on social media platforms. They influence their followers through creating content, podcasting, sharing pictures and videos, and likes. Therefore, companies use them for social media promotion.

In addition, social media influencers are third-party endorsers who form audience behaviors through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and so on (Freberg et al., 2011). Moreover, social media influencers can be defined as individuals who build their audience using social media (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Finally, social media influencers refer to independent third-party endorsers who, via social media sites, communicate their opinions to affect their follower’s attitudes concerning products and services (Muntinga et al., 2011). Dizon (2015) identified four major groups of social media influencers: (1) celebrity influencer, (2) micro-celebrity, (3) industry expert, and (4) bloggers and content creators.

For the purpose of this research, social media influencers are defined as individuals who have created trust with their followers on social media platforms due to their authority, knowledge, experience, and relationship and thus have a substantial influence on them, especially on their purchase decisions.

3.3 Influencer marketing

There is no generally accepted definition of influencer marketing since this concept is relatively a new one in the literature. However, the most important of these definitions are highlighted below.

Influencer marketing refers to making use of main influencers, such as social media influencers, to promote products and services (Audrezet et al., 2018). In addition, Byrne et al. (2017) defined influencer marketing as a marketing tool used by marketers to promote products and services by taking advantage of influencers, particularly social media influencers.

Moreover, influencer marketing is defined as the art and science of taking advantage of individuals who are greatly influential in social media platforms to communicate brand messages with their followers (Sammis et al., 2016).

For the purpose of this research, influencer marketing is defined as the art and science of using social media influencers in order to communicate product messages to customers in a way that affects their behavior.

3.4 Importance of influencer marketing

To highlight the importance of influencer marketing in the field of business, it is necessary to say that approximately 70% of customers are very likely to hear about new goods and services from people they follow on Facebook and nearly 22% of customers are most probably to buy products, including beauty and fashion items, after influencers' recommendations (CPCSTRATEGY, 2019).

A recent survey conducted by Rakuten Marketing (2019) confirmed the same idea by saying that customers are repeatedly discovering new goods, services, and brands through influencers. Numerically, around 41% of customers reported that they find at least one new product or brand from an influencer each week and nearly 24% of customers said that they do so each day. Since

65% of customers frequently find something new, existing and new brands have many chances to be discovered by customers through influencers.

Finally, Stelzner (2013) emphasized the role that social media marketing is currently playing by saying that 86% of marketers reported that social media is significant for their businesses. Moreover, no less than 88% of marketers expressed their interest in knowing the most effective social media strategies and the best tactics to involve their audience in social media. In addition, 69% of marketers revealed that they plan to increase their use of YouTube, making it the first social media platform marketers intend to invest in. Furthermore, 89% of marketers said that having more exposure and traffic is the top advantage of social media marketing. Besides, over 50% of marketers who have been using social media marketing for a minimum of 3 years declared that it has increased their sales. What is more is that 63% of markers who have been using social media for a minimum of 1 year found that it is beneficial for creating loyal customers. Last, but not the least, almost 50% of marketers who use social media reported a decrease in marketing expenses.

3.5 Social learning theory

One of the most important theories that can help understand the effect of social media influencers is the social learning theory. Below is a brief discussion of this theory.

The social learning theory, proposed by Bandura in 1963, has been extensively applied in different academic studies, especially in the advertising arena (Bush et al., 2004). This theory provides a theoretical basis for the notions of socialization agents that can forecast consumer behavior (Martin & Bush, 2000).

The theory states that a consumer gets motivation and accordingly displays positive attitude from socialization agents through social interaction, both directly and indirectly (Subramanian & Subramanian, 1995).

Many empirical studies, particularly in the field of marketing, have used this theory to analyze consumer behavior via many socialization agents including, among others, celebrities, family members, friends, and social media influencers (e.g. Clark et al. 2001; Kotze, 2001).

For example, Makgosa (2010) concluded that the social learning theory can persuasively describe the effect of celebrities on consumer behavior. In addition, the theory is suggested as a theoretical basis to understand social media influencers as a kind of third-party endorsers who can form audience behaviors and decision-making processes through using social media.

In summary, the social learning theory suggests that an individual's decision to buy a certain product is extremely affected by social media influencers including, among other things, their characteristics and effectiveness.

3.6 Attribution theory

In addition to the social learning theory, the attribution theory is also useful to understand the impact of social media influencers on their followers. Below is a brief discussion of this theory.

The attribution theory explains how an individual attribute an opinion or behavior to an external or internal disposition (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The more a given customer attributes reviews or opinions of other people about a certain product to the actual performance of that product, the more the customers will view that those people are trustworthy, the more the customer will have trust in the reviews or opinions, and the stronger the customer's belief that the product has in fact the attributes that are mentioned in the reviews or opinions (Lee & Yuon, 2009).

According to this theory, influencers play a significant role in shaping other customers' views on goods and services. This is of great importance for brand marketers who strive to have positive feedback on social media sites to motivate other customers to try their products or services.

3.7 Purchase process

The purchase process of beauty and fashion products is the same as the typical purchase process of any other products (Rivera & Garcillán, 2012). This process consists of five main phases: (1) need recognition, (2) information searches, (3) alternatives evaluation, (4) actual purchase, and (5) post-purchase evaluation. Each of these phases is discussed below.

1. Need Recognition

This phase begins when an individual recognizes that there is a gap between what he or she perceives as the ideal in comparison with the real condition. In many circumstances, the consumer recognizes that he or she needs or wants something by following social media influencers and realizing that he or she does not have the beauty or fashion product that might come in handy. Social media influencers help to recognize needs and wants.

2. Information Search

Once consumers have recognized their needs and wants, they start to search for information to satisfy their unmet needs and wants. This search can be either internally by recovering knowledge from memory or externally by collecting information from friends, family members, or from the market. In this case, many consumers, especially when they need beauty and fashion products, turn to social media influencers for information.

3. Alternatives Evaluation

At this phase, consumers search for answers to two main questions when they compare and choose among various products: (1) what are my alternatives? and (2) what is the best alternative?

Social media influencers, particularly in beauty and fashion products, make it much easier and faster for consumers to evaluate their alternatives mainly by reviewing feedback made by social media influencers and users.

4. Actual Purchase

At this phase, consumers decide whether to purchase the product or not. Sometimes, and once reached at this phase, consumers freeze the purchase process and restart it later at any of the earlier phases.

5. Post-Purchase Evaluation

At this phase of the purchase process, consumers decide if they are satisfied with their purchase or not. Consumers are satisfied if their expectations meet or exceed their

perceptions of the product. In contrast, consumers are dissatisfied if their perceptions of the product fall short of their expectations. Through social media, consumers can leave their views and feedback, whether positive or negative, about the specific product they have purchased.

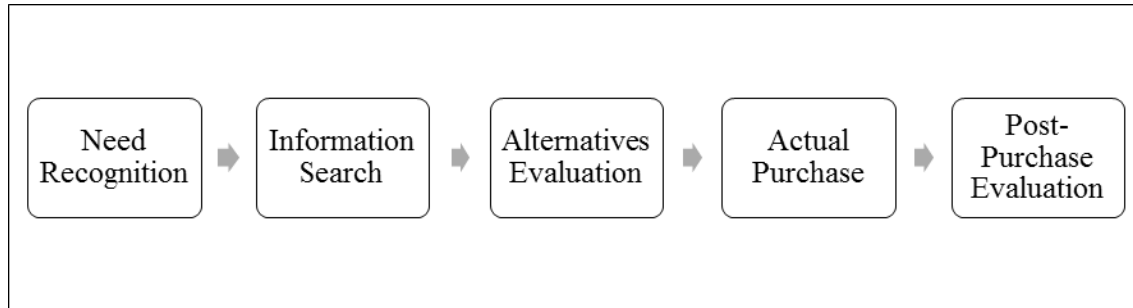


Figure 2: Phases of purchase process

Source: Kotler et al. (2005).

3.8 Overview of social media in Palestine

The total population of Palestine is approximately 5 million. The distribution of total population according to age indicates that 38% are 14 years or less, 30% are 15-29 years, 27% are 30-60 years, and 5% are more than 60 years (Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Internet users represent nearly 61% of the total population. Among those internet users, roughly 61% use online shopping. Around 37% of the total population use social media sites. Specifically, 30%, 13%, 6%, and 3% of the total population use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, respectively.

These statistics indicate that the total number of Palestinians who use Facebook is approximately 1.5 million (46% females versus 54% males). Among those users, 6% use their computers, 66% use their mobiles, and 29% use both their computers and mobiles to access Facebook. Around 50% of those user's access Facebook between 6:00 PM and 10:00 PM.

The geographic distribution of Facebook users indicates that Gaza has the maximum number of active Facebook users per month (500– 600 thousand), while Salfit has the minimum number of active Facebook users per month (4.5– 5 thousand).

Table 2 shows the distribution of Palestinian Governorates (i.e. municipalities) according to the number of monthly active Facebook users.

In terms of interactions in Facebook, Salfit has the maximum average number of interactions per Facebook user (69 interaction), whereas Gaza has the minimum number of interactions per Facebook user (32 interaction). In this context, interactions include likes, comments, shares, posts, and ads engagements.

Palestinian Governorates by Monthly Active Facebook Users	
Governorate	Monthly Active Facebook Users
Tulkarm	50 – 60 thousands
Jenin	40 – 45 thousands
Bethlehem	40 – 50 thousands
Qalqelia	20 – 25 thousands
Jericho	10 – 15 thousands
Salfit	4.5 – 5 thousands
Gaza	500 – 600 thousands
Jesusalem	200 – 250 thousands
Nablus	150 – 200 thousands
Hebron	100 – 150 thousands
Ramallah & Al-Bireh	100 – 150 thousands

Table 2: Palestinian Governorates by Monthly Active Facebook Users.

Source: Digital and Social Media Report in Palestine (2017).

Table 3 shows the distribution of Palestinian Governorates according to the average number of interactions per Facebook user.

Palestinian Governorates by Facebook Interactions	
Governorate	Interactions per Facebook User
Tulkarm	50 interaction
Jenin	63 interaction
Bethlehem	61 interaction
Qalqelia	51 interaction
Jericho	63 interaction
Salfit	69 interaction
Gaza	32 interaction
Jerusalem	54 interaction
Nablus	45 interaction
Hebron	51 interaction
Ramallah & Al-Bireh	51 interaction

Table 3: Palestinian Governorates by Facebook Interactions

Source: Digital and Social Media Report in Palestine (2017).

Statistics indicate that there are approximately 8,821 Palestinian domains. These domains are as follows: (1) 7,098 domains ending with .ps, (2) 1,090 domains ending with .falasteen, (3) 391 domains ending with .com.ps, (4) 100 domains ending with .org.ps, (5) 94 domains ending with .edu.ps, and (6) 48 domains ending with .net.ps.

Regarding the usage of different social media sites in Palestine, 80% said that they used Facebook at least once a month, whereas only 19% said that they used Skype at least once a month.

Table 4 shows the usage percent of different social media platforms at least once a month.

Usage Percent of Social Media Platforms At least Once a Month	
Social Media Platform	Usage Percent (%)
Facebook	80
YouTube	70
WhatsApp	69
Instagram	68
Snapchat	49
Twitter	31
Google+	28
LinkedIn	20
Viber	20
Skype	19

Table 4: Usage Percent of Social Media Platforms At least Once a Month

Source: Digital and Social Media Report in Palestine (2017).

The distribution of social media platforms according to users' preferences indicates that Facebook is the most preferred social media platform whereas Twitter is the least preferred one.

Table 5 shows the distribution of social media platforms according to users' preferences.

Distribution of Social Media Platforms by Users' Preferences	
Social Media Platform	Preference Percent (%)
Facebook	73
Instagram	59
Snapchat	34
Twitter	5
Google+	6
LinkedIn	14

Table 5: Distribution of Social Media Platforms by Users' Preferences

Source: Digital and Social Media Report in Palestine (2017).

Social media users in Palestine use social media platforms for different purposes. Specifically, three-quarters of social media users use social media sites to communicate with others, 73% to get news updates, 52% to full their leisure time, 41% for their work, 40% to watch videos, 36% to stay up to date with new trends, and 3% for other purposes.

Moreover, approximately 90% of people depend on social media platforms to get their news and latest updates compared to other media such as websites (38%), TV channels (21%), mobile apps (20%), radio channels (17%), and newspapers (8%).

In 2015, the total Palestinian spending on Facebook advertising was 1,440 thousand US\$. This spending on Facebook advertising increased in 2016 by nearly 13% to reach 1,625 thousand US\$. Compared to 2016, total spending on Facebook advertising in 2017 was 2,170 thousand with an

increase of approximately 34%. These statistics indicate that marketers in Palestine are more and more interested in social media marketing.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the distribution of influencer followers on different social media platforms in Palestine shows that the maximum number of influencers' followers are on Facebook (200,000 followers), whereas the minimum number of influencers' followers are on LinkedIn (13,000 followers). These figures indicate that influencer marketing plays and is expected to play a significant role in the future.

Table 6 shows the number of influencers' followers on different social media platforms in Palestine.

Number of Influencers' Followers on Social Media Platforms	
Social Media Platform	Number of Followers
Facebook	190,000
Instagram	150,000
Snapchat	34,000
Twitter	200,000
YouTube	133,300
LinkedIn	13,000

Table 6: Number of Influencers' Followers on Social Media Platforms.

Source: Digital and Social Media Report in Palestine (2017).

3.9 Top social media influencer in Palestine

The top social media influencers in Palestine in the field of beauty and fashion are shown in Table 7.

The top three beauty and fashion influencers in Palestine are Bana, Ameer Asfour, and Khaseel Khattab.

Top Beauty and Fashion Influencers in Palestine	
Name	Followers
Bana	413 K
Ameer Asfour	311 K
Khaseel Khattab	302 K
Reena abdelrahim	291 K
Nagham pro	282 K
Lanaa.line	227 K
Lauren imseeh	179 K
Dana Kittaneh	102 K
Edmonds fashion	92 K
Racha Qasem	79.4 K
Enas lubbadeh	59.5 K
Majdoline shahed	48.5 K
Farah salem	30.6 K
Dina azoni	21.6 K
Lana Demaidi	19.6 K

Table 7: Top Beauty and Fashion Influencers in Palestine

Source: Researcher's own elaboration from social media.

Here is a brief description of some of the influencers:

Nagham Zalabia

She was born in 1990 and has been obsessed with beauty products ever since, she started off her business while she was working at her family shop and was persuaded by her sister a social media page to promote her products, at first she was a bit shy, but with her family support she started her page and started her online business by selling tested products by herself , and that’s what gained her popularity, she was very sincere and very passionate, and then she left her family’s business while her business was expanding so fast, opened up her own shop and her future ambition is to create her own brand, see Figure 3.

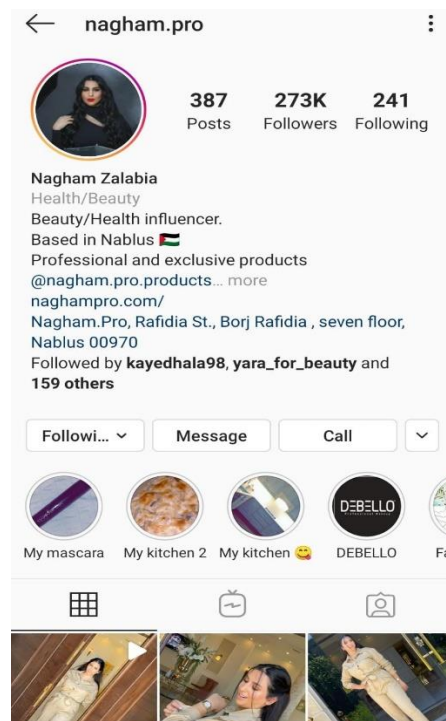


Figure 3: Nagham Zalabia Instagram

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/nagham.pro/?hl=es>

Lana AL-Sadder

She was one of my university classmates, and I remember how gorgeous she was back in the days. She started her business with only 200 NIS at the age of 22, in the past 2 years she has been working so hard on expanding her social media content and how to gain people's love and trust, she reached a great number of followers by sharing stories that touches realities. With her family and friends' support she was able to influence the young girls and advise them. She started selling her products online and then was able to open her own shop and then she launched her own brand called "Lana Line". She had so many positive feedbacks on her products which helped her to create her own application to facilitate the selling of her products, see Figure 4.

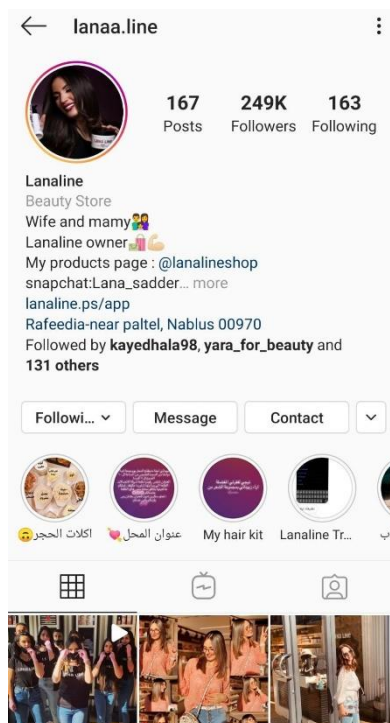


Figure 4: Lana AL Sadder Instagram

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/lanaa.line/?hl=es>

Reena Abd Al-Rahim

Palestinian makeup artist and social media star whose tips and tutorials have earned her 291,000 followers. She graduated from Chic Studios School of Makeup Artistry in 2013 and then started off her career by videotaping her make up tutorials and writing blogs, until she was finally able to open up her Reena's beauty Academy in 2014, and in 2016 she became the makeup artist and blogger for Loyal stores. She stated that she had the support of her family all through her early career to social media fame, see Figure 5.

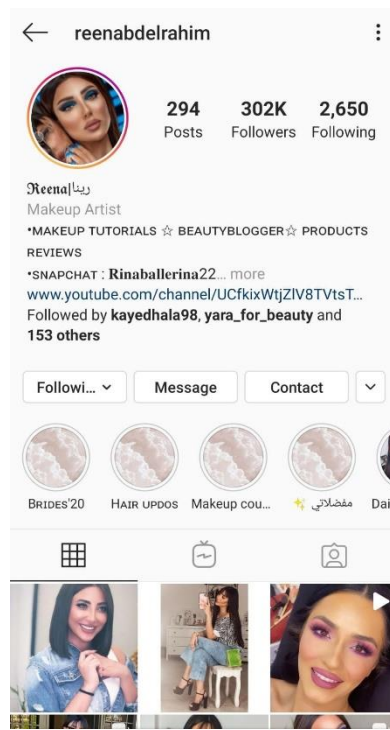


Figure 5: Reena Abd Al-Rahim Instagram

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reenabelrahim/>

Chapter 4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research design

As said earlier, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine.

Researchers normally conduct qualitative or quantitative studies. The first type of studies is usually undertaken when data gathered are exploratory in their nature. In qualitative studies, primary data frequently are gathered from answers to interviews, from responses to open-ended questionnaires, through observations, or from secondary sources (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) with the purpose of having in depth information and, in Marketing, they are used to see inside the "black box" of user needs and actions.

On the other hand, the second type of studies are normally carried out when there are theories with reference to the phenomena of interest and hypotheses are developed accordingly to test them. In quantitative studies, data are usually collected through structured questionnaires (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

This study adopts the quantitative hypothesis-testing empirical research design, where the primary data on the study variables (i.e. social media influencers and purchase process) are conveniently collected, through a structured questionnaire that is electronically administered, from a sample of Palestinian customers who purchase beauty and fashion products after using social media platforms. This research design is selected since the researcher is interested in testing the structural hypotheses of study using the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) techniques.

The model of study is shown in Figure 6 below.

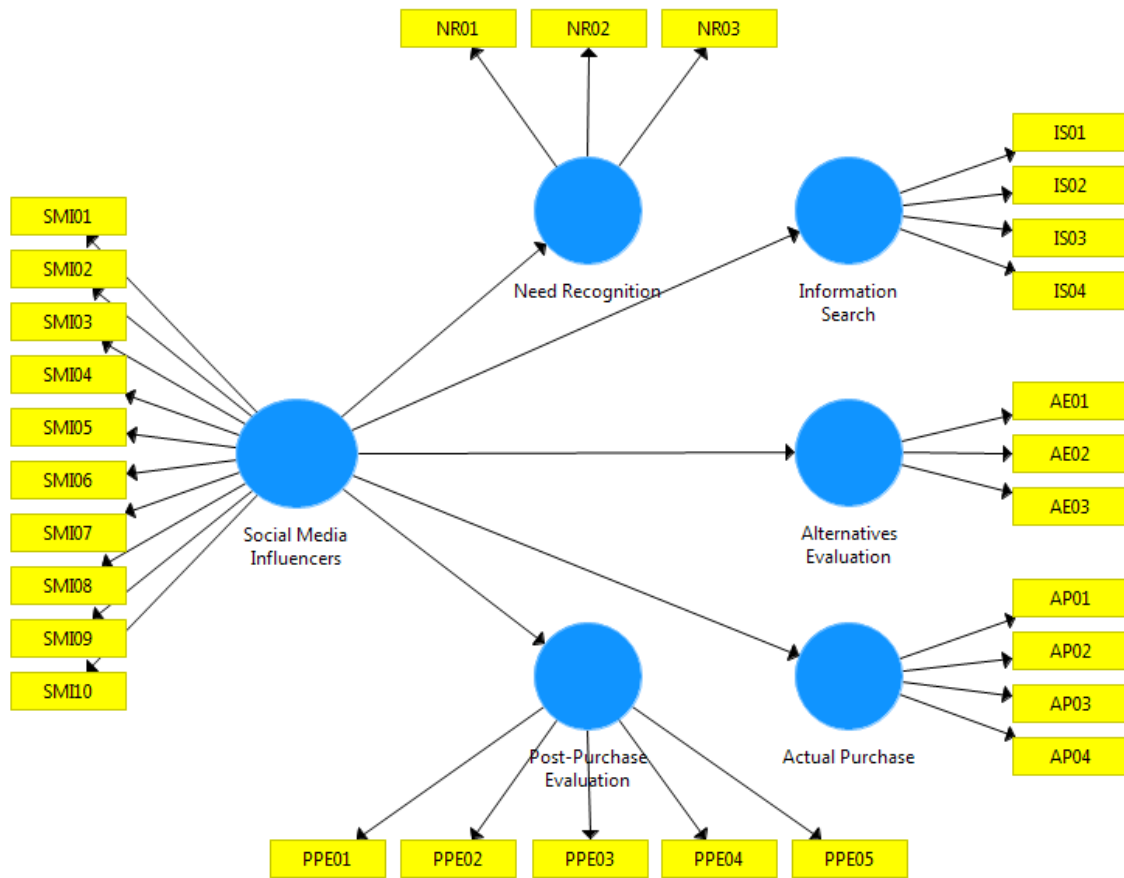


Figure 6: Model of Study

Source: Own elaboration

4.2 Population and sample

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the population of any study refers to the total number of people, events, or things of interest to the researcher whereas the sample of any study is a subset of the total population.

Since the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine, the population of the study consists of all social media users in Palestine who purchase beauty and fashion products

after using social media platforms. The total population is approximately 1,800 thousands (Digital and Social Media Report in Palestine, 2017).

The sample of the study, on the other hand, is made up of 162 persons who are conveniently selected from the total population. Therefore, this sample represents nearly 0.01% of the total population.

4.3 Data collection method

Having developed the hypotheses of study, primary data on each variable need to be collected. In this regard, there are three data collection methods: (1) observations, (2) interviews, and (3) questionnaires. The last is of three main types: (1) personally administered questionnaires, (2) mail questionnaires, and (3) electronic questionnaires (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

In this study, the questionnaire is utilized as a data collection method since it is more efficient than any other method in terms of both time and cost. Specifically, structured questionnaires are electronically distributed to social media users in Palestine using Google Forms. They were sent from 28/3/2020 to 16/4/2020. A total of 162 completed and valid questionnaires are received within this period.

Five main reasons forced the researcher to utilize electronic questionnaires. The reasons are: (1) they are easy to administer, (2) they can reach wherever, (3) they are not expensive, (4) their delivery is fast, and finally (5) respondents can answer at their convenience.

4.4 Research instrument

As mentioned previously, primary data are gathered through a structured questionnaire. The researcher developed a questionnaire that starts with an introduction where the aim of the study is specified, and the confidentiality of data collected is assured. The developed questionnaire is made up of four parts.

The first one aims to collect general information about respondents' characteristics including their gender, marital status, age, place of residence, level of education, employment status, and monthly household income.

The second part aims to collect data on respondents' use of social media platforms. This part consists of 7 questions.

The third part aims to collect data on the perceptions of customers who purchase beauty and fashion products using social media in Palestine on social media influencers. This part includes 10 items that capture attractiveness, prestige, expertise, information, and interaction.

Finally, the fourth part aims to collect data on the purchase process of Palestinian customers who purchase beauty and fashion products using social media. This part includes 19 items belonging to the five dimensions of the purchase process (i.e. need recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, actual purchase, and post-purchase evaluation).

A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), is used for the last two parts of the questionnaire. All items are positively phrased. Therefore, no items need to be reversed. The research instrument is attached in Appendix A. The English version is presented although it was also delivered in Arabic in case respondents do not understand English.

4.5 Unit of analysis

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the unit of analysis refers to the level at which data are aggregated and analyzed. The unit of analysis may be individuals, dyads, groups, organizations, or even countries.

Primary data, in this study, are gathered and then analyzed at the individual level (i.e. at the level of each social media user who purchases beauty and fashion products using social media platforms). Specifically, the researcher is interested in looking at the data gathered from each individual and dealing with each response as an individual data source. Consequently, individuals are the unit of analysis.

4.6 Data analysis techniques

In this study, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics are utilized. Specifically, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, are used to describe respondents' characteristics. They are also used to analyze respondents' use of social media platforms.

In addition, the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique is used to investigate the impact of social media influencers on the different stages of the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine.

In this context, it is worth saying that structural equation modelling (SEM) is a multivariate technique that combines features of factor analysis and regression, enabling researchers to examine relationships among different variables.

The covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) and the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) are the two approaches to conducting structural equation modelling (SEM).

The PLS-SEM technique, instead of the CB-SEM technique, is used in this study for many reasons: (1) the PLS-SEM technique is applicable even in cases of small sample sizes, (2) the PLS-SEM technique is a non-parametric one that does not require data to be normally distributed, (3) the PLS-SEM technique can be used to evaluate the measurement model and the structural model, (4) the PLS-SEM is appropriate to investigate complex relationships among variables, and (5) the PLS technique enjoys greater statistical power, which means that it is more likely to conclude that a specific relationship is significant when it is in fact significant in the population.

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) analysis involves two main steps. The first step is evaluating the measurement model, which represents the relationships between the variables and their items. The second step is evaluating the structural model, which represents the relationships between different variables.

The partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is primarily based on two main procedures. They are the bootstrapping procedure and the blindfolding procedure.

In the first procedure, subsamples are created from randomly drawn observations with replacement from the original data set. Then, each subsample is used to estimate the path model. The process is repeated until many random subsamples are created, typically about 5,000. The blindfolding procedure is used to calculate the predictive relevance (Q^2) value for a specified omission distance (D). This procedure is a sample reuse technique that omits every d^{th} data point in the dependent

variable's items and estimates the parameters with the remaining data points (Henseler et al., 2009). The omitted data points are considered missing values and treated accordingly when running the PLS-SEM algorithm. The resulting estimates are then used to predict the omitted data points. The difference between the true (i.e., omitted) data points and the predicted ones is then used as input for the Q^2 measure. Blindfolding is an iterative process that repeats until each data point has been omitted and the model re-estimated.

4.7 Data analysis software

Having finished the data collection process, data are coded, edited, and entered the SPSS and Smart-PLS to be statistically analyzed.

4.8 Limitations of study

The following limitations to the study are worth mentioning:

- The study is applied to a convenient sample of customers who purchase beauty and fashion products using social media platforms in Palestine. Therefore, special attention should be paid to generalizability of results.
- Social media influencers are measured using five aspects. Namely, attractiveness, prestige, expertise, information, and interaction. These aspects are used since, according to previous literature, they are the most important characteristics of social media influencers in terms of their potential effect on customers' purchase process, especially in the beauty and fashion products. However, measuring social media influencers using other aspects may give different results.
- The study investigates the impact of social media influencers on the five stages of the customers' purchase process. Namely, need recognition, information selection, alternatives evaluation, actual purchase, and post-purchase evaluation. However, using other stages of the purchase process may give different results.

4.9 Ethical considerations

Four ethical issues are worth mentioning with respect to this study. First, the purpose of the study is explained to respondents before completing the questionnaire. Moreover, the information provided by respondents is treated as strictly confidential. In addition, no misrepresentation or distortion in reporting the data collected during the study is deliberately made. Finally, there is no conflict of interest between the researcher from one hand and any other party from the other hand.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Respondents' Socio-Economic Characteristics

This section discusses in a descriptive way respondents' socio-economic characteristic including gender, age, marital status, place of residence, educational level, employment status, and level of household income.

As indicated in Table 8 “respondents' socio-economic characteristics”, approximately 9% of respondents are males while the remaining 91% of them are females. This reflects the fact that females are much more interested in beauty and fashion products than males are.

With respect to respondents' distribution according to their age groups, Table 5.1 indicates that about 5% of them are under 20 years, 67% are 20-30 years, 22% are 31-40 years, 4% are 41-50 years, and only 2% are over 50 years.

Table 8 also shows the distribution of respondents according to their marital status. Specifically, 44% of respondents are single, 54% of them are married, and the remaining 2% have other marital statuses.

In addition, it shows the distribution of respondents according to place of residence. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) live in urban areas whereas the remaining 4% of those respondents live in rural areas.

In terms of educational level, the table indicates that nearly 5% of respondents have primary or secondary education, 9% hold Diploma degree, 73% hold BA degree, 12% hold master's degree, and less than 1% of them hold PhD.

Moreover, it shows the distribution of respondents according to employment status. Specifically, around 55% of them are employed and the remaining 45% are unemployed.

Finally, the table indicates that less than 3% of respondents reported a low level of monthly household income, 85% said that they have a moderate level of monthly household income, and 12% stated that they have a high level of monthly household income.

Respondents' Socio-Economic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender:	Male	15	9.26
	Female	147	90.74
Age:	Under 20	8	4.94
	20–30	109	67.29
	31–40	35	21.60
	41–50	7	4.32
	Over 50	3	1.85
Marital status:	Single	71	43.83
	Married	87	53.70
	Other	4	2.47
Place of residence:	Urban	156	96.30
	Rural	6	3.70
Educational level:	Primary/secondary	8	4.94
	Diploma	15	9.26
	BA	118	72.84
	Master's	20	12.34
	PhD	1	0.62
Employment status:	Employed	89	54.94
	Unemployed	73	45.06
Household income:	Low	4	2.47

Moderate	138	85.19
High	20	12.34
Sample size (N)	162	100.00

Table 8: Respondents' Socio-Economic Characteristics

Source: Own elaboration

5.2 Respondent's Use of Social Media

In this section, respondents' use of social media is analyzed in a descriptive way in terms of whether social media marketing attract them, social media platforms they use to follow beauty and fashion influencers, number of beauty and fashion influencers they follow on social media, number of hours a week they spend following beauty and fashion influencers, whether they have purchased beauty and fashion products recommended by social media influencers, and the extent to which they are affected by beauty and fashion influencers.

Table 9 summarizes respondents' use of social media.

Respondents' Use of Social Media		
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Attraction of social media marketing:		
Yes	126	77.78
No	36	22.22
Social media platforms used to follow beauty and fashion influencers:		
Facebook	113	69.75
Instagram	116	71.60
Snapchat	75	46.30

Twitter	3	1.85
YouTube	26	16.05
Other	4	2.47

Number of beauty and fashion influencers followed on social media:

1-3	48	29.63
4-6	57	35.19
7-9	18	11.11
More than 9	39	24.07

Number of hours a week spent following beauty and fashion influencers:

Less than 1 hour	61	37.65
1-2 hours	60	37.04
3-4 hours	25	15.43
More than 4 hours	16	9.88

Purchasing beauty and fashion products recommended by social media influencers:

Yes	116	71.60
No	46	28.40

Frequency of purchasing beauty and fashion products:

Weekly	8	4.94
Monthly	49	30.25
Quarterly	42	25.93
Semiannually	24	14.81

Annually	39	24.07
Extent to which affected by beauty and fashion influencers:		
Not at all	35	21.60
To some extent	116	71.61
To large extent	9	5.56
To great extent	2	1.23
Sample size (N)	162	100.00

Table 9: Respondents' Use of Social Media

Source: Researcher's own calculation.

Table 9 indicates that slightly more than three-quarters (78%) of respondents are attracted by social media marketing while the remaining 22% of them said that they are not attracted by this kind of marketing. These figures highlight the importance of social media marketing in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine.

Moreover, it indicates that the top three social media platforms that are used to follow beauty and fashion influencers in Palestine are Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, respectively. On the other hand, YouTube, Twitter, and other social media platforms are much less used to follow beauty and fashion influencers in the country. These figures highlight the most important social media platforms that are used to follow trends in beauty and fashion products.

In addition, the table shows the distribution of respondents' according to the number of beauty and fashion influencers they normally follow on social media platforms. Specifically, almost 30% of those respondents follow 1-3 influencers, 35% follow 4-6 influencers, 11% follow 7-9 influencers, and 24% follow more than 9 influencers. These figures highlight the importance of beauty and fashion influencers in terms of shaping their followers' perceptions towards beauty and fashion products.

The table also indicates that 38% of respondents spend less than an hour a week following beauty and fashion influencers, 37% spend 1-2 hours a week following beauty and fashion influencers, 15% spend 3-4 hours a week following beauty and fashion influencers, and 10% spend more than 9 hours a week following beauty and fashion influencers.

What is more important is that, nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents said that they have ever purchased beauty and fashion products that are recommended by social media influencers they follow. On the other hand, only 28% of respondents said that they have not purchased beauty and fashion products due to recommendations made by social media influencers. These figures, again, highlight the importance of this kind of marketing in general and particularly in the beauty and fashion industry.

Furthermore, the table shows that only 5% of respondents purchase beauty and fashion products on a weekly basis, 30% purchase those products on a monthly basis, 26% purchase on a quarterly basis, 15% purchase these products semiannually, and 24% purchase them annually. These figures highlight the vital role that could be played by social media influencers to solicit their followers to buy beauty and fashion products more frequently than they now do.

Finally, it confirms the importance of social media influencers in the beauty and fashion industry. Numerically, only 22% of respondents said that they are not affected by beauty and fashion influencers at all. Alternatively, more than three-quarters (78%) of respondents said that they are affected by beauty and fashion influencers to different extents. Specifically, 72% of total respondents stated that they are affected by beauty and fashion influencers to some extent, 6% to large extent, and only 1% to great extent.

5.3 Evaluation of Measurement Model

Before testing the five hypotheses that are previously developed using the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique, it is important to evaluate the measurement model. More specifically, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and collinearity assessment are discussed below.

5.3.1 Convergent validity

Convergent validity is the extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same construct. Thus, the items that are indicators of a specific construct should converge or share a high proportion of variance. To evaluate convergent validity of constructs, factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) are usually used.

High factor loadings on a construct indicate the associated items have much in common, which is captured by the construct. The value of factor loading ranges between 0 and 1. In this regard, a rule of thumb is that the factor loadings should be 0.70 or higher.

However, researchers normally get weaker factor loadings (below 0.70) in social sciences. Rather than automatically deleting an item with factor loading below 0.70, the impact of item removal should be examined on the composite reliability and the content validity as well.

In general, items that have factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be considered for deletion from the scale only when deleting the item increases the composite reliability (CR) or the average variance extracted (AVE) above the minimum threshold values (0.70 and 0.50, respectively). However, items with factor loadings below 0.40 should always be deleted from the scale.

Average variance extracted (AVE) is the grand mean value of the squared loadings of the items associated with the construct (i.e., the sum of the squared loadings divided by the number of indicators). Thus, the average variance extracted (AVE) is equivalent to the communality of a construct. Average variance extracted (AVE) varies between 0 and 1.

An average variance extracted (AVE) value of 0.50 or higher indicates that, on average, the construct explains more than half of the variance of its items. On the contrary, an average variance extracted (AVE) of less than 0.50 indicates that, on average, more variance remains in the error of the items than in the variance explained by the construct. Therefore, average variance extracted (AVE) should be above 0.50 to have adequate convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Finally, composite reliability (CR) is a measure internal consistency reliability. Its value ranges between 0 and 1. Higher values of composite reliability (CR) suggest higher levels of reliability.

Generally, composite reliability (CR) is interpreted just as Cronbach Alpha. Specifically, composite reliability (CR) values of 0.60 to 0.70 are considered acceptable in exploratory research.

The convergent validity assessment of the measurement model is shown in Table 5.3.

Convergent Validity Assessment of Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	CR			
Social media influencers	SMI1	0.669	0.510	0.891			
	SMI4	0.550					
	SMI5	0.718					
	SMI6	0.647					
	SMI7	0.747					
	SMI8	0.810					
	SMI9	0.727					
	SMI10	0.807					
	Need recognition	NR1			0.865	0.746	0.898
		NR2			0.902		
NR3		0.822					
Information search	IS1	0.781	0.662	0.887			
	IS2	0.892					
	IS3	0.813					
	IS4	0.763					
Alternatives evaluation	AE1	0.893	0.805	0.925			
	AE2	0.877					

	AE3	0.921		
Actual purchase	AP1	0.839	0.753	0.924
	AP2	0.875		
	AP3	0.899		
	AP4	0.858		
Post-purchase evaluation	PPE1	0.709	0.638	0.897
	PPE2	0.871		
	PPE3	0.858		
	PPE4	0.789		
	PPE5	0.754		
SMI2 and SMI 3 are removed from the scale.				

Table 10: Convergent Validity Assessment of Measurement Model

Source: Own elaboration.

As indicated in Table 10, all items that capture social media influencers have good factor loadings except for two items, namely SMI2 and SMI 3. These two items are removed from the scale according to the previously mentioned criteria before the structural equation model is estimated. Similarly, all items that measure the different stages of the purchase process have factor loadings above the minimum level of 0.70.

Moreover, Table 10 indicates that the construct of social media influencers has average variance extracted (AVE) that is above the minimum threshold of 0.50 after the two items (i.e. SMI2 and SMI3) are deleted. In the same way, each stage of the purchase process has average variance extracted (AVE) that is above the minimum acceptable level of 0.50.

Finally, the composite reliability (CR) value of social media influencers is higher than the minimum acceptable level of 0.70. In the same way, each stage of the purchase process has composite reliability (CR) value above the minimum acceptable level.

Thus, it is concluded that the convergent validity of the measurement model is established according to the above three criteria.

5.3.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs. Therefore, establishing discriminant validity implies that a construct is unique and captures phenomena not represented by other constructs in the model. Normally, cross loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criterion are the two measures used to assess discriminant validity. Each of these measures are described below. According to the cross-loadings approach, the loading of an item on its assigned construct should be higher than its cross-loadings on all other constructs.

The discriminant validity assessment of the measurement model using the cross-loadings approach is shown in Table 11.

Cross-Loadings of Measurement Model

	SMI	NR	IS	AE	AP	PPE
SMI1	0.669	0.398	0.307	0.308	0.286	0.308
SMI4	0.550	0.320	0.270	0.320	0.429	0.290
SMI5	0.718	0.392	0.378	0.360	0.328	0.368
SMI6	0.647	0.255	0.302	0.252	0.251	0.263
SMI7	0.747	0.406	0.348	0.282	0.174	0.316
SMI8	0.810	0.405	0.371	0.361	0.298	0.426
SMI9	0.727	0.329	0.235	0.167	0.135	0.273

SMI10	0.807	0.378	0.338	0.306	0.278	0.414
NR1	0.479	0.865	0.615	0.517	0.507	0.461
NR2	0.440	0.902	0.640	0.604	0.542	0.476
NR3	0.403	0.822	0.508	0.547	0.595	0.469
IS1	0.319	0.559	0.781	0.541	0.511	0.458
IS2	0.456	0.624	0.892	0.657	0.491	0.562
IS3	0.392	0.525	0.813	0.685	0.569	0.539
IS4	0.272	0.513	0.763	0.765	0.541	0.550
AE1	0.347	0.544	0.737	0.893	0.542	0.584
AE2	0.390	0.603	0.683	0.877	0.651	0.541
AE3	0.403	0.580	0.743	0.921	0.654	0.633
AP1	0.284	0.556	0.630	0.678	0.839	0.557
AP2	0.295	0.495	0.511	0.548	0.875	0.485
AP3	0.384	0.582	0.545	0.573	0.899	0.442
AP4	0.376	0.550	0.550	0.607	0.858	0.542
PPE1	0.322	0.451	0.598	0.622	0.585	0.709
PPE2	0.434	0.463	0.489	0.542	0.421	0.871
PPE3	0.445	0.388	0.463	0.437	0.357	0.858
PPE4	0.320	0.309	0.477	0.448	0.452	0.789
PPE5	0.354	0.562	0.593	0.598	0.565	0.754

Table 11: Cross-Loadings of Measurement Model

Source: Own calculation.

As can be seen in Table 11, items capturing social media influencers load more on their own construct but lower on the other constructs. In the same way, items tapping each stage of the purchase process load high on their own construct but lower on the other constructs. Therefore, the analysis of cross-loadings indicates that the discriminant validity of the measurement model is established.

The second approach that is used to assess discriminant validity is the Fornell-Larcker criterion. This criterion compares the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) values with the construct correlations. Specifically, the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct. The rationale of the Fornell-Larcker approach is based on the idea that a construct shares more variance with its associated items than with any other construct.

The discriminant validity assessment of the measurement model using the Fornell-Larcker criterion is shown in Table 12.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion of Measurement Model

	SMI	NR	IS	AE	AP	PPE
SMI	0.714					
NR	0.512	0.864				
IS	0.455	0.684	0.814			
AE	0.424	0.642	0.803	0.897		
AP	0.392	0.631	0.641	0.690	0.868	
PPE	0.476	0.542	0.646	0.653	0.580	0.799

Table 12: Fornell-Larcker Criterion of Measurement Model

Source: Own elaboration.

As indicated in Table 12, the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) is on the diagonal. The non-diagonal entries represent the correlations between the constructs. It is obvious that the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) is larger than its correlation with other constructs. Thus, the discriminant validity is established.

To summarize, the convergent and discriminant validities of the measurement model are both established.

5.3.3 Collinearity Assessment

A related measure of collinearity is the variance inflation factor (VIF). It is defined as the reciprocal of the tolerance. Its square root indicates the degree to which the standard error is increased due to the presence of collinearity. In the PLS-SEM context, a value of variance inflation factor (VIF) of 5 and higher indicates a potential collinearity problem (Hair et al., 2011).

The collinearity assessment of the measurement model using the variance inflation factor (VIF) is shown in Table 13.

Collinearity Assessment of Measurement Model Using VIF

Item	VIF	Result
Social media influencers		
SMI1	1.544	Acceptable
SMI4	1.395	Acceptable
SMI5	1.864	Acceptable
SMI6	1.644	Acceptable
SMI7	2.470	Acceptable
SMI8	3.635	Acceptable
SMI9	2.870	Acceptable
SMI10	4.048	Acceptable
Need recognition		
NR1	1.901	Acceptable
NR2	2.432	Acceptable
NR3	1.779	Acceptable
Information search		
IS1	1.915	Acceptable
IS2	2.379	Acceptable
IS3	1.874	Acceptable
IS4	1.737	Acceptable
Alternatives evaluation		
AE1	2.673	Acceptable
AE2	2.072	Acceptable

AE3	2.958	Acceptable
Actual purchase		
AP1	2.347	Acceptable
AP2	2.770	Acceptable
AP3	2.694	Acceptable
AP4	2.120	Acceptable
Post-purchase evaluation		
PPE1	1.625	Acceptable
PPE2	3.020	Acceptable
PPE3	3.088	Acceptable
PPE4	1.961	Acceptable
PPE5	1.729	Acceptable

Table 13: Collinearity Assessment of Measurement Model Using VIF

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 13 indicates that items that capture social media influencers have values of variance inflation factor (VIF) that are less than 5. Similarly, items that tap the different stages of the purchase process have values of variance inflation factor (VIF) that are below 5.

Thus, it is concluded that there is no collinearity problem in the measurement model.

The results of the measurement model are depicted in Figure 7.

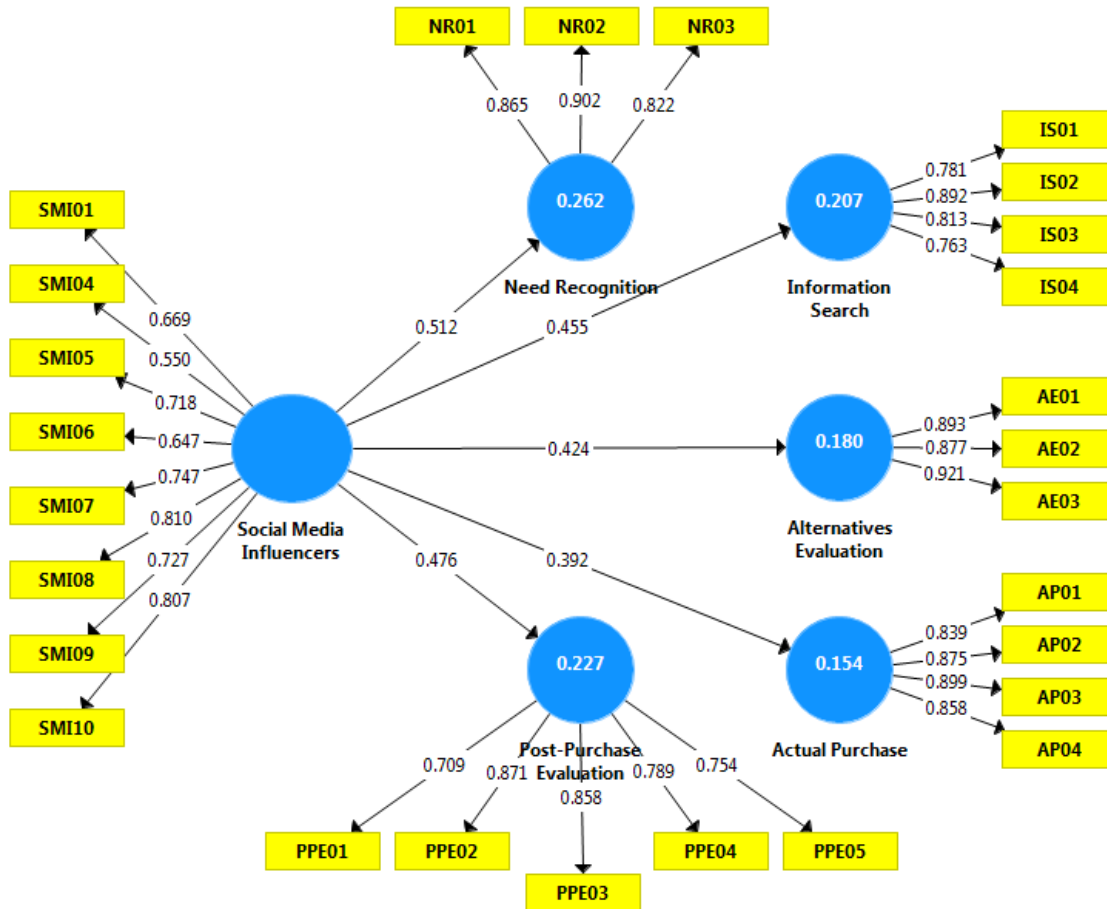


Figure 7: Results of Measurement Model

Source: Own elaboration.

5.4 Hypotheses Testing

Having evaluated the measurement model in the previous section, it is time to test the five hypotheses that are developed using the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique.

Recall that the five hypotheses to be tested are:

1. Social media influencers positively affect the need recognition phase of the purchase process.

2. Social media influencers positively affect the information search phase of the purchase process.
3. Social media influencers positively affect the alternatives evaluation phase of the purchase process.
4. Social media influencers positively affect the actual purchase phase of the purchase process.
5. Social media influencers positively affect the post-purchase evaluation phase of the purchase process.

To test each of the above hypotheses, the partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) is run by drawing 5,000 bootstrap samples. In this context, it is useful to say that in the bootstrapping procedure, subsamples are created with observations randomly drawn (with replacement) from the original set of data. To ensure stability of results, the number of subsamples should be large.

The results of the PLS-SEM are shown in Table 14.

Path Analysis				
Hypothesis	Std. Beta	Std. Error	T-Value	P-Value
Social media influencers → Need recognition	0.512	0.066	7.761	0.000*
Social media influencers → Information search	0.455	0.068	6.648	0.000*
Social media influencers → Alternatives evaluation	0.424	0.067	6.366	0.000*
Social media influencers → Actual purchase	0.392	0.070	5.619	0.000*
Social media influencers → Post-purchase evaluation	0.476	0.069	6.941	0.000*
* Significant at $P \leq 0.001$.				

Table 14: Path Analysis

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 14 indicates that the coefficient of the path between social media influencers and need recognition is 0.512. This coefficient is significant at the 0.001 level. In addition, the coefficient has a positive sign, meaning that social media influencers positively affect the need recognition stage of the purchase process. Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted.

Similarly, the coefficient of the path between social media influencers and information search is 0.455. This coefficient is significant at the 0.001 level. This means that social media influencers positively affect the information search stage of the purchase process. Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Moreover, the coefficient of the path between social media influencers and alternatives evaluation is 0.424. This coefficient is significant at the 0.001 level. This coefficient has a positive sign, meaning that social media influencers positively affect the alternatives evaluation stage of the purchase process. Thus, the third hypothesis is accepted.

Furthermore, the coefficient of the path between social media influencers and actual purchase is 0.392. This coefficient is significant at the 0.001 level. The coefficient has a positive sign. This means that social media influencers positively affect the actual purchase stage of the purchase process. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is accepted.

Finally, the coefficient of the path between social media influencers and post-purchase evaluation is 0.476. This coefficient is significant at the 0.001 level. The positive sign of the coefficient indicates that social media influencers positively affect the post-purchase evaluation stage of the purchase process. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis is accepted.

Figure 8 summarizes the results of estimated structural model.

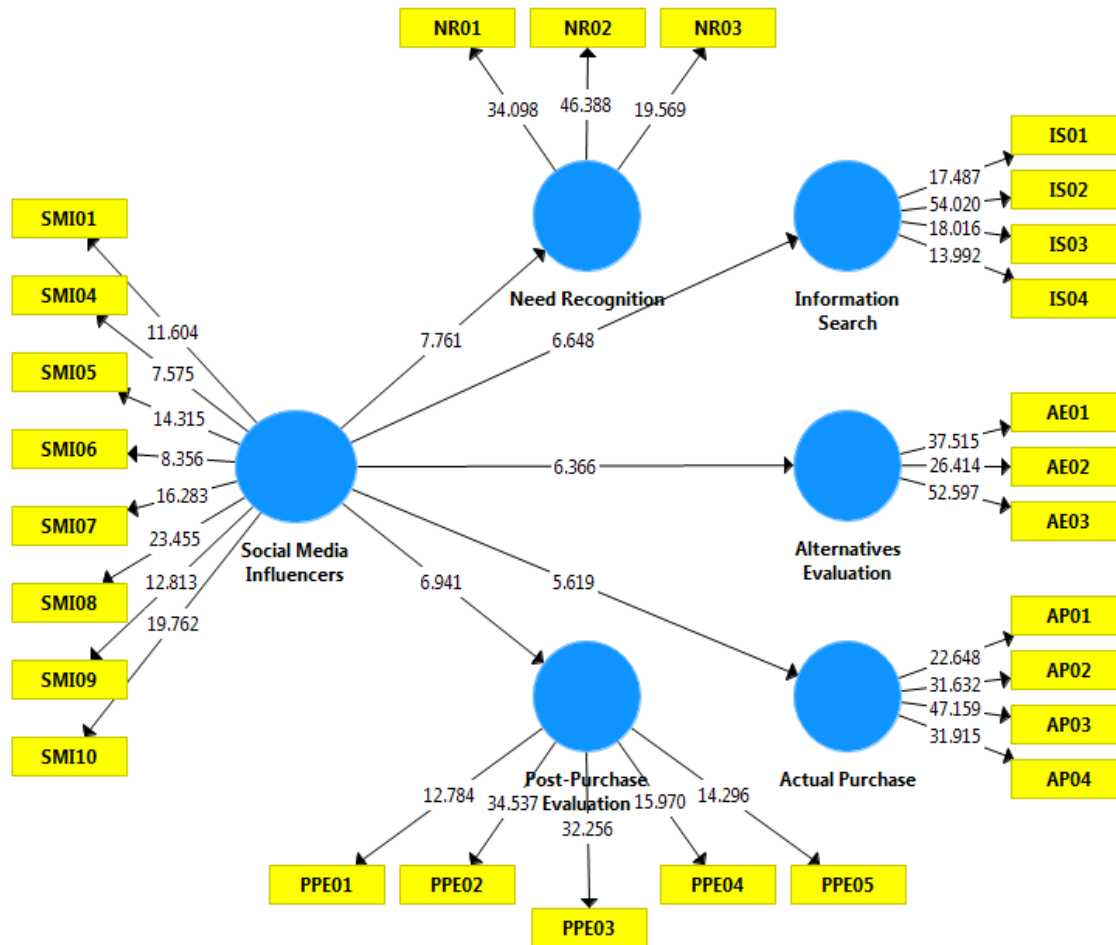


Figure 8: Results of Estimated Structural Model

Source: Own elaboration

5.5 Evaluation of Structural Model

Having estimated the partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM), it is important now to evaluate the PLS-SEM that is already estimated. In this context, the coefficient of determination (R^2), the effect size (f^2), and the predictive relevance are the three criteria that are used. Each of these is discussed below.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is an important criterion in the evaluation of the partial least squares' structural equation model (PLS-SEM). This coefficient represents the proportion of the variation in the dependent variable that is explained by one or more independent variable (Hair et al., 2010).

The minimum acceptable level of the coefficient of determination (R^2) depends on the context of research (Hair et al., 2010). However, Falk and Miller (1992) recommend an R^2 value of 0.10 as a minimum acceptable level. According to Cohen (1988), R^2 values of dependent variables are evaluated as follows: (1) substantial (0.26), (2) moderate (0.13), and (3) weak (0.02).

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the five dependent variables of study are shown in Table 15.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2) of Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	R^2	Result
Need recognition	0.262	Substantial
Information search	0.206	Moderate
Alternatives evaluation	0.180	Moderate
Actual purchase	0.154	Moderate
Post-purchase evaluation	0.227	Moderate

Table 15: Coefficient of Determination (R^2) of Dependent Variables

Source: Own calculation.

Table 15 indicates that need recognition has an R^2 value of 0.262. This means that nearly 26% of the variation in the need recognition stage of the purchase process is explained by social media influencers. This R^2 value is considered more than the minimum acceptable level according to Falk and Miller (1992) and substantial according to Cohen (1988).

Similarly, information search has an R^2 value of 0.206, indicating that approximately 21% of the variation in the information search stage of the purchase process is explained by social media influencers. This R^2 value is considered more than the minimum acceptable level according to Falk and Miller (1992) and moderate according to Cohen (1998).

Moreover, alternatives evaluation has an R^2 value of 0.180, meaning that 18% of the variation in the alternative's evaluation stage of the purchase process is explained by social media influencers. This R^2 value is considered more than the minimum acceptable level according to Falk and Miller (1992) and moderate according to Cohen (1998).

In the same way, actual purchase has an R^2 value of 0.154, which means that around 15% of the variation in the actual purchase stage of the purchase process is explained by social media influencers. This R^2 value is more than the minimum acceptable level according to Falk and Miller (1992) and moderate according to Cohen (1998).

Finally, post-purchase evaluation has an R^2 value of 0.227. This value means that roughly 23% of the variation in the post-purchase evaluation stage of the purchase process is explained by social media influencers. This R^2 value is considered more than the minimum acceptable level according to Falk and Miller (1992) and moderate according to Cohen (1998).

Another criterion used in the assessment of the partial least squares' structural equation model (PLS-SEM) is the effect size (f^2). It indicates the relative effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable due to changes in the R^2 (Chin, 1998). The effect size (f^2) is calculated as the increase in R^2 of the dependent variable to which the path is connected relative to the dependent variable's proportion of unexplained variance (Chin, 1998).

According to Cohen (1988), an effect size (f^2) above 0.35 is considered large, an effect size (f^2) ranging from 0.15 to 0.35 is considered medium, an effect size (f^2) between 0.02 to 0.15 is considered small, and an effect size (f^2) less than 0.02 is considered with no effect.

The effect size (f^2) for the dependent variables of the model are shown in Table 16.

Effect Size (f^2) for Dependent Variables

Path	f^2	Result
Social media influencers → Need recognition	0.356	Large
Social media influencers → Information search	0.261	Medium
Social media influencers → Alternatives evaluation	0.220	Medium
Social media influencers → Actual purchase	0.182	Medium
Social media influencers → Post-purchase evaluation	0.293	Medium

Table 16: Effect Size (f^2) for Dependent Variables

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 16 indicates that there is a large effect size of social media influencers on the need recognition stage of the purchase process ($f^2 = 0.356$). Moreover, there is a medium effect size of social media influencers on each of the other four stages of the purchase process. Namely, information search, alternatives evaluation, actual purchase, and post-purchase evaluation.

In addition to testing the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the effect size (f^2), it is also necessary to test the predictive power of the estimated PLS-SEM. This is carried out using the predictive relevance (Q^2) test.

The predictive relevance (Q^2) can be calculated using the cross-validated redundancy approach or the cross-validated communality approach. In this study, the cross-validated redundancy approach is used as a measure of predictive relevance (Q^2) since it, as opposed to the other approach, includes the structural model, the key element of the path model, to predict eliminated data points.

A cross-validated redundancy value of more than zero indicates that there is predictive relevance while a value of less than zero indicates that the model lacks predictive relevance (Fornell and Cha, 1994).

The predictive relevance (Q^2) of the model is assessed using the cross-validated redundancy approach as shown in Table 17.

Predictive Relevance (Q^2) of Model

Dependent Variable	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (1-SSE/SSO)$
Need recognition	483.000	392.357	0.188
Information search	644.000	563.122	0.126
Alternatives evaluation	483.000	419.035	0.132
Actual purchase	644.000	575.905	0.106
Post-purchase evaluation	805.000	693.533	0.138

Table 17: Predictive Relevance (Q^2) of Model

Source: Own elaboration.

In Table 17, SSO refers to the sum of squared observations, SSE refers to the sum of squared prediction errors, and the last column (i.e., $1-SSE/SSO$) gives the Q^2 value. This value is used to assess the model's predictive relevance.

Table 17 indicates that the Q^2 values of the five dependent variables are all above zero. More specifically, need recognition has Q^2 value of 0.188, information search has Q^2 value of 0.126, alternatives evaluation has Q^2 value of 0.132, actual purchase has Q^2 value of 0.106, and post-purchase evaluation has Q^2 value of 0.138. All of these values provide support for the model's predictive relevance regarding the dependent variables.

5.6 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

In summary, the five hypotheses of the study are all accepted. Table 18 summarizes the results of hypotheses testing.

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Decision
1	Social media influencers → Need recognition	Accepted
2	Social media influencers → Information search	Accepted
3	Social media influencers → Alternatives evaluation	Accepted
4	Social media influencers → Actual purchase	Accepted
5	Social media influencers → Post-purchase evaluation	Accepted

Table 18: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Source: Own elaboration

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Based on data analysis and discussion, the main conclusions are summarized below:

1. Slightly more than three-quarters (78%) of respondents are attracted by social media marketing while 22% of them are not attracted by this kind of marketing. These figures highlight the importance of social media marketing in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine.
2. The top three social media platforms that are used to follow beauty and fashion influencers in Palestine are Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, respectively. On the other hand, YouTube, Twitter, and other social media platforms are much less used.
3. Almost 30% of respondents follow 1-3 influencers, 35% follow 4-6 influencers, 11% follow 7-9 influencers, and 24% follow more than 9 influencers. These figures highlight the importance of beauty and fashion influencers in terms of shaping their followers' perceptions towards beauty and fashion products.
4. 38% of respondents spend less than an hour a week following beauty and fashion influencers, 37% spend 1-2 hours a week, 15% spend 3-4 hours a week, and 10% spend more than 9 hours a week.
5. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents say that they have purchased beauty and fashion products that are recommended by social media influencers they follow. On the other hand, only 28% of respondents say that they have not purchased those products due to recommendations made by social media influencers. These figures highlight the importance of this kind of marketing in general and particularly in the beauty and fashion industry.

6. Only 5% of respondents purchase beauty and fashion products on a weekly basis, 30% purchase those products on a monthly basis, 26% purchase on a quarterly basis, 15% purchase semiannually, and 24% purchase them annually. These figures highlight the vital role that could be played by social media influencers to solicit their followers to buy beauty and fashion products more frequently than they now do.
7. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents say that they are affected by beauty and fashion influencers to different extents. Specifically, 72% of total respondents stated that they are affected by beauty and fashion influencers to some extent, 6% to large extent, and only 1% to great extent. On the other hand, only 22% of respondents say that they are not affected by beauty and fashion influencers at all.
8. Social media influencers have a direct positive effect on each of the five stages of the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine. More specifically, social media influencers positively affect the need recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, actual purchase, and post-purchase evaluation phases of the purchase process.
9. Social media influencers explain the variation in each stage of the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine. Specifically, 26% of the variation in the need recognition, 21% of the variation in the information search, 18% of the variation in the alternatives evaluation, 15% of the variation in the actual purchase, and 23% of the variation in the post-purchase evaluation are explained by social media influencers.
10. There is a large effect size of social media influencers on the need recognition stage of customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine. Moreover, there is a medium effect size of social media influencers on each of the other four stages of the purchase process. Namely, information search, alternatives evaluation, actual purchase, and post-purchase evaluation.

6.2 Recommendations

Considering the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are worth mentioning:

1. Companies that sell beauty and fashion products are recommended to invest more and more in efficient ways of marketing including social media marketing to make use of the influence that social media influencers can have in terms of reaching target customers and inducing them to purchase.
2. Companies that sell beauty and fashion products are recommended to build relationships with social media influencers who can enlarge customer base and enhance customer trust and loyalty, which in turn result in long-term customer relationships and more sales.
3. Companies that sell beauty and fashion products should use some incentives, including discounts, to encourage their customers recommend their products via different social media platforms to shape followers' attitudes towards their products.
4. Marketers working in the beauty and fashion industry should encourage customers to share their positive experiences on social media platforms about the products they promote.
5. Customers who purchase beauty and fashion products should express their concerns and complaints about the products they purchase on the companies' website as well as social media platform to force these companies to improve their products.
6. Marketers working in the beauty and fashion industry should deal with customers' concerns and complaints about the products they purchase and communicate through social media platforms.
7. Since customers are more likely to purchase beauty and fashion products that are recommended by other people, companies and their marketers should encourage social media users to create positive WOM on social media platforms to enhance their sales.

8. Companies that sell beauty and fashion products should hire social media influencers who have many followers, have good characteristics, and can shape their followers' attitudes in a positive way.
9. Companies that sell beauty and fashion products should follow customers' feedback about their experiences on social media platforms to have an idea of what they have done right and what they need to improve.

6.3 Direction for future research

This study investigated the impact of social media influencers on the customers' purchase process in the beauty and fashion industry in Palestine. However, future researchers are directed to carry out similar studies on industries other than the beauty and fashion industry (e.g. sport industry). Moreover, researchers are recommended to conduct studies that investigate the impact of social media influencers on variables other than the purchase process (e.g. purchase intentions, decision-making process, brand personality, perceptions, and recommendation). Finally, researchers are encouraged to use other sampling techniques, larger sample size, and different statistical analysis techniques.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant,

The researcher, who is currently enrolled in the Master Program at the UPV University, is conducting a study titled “The Impact of Social Media Influencers on the Customers’ Purchase Process in the Beauty and Fashion Industry in Palestine”.

This questionnaire is designed to collect the necessary data for the study. The information you provide will help the researcher better understand the impact of social media influencers on customers’ purchase process. Because you are the one who can give a correct picture in this regard, I request you to respond to the questions frankly and honestly.

Your response will be kept strictly confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the information you give.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation. I greatly appreciate your help in furthering this research endeavor.

Cordially,

Nour Irshaid

8.1 Section one: Socioeconomic Characteristics

Please circle the number of the appropriate response for you in respect of the following items:

1. Gender:

1. Male

2. Female

2. Marital status:

1. Single

2. Married

3. Other. Specify: _____

3. Age:

1. Under 20

2. 20–30

3. 31–40

4. 41–50

5. Over 50

4. Place of residence:

1. City

2. Town

3. Village

4. Camp

5. Highest completed level of education:

1. No education

2. Primary or secondary school

3. Diploma

4. BA

5. Master's

6. PhD

6. Employment status:

1. Employed

2. Unemployed

7. Level of monthly household income:

1. Low

2. Moderate

3. High

8.2 Section two: Use of social media platforms

Please circle the number of the appropriate response for you in respect of the following items:

1. Does social media marketing attract you?
 1. Yes
 2. No

2. What social media platforms do you use to follow beauty and fashion influencers? (please check all that apply)
 1. Facebook
 2. Instagram
 3. Snapchat
 4. Twitter
 5. YouTube
 6. Other. Specify: _____

3. How many beauty and fashion influencers on social media do you follow?
 1. 1–3
 2. 4–6
 3. 7–9
 4. More than 9

4. How many hours a week do you usually spend following beauty and fashion influencers?
 1. Less than 1 hour
 2. 1–2 hours
 3. 3–4 hours
 4. More than 4 hours

5. Have you ever bought beauty and fashion products recommended by influencers?
 1. Yes
 2. No

6. How often do you purchase beauty and fashion products?
 1. Weekly
 2. Monthly
 3. Quarterly
 4. Semiannually
 5. Annually

7. How much do you think you are affected by beauty and fashion influencers?
 1. Not at all
 2. To some extent
 3. To large extent
 4. To great extent

8.3 Section three: Social media influencers

Put the most appropriate response number for you beside each item, using the scale below:				
Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Dimension 1: Attractiveness				
1. The contents of beauty and fashion influencers are attractive.				
2. The contents of beauty and fashion influencers are virtually appealing.				
Dimension 2: Prestige				
3. The contents of beauty and fashion influencers are prestigious.				
4. The contents of beauty and fashion influencers are upscale.				
Dimension 3: Expertise				
5. When looking at beauty and fashion influencers, I find that they are experienced.				
Dimension 4: Information				
6. I look at beauty and fashion influencers' contents because I find them informative.				
Dimension 5: Interaction				

7. I feel that beauty and fashion influencers would talk back to me if I send a private message.	
8. I feel that beauty and fashion influencers would talk back to me if I post a comment.	
9. I feel that beauty and fashion influencers would respond to me quickly and efficiently if I send a private message.	
10. I feel that beauty and fashion influencers would respond to me quickly and efficiently if I post a comment.	

8.4 Section four: Purchase process

Put the most appropriate response number for you beside each item, using the scale below:				
Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Phase 1: Need recognition				
1. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products let me realize my needs about those products.				
2. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products prompt me about purchasing those products.				
3. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products enable me to reevaluate my needs.				
Phase 2: Information search				
4. When I make a research about beauty and fashion products, I examine the related likes/comments/shares on social media platforms.				
5. When I make a research about beauty and fashion products, likes/comments/shares on social media platforms are important sources of information.				
6. When I make a search about beauty and fashion products, I think that likes/comments/shares on social media platforms are reliable.				
7. I do not make a purchase decision of beauty and fashion products without examining the related likes/comments/shares on social media platforms.				
Phase 3: Alternatives evaluation				
8. When evaluating the alternatives for beauty and fashion products, I take into consideration the related likes/comments/shares on social media platforms.				

9. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products enable me to evaluate the alternatives in my mind.	
10. I do not finish evaluating the alternatives without checking the likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products.	
Phase 4: Actual purchase	
11. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products influence the product I choose.	
12. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products influence my brand choice.	
13. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products influence the place of my purchase.	
14. Likes/comments/shares on social media platforms about beauty and fashion products influence the time of my purchase.	
Phase 5: Post-purchase evaluation	
15. When I search for solutions to my problems on beauty and fashion products, I check the likes/comments/shares on social media platforms related to that product.	
16. I share my satisfaction or dissatisfaction about my beauty and fashion products on social media platforms.	
17. If I am satisfied with my beauty and fashion products, I share my next purchase decision on social media platforms.	
18. If I am not satisfied with my beauty and fashion products, I share my decision of not purchasing the same product again on social media platforms.	
19. After purchasing a beauty and fashion product, I check reviews on social media platforms to evaluate my decision.	

Thank you