

# “How Emotional Branding by Beauty Influencers Affect Buying Behaviour of Gen Z Women?”



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# **1. Abstract**

The way beauty influencers emotionally connect with audiences on platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube is changing how Gen Z women shop, especially for skincare and cosmetics (Pan *et al.*, 2025). This study focuses on how emotional branding, through elements like storytelling, vulnerability, trust and relatability, shapes the buying behaviour of Gen Z women. While influencer marketing is well-established, fewer studies explore the emotional dynamics within influencer content that impact how young women feel and decide. This research helps fill that gap by looking at how emotional responses translate into actual purchase decisions.

Being rooted in prior research (Shah *et al.*, 2023; Racine, 2021; Kim and Sullivan, 2019), this study used a quantitative method through a structured online survey. Respondents were women aged 18 to 28 who actively follow beauty influencers. The questionnaire explored emotional responses like trust and persona connection, alongside behaviours like clicking on links, using promo codes, and repeat purchases.

Key findings revealed that most Gen Z women engage regularly with influencer content, follow several influencers, and feel emotionally connected to at least one. Emotional storytelling, especially content that showed real struggles like acne or self-doubt, was found to build higher trust and influence. Many participants admitted to purchasing not just because of product quality, but because some of their emotions got moved with the way an influencer was promoting it. Also, micro-influencers were viewed as more relatable and trustworthy compared to celebrities. However, it has also been found that emotional branding backfires when it feels fake or overly commercial. When influencers lacked consistency or authenticity, it results in drop in trust, supporting previous claims by Buckley *et al.* (2024) and Knoll and Matthes (2017) on the importance of emotional credibility in digital influence.

This research shows that emotional branding is a core driver in Gen Z's beauty purchasing behaviour. It offers a strong foundation for both academics and marketers to better understand how trust, identity fit, and emotional resonance impact consumer choices, and how in the world of beauty marketing, genuine emotional stories can hold more power than polished advertising.

## **2. Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Stephen Sands, whose guidance, patience, and insightful feedback helped me shape this dissertation from a simple idea into a full research project. His support and insights helped bring clarity to my work.

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A special thanks to all the amazing women who took the time to respond to my survey and contributing their honest input, without which this research would not have been possible.

Finally, thanks to my parents for their unwavering support, and to my classmates for their constant encouragements and cooperation.

### **3. Submission of Thesis and Dissertation**

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## **4. Introduction**

The rise of social media have reshaped the way people discover and interact with brands, especially within the beauty and skincare industry (Hudders *et al.*, 2021; Racine, 2021). Over the last decade, platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube have become key spaces where influencers, particularly beauty influencers, connect with audiences not only through product promotions but through deeply personal and emotional content (Pan *et al.*, 2025). For Gen Z women, who are digital natives and highly active on social media, these influencers serve as trusted sources of advice, inspiration, and validation (Nguyen *et al.*, 2023). They do not only showcase products but share their skincare struggles, personal journeys, and transformation stories. As a result, these influencers are able to build emotional bonds that feels more like friendships than advertising, which is exactly what makes emotional branding such a powerful tool in this context (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

Emotional branding refers to the use of emotion-driven narratives, symbols, or messages to create strong emotional connections between a brand and its audience (Racine, 2021). In the world of beauty, emotional branding often involves qualities that resonate deeply with younger consumers like vulnerability, relatability and authenticity. For Gen Z, emotional honesty matters more than perfection and they tend to value influencers who show their real skin, talk about self-esteem issues, or explain how a product fits into their personal story (Zilka, 2023; Kim and Sullivan, 2019). In many ways, influencer marketing has shifted from simply showcasing a product to telling an emotional story that aligns with the values and identity of the audience.

While influencer marketing is a growing field and much has been written about its impact on brand awareness, engagement, and sales, there is still a limited understanding of the emotional mechanisms that drive consumer behaviour, particularly in the context of beauty influencers and Gen Z women. Existing literature has touched on emotional attachment (Shah *et al.*, 2023), parasocial relationships (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), and trust in influencers (Hudders *et al.*, 2021), but fewer studies have examined how all these emotional factors combine to influence real-world buying behaviour. This is the key gap this dissertation aims to address.

This central research question is: How does emotional branding from beauty influencers affect the purchasing behaviour of Gen Z women? This study goes beyond simply measuring whether influencers drive purchases. Instead, it focuses on the emotions behind those decisions, such as trust, authenticity, identity fit, and emotional connection, and explores how they shape the way Gen Z women respond to beauty content on social media. These elements are central to how emotional branding works and are crucial to understanding the deeper psychological motivations that go beyond product features or price (Pan *et al.*, 2025).

To explore this question, the study adopted a quantitative research approach, using a structured online survey targeted at Gen Z women aged 18 to 28 who actively follow beauty influencers. The survey included questions designed to measure emotional responses to influencer content preferences (e.g. tutorials, reviews, or transformation videos), and behavioural outcomes like clicking on links, using discount codes, or making repeat purchases. The aim was to collect both emotional and behavioural data to build a clearer picture of how emotional branding acts in this particular demographic.

Several key themes are analysed throughout the dissertation. First is the theme of trust and authenticity, which examines how perceived honesty and vulnerability in influencer content influences credibility and buying decisions (Hudders *et al.*, 2021; Lou and Yuan, 2019). The second theme is identity fit, looking at how well the influencer's personality, appearance, or life experiences align with those of the audience and how this alignment builds emotional congruence (Ding, 2024). Another important area is platform behaviour, where the study explores how Gen Z women interact with different forms of influencer content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram (Chiu and Ho, 2023), and how features like stories, reels and live streams support emotional engagement. Finally, the study also looks at the limits of emotional branding, such as when content feels too commercial or inconsistent, which can reduce trust and result in disengagement or backlash (Buckley *et al.*, 2024).

What makes this study relevant is that it focuses on emotional branding as a strategic yet human practice. The beauty industry is already emotionally charged, it deals with self-image, confidence, identity and self-care, and when this meets influencer-led content that is perceived as real and emotionally honest, the

consumer-brand relationship transforms into something more personal (Papageorgiou *et al.*, 2022). For marketers and brands trying to reach Gen Z, understanding how emotional connections are formed, what breaks them, is key to creating meaningful, lasting influencer.

Furthermore, this dissertation also has practical value as the findings can help brands better identify what kind of influencer content resonated emotionally with Gen Z women. It can also inform influencer strategies, for example, by encouraging partnerships with micro-influencers who are seen as more relatable or by supporting real, story-based content rather than scripted advertisements. It also offers academic contribution by deepening the understanding of how emotional branding works specifically in the context of social media influencers and young female consumers, an area that is still underdeveloped in marketing literature.

In the chapters of this study, the literature review will outline key theories and existing studies on emotional branding, influencer marketing, Gen Z psychology, and beauty consumer behaviour. The methodology chapter explains how data was collected and analysed, followed by a detailed findings and discussion section that links participants responses to existing theory. The dissertation concludes with key insights, limitations and recommendations for future research. Ultimately, this study aims to show that emotional branding is not just a soft, creative element of influencer marketing but a central and highly impactful force in shaping how Gen Z women think, feel and behave as beauty consumers.

## **5. Literature Review**

### **5.1. Introduction**

In today's digital world where the market depends on digital media and technology, brands are doing more than just selling products based on their qualities or prices. Instead, they are trying to connect emotionally with their audiences, especially in the beauty industry (Pan *et al.*, 2025). So, rather than simply focusing on what a moisturizer or lipstick does, brands focus on how it can make the consumer feel,

whether the feeling is confidence, comfort, empowerment or self-love. This is how beauty brands do emotional branding, as it is when brands try to create a bond using feelings, identity, and values rather than just product benefits or price (Gross *et al.*, 2023; Joshi *et al.*, 2023). In their study, Racine (2021) explains that emotional branding helps brands build deeper and longer-lasting connections with their customers. Also, Kim and Sullivan (2019) say that emotional branding works well when it aligns with how someone sees themselves or how they want to be seen. Then, Yin Zhang *et al.* (2022) further support this idea by showing that emotions in branding lead to stronger loyalty and attention, especially on social media.

There is a notable rise in influencers on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok in the last few years (Hudders *et al.*, 2021), which had made emotional branding even more powerful as instead of brands speaking directly to consumers, they now use influencers to speak to them as they specialise in certain niches and got people following them who are interested in those areas (Gross *et al.*, 2023; Joshi *et al.*, 2023). Influencers often share their personal stories, struggles and successes while using certain products that creates a feeling of trust and connection, as Lacap *et al.*, 2024; Hudders *et al.* (2021) and Pourkabirian *et al.* (2021) say influencers help humanise brands and make their messages feel more authentic.

Moreover, Pan *et al.* (2025), and Lou and Yuan (2019) also show that emotional messages from influencers lead to stronger purchase intentions, especially when women feel emotionally connected to the influencer, also supported by studies done by Comicho *et al.*, 2025; Ateş *et al.*, 2024, and Verma and Sainy, 2024). One group that is particularly affected by this combination of emotional branding influencer marketing is Gen Z women. Born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019), Gen Z is a generation that has grown up with technology and is constantly connected to social media, being exposed to influencers content daily and are very responsive to emotional messaging (Kuo and Le, 2025).

This literature review will explore these ideas through three main themes: the nature of emotional branding in beauty, how influencers act as emotional branding agents, and how Gen Z women react emotionally and behaviourally to these strategies, then moving ahead with critique and research gap.

## 5.2. Theme 1: Emotional Branding

Emotional branding is a strategy used by companies to make consumers feel emotionally connected to a product, brand, or service (Racine, 2021; Kim and Sullivan, 2019). In the beauty industry, emotional branding is particularly powerful because beauty products often relate to self-image, identity and personal belonging, or empowerment to the use of a product. According to Kim and Sullivan (2019), emotional branding works by aligning the brand's values with the identity and values of the consumer. Then, Racine (2021) states that emotional branding helps brands cut through the saturated market by creating messages that people feel on a deeper level.

In the context of beauty products, emotional branding has been used to create campaigns that embodies an emotion, such as, many skincare and cosmetic brands focus on self-love, confidence, or overcoming insecurity. Amelia *et al.* (2023) note that Gen Z women respond well to emotional branding when it feels authentic and not forced. Pan *et al.* (2025) also point out that emotional triggers such as trust, warmth, and vulnerability increase the effectiveness of marketing messages, and further on this, Yin Zhang *et al.* (2022) explain that emotions make people pay attention to branding and can shape long-term preferences, especially in competitive markets like beauty. It also affects the way consumers see a brand or its value as when people feel emotionally connected to a product, they are more likely to recommend it to others (Gross *et al.*, 2023).

Zaman *et al.* (2024) found that emotional attachment can influence brand preference and even brands loyalty. This is very true for skincare and cosmetics, where consumers often seek out brands that represent more than just beauty, they seek for values like body positivity, diversity, inclusivity etc. (Shah *et al.*, 2023; Joshi *et al.*, 2023; Racine, 2021; Kim and Sullivan, 2019).

However, emotional branding must be carefully done as Buckley *et al.* (2024) caution that overly polished or inauthentic emotional branding can backfire because Gen Z consumers are quick to spot fake emotional appeals and may respond negatively to brands that appear manipulative or insincere. Also, Enriquez *et al.* (2025) highlight that unrealistic beauty standards promoted in emotional campaigns can lead to negative emotional effects, such as reduced self-esteem or body dissatisfaction.

Weinlich and Semerádová (2022) similarly note that negative emotional cues in influencer marketing can weaken audience trust and brand perception. This means that while emotional branding is powerful, it must be delivered in a way that aligns with the consumer's values and lived experiences.

Then, Liu et al. (2025) also link emotional branding to impulse buying, stating that when emotions are triggered, people are more likely to quick purchasing decisions without thinking deeply. Singh *et al.* (2023) agrees to this and adds that emotionally engaging content, especially on social media, can make consumers buy products they had not planned to purchase. Verma and Sainy (2024) also find that emotionally driven influencer content significantly boosts purchase intentions among young consumers. his kind of buying is emotionally driven rather than logically planned. In addition to this, Holiday *et al.* (2023) finds in their study that visual and verbal cues, like facial expressions, tone of voice and language used can make a huge difference by making brand message feel more real, personal and meaningful; and Mabkhot *et al.* (2022) further support this by showing that when trust is built through emotional consistency, consumers feel safer making repeat purchase, increasing brand loyalty in long term.

Storytelling is also a part of emotional branding as brands often use stories to communicate struggles, journeys, and personal success related to their products, making these stories more than just marketing, they are emotional experiences that consumers remember. For this, Shah *et al.* (2023) argue that storytelling creates a deeper bond between the brand and the consumer because when a story shows or includes the consumer's own life or desires, it becomes easier to trust and engage with the brand.

Despite all of this, emotional branding is not a science that will always be accurate as some emotional messages work better than others, and some audience are more receptive than others, such as emotional branding related to mental health, body positivity, skincare, trends, cosmetics or self-care tends to resonate more with Gen Z women because of the awareness on such topics among the other audience groups. As per Zilka (2023), Gen Z is drawn to emotionally honest content that acknowledges real challenges and avoids perfection; and Amelia *et al.* (2023) also report that messages about real beauty, self-acceptance and self-improvement are

more successful in beauty marketing than those focusing on luxury or exclusivity. Kuo and Le (2025) similarly find that Gen Z women respond strongly to relatable and attractive influencer figures in beauty marketing. Hence, when done right, emotional branding can create long-term customer relationships and influences both the emotions and buying behaviour of consumers but if not, it has potential to break trust and harm brand reputation greatly.

### **5.3. Theme 2: Influencers**

Influencers do not just promote products, but they integrate them into their personal lives, which allows them to create emotional stories and message that feel authentic to followers. According to Gross *et al.* (2023) and Hudders *et al.* (2021), influencers make brand messages feel more human, which increases emotional impact. Also, Ateş *et al.* (2024), Verma and Sainy, (2024), Zaman *et al.* (2024) and Shah *et al.* (2023) show that female consumers are more likely to buy products when they feel an emotional bond with influencer presenting them. This shows how influencers become a kind of bridge that connects brands to consumers through emotional cues.

Moreover, Liu and Wang (2025), Lacap *et al.*, (2024), Purnamaningsih and Rizkalla (2020), and Sokolova and Kefi (2020) explain that followers may see influencers as friends or role models, even though the connection is not mutual, forming parasocial relationships, which refers to a one-sided emotional connection that people develop with influencers. Bogdan *et al.* (2025) and Shah *et al.* (2023) add that emotional closeness to influencers increases consumer trust and the perceived credibility of product recommendations. The effect is strengthened when influencers consistently show emotional openness, such as talking about their struggles or sharing personal stories related to skincare and beauty. The style and tone used by influencers also matter a lot as Holiday *et al.* (2023) explain that non-verbal cues like facial expressions, tone of voice, and eye contact in videos can boost the emotional effect of content. For example, when an influencer shares their emotional story or struggle while sharing a cleanser for acne prone skin, viewers who relate to her story are more likely to believe and relate to the message. This adds more emotional layers to the product, which plain advertising often cannot do.

Balqis *et al.* (2024) found that content created by influencers themselves is seen as more credible than content provided by the brand as when influencers talk about a product in their own way, using their own words and emotions, the message feels more natural. Moreover, Joshi *et al.* (2023) Hudders *et al.* (2021) argue that micro-influencers are especially powerful in emotional branding because they seem more relatable and trustworthy than celebrities. These influencers are often seen as real people, making their emotional content more believable. Hence, credibility is an extremely important factor when it comes to success of emotional branding. In this context, Abdul Aziz *et al.* (2023) explain that when an influencer is seen as credible and emotionally trustworthy, it makes consumers feel closer to the brand because influencer-brand alignment is important. Also, Hung *et al.* (2025) show that if the influencer's personality, values, or lifestyle match the product, people are more likely to accept and respond positively. The more emotional fit there is between the influencer and the brand, the stronger the message.

Another finding comes from Zaman *et al.* (2024), who suggest that emotional attachment to influencers can turn into emotional attachment to the brand. This is especially true when the influencer shares their genuine feelings about the product or integrates it into their routines. Racine (2021), and Weinlich and Semerádová adds that emotional closeness through influencers makes branding feel like a shared experience, not just a transaction. Thus, this emotional connection makes people feel like they are buying into a lifestyle or belief, not just a product. Moreover, in some cases, influencers even become the emotional face of a brand. Pan *et al.* (2025), and Kuo and Le (2025) suggest that influencers can act as emotional agents for brands, passing on feelings like care, honesty, and authenticity. This is powerful for younger consumers who look for emotional meaning behind their purchases.

However, the strategy is not without problems. Buckley *et al.* (2024) warn that if influencers see too perfect or fake, emotional branding fails. Gen Z audiences are especially sensitive to insincerity, so, if they feel like the influencer is promoting a product only for money, and not because they genuinely care about it, then the emotional message is not accepted by them. In addition to this, Kumar (2023), and Pedalino and Camerini (2022) says that idealised portrayals from influencers can

cause negative emotions like self-doubt, self-sabotage or body dissatisfaction. That is why emotional branding must be handled carefully to avoid backfiring.

In conclusion, influencers are one of the key messengers of emotional branding in beauty industry. Through their trustworthiness, tone, content style and emotional storytelling, they help in turning cosmetic and skincare products into emotional experiences when their content feels honest, personal and emotionally aligned with the brand.

#### **5.4. Theme 3: Gen Z buyers**

For the purpose of this study, Gen Z women are defined as women aged between 18- to 28-year-old, in line with the Dimock (2019), who categorise Generation Z as those born between 1997 and 2012. These women are considered highly emotional, digitally savvy and influenced by social media as they are exposed to it more than previous generations; and beauty influencers on the platforms like TikTok and Instagram, play a huge role in shaping what Gen Z buys and also great deal of how they feel. Due to this, their purchasing behaviour is tied very closely to how they relate emotionally to the influencers and the branding being shown to them (Khwela *et al.*, 2024; Zaman *et al.*, 2024; Gross *et al.*, 2023; Joshi *et al.*, 2023; Kim and Sullivan, 2019).

Moreover, Papagerorgozeriou *et al.* (2022) says in their study that Gen Z women are not buying skincare or cosmetics, but they are buying into emotional values like confidence, self-care, and belonging, this is also supported by Comicho *et al.* (2025) and Ateş *et al.* (2024). Also, beauty influencers can change how Gen Z sees themselves. Enriquez *et al.* (2025), Kuo and Le (2025), and Weinlich and Semerádová, (2022) said that when influencers talk about self-worth or share their personal beauty journey, Gen Z viewers can start seeing their own image differently. Moreover, they stated that beauty campaigns that focus on things like empowerment or confidence make young women feel better and connect more with the brand. So instead of pushing perfection, the influencers who talk about real stuff like struggling with acne or feeling bad about their appearance help Gen Z women feel less alone and more relatable. And, when the influencers are relatable emotionally, that

emotional feeling stick to the brand too (Zaman *et al.*, 2024; Pourkabirian *et al.*, 2021; Purnamaningsih and Rizkalla, 2020).

Efendioĝku (2019) states about how seeing others enjoy products or look confident can trigger emotional comparison, for example, if many influencers are posting about a cleanser that got them rid of acne and get better skin texture, then a Gen Z women watching or interacting with those posts might as well think that it will work for her as that could trigger an insecurity in her or maybe a desire for improvement, she might want that feeling too as the influencers are claiming the cleanser gave them, so they buy in (Lacap *et al.*, 2024).

The fact that Gen Z reacts differently to different types of influencers is supported by Chiu and Ho (2023) in their study as micro-influencers tend to make stronger emotional connections because they feel more genuine and do not seem like unapproachable or distant celebrities. Then, Özer *et al.* (2022) and Hudders *et al.* (2021) added that micro-influencers are usually better at this because they seem more like regular people and more approachable. Nguyen *et al.* (2022) added that emotional similarity is often more important than influencer popularity. So, if someone feels relatable, even if they are not very famous, they will still influence Gen Z buying decisions Liu and Wang (2025), and Comicho *et al.* (2025). Moreover, Bogdan *et al.* (2025) said that things like trust and feeling are connected, and called it as identification, are the things that turn emotional branding into action, as Gen Z needs to see a bit of themselves in the influencer to pay attention to them or care about them at all.

Furthermore, Gen Z women care greatly about emotional congruence as stated by Pan *et al.* (2025) that when the influencer's vibe and message match the brand, for example, if an influencer is all about self-acceptance and body-positivity, promoting a product in congruence, it feels right, but if they're suddenly promoting something opposite of what they usually preach, such as, beauty injections, they feel fake. For this, Shah *et al.* (2023) said that trust is very important here, because if the congruence is broken, the emotional connection breaks simultaneously, supported by other studies conducted by Gross *et al.* (2023) and Joshi *et al.* (2023).

Hoang and Khoa (2022) also talk about flow state, where Gen Z is just scrolling, fully into the content and they do not realise that they're making buying decisions

unconsciously. It is not like they sit down just to compare products, but they go with how it makes them feel. Emotional branding hijacks this flow and makes buying decisions feel natural (Gross *et al.*, 2023; Weinlich and Semerádová, 2022). However, it is not always good as seeing all these pretty faces perfectly fitting in beauty standards pushed by society, and it can make Gen Z feel insecure about them while chasing those unrealistic standards. Papagerorgiou *et al.* (2022) said that girls often compare themselves to influencers and feel bad for not looking the same. Also, Pedalino and Camerini (2022) found in their study that Instagram especially, is linked to lower self-esteem of Gen Z as it is crowded with high expectation beauty content. Therefore, emotional branding can backfire if it makes Gen Z feel worse about themselves as they will start resonating negative feelings with the influencer's content and ultimately with the brand (Buckley *et al.*, 2024, Ateş *et al.*, 2024).

### **5.5. Critical Reflection**

The literature strongly supports emotional branding as powerful marketing approach especially when delivered through influencers while talking about many studies, such as Zaman *et al.* (2024) and Kim and Sullivan (2019) that highlight benefits such as building trust, engagement, and stronger brand-consumer relationships. However, there are clear gaps that are often overlooked, for example, there is limited discussion on what happens when emotional branding fails or backfires. This is particularly relevant for Gen Z audiences, who are more emotionally aware and quick to spot or even criticise, content that feels fake or overly polished (Buckley *et al.*, 2024).

Much of the existing research still shows that emotional branding works similar in every marketing strategy without considering how it might vary across different Gen Z sub-groups or product categories. This is a problem because factors such as cultural background, lifestyle, influencer type and personal identity can shape how branding messages are received (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022; Racine, 2021). Another issue is that many studies focus on ideal conditions such as trust, authenticity, identity alignment but without addressing more complex realities like the influence of social platforms, the impact on mental well-being, or the fast-changing nature of online behaviour (Pedalino and Camerini, 2022).

This dissertation aims to address some of these gaps by looking at how real Gen Z women respond emotionally to influencer branding, not just when it works, but why, how, and under what conditions it becomes effective or problematic.

## **5.6. Research Gap**

Even though, much has been written on influencers and emotional branding, there are still important gaps left as not many studies look closely at how emotional branding through beauty influencers specifically affects Gen Z women's emotions and buying behaviour (Zaman *et al.*, 2024; Abdul Aziz *et al.*, 2023). Also, not enough research look at how things like influencer type, content style or platform makes a difference in emotional branding (Hung *et al.*, 2025; Lou and Yuan, 2019; Hudders *et al.*, 2021). And, even fewer studies explore how Gen Z women themselves help shape emotional branding by reacting to the content of influencers (Shah *et al.*, 2023; Kumar, 2023; Papageorgious *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, this dissertation will focus on these missing areas by having a close look at how emotional branding from beauty influencers affects Gen Z women's feelings and choices.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

Emotional branding is crucial when it comes to beauty influencers and how Gen Z women respond to them, because it is no more just about marketing a face cream or foundation, it is now about how that product makes someone feel (Gross *et al.*, 2023; Weinlich and Semerádová, 2022). Purchase decisions are strongly influenced by how well Gen Z resonates with the influencer and their message, as influencers act as emotional messengers, sharing personal stories and routines that make audiences feel seen and understood. Moreover, storytelling, emotional honest, and shared experiences enhance trust and engagement, making recommendations more persuasive than traditional advertising (Comicho *et al.*, 2025, Joshi *et al.*, 2023; Pourkabirian *et al.*, 2021).

However, emotional branding works best when it feels natural and not forced. So, if an influencer is promoting something only for money, Gen Z women can tell and reject it as well (Verma and Sainy, 2024). Also, influencers who focus on things like

body image and mental health connect often better with Gen Z women, sometimes even more than product features and price (Lacap *et al.*,2024). Therefore, this literature review shows that influencer led emotional branding is more than just a trend but a strategic approach to building trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement with Gen Z women.

## **6. Research Question**

The main aim of this research is to find out how emotional branding done by beauty influencers affects the buying decisions of Gen Z women. While doing the literature review, it became clear that these decisions are not always based on price, quality or usefulness of a product, instead, a lot of them are shaped by how the person feels about the influencer or the brand, like trust, emotional connection, or whether the influencer feels relatable.

Hence, the central and main research question for this study is: **“How does emotional branding from beauty influencers affect the purchasing behaviour of Gen Z women?”**

From past studies done in this area we can see how emotions influence consumer behaviour such as Racine (2021), and Kim and Sullivan (2019). Several other authors like Zaman *et al.* (2024) and Shah *et al.* (2023), have talked about how trust, attachment, and feelings towards influencers can shape what people buy, but there has not been much work done on how all these emotional factors come together in the specific case of Gen Z women buying skincare and beauty products. Also, to make the main question easier to research, it was broken down into four smaller sub-questions. These sub-questions each focus on one part of emotional branding that seems to buying decisions, based on what was seen in past research.

### **6.1. Sub-Question 1: Do Gen Z women feel emotionally attached to beauty influencers?**

Emotional attachment occurs when someone feel close to an influencer, even if they've never met as this is very common when influencers share personal stories, emotions, or their own beauty struggles. Supporting evidence from Shah *et al.* (2023), and as Sanchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) show that this emotional closeness can actually make followers more likely to buy what the influencer recommends. These are called parasocial relationships in which one-sided emotional connections where people feel like they know the influencer personally (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). This question will help to understand if those feelings lead to buying behaviour.

#### **6.2. Sub-Question 2: Does trust in an influencer affect purchase behaviour?**

Trust is a key part of emotional branding. Even if the message is emotional, it will not work unless the followers trusts the person saying it. Past research (Zaman *et al.*, 2024; Lou and Yuan, 2019) found that followers are more likely to buy something if they believe the influencer is honest and just being paid to say good things. So, this sub-question helps measure if high trust makes people more likely to follow through with a purchase.

#### **6.3. Sub-Question 3: Does identity alignment make a difference?**

This question looks at whether people are more affected by influencers who seem similar to them, such as, if an influencer shares the same style, values or struggles, then the followers may feel like the influencer gets them due to identity congruence (Kim and Sullivan, 2019). When this happens, the emotional message feels more real and relatable. Studies like Jain and Roy (2016) and Hung *et al.* (2025) support this idea by showing that identity fit strengthens emotional influence.

#### **6.4. Sub-Question 4: Does the authenticity of emotional branding matter?**

Gen Z is highly aware of when content seems fake or too polished. If an influencer seems overly scripted or inauthentic, their emotional message might not work. Buckley *et al.* (2024) found that many Gen Z women feel awkward or doubtful when brands try too hard to be emotional in a commercial way. On the other hand, influencers who show real emotions and everyday struggles are seen more trustworthy and persuasive. This question will examine how authenticity changes how people respond to branding.

### **6.5. Why These Questions Matter**

Each sub-question addresses a different part of emotional branding, like attachment, trust, identity fit, and authenticity, and together they help answer the main research question in a structured way. Thus, by answering these sub-questions, the research will find out which emotional factors are most important in influencing Gen Z women. This would not just benefit marketers and brands but also shows how emotions and identity shapes the way young women make decisions online. Furthermore, it helps to close a gap in the existing research by bringing all these emotional elements together in one focused study.

## **7. Methodology**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This section outlines how the research was designed, planned and conducted to examine the effect of emotional branding by beauty influencers on the buying behaviour of Gen Z women. Emotional branding is known to be rooted in deep feelings of an individual such as trust, identity, and emotional connection, yet feelings are hard to measure perfectly (Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023; Jackson and Dolan, 2021; Racine, 2021). This will be explored using a structured survey with quantifiable answers. This section includes the research philosophy and approach, research design, sampling strategy, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, critique and limitations of the study. The goal is to explain how the study was conducted and why the certain choices were made.

## 7.2. Research Philosophy and Approach

This research adopts a post-positivist philosophy. It is appropriate when studying people's behaviour and feelings because it understands that human emotions can never be measured perfectly but still try to find patterns using structured tools (Saunders *et al.*, 2023; Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023; Jackson and Dolan, 2021). In this case, the study aims to understand how Gen Z women react to influencer content that has emotional branding, emotionally and in their purchase behaviour.

Creswell (2017), and Maksimović and Evtimov, (2023) explains that post-positivist research recognises that all observation is fallible and that we can never fully know reality, but we can try to approach the truth through careful observation and logical reasoning. Thus, a fully scientific or positivist view might ignore the emotional part, which is why a post-positivism approach provides a good middle ground. According to Bryman and Bell (2022), post-positivism is popular in social sciences because it allows for measuring attitudes and behaviours without expecting perfect objectivity.

The research also follows a deductive approach, which means that it starts with theories and ideas found in other research and tests them in a specific setting or criterion. According to Sauders *et al.* (2023), deductive research is about developing a hypothesis based on existing theory and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis. Earlier, the literature review showed ideas like trust in influencers or feeling emotionally aligned with them can influence whether someone buys a product (Zaman *et al.*, 2024; Singh, 2024; Arizal *et al.*, 2024; Shah *et al.*, 2023). So, this study tests those theories to what extent they apply to Gen Z women who follow beauty influencers.

This approach is valuable because it gives the study a clear structure as ideas from past studies are turned into survey questions, and then the responses are analysed to see if the same patterns appear (Fowler, 2013; Finstad, 2010). If the same findings are discovered in this new context, it supports the original theories. If not, then the research may show new or different insights. This back-and-forth between theory and data is one of the key strengths of the deductive approach.

### 7.3. Research Design

The research uses a quantitative research design, specifically a cross-sectional survey. This is because, quantitative research is useful when the goal is to collect measurable data and look at relationships between variables (Saunders *et al.*, 2023; Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023; Jackson and Dolan, 2021). Here, the goal is to measure how emotional branding affects buying behaviour using survey questions that generate numerical answers. Then, a cross-sectional design means that the data is collected all at once rather than over a long period. This fits the time frame of dissertation and matches the digital behaviours of Gen Z women, who tend to react quickly to content online (Bryman, 2016).

According to Creswell (2017), cross-sectional studies are best when you want an idea of current behaviours and attitudes and widely applied in consumer behaviour research, further supported by Fink (2017) and Fowler Jr (2013). The questionnaire design and questions were inspired by Khwela *et al.* (2024), Foroughi *et al.* (2024), Borges-Tiago, Santiago and Tiago (2023) and Filieri *et al.* (2023) and, as they did studies in the similar areas using online survey method. Using a similar structure here makes this study comparable and helps ensure consistency in how variables are measured.

The survey includes questions about emotional trust, brand authenticity, identity alignment with the intention to purchase. These variables came from studies such as Shah *et al.* (2023) and Pan *et al.* (2025) who used similar measures to study consumer reactions to influencer content. Some questions were multiple choice based, and others used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, which is commonly used in consumer behaviour studies because it makes it easy for participants to express their opinions in a measurable way (Brace, 2018; Joshi *et al.*, 2015; Finstad, 2010). Consequently, this research design helps turn emotional experiences into data that can be analysed, even though emotions are personal and subjective, if enough people respond in similar ways, it becomes possible to see which emotional branding elements have the strongest influence on consumer behaviour.

Besides being structured, the quantitative design also helps avoid bias that sometimes comes from more open-ended methods. In interview or focus groups, the

presence of the researcher can sometimes influence how people answer, especially on emotional topics. For example, Gen Z woman might say that she feels confident about herself and her beauty decision, not to appear insecure in front of others during an interview. However, a survey done in private lets participants express feelings without pressure, which is especially important when asking about emotional branding and identity (Bryman and Bell, 2022; Tufekci, 2014).

Another benefit of this design is it helps compare results with similar studies. Many marketing and influencer-related studies also used structured surveys, so the findings from this project can be matched or contrasted with others. For example, Liu *et al.* (2025) used surveys to measure impulsive buying on social media, and Amelia *et al.* (2023) did the same for beauty influencers. This creates a shared method that makes the findings of this study easier to understand alongside existing literature.

Additionally, the survey questionnaire is short and scrollable which increases the chances of getting complete and honest responses. It is also more accessible due to being mobile-friendly, so participants can take part in it just on their phones wherever they are, without needing to schedule a time or meet someone (Kalimeri *et al.*, 2020)). Ultimately this flexibility helps with both participation and response quality. In conclusion, the research design was chosen because it fits the topic i.e., emotions and influencers, the audience i.e., Gen Z women, and the method i.e., structured, fast and private (Singh, 2024; Arizal *et al.*, 2024; Hassoun *et al.*, 2023).

#### **7.4. Sampling Strategy**

Since this study aims to examine how emotional branding through influencers affects Gen Z women's buying behaviour, the sample was focused specifically on women aged between 18 and 28 (Dimock, 2019). This group was chosen because they are part of the digitally native generation who engage heavily with social media platforms, follow influencers regularly, and are highly responsive to emotional and identity-based marketing as the literature review highlighted how Gen Z women are the most emotionally responsive to influencer content, especially in area like skincare and self-image (Kumar, 2023; Zilka, 2023).

The sampling method used in this study was non-probability purposive sampling. This means participants are selected based on specific characteristics, in this case, their gender: female, age group: Gen Z, and social media usage. Unlike random sampling, purposive sampling allows the researcher to intentionally target those who were most likely to provide useful insights for the study (Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023; Jackson and Dolan, 2021; Saunders *et al.*, 2023). While this method does limit generalisability, it was suitable when the research focuses on a specific population with shared traits and behaviours.

One additional reason purposive sampling was helpful is that it allowed the researcher to focus only on participants with direct experience of the topic. Since emotional branding works through repeated exposure and personal connection (Racine, 2021; Kim and Sullivan, 2019), the participants needed to be people who had seen and followed beauty influencers. If random people had been selected, some might not have followed influencers or not much active on social media, which would make their answers irrelevant or misleading (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022). By targeting people who were already in the influencer space, the study obtained responses that were based on real interactions and not assumptions (Tufekci, 2014; Fowle Jr, 2013)

Participants were reached through online channels, such as social media groups, student forums, snowballing, and personal networks. The survey was created via Google Forms, which allowed easy access and participation through mobile devices, a format that aligns well with how Gen Z typically interacts online. This also made the research more accessible and increased the likelihood of reaching a diverse sample within the target group. The planned sample size was approximately 100 respondents. Studies like Amelia *et al.* (2023) and Nguyen *et al.* (2022) also used similar sample sizes when conducting their respective studies on social media influence and consumer behaviour. However, since purposive sampling is not random, it does have some limits. For example, the sample may not represent all Gen Z women, and some opinions may be missed.

Another point is that this sampling method made it easier to balance participants across different platforms. For example, some participants followed beauty influencers on Instagram, while others preferred TikTok or YouTube, and since

different platforms have slightly different branding strategies, having this mix helped give a wider perspective on how emotional branding works across social media (Hung *et al.*, 2025). Hence, even if this method is not perfect and has its own limitations, it still is able to create a focused and relevant dataset.

### **7.5. Data Collection**

For this research, data was collected using a structured online survey. The tool used to build and distribute the survey was Google Forms, which was chosen because it is easy to use, free, mobile friendly (Kalimeri *et al.*, 2020; Fowler Jr, 2013). Since most Gen Z use smartphones for almost everything, this platform worked well to get responses (Arizal *et al.*, 2024). The survey was kept short and simple to encourage more people to complete it in around 3 to 5 minutes, rather than abandoning it during a long process. At the start of the survey, there was a brief introduction explaining the purpose of the study and a consent form where participants had to agree before starting. It also explained that all answers would be anonymous, and participants could leave the survey at any time without having to give a reason. So, this followed a standard ethical practice (Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023; Jackson and Dolan, 2021; Creswell, 2017).

The survey had three main parts: Demographics, Social Media Behaviour and Main Variables. Firstly, demographics included age and gender to confirm the participant is part of Gen Z and female. Then, social media behaviour included questions like how often they use Instagram or TikTok and if they follow beauty influencers. Lastly, main variables part asks about emotional connection to influencers, trust, identity alignment, authenticity of content and likelihood to purchase.

Most of the questions were multiple choice, closed-ended and used Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure and analyse the feelings that had been converted into numbers using the survey. Also, Brace (2018) and Finstad (2010) recommends Likert scales for marketing research because they are easy to use and reliable. The survey questions were based on the existing studies that used similar measures. Also, as suggested by Brace (2018) the survey was made visually simple to keep the dropout rate low, especially in the case of younger

generation. Moreover, the structure of survey followed a thematic order because of which the questions were grouped by themes such as emotional attachment, trust, identity and purchase intention to maintain the flow as this structure was used and found to be successful in previous studies such as Sanchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) by grouping questions of a theme which resulted in improved response accuracy of the results.

## 7.6. Data Analysis

Once the survey responses were collected using Google Forms, all the answers were then exported in an excel document so the data could be kept clean and organised before analysis. The first step of analysis was to use descriptive statistics, looking at the data to see what the basic patterns are. For example, how many women said they trust beauty influencers? How many said they bought something just because an influencer used it or recommended it? etc. These patterns were measured using tools like frequencies which is how many people chose a certain answer, percentage and means which is average scores on each question as done in studies like Pan *et al.* (2025), Maksimović and Evtimov (2023), Nguyeb *et al.* (2022), and Jackson and Dolan (2021).

Descriptive analysis helps to understand what the group of Gen Z women is feeling and doing (Arizal *et al.*, 2024; Lou and Yuan, 2019). It shows what emotions are common and whether most participants trust influencers or not. Saunders *et al.* (2023) recommend descriptive analysis as the first step in almost all quantitative studies.

After that, the study used correlation analysis as correlation shows a connection between two things, such as, does higher emotional attachment to an influencer relate to higher chances of buying a product? if yes, then that is a positive correlation, otherwise negative. However, it does not show that one thing causes another but just that they move together. This kind of analysis helps link the different emotional variables from the literature review (Jackson and Dolan, 2021; Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023) For example, Amelia *et al.* (2023) found that emotional trust in

skincare influencers strongly influenced consumer action, and this study checked if the same pattern happened here.

### **7.7. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards are central to the integrity of this research. Before taking part in the survey, participants were presented with a clear informed consent statement outlining the purpose of the study, how the data would be used, and their rights as participants (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022; Jackson and Dolan, 2021; Nguyen *et al.*, 2022). This includes the right to withdraw from the survey at any time before submission, without explanation or consequences (Pan *et al.*, 2025, Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023).

To maintain anonymity, the survey did not collect any names, email addresses, or IP data. Demographics were limited to age bracket and typical social-media usage, sufficient for analysis yet impossible to track back to an individual (Sanchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Kalimeri *et al.*, 2020). All raw data was stored in a password protected file and used solely for academic purposes related to this dissertation.

Since the topic involves emotional branding and influencer marketing, and not sensitive personal topics, the potential for harm or discomfort is very low. However, participants were made aware that their responses are voluntary and that they can skip any questions they did not want to answer. (Arizal *et al.*, 2024; Hudders *et al.*, 2021).

### **7.8. Research Limitations**

Every study has boundaries and acknowledging them helps place the findings in context. First, this research uses non-probability purposive sampling, targeting Gen Z women reachable via online channels. While practical and aligned with the study's focus, this approach limits generalisability. Respondents who choose to participate may already be more engaged with influencers than the wider Gen Z female

population, introducing self-selection bias (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022; Hudders *et al.*, 2021; Kalieri *et al.*, 2020; Knoll and Matthes, 2017).

Second, the study relies on self-report measures. Although these scales translate feelings into analysable numbers, they depend on each participant's honesty and self-awareness (Sha *et al.*, 2023; Zilka, 2023, Finstad, 2010). Also, social-desirability bias might lead some respondents to overstate positive behaviours, for example making thoughtful purchases, and understate negative ones, for example impulse buying. Moreover, memory recall can also affect accuracy, especially when asking about past purchasing decisions linked to emotional states.

Third, the design is cross-sectional, providing a smaller idea not the whole (Papagerious *et al.*, 2022; Pedalino and Camerini, 2022; Mabkhot *et al.*, 2022; Jackson and Dolan, 2021) So, emotional reactions and consumer habits may evolve with trends, platform changes, or personal circumstances (Pam *et al.*, 2025; Ding, 2024; Arizal *et al.*, 2024; Racine, 2021).

Fourth, while the questionnaire covers key constructs, emotional connection, trust, authenticity, identity fit, and purchase behaviour, it may not capture every nuanced factor influencing consumer decision making. Also, variables like peer influence, broader cultural trends, or economic constraints are not explicitly measured. Their absence means any casual claims must be made cautiously (Buckley *et al.*, 2024; Maksimović and Evtimov, 2023; Jackson and Dolan, 2021).

Finally, statistical power is linked to sample size. With a target of around 100 responses that could not be fulfilled because of the time constraint, settling at the responses from 65 Gen Z women, the study can provide reliable descriptive insights and modest correlations. More advanced analysis such as mediation or moderation models might require larger samples to draw robust conclusions (Liu *et al.*, 2025; Arizal *et al.*, 2024; Holiday *et al.*, 2023; Finstad, 2010). Despite these constraints, the research offers valuable, focused insights into emotional branding resonates within a clearly defined demographic. Recognising these limitations ensures that conclusions remain grounded and provides direction for further studies aiming to build on this work.

## 7.9. Critique

This methodology used in this research worked well overall, but it was not without flaws. Using a survey made sense because it was easiest way to reach Gen Z women who are always online and familiar with social media platforms (Zilka, 2023; Kumar, 2023). Google Forms was simple to share, and the questions were quick to answer, which probably helped get more responses. Still there are some things that are not at their best.

One of the main issues is the sampling method as purposive sampling focused directly on the group this study was about, Gen Z women who follow beauty influencers, but it also means that findings cannot be generalised to everyone (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022; Hudders *et al.*, 2021; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Most of the people who answered probably had a strong interest in influencer content already, so their responses might not reflect what less engaged users think or feel.

Then, the cross-sectional design also worked for the limited time frame only, giving a snapshot of the data. Influencer trends and feelings can change quickly online, so if the survey had been done at another time, the result may vary (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Ding, 2024; Mabkhot *et al.*, 2022). A longer-term study might have helped show how emotional branding builds up over time, but that was not realistic for this project due to the time constraints.

Also, while the survey covered a lot of useful ideas from the literature, like emotional connection and trust, it did not explore other factors like peer influence (Khwela *et al.*, 2024). Lastly, the data analysis was kept simple using normal tools, which was fine for this, but more advanced tools could have helped explore the data deeper.

## 7.10. Conclusion

In conclusion, this methodology acted as the foundation for turning emotional ideas into something measurable. Even though concepts like trust, attachment, and connection are quite personal, the study found a way to explore them through structured tools like surveys and Likert scales (Racine, 2021; Kim and Sullivan, 2019). Also, the chosen post-positivist philosophy made it possible to look at feelings in a realistic way accepting that emotions matter but still trying to find patterns across

a group (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Shah *et al.*, 2023; Holiday *et al.*, 2023). Then, using a deductive approach helped bring theories from existing research into action, while the cross-sectional design made it possible to collect useful data at one point in time. The sample was carefully chosen to fit the research aim, and the ethical process made sure everyone’s privacy was respected (Zilka, 2023).

Hence, the methodology helped connect branding with real-world data as it gives a good base for analysing how Gen Z women respond to beauty influencers emotionally and behaviourally. It also shows that even soft topics like feelings can be studied in structured (Knoll and Matthes, 2017; Jain and Roy, 2016).

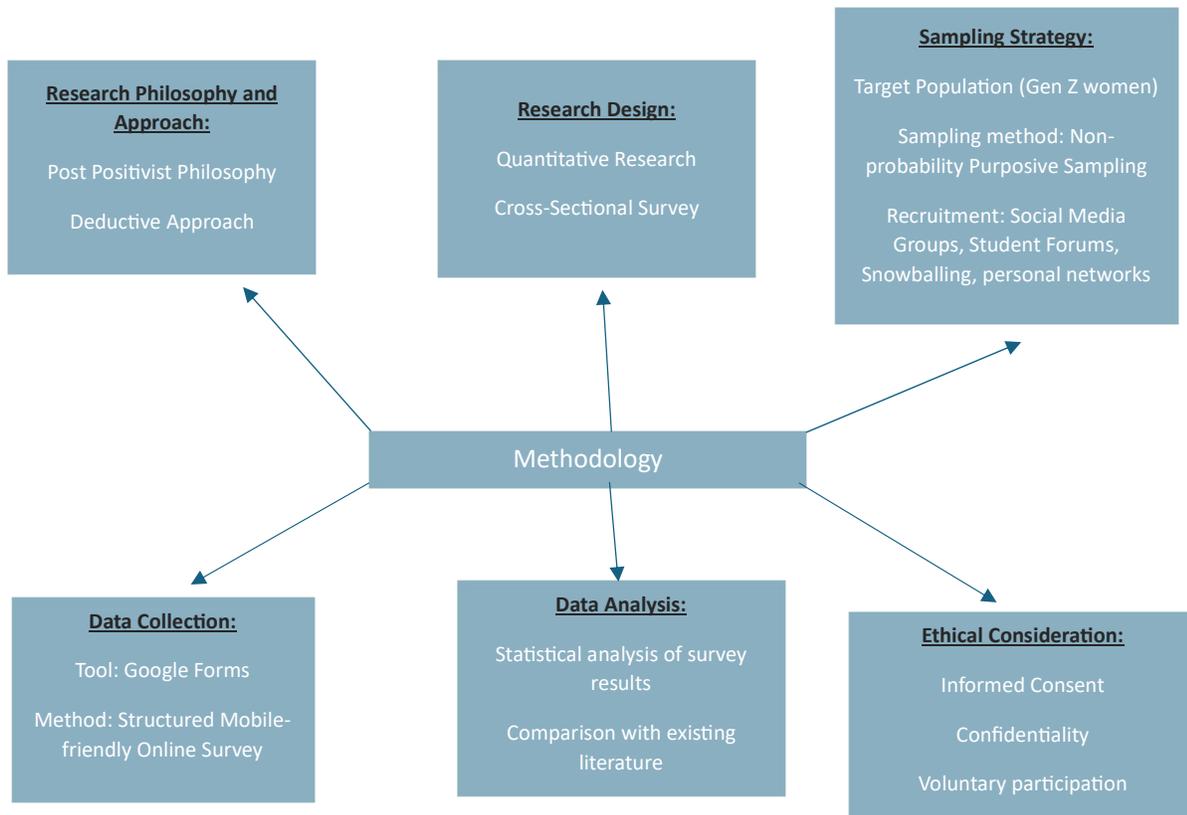


Figure A

## **8. Findings and Analysis**

### **8.1. Overview**

This section presents the findings of the study based on survey responses from Gen Z women aged 18 to 28. The goal was to explore how emotional branding from beauty influencers affects their buying decisions. Data was collected through an online Google Forms survey, and the respondents were active on social media users who follow at least one beauty influencer, which made them suitable for the research.

It has been broken down into five main sections, namely engagement, connection, buying behaviour and decision making, trust and resistance, and summary of key patterns. The first part looks at how Gen Z women generally engage with beauty influencers online, like what platforms they use, how many influencers they follow, and what kind of content they watch. Then, it dives into the emotional side by how they feel about influencers. How much trust they put in them, and what kind of influencers they connect with emotionally. After that, the actual purchase behaviour has been explored with questions like how often these women buy products promoted by influencers, whether they use promo codes, and what type of content trigger their buying decisions. The fourth part of the findings focuses on scepticism that are things that hold them back from buying, and when emotional branding does not work as expected. The last part summaries the key things we have learned and links them back to the literature. Hence, throughout the sections, results are explained with deep analysis to give a view of how emotional branding really works with Gen Z in today's online beauty space (Ding, 2024; Hudders *et al.*, 2021).

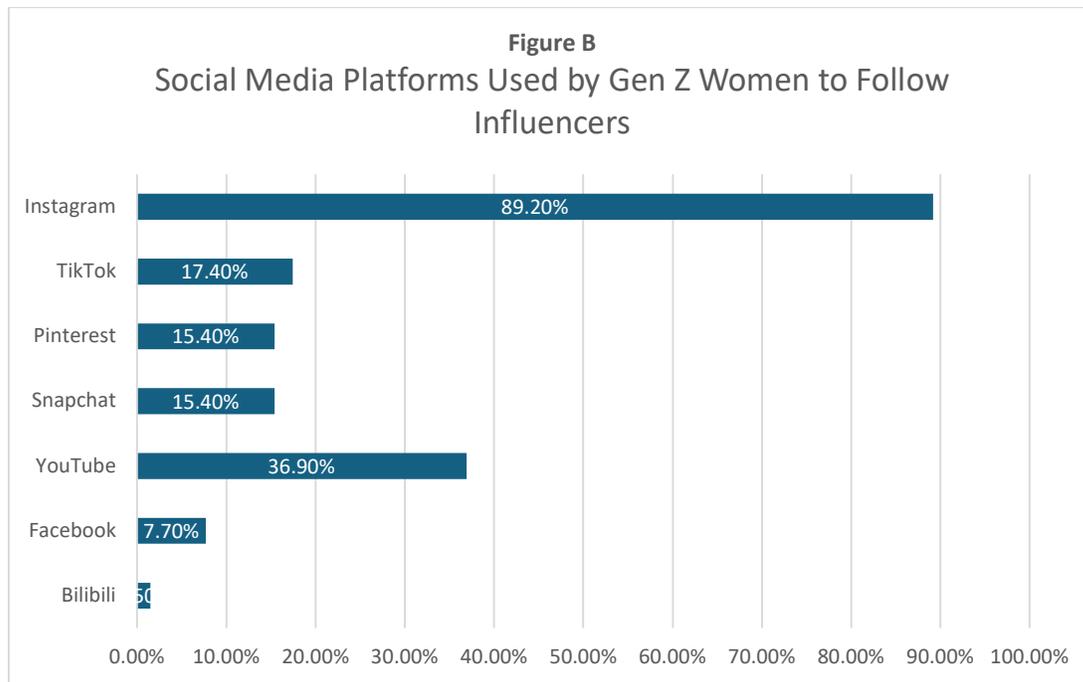
### **8.2. Engagement**

The survey investigated how and in what ways Gen Z women interact with beauty influencers. This is important because emotional branding cannot happen unless there is consistent interaction and exposure. The survey results showed that Gen Z women are not just occasional viewers, but they are actively and regularly consuming beauty content from influencers by showing how they just do not watch

but engage in comments, click the links provided by an influencer and even suggest the products to others.

Most respondents said that they follow influencers on multiple platforms. The top three platforms were Instagram (89.2%), YouTube (36.9%) and TikTok was selected by almost (19.9%). This indicates that Instagram is currently the most influential space for beauty content (Khwela *et al.*, 2024; Chiu and Hou, 2023).

Also, short videos, trends, and product demos make it easier for emotional branding to work quickly. However, a respondent from China reported using apps like Bilibili instead of Instagram or TikTok. YouTube was the second most used, suggesting that longer-form content like tutorials and skincare routines still attracts decent number of viewers (Amelia *et al.*, 2023).



When asked how often they watch beauty content, 53.1% respondents said they watch it a few times a week, while 28.1% every day and only 18.8% said they rarely watch. This shows that influencer content is a regular part of their online life (Zilka, 2023). Even if they are not binge watching it, they are still consuming it frequently enough to be emotionally affected. Consistency seems more important

than daily exposure. These patterns show that Gen Z's relationship with influencers is ongoing and active (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022).

Another important finding was the number of influencers followed to which respondents said 25.4% follow 10 or more beauty influencers, 27% follow 5 to 9 and 47.6% follow 1 to 4. This means that most Gen Z women do not rely on just one influencer for advice or inspiration. They engage with many voices, which increases the chances of being exposed to emotional messaging repeatedly. Following a wide mix of influencers also means mix of influencers which is something that works well for emotional branding as when the same

emotional messages come from different sources, makes them feel more natural and believable (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Sokolov and Kefi, 2020)

Hence, all this shows that Gen Z women are not passive followers but are active consumers of influencer content as through survey, it can be found that they actively check comments under influencer's posts and actively click links provided by influencers to get deeper insights. Their high engagement levels create a ground where emotional branding can take root. The platforms they use, the number of influencers they follow and the frequency with which they watch them online make them a group that is constantly surrounded by emotionally charged beauty content (Hudders *et al.*, 2021; Racine, 2021).

### **8.3. Emotional Attachment and Connection**

Emotional branding relies on feelings, like trust, identity, and connection, and the data shows that many Gen Z women do feel emotionally close to at least one influencer they follow. One of the survey questions asked whether they feel emotionally connected to an influencer to which 29.2% of participants agreed or strongly agreed, which shows that influencers are more than just content creators, that are seen as people who can form real, emotional ties with their audience (Shah *et al.*, 2023; Sanchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo 2021). Emotional branding becomes stronger when followers do not just see an influencer as someone who advertise, but someone they relate to. This idea aligns with the concept of parasocial relationships, where people form one-sided emotional bonds with media

personalities (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Chung and Cho, 2017). So, in this case, this bond shows how they feel about the products being shown.

Moreover, trust is also an important part of emotional connection for which the data showed that 62.5% respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they trust influencers more when they show their real skin and lifestyle. This was one of the strongest responses in the whole survey. People want to see the truth, not filtered skin or the pretty perfect edits, but the raw and real version of the person because this makes them seem more human and emotionally relatable (Abdul *et al.*, 2023; Holiday *et al.*, 2023). When influencers show their skin without makeup or talk about their skincare problems, it builds trust and makes the branding feel authentic. The emotional connection becomes deeper because it feels like the influencer is being honest and vulnerable.

The same pattern was seen in the question about influencers sharing beauty struggles as over 67.7% of participants said they prefer influencers who talk about their own problems, like dealing with acne, stress or insecurities. This kind of content does not just make the influencer seem honest, but also it makes the viewers feel seen. Gen Z women, who are often going through similar challenges, relate more to someone who opens up (Enriquez *et al.*, 2025; Kumar, 2023). This builds emotional loyalty, which is much more powerful than just attention and this way branding becomes personal because it feels like someone is helping, not just selling (Kim and Sullivan, 2019).

Another finding was about micro-influencers. 53.9% respondents said they are more influenced by smaller influencers than by celebrities, while 21.5% said they stand neutral on this. This supports the idea that emotional connection is stronger when the influencer feels more like a peer than a distant superstar. Micro-influencers are often seen as more real, more responsive, and more aligned with everyday life of their audience (Zaman *et al.*, 2024; Hudders *et al.*, 2017). When they promote something, it feels like a trusted friend giving advice and this emotional closeness makes their branding more effective. Hence, emotional connection plays a big role in how Gen Z responds to influencer content. Truth, honesty, and relatability are the core of emotional branding. When influencers act like real people not just marketers,

their message lands more deeply (Ding, 2024; Hudders *et al.*, 2021; Lou and Yuan, 2019)

#### **8.4. Buying Behaviour and Decision Making**

Buying behaviour is another crucial factor, like whether Gen Z women buy products recommended by influencers, how often they do it, and what makes them decide to go ahead with a purchase. The results of this study show that emotional branding does not just stay in the heart, it reaches the wallet too.

First, a significant 80% of respondents said they have purchased a skincare or beauty product after seeing it on an influencer's post or story. This shows that influencers are not just entertainment, they drive actual consumer behaviour. What is interesting is that this purchase is not always based on product features or price as often it is about how the influencer made them feel (Khwela *et al.*, 2024; Kumar, 2023). Some said they trusted the influencer's experience, others said the influencer made the product seem emotionally appealing, like it could help them feel confident or cared for.

Then, discount codes and promo links also played a big role as 53.8% said they had used a discount code provided by an influencer. This shows that emotional branding and practical benefits work together (Balqis *et al.*, 2024). If someone already trusts the influencer and feels a connection, then getting a discount makes the decision easier. The emotional side builds the desire, and the code pushes them to act. It is like the emotion opens the door and the discount is the final push.

When asked what kind of influencer content made them buy, 78.1% said reviews, 45.3% selected tutorials, followed by 44% for before-and-after transformations and 9.4% selected unboxing hauls. These types of content are more than just visuals; they are emotional stories. A before-and-after shows hope, a sense that "this could work for me too"; a review feels like honest advice; a tutorial feels like the influencer is guiding you. These formats let followers imagine themselves using the product and feeling better, which is a big part of emotional branding (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Racine, 2021).

Another key finding was about impulse purchases as 46.2% of respondents said they had made quick, unplanned purchases because an influencer's content felt emotionally strong. This might include emotional language like "this product changed my life" or a moment of vulnerability like showing their acne journey. These emotional cues tap into real feelings, insecurity, hope, belonging, and can lead to quick decision. This matches what Singh (2023) found in their study on emotional triggers and impulse buying among consumers. Also, the unintentional buying behaviour connects with the idea of subconscious emotional response which is when someone feel good about the influencer and then trust their recommendations without overthinking it (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Hence, when someone feels like an influencer "gets them", it is easier to believe in the products they promote.

Some even said they made the product a part of their daily routine after discovering it through an influencer (73.8%), that shows long-term influence. So, it is not just one-time buying, it becomes a habit. When a product becomes part of someone's self-care or skincare routine, it means the emotional bond is strong and lasting. This aligns with what Özer *et al.* (2022) discussed about brand loyalty developing from emotional trust.

There was also a question that asked participants to think about their most recent influencer-inspired purchase. When asked what triggered that decision, common responses included: feeling emotionally connected to the influencer (19%), trusting their expertise (66.7%), or simply being drawn in by a discount code (20.6%). This shows that emotional and practical reasons are not separate, they work together (Abdul Aziz *et al.*, 2023). Even the number of influencer-inspired purchases in the last 3 months showed how common this behaviour is. 43.1% said they bought 1-3 times recently, 13.8% said 4 to 7 times, 9.2% said 7 to 10. This proves that emotional branding through influencers is not just a theory, it is something that leads to real and repeated consumer actions (Zaman *et al.*, 2024). Another finding was about how quick the buying process can be as when an influencer says "link in bio" or adds a swipe-up with a discount, the whole purchase can happen in very less time. This shows that influencer branding, especially when it is emotional, does not just change feelings but it speeds up actions too. Some studies even say that this creates a "flow state" in consumer behaviour, where everything just feels natural and fast (Liu *et al.*,

2025; Hoang and Khoa, 2022), and this is beneficial as emotional branding is not always about deep reflection, sometimes it is about creating quick emotional momentum.

Lastly, beauty influencers seem to have a unique kind of power compared to other types of influencers because beauty and skincare are already personal topics, they make it easier for followers to connect emotionally. As show in earlier studies such as Hung *et al.* (2025) and Enriquez *et al.* (2025), the emotional tone in beauty marketing is often softer, supportive, and focused on care, not just appearance. That tone builds deeper emotional layers over time and that is clearly seen in how often respondents mentioned trust, routine or insecurity as emotional reasons behind buying.

#### **8.5. Trust and Resistance**

While a lot of the data showed positive emotional influence, not all responses were full of agreement as some people said they avoid buying products shown by influencers which highlight a big limitation of emotional branding. So, when asked what makes them avoid buying a product promoted by an influencer, people selected reasons like the content felt fake (80%), the influencer did not or align with the product (35.4%). This tells us that if emotional branding feels forced or fake, it eventually fails. It is not just about using emotional words or personal stories but to be sincere (Buckley *et al.*, 2024; Lou and Yuan, 2019). This aligns with Kumar (2023), who also found that idealised or overly curated influencer content often triggers doubts among young women.

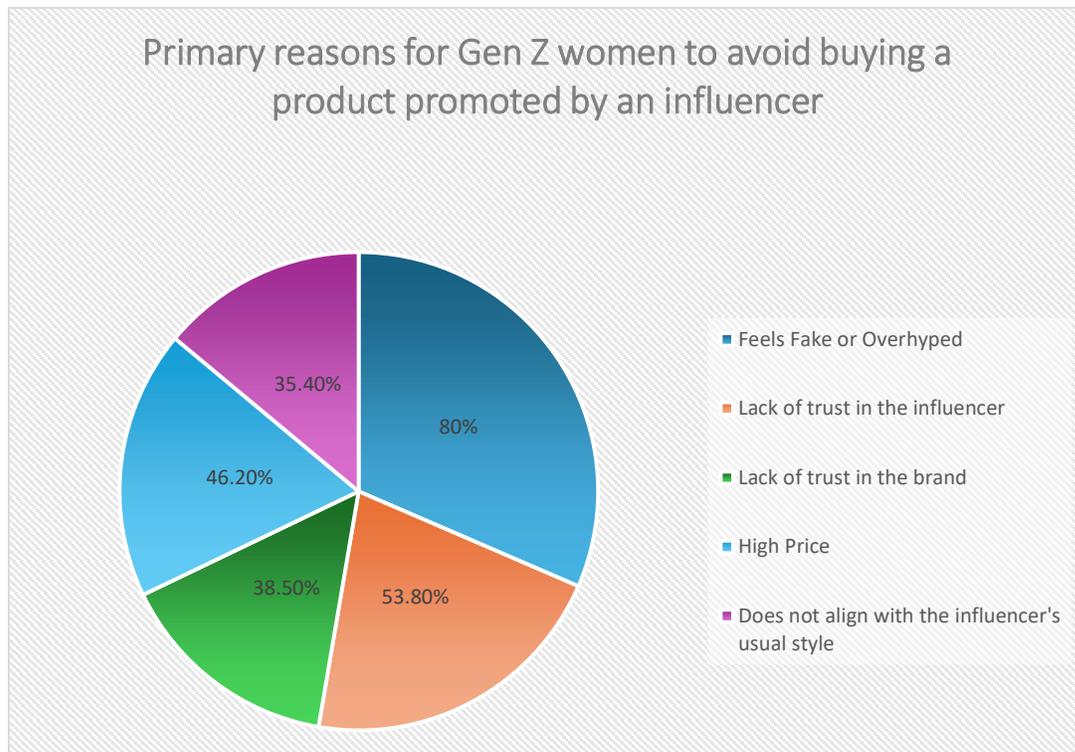


Figure C

Another sign of cautious behaviour was that nearly 75.4% said they always or often check the comments or reviews under influencer posts before deciding to buy. This means they do not just trust what is being shown but they also look for signs from others. This shows the need for social proof which is also emotional as seeing someone else say that it worked for them or it irritated their skin just builds that second layer of trust or caution. This behaviour lines up with the finding from Zhang *et al.* (2022), who discussed the importance of EWOM (Electronic Word-of-Mouth) in emotional decision making. Then, 35.4% responses also hinted at the issue of identity mismatch. This shows that emotional branding also depends on how much the follower sees themselves in the influencers. Hence, while emotional branding can be powerful, it can also be fragile as it backfires when felt too scripted, fake or overdone. The results show that Gen Z women expect honesty, emotional realism, and a consistent message. Anything that feels like a strategy instead of a story is likely to be ignored.

## 8.6. Summary of Key Patterns

All the data together paints a clear picture that Gen Z women are emotionally sensitive and digitally active consumers. They do not just scroll past influencer content, but they stop, engage, feel and sometimes act. Emotional branding works when it builds a sense of realness, trust, and identity match. So, influencers who show vulnerability and talk about their beauty struggles are more effective than those who just promote products with perfect photos, supported by 62.5% of respondents. However, this generation also knows how to spot fakeness, that is why, when something feels off, whether it is too polished or too repetitive, they hold back (Ding, 2024; Knoll and Matthes, 2017). Their trust is earned through emotional consistency and not through flashy campaigns. Also, the findings match what many previous researchers said, such as Shah *et al.* (2023) and Hudders *et al.* (2021) said that the themes of emotional attachment, trust and authenticity. However, this study will show real answers about Gen Z women's everyday beauty habits proving that the emotional connection is real, and it plays out in their online behaviour and purchase patterns as 62.5% said emotional honesty matters.

Moreover, these findings can help brands and marketers understand what really matters to Gen Z. So, it is not just about the product, but it is the emotion around it, and when the emotion comes from someone they believe in, emotional branding becomes more powerful. Influencers are not just marketers anymore, they are emotional bridges between brand and consumers (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Racine, 2021).

Another insight that came from the data is how emotional branding works best when it mirrors the follower's own reality. If the influencer is showing product in a clean, relatable, everyday setting such as applying serum before bed or showing skin texture up close, Gen Z women feel seen. It becomes less about selling and more about sharing (Holiday *et al.*, 2023). This idea of emotional mirroring was supported by several respondents who said they prefer influencers "who feel like me".

In addition to this, the data shows that repetition matters as well as when the same product is recommended multiple time by influencers, it builds a familiarity that slowly builds emotional attachments as around 40% of participants said they are more likely to buy a product they have seen it multiple times and 30.8% took a neutral stand. This matches what Jain and Roy (2016) called meaning transfer, where emotional traits from the influencer slowly move onto the brand. But when every influencer talks

about it in the same time period, respondents reported the opposite happens and they tend to avoid buying products because of reasons like it feels fake (80%), unalignment of influencer and brand (35.4%), lack of trust in the influencer (53.8%) and lack of trust in the brand (38.5%), making the brand feels like a campaign, not a story.

Lastly, emotional branding from influencers is not a one size fits all approach. Some respondents respond strongly to vulnerability, others to consistency while others to aesthetic content Over-selling kills the emotion so selling needs to be balanced and mixed with emotional weight to make it work better, especially in the case of Gen Z women, who are both highly emotional and highly aware (Buckley *et al.*, 2024; Zilka, 2023).

## **9. Discussion**

### **9.1. Introduction**

This study focused on trying to understand how emotional branding, especially from beauty influencers like skincare and makeup creators, really affects what Gen Z women decide to buy. To achieve this, the survey helped in revealing how all these factors come together in real life to influence Gen Z women buying behaviour. From what participants shared, it became clear that emotions play a significant role in how Gen Z women interact with beauty content online. Some bought products just because they trusted the influencer. Others clicked on links because the influencer felt real and genuine, while many admitted they were more likely to try something if the influencer talked about personal struggles or showed their own skin problems (Kumar, 2023; Hudders *et al.*, 2021). Hence, emotional branding proved effective, but only when it felt natural and not like a sales pitch.

This section has been divided into five themes: emotional branding and beauty purchases, trust and perceived authority, identity fit, platform behaviour and patterns, and implication, limitation and future research, with the aim to discuss more deeply about what these survey findings mean, what they show when compared with existing studies and theories, and what we can learn from them moving forward.

Thus, the goal is not just to describe what the survey found but to understand what it all really means when put into right context.

## **9.2. Emotional Branding and Beauty Purchases**

Using the survey's result, it can be clearly said that that emotional branding really does influence how Gen Z women approach beauty and skincare purchases when done in a way that connects with people. A good number of participants said that they had bought something after watching a tutorial (45.3%), review (78.1%), or before and after results (68.8%) from a beauty influencer. These were not just regular ads but emotional or personal moments, and that is where different lies. Emotional branding is not about pushing products as it is more about storytelling and making people feel something (Pan *et al.*, 2025; Racine, 2021, Lou and Yuan, 2019).

According to Racine (2021), emotions create a bridge between the brand and the consumer. This really showed in the results because it was not just the product that pulled people in, it was the way the product was shown, in real-life settings, with struggles, routines or even small wins. 68.8% respondents mentioned being influenced when they saw a transformation, like before-and-after results. This fits with what Hudders *et al.* (2021) described about influencers building emotional narratives that transfer directly to the product being shown.

The idea of meaning transfer also comes into play here as Jain and Roy (2016) discussed how people tend to associate the traits of influencer with the traits of the brands they promote. This was seen in the way participants explained feeling drawn to a product just because it was shared by someone they felt connected to emotionally. A total of 66.7% said they trusted the influencer's expertise as the reason for their most recent purchase, while 19% said they felt an emotional connection, showing the influence of both rational and emotional appeal.

Interestingly, things like discount codes or "swipe up to buy" links were not ignored. In fact, they worked better when they were combined with emotional storytelling. More than half (53.8%) said they had used codes from influencers, and a few people said they clicked links or used codes because it felt like a recommendation from a friend, not a marketing tactic. This is what Pan *et al.* (2025) talk about when they say

that emotional branding is more than just strategy, it is about creating experiences that feel human. It was also similar to what Balqis *et al.* (2024) noted, where influencer-led content drove stronger electronic word of mouth and purchase intention when the emotional tone was right.

Through answer of participants, it can be found that content like tutorials (45.3%), reviews (78.1%) and personal stories shapes their decisions more than plain promotions content that included the influencer saying something like, “This really helped my skin” or “I have been through this too”, hit differently than just showing a product and telling its features. These moments made the product feel like part of a bigger journey, rather than a quick sale. According to Kumar (2023), emotional resonance in such stories make Gen Z likely to respond positively.

Another thing worth noting is that emotional branding did not only lead to first-time purchases, but many participants (73.8%) said they added products to their regular routine because of influencers which shows that emotional branding can also help with long-term consumer habits. It is not about one purchase as it can lead to repeated engagement and brand loyalty over time. Shah *et al.* (2023) also pointed this out by saying that emotional attachment can act as a bridge between influencer content and ongoing buying behaviour. Also, emotional responses and attachment affects decision-making often as when asked how often their feelings about an influencer ad impacted their choice to buy, most participants (57.5%) chose “often” or “always”. That shows just how much emotional branding is not just a background factor, but it is very central to how emotional cues like warmth and authenticity are among the strongest predictors of purchase intent, and the current findings back that up.

Thus, emotional reactions, whether it is feeling inspired, trusting the influencer or feeling seen, play a massive role in how Gen Z women decide what to buy when it comes to beauty products. It is not just what the product does, it is how it makes them feel through the influencer’s story (Enriquez *et al.*, 2025; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020)

### 9.3. Trust and Perceived Authenticity

Trust was another strong theme that came up through the survey responses as most participants said they trusted influencers more when they showed their real skin, talked about their beauty problems, or shared their honest routines. In fact, 40% of respondents strongly agreed and 27.7% agreed that they were more likely to buy from influencers who showed personal beauty struggles and did not just post perfect, sponsored content. This really supports what Sokolova and Kefi (2020) discussed about parasocial relationships which is when followers start to feel like they know the influencer personally, trust starts to build. And with trust, buying behaviour becomes more emotionally driven rather than logical as the survey also showed that influencers who used emotional honesty in their content, like showing breakouts or skincare issues, were seen as more reliable that means trust is not built by polished images but through emotional transparency.

There were also clear patterns in how people reacted to discount codes and product links. While 53.8% of participants admitted using discount codes or clicking links, they only did it when they trusted the influencer and felt the recommendation was genuine. This supports what Lou and Yuan (2019) said about message value and credibility, i.e. the more authentic the content, the stronger its effect will be. Hudders *et al.* (2021) said that trust is more than just believing someone, it is about emotional alignment and the current findings from survey data matched that. Also, 80% participants said they ignored or avoided influencer content that felt forced, too polished, or did not feel emotionally real, it lost its influence.

Another point was how many participants said they trusted micro-influencers more than celebrities, which is probably because micro-influencers shares more day-to-day, emotionally honest content and engage more with followers as Hudders *et al.* (2021) found that micro-influencers with a smaller audience often seem more approachable, which leads to stronger emotional branding results and was clearly supported by the survey data too.

Furthermore, when an influencer promotes different product that do not fit their earlier messages or change their content style, a state of emotional inconsistency gets created which ultimately breaks trusts and weakens the branding effect. As Hudders *et al.* (2021) said, authenticity is not just being real, it is about emotionally

consistent. For example, if an influencer who always talks about natural skincare suddenly promotes a chemical-based product without any explanation or context, it creates confusion and reduce emotional credibility. This reaction also connects to backlash or cancel culture where followers feel let down by influencers and hence reject them. Buckley *et al.* (2024) explained that even emotionally empowering campaigns can cause discomfort if they come off as too strategic and commercial. So, trust is not just earned once, but it must be maintained carefully and any unalignment or mismatch can undo a lot of hard work.

Hence, trust and authenticity are extremely crucial to whether emotional branding worked or not. If the influencer seems fake or too brand-focused, emotional impact drops and so does buying behaviour.

#### **9.4. Identity Fit**

Another important insight from the survey was how much identity fit mattered as a big portion of participants said they followed influencers who looked like them, shared similar beauty struggles, or talked in a way they related to. For example, 40% rated “strongly agree” and 27.7% rated “agree” when asked whether they follow influencers who share personal beauty struggles rather just sponsored content, showing strong emotional connection. This shows that emotional branding is closely ties to personal identity and self-image. When influencers shared emotional stories that matched the follower’s own experience, like dealing with acne, dark circles or feeling insecure, participants said they felt more connected, this connects with Zilka (2023) who said Gen Z women want to see emotional literacy and vulnerability, not just beauty tips. Identity fit made the message feel more emotionally real.

Papageorgious *et al.* (2022) found that idealised beauty standards on social media can lead to negative self-perception. Respondents reported that they felt better when influencers showed their flaws and made beauty feel more inclusive. That shows emotional branding can go both ways as it can empower, but it can also make someone feel left out if done wrong. Also, Kumar (2023) talked about how influencers affect what young women believe is normal or desirable. This showed up in the survey too as 25.4% participants said they were more likely to buy something

if it matched the kind of beauty they related to, not just what was trendy. This kind of emotional alignment between influencer and follower is what Ding (2024) described as emotional congruence which is when values and emotional tone match, trust and purchase intent both increases.

Thus, identity fit made emotional branding work better because it felt more personal and when followers saw themselves reflected in the influencer, they did not just feel inspired, but they feel included, which is even more powerful as that is what made them more likely to trust, engage and buy.

### **9.5. Platform Behaviour and Patterns**

The survey also investigated how Gen Z women behave on different platforms, and what kind of content they engage with. Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok were by far the most used platforms for following beauty influencers. This matches what Chiu and Ho (2023) noted about Gen Z's preference for fast, visual, and emotionally charged content. These platforms also support features like stories, reels, and lives which help influencers to be more emotionally expressive and engaging.

Participants said they preferred content like tutorials (45.3%), before and after results (68.8%) and reviews (78.1%). These types of content do not just show the product; they bring it to life. When influencers show how a product works on their real skin or talk about their honest experiences, it adds an emotional layer that static ads cannot deliver. This reflects what Holiday *et al.* (2023) said in their study on multimodal emotional, where even things like facial expressions and tone of voice help increase emotional engagement with influencer content.

Another thing discovered was how often participants clicked links or used discount codes. Around 53.8% of respondents admitted to using a discount code provided by an influencer at least once, but again, only when they felt the recommendation was genuine as from survey results Gen Z women prefer influencer's who show their reality instead of commercialised content. This shows that behaviour like clicking and buying does not just happen because a link is there, it happens because there is an emotional build up that creates trust and interest. When participants said they were

influenced, it was not just about the content being there, it was about the way it made them feel, and in support of this Lou and Yuan (2019) found that message credibility and emotional resonance significantly increase consumer trust and effectiveness of influencer promotions.

The survey also showed that 44.6% participants spend more time watching influencer content than brand advertisements and this tells us a lot about where Gen Z women's attention is going. So, brands who want to connect emotionally with Gen Z women cannot just rely on polished commercials anymore, they need influencers who can talk to people emotionally and casually. This connects with the ideas of Kim and Sullivan (2019) about emotional branding being more effective when it speaks to the heart, not just the logic.

Hence, in terms of platform behaviour, Gen Z women are not just passive followers, but they are watching, feeling, comparing and reacting. Their buying decisions are tied closely to how influencer content fits into the digital habits and that is where emotional branding can really work.

#### **9.6. Implication, Limitations and Future research**

These findings offer several important implications, both for marketers and for academic research. First, emotional branding through influencers does influence purchasing, but only when it feels real that means brand should focus less on perfect images and start supporting influencers who are honest, imperfect, and emotionally relatable as majority of participants said they were more likely to buy from influencers who seemed honest and emotionally vulnerable. Content that shows vulnerability, like acne, failed routines or skin anxiety, builds more trust than polished perfection.

Second, brands should consider working more with micro-influencer, not just big influencers or celebrities. As the survey suggests, followers are more likely to trust and emotionally connect with influencers who feel like peers, not stars. This supports Hudders *et al.* (2021), who argued that influencers with smaller followings can feel more sincere and trustworthy. Also, survey shows how 53.9% of participants agreed

or strongly agreed that they micro-influencers more than large-scale celebrity influencers.

Third, identity fit really matters as if the brands only use one type of influencer, say someone with flawless skin, skinny body and perfect hair, they are missing out a big audience who do not feel represented. Gen Z women want to see themselves in influencer content that means more diversity in skin tone, background, language, and even personality style, and survey results indicates that participants said they follow influencers who look like them or share similar skin issues that can be concluded by their interest in influencer's honest lifestyle and personal struggles. Also, Nguyen *et al.* (2022) pointed out that cultural identification with influencers increases emotional attachment and buying behaviour.

Another thing to consider is how influencers use emotional storytelling, and brand might want to give influencers more freedom to share real stories instead of scripts. The survey showed that 67.7% participants do not just want reviews, they want real moments, stories that mirror their own experiences, and emotions they can relate to as respondents reported their follow influencers who share their personal beauty struggles and not just sponsored content. This supports the idea that participants do not just want reviews, they want real moments, stories that mirror their own experiences, and emotions they can relate to (Pan *et al.*, 2025, Enriquez *et al.*, 2025; Lou and Yuan, 2019).

In terms of limitations, this study focused only on Gen Z women aged 18 to 28 which is a specific group. Also, the data was collected through self-report surveys, which means it depends on what people say about themselves and sometimes people forget things or answer in a way that sound good, not necessarily true. This is known as social desirability bias (Saunders *et al.*, 2023) and even though the sample was valid for this research, it cannot be generalised to everyone. Moreover, the method used a cross-sectional approach to survey which means that survey only captured opinions at one point in time. Emotional branding, however, might change over time or work differently based on events.

As for future research, a few areas stand out. One is exploring how emotional branding works for different genders and different age groups, especially since beauty marketing is becoming more inclusive. Another area would be to rest the

difference between influencers who promote high-end vs. budget products, and does emotional branding work differently depending on price and product type? Moreover, future studies could use interviews, and not just surveys to allow participants to explain more deeply their emotion in this area.

Additionally, it would be useful to explore how emotional branding works with virtual or AI influencers as more digital avatars enter the influencer space, it is unclear whether emotional branding work the same way. Do Gen Z women trust digital influencers the same way as real ones? Will emotional cues like voice tone or facial expressions still have same effect? These are some new questions that could be explored using similar survey design or conducting personal interviews. Lastly, future research could compare influencer impact across different regions or countries (Zilka, 2023; Nguyen *et al.*, 2022; Racine, 2021)

### **9.7. Answers to research sub-questions**

The survey findings clearly demonstrated that Gen Z women do feel emotionally attached to beauty influencers, with 29.2% agreeing that they feel connected to at least one influencer they follow, while 26.2% stays neutral on this, which aligns with the concept of parasocial relationships where followers develop one-sided yet emotionally significant bonds with influencers (Shah *et al.*, 2023, Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

Trust also seemed as a critical factor for buying behaviour, as 62.5% indicated they trust influencers more when they show authenticity, supporting the view that credibility enhances persuasion and buying intentions (Hudders *et al.*, 2021).

Identity alignment further strengthened emotional branding effectiveness, with 67.7% preferring influencers whose lifestyle, appearance, or beauty struggles, indicating that emotional congruence increases engagement and purchase likelihood (Ding, 2024; Kumar, 2023).

Lastly, the authenticity of emotional branding proved essential, with 80% ignoring content they perceived as fake or overly polished, reinforcing that emotional marketing succeeds only when grounded in sincerity and consistent messaging (Buckley *et al.*, 2024; Holiday *et al.*, 2023). These results confirms that emotional

connection, trust, identity fit, and authenticity are interdependent factors that collectively shape Gen Z women's buying behaviour in the beauty sector.

### **9.8. Conclusion**

This discussion showed that emotional branding from beauty influencers has a strong impact on Gen Z women, but only when it is rooted in authenticity, trust, and identity fit. Survey participants did not respond to perfect advertisements; they responded to emotional honesty. They wanted influencers who looked like them, spoke like them, and showed real beauty struggles; and when those emotional connections were made, buying behaviour followed. Moreover, the findings supported theories like meaning transfer (Jain and Roy, 2016), parasocial interaction (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), and emotional congruence (Ding, 2024), but also added new insights about daily social media habits, platform design, and content types shape emotional responses.

So, instead of aiming for polished image, brands should support influencers in building real emotional connections with their audience. Emotional branding is not a technique, but it is a relationship, and Gen Z women know when it is real and when it is not.

## **10. Conclusion**

This research discussed how emotional branding used by beauty influencers affects the buying behaviour of Gen Z women. The goal was not just to find out whether they buy products after watching influencer content, but to understand the emotional responses behind those decisions and things like trust, relatability, personal connection, and the kind of content that make people feel like "this is for me" were at the centre of the study. From everything that was studied, such as the survey, the literature, and the theories, it was found that beauty marketing today is more emotional than ever before as it is no longer just showing a product and talking about its benefits. Now, it is about how that product makes someone feel, and how

believable the influencer is when sharing that story. Previous literature by Racine (2021) explained how emotion is the core driver in brand communication, and this research confirms that with real data from Gen Z women who actively follow beauty influencers. Hudders *et al.* (2021) also argued that influencers play the role of emotional messengers from brands, and this study proves that Gen Z genuinely responds to emotional signals more than plain product features or offers (Kim and Sullivan, 2019).

One of the most important things found was how deeply connected Gen Z women feel to influencers. Many survey responses reflected emotional closeness, and this was even stronger when the influencers shared personal struggles or unfiltered content. This supports the idea of parasocial interaction, where a one-way bond feels very real to the viewer as discussed by Sokolova and Kefi (2020). It means that even though there is no real relationship, Gen Z women feel like they know the influencer and that makes their buying choices more emotionally driven. Moreover, studies by Sanchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) and Shah *et al.* (2023) further support that emotional attachment leads to stronger brand trust and purchasing behaviour. This study adds to that by showing how the emotional trusts also form through vulnerability, relatability, and honest storytelling.

Another crucial finding was that smaller influencers, or micro-influencers, tend to be more effective when it comes to emotional branding as many respondents said they trust influencers who seem more relatable, and do not just polished ads. This fits well with findings of Chiu and Ho (2023), and Lou and Yuan (2019) who showed that micro-influencers often outperform celebrities in terms of emotional impact and credibility. Hudders *et al.* (2021) also highlighted how follower count and message authenticity work together to shape perception. In this research, Gen Z women responded better to influencers who share their beauty struggles and daily routines, and not just endorsements, which further proves that emotional honesty matters more than glamour.

However, it is not always effective because this research also showed how Gen Z women can sense when something feels forced or fake. Emotional branding does not work when the message feels too commercialised. This was shown in the survey responses where many participants said they lose interest if it feels too commercial

or inauthentic, and this is also supported by Jain and Roy (2016) as they discuss about the dangers of meaning transfer failing when the influencer does not match the brand. The study by Holiday *et al.* (2023) discusses how emotional tone in influencer content affects brand engagement, and this research confirms that Gen Z wants real emotions, not forced promotions. Thus, while emotional branding can be powerful, it also has its limits.

On the behavioural side, emotional branding clearly influences more than just first-time buying. The survey showed that many Gen Z women go on to use the product long-term, include it in their routine, or even recommend it to friends. This shows that emotional branding helps in building not just interest but brand loyalty. Racine (2021) said that emotional branding turns consumers into brand believers, and that is exactly what was observed in this study. Amelia *et al.* (2023) and Özer *et al.* (2022) also found that emotional trust leads to repeat purchases and deeper loyalty, which is seen again here. So, for brands, emotional branding is not just a tool for awareness but a strategy for long term connection.

However, it also had some limitations. The data was collected through a cross-sectional survey, so it only shows responses at one point in time. Then, the sample size of respondents was small, which means it cannot speak for whole Gen Z female generation. Still, the trends shown align with existing theory and help fill some important gaps as noted by Pan *et al.* (2025), emotional branding still needs more focused research in niche spaces, so this study takes that step using beauty influencers. Moreover, the time period for research was limited that made the research less deep but the limitations give space for future researchers to explore how emotional branding changes over time, across different platforms, genders, cultures etc.

Therefore, emotional branding from beauty influencers has a real and measurable effect on how Gen Z women think, feel, and shop. Trust, relatability, and emotional connection were the most important elements that stood out repeatedly. This research helped show that Gen Z does not just buy what they see, but they buy what they feel connected to. When emotional branding is done with honesty and authenticity, it can go beyond products to creating relationships.

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# 12. Appendices

## Survey Results:

1	Timestamp	What is your gender identity	Which platforms do you mainly use to follow influencers? (Select all that apply)	How many beauty influencers do you actively follow?
2	7/4/2025 17:53:47	Female	Instagram, YouTube	1-4
3	7/4/2025 18:50:42	Female	Instagram	1-4
4	7/4/2025 19:28:23	Female	YouTube	1-4
5	7/4/2025 19:53:20	Female	Instagram, YouTube	1-4
6	7/4/2025 19:59:37	Female	Instagram	1-4
7	7/4/2025 20:01:42	Female	YouTube	1-4
8	7/4/2025 20:02:44	Female	Instagram	1-4
9	7/4/2025 20:05:46	Female	Instagram	5-9
10	7/4/2025 20:20:09	Female	Instagram	10 or more
11	7/4/2025 23:10:43	Female	Instagram	5-9
12	7/4/2025 23:16:52	Female	Instagram	10 or more
13	7/4/2025 23:24:05	Female	Instagram	
14	7/4/2025 23:44:23	Female	Instagram, YouTube	1-4
15	7/4/2025 23:54:58	Female	Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Pinterest	5-9
16	7/5/2025 0:25:31	Female	Instagram	
17	7/5/2025 3:46:41	Female	Instagram	1-4
18	7/5/2025 4:06:11	Female	Instagram	1-4
19	7/5/2025 4:17:32	Female	Instagram	1-4
20	7/5/2025 8:20:36	Female	Instagram, YouTube	5-9
21	7/5/2025 9:22:05	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest	5-9
22	7/5/2025 9:23:52	Female	Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat	10 or more
23	7/5/2025 9:25:26	Female	Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest	5-9
24	7/5/2025 9:26:48	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest	10 or more
25	7/5/2025 9:28:04	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat	5-9
26	7/5/2025 9:29:24	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat	5-9
27	7/5/2025 9:30:58	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat	10 or more
28	7/5/2025 9:42:24	Female	Instagram, Pinterest	1-4
29	7/5/2025 14:30:42	Female	Instagram	5-9
30	7/5/2025 14:31:33	Female	Instagram	1-4
31	7/5/2025 14:32:18	Female	Instagram	1-4
32	7/5/2025 14:38:20	Female	Instagram, YouTube	1-4
33	7/5/2025 14:43:11	Female	Instagram	10 or more
34	7/5/2025 15:01:53	Female	Instagram	5-9
35	7/5/2025 15:14:09	Female	Instagram, YouTube	1-4
36	7/5/2025 20:16:15	Female	YouTube	10 or more
37	7/5/2025 21:54:56	Female	Instagram	5-9
38	7/5/2025 22:53:25	Female	YouTube	5-9
39	7/5/2025 22:59:59	Female	Instagram	1-4
40	7/5/2025 23:03:13	Female	Instagram, Tiktok	5-9
41	7/5/2025 23:05:46	Female	Instagram, Tiktok	5-9
42	7/5/2025 23:06:04	Female	Instagram	1-4
43	7/5/2025 23:09:32	Female	Tiktok	1-4
44	7/5/2025 23:09:57	Female	Instagram, YouTube, TikTok	1-4
45	7/5/2025 23:15:17	Female	Instagram	1-4
46	7/5/2025 23:17:35	Female	Instagram	10 or more
47	7/5/2025 23:19:02	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest	10 or more
48	7/5/2025 23:59:51	Female	Instagram, TikTok	5-9
49	7/6/2025 2:45:10	Female	Tiktok	10 or more
50	7/6/2025 9:27:33	Female	Instagram, tiktok	1-4
51	7/6/2025 9:51:26	Female	Instagram	10 or more
52	7/6/2025 10:26:24	Female	Instagram, Tiktok	1-4
53	7/6/2025 10:27:37	Female	I dont follow influencers	1-4
54	7/6/2025 10:28:03	Female	Instagram, Tiktok	10 or more
55	7/6/2025 11:22:51	Female	Instagram, Tiktok	10 or more
56	7/6/2025 12:37:58	Female	Instagram	5-9
57	7/6/2025 12:53:55	Female	Instagram	10 or more
58	7/6/2025 13:42:09	Female	Instagram, TikTok	1-4
59	7/6/2025 14:40:00	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Tiktok	10 or more
60	7/6/2025 15:43:35	Female	Instagram	1-4
61	7/7/2025 18:10:36	Female	Instagram	1-4
62	7/7/2025 20:42:14	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Biilibili, Tiktok	5-9
63	7/7/2025 21:57:19	Prefer not to say	Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest	10 or more
64	7/8/2025 13:00:55	Female	Instagram	1-4
65	7/17/2025 21:59:56	Female	Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest	1-4
66	8/11/2025 13:35:09	Female	Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest	1-4

	How often do you watch beauty tutorials or skincare videos by influencers?	Have you ever bought a skincare or beauty product after seeing it on an influencer's post or story?	Have you ever used a discount code or promo code given by an influencer?
1			
2	A few times a week	Yes	No
3	Rarely	Yes	Yes
4	Rarely	No	No
5	A few times a week	Yes	No
6	Everyday	Yes	No
7	Everyday	No	No
8	A few times a week	No	No
9	Everyday	Yes	Yes
10	Everyday	Yes	Yes
11	A few times a week	Yes	No
12	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
13	Rarely	Yes	No
14	Rarely	Yes	No
15	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
16	Everyday	Yes	No
17	Everyday	Yes	No
18	Rarely	Yes	Yes
19	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
20	A few times a week	No	No
21	A few times a week	Yes	No
22	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
23	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
24	A few times a week	Yes	No
25	A few times a week	Yes	No
26	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
27	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
28	A few times a week	Yes	No
29	Everyday	Yes	Yes
30	Everyday	Yes	Yes
31	Everyday	Yes	Yes
32	Everyday	Yes	Yes
33	A few times a week	No	No
34	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
35	Rarely	No	No
36	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
37	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
38		Yes	Yes
39	Rarely	No	No
40	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
41	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
42	A few times a week	No	No
43	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
44	Everyday	No	No
45	Rarely	No	No
46	A few times a week	Yes	No
47	Everyday	Yes	Yes
48	A few times a week	Yes	No
49	Everyday	Yes	Yes
50	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
51	Everyday	No	No
52	A few times a week	Yes	No
53	A few times a week	No	No
54	A few times a week	Yes	No
55	A few times a week	Yes	Yes
56	Rarely	Yes	Yes
57	Everyday	Yes	No
58	A few times a week	Yes	No
59	Rarely	Yes	No
60	Rarely	Yes	No
61	Rarely	No	Yes
62	A few times a week	Yes	No
63	Everyday	Yes	Yes
64	Everyday	Yes	Yes
65	Everyday	Yes	No
66	A few times a week	Yes	No



	Have you ever used a discount code or promo code given by an influencer?	Have you ever clicked a product link (e.g., "Link in bio" or "Swipe up") shared by an influencer?	Have you ever recommended an influencer's product to a friend?
1			
2	No	No	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	No	Yes	No
5	No	Yes	Yes
6	No	Yes	Yes
7	No	No	No
8	No	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	No
11	No	Yes	Yes
12	Yes	Yes	No
13	No	No	Yes
14	No	Yes	Yes
15	Yes	No	Yes
16	No	Yes	No
17	No	Yes	No
18	Yes	No	Yes
19	Yes	Yes	Yes
20	No	Yes	No
21	No	No	Yes
22	Yes	No	Yes
23	Yes	Yes	Yes
24	No	No	Yes
25	No	Yes	Yes
26	Yes	Yes	Yes
27	Yes	No	Yes
28	No	No	Yes
29	Yes	Yes	Yes
30	Yes	Yes	Yes
31	Yes	Yes	Yes
32	Yes	Yes	Yes
33	No	Yes	Yes
34	Yes	Yes	Yes
35	No	No	No
36	Yes	Yes	Yes
37	Yes	Yes	Yes
38	Yes	Yes	Yes
39	No	No	No
40	Yes	Yes	Yes
41	Yes	Yes	Yes
42	No	No	No
43	Yes	Yes	No
44	No	Yes	No
45	No	Yes	No
46	No	Yes	Yes
47	Yes	Yes	Yes
48	No	Yes	Yes
49	Yes	Yes	Yes
50	Yes	Yes	Yes
51	No	Yes	No
52	No	Yes	No
53	No	Yes	No
54	No	Yes	Yes
55	Yes	Yes	Yes
56	Yes	Yes	No
57	No	Yes	Yes
58	No	No	No
59	No	No	No
60	No	No	Yes
61	Yes	Yes	No
62	No	Yes	Yes
63	Yes	Yes	Yes
64	Yes	Yes	No
65	No	Yes	Yes
66	No	Yes	Yes

	Have you ever recommended an influencer's product to a friend?	Have you made a product part of your daily beauty routine after discovering it through an influencer?	Have you made an impulse purchase because of an influencer's emotional positioning of a product?
1			
2	Yes	Yes	No
3	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	No	Yes	No
5	Yes	Yes	No
6	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	No	No	No
8	Yes	No	No
9	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	No	No	Yes
11	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	No	No	Yes
13	Yes	No	No
14	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	Yes	Yes	Yes
16	No	Yes	No
17	No	Yes	No
18	Yes	Yes	No
19	Yes	Yes	Yes
20	No	No	No
21	Yes	Yes	Yes
22	Yes	Yes	Yes
23	Yes	Yes	Yes
24	Yes	Yes	Yes
25	Yes	Yes	Yes
26	Yes	Yes	Yes
27	Yes	Yes	Yes
28	Yes	Yes	No
29	Yes	Yes	No
30	Yes	Yes	Yes
31	Yes	Yes	Yes
32	Yes	Yes	Yes
33	Yes	Yes	Yes
34	Yes	Yes	No
35	No	No	No
36	Yes	Yes	Yes
37	Yes	Yes	Yes
38	Yes	Yes	Yes
39	No	No	No
40	Yes	Yes	No
41	Yes	Yes	Yes
42	No	Yes	No
43	No	Yes	No
44	No	Yes	No
45	No	No	No
46	Yes	Yes	No
47	Yes	Yes	No
48	Yes	No	Yes
49	Yes	Yes	No
50	Yes	Yes	No
51	No	No	No
52	No	No	No
53	No	No	No
54	Yes	Yes	Yes
55	Yes	Yes	No
56	No	Yes	Yes
57	Yes	No	No
58	No	No	No
59	No	Yes	No
60	Yes	Yes	Yes
61	No	No	No
62	Yes	Yes	No
63	Yes	Yes	Yes
64	No	No	No
65	Yes	Yes	Yes
66	Yes	Yes	No



	How often do your feelings about an influencer ad affect your decision to buy what they promote?	In the last 3 months, how many influencer-inspired purchases did you make?	How often do you check the comments or reviews under an influencer's post before deciding to buy?
1			
2	Sometimes	1-3	Often
3	Sometimes	0	Always
4	Sometimes	4-7	Always
5	Sometimes	0	Always
6	Rarely	1-3	Always
7	Never	0	Often
8	Rarely	0	Always
9	Sometimes	1-3	Always
10	Always	1-3	Always
11	Sometimes	1-3	Always
12	Often	1-3	Often
13	Rarely	0	Always
14	Sometimes	1-3	Often
15	Often	1-3	Always
16	Sometimes	1-3	Always
17	Sometimes	4-7	Often
18	Always	0	Always
19	Sometimes	1-3	Always
20	Rarely	0	Sometimes
21	Often	4-7	Always
22	Sometimes	7-10	Always
23	Sometimes	7-10	Always
24	Often	4-7	Often
25	Often	7-10	Always
26	Often	4-7	Often
27	Often	7-10	Often
28		1-3	Rarely
29	Often	1-3	Always
30	Always	1-3	Sometimes
31	Often	1-3	Always
32	Always	1-3	Always
33	Always	0	Always
34	Sometimes	1-3	Always
35	Rarely	0	Rarely
36	Often	1-3	Always
37	Sometimes	1-3	Always
38	Often	4-7	Sometimes
39	Rarely	0	Sometimes
40	Sometimes	4-7	Always
41		1-3	Always
42	Rarely	0	Always
43	Often	0	Always
44	Sometimes	0	Always
45	Never	0	Never
46	Never	0	Always
47	Always	1-3	Always
48	Rarely	1-3	Sometimes
49	Sometimes	4-7	Often
50	Sometimes	1-3	Sometimes
51	Sometimes	0	Often
52	Never	0	Always
53	Often	0	Always
54	Always	1-3	Always
55	Often	4-7	Always
56	Sometimes	7-10	Rarely
57	Sometimes	0	Rarely
58	Often	0	Rarely
59	Rarely	0	Sometimes
60	Sometimes	1-3	Rarely
61	Rarely	0	Always
62	Rarely	1-3	Sometimes
63	Often	7-10	Sometimes
64	Sometimes	1-3	Often
65	Sometimes	1-3	Always
66	Sometimes	1-3	Often

1	Think of your most recent purchase triggered by an influencer. What was the main reason behind it? (Select all that apply)	I feel emotionally connected to at least one beauty influencer I follow	I trust influencers more when they show their real skin/lifestyle
2	Trusted their expertise	3	4
3	Felt an emotional connection, Discount code,	4	3
4	Trusted their expertise	1	5
5	Trusted their expertise	1	5
6	Trusted their expertise	3	3
7	Discount code	2	4
8	.	5	2
9	Discount code	1	5
10	Felt an emotional connection, Trusted their expertise, Wanted to support them	1	1
11	Trusted their expertise	2	5
12	Wanted to support them	2	4
13	Trusted their expertise	1	5
14	Trusted their expertise	3	2
15	Felt an emotional connection, Trusted their expertise	3	3
16	Trusted their expertise	1	4
17	Trusted their expertise, Wanted to support them	3	4
18	Felt an emotional connection	1	
19	Trusted their expertise	4	3
20	no	2	3
21	Trusted their expertise	5	1
22	Felt an emotional connection, Trusted their expertise	5	5
23	Trusted their expertise, Discount code	5	5
24	Felt an emotional connection, Discount code	4	5
25	Felt an emotional connection, Trusted their expertise	4	5
26	Felt an emotional connection, Trusted their expertise	5	4
27	Trusted their expertise, Discount code	4	5
28	Trusted their expertise	1	2
29	Product review	3	4
30	Trusted their expertise	3	3
31	Trusted their expertise	3	3
32	Trusted their expertise, Wanted to support them	3	3
33	Felt an emotional connection	1	1
34	Trusted their expertise	2	5
35		1	3
36	Trusted their expertise	5	5
37	Trusted their expertise	2	4
38	Discount code	3	2
39	Wanted to support them, Discount code	2	4
40	Trusted their expertise, Discount code	4	5
41	Discount code	4	4
42	Trusted their expertise	1	3
43	Trusted their expertise	1	4
44	Discount code	2	5
45		1	4
46	Trusted their expertise	3	4
47	Trusted their expertise	1	5
48	Trusted their expertise	3	5
49	Trusted their expertise	5	5
50	Trusted their expertise	4	4
51		3	2
52	Trusted their expertise	1	5
53	I didnt buy it	2	3
54	Felt an emotional connection, Trusted their expertise	4	3
55	Wanted to support them	5	5
56	Felt an emotional connection	3	4
57	Discount code	3	5
58	Trusted their expertise	1	4
59	Trusted their expertise	3	5
60	Felt an emotional connection	1	1
61	Trusted their expertise	1	1
62	Trusted their expertise	1	5
63	Trusted their expertise, Discount code	4	4
64	Wanted to support them	1	1
65	Trusted their expertise	4	5
66	Trusted their expertise	3	3

	I follow influencers who share their personal beauty struggles and not just sponsored content	I am more likely to buy a product that many influencers are talking about	I am influenced more by micro-influencers than celebrities
1			
2	4	3	4
3	2	4	3
4	5	5	5
5	5	3	3
6	5	1	1
7	4	1	3
8	2	5	3
9	5	5	5
10	1	1	1
11	4	3	4
12	5	5	2
13	5	4	5
14	1	2	2
15	3	3	3
16	3	3	4
17	3	3	5
18	1	1	1
19	3	3	3
20	4	3	4
21	5	5	4
22	5	5	5
23	5	5	5
24	5	5	5
25	5	4	4
26	5	4	4
27	4	4	4
28	2	1	1
29	4	3	3
30	3	3	3
31	3	3	3
32	3	3	3
33	1	3	3
34	5	4	5
35	1	1	3
36	5	5	4
37	3	2	3
38	4	4	2
39	4	1	4
40	5	4	4
41	5	5	5
42	4	4	4
43	4	3	4
44	4	3	4
45	4	2	4
46	4	4	4
47	5	3	5
48	5	2	2
49	5	1	2
50	4	3	5
51	2	2	1
52	5	1	4
53	4	1	2
54	5	5	4
55	5	4	5
56	2	3	2
57	5	5	5
58	5	3	5
59	5	1	4
60	3	4	3
61	3	1	1
62	4	2	2
63	4	4	2
64	1	1	1
65	5	4	5
66	4	3	4

	I have felt "influenced" to buy something just because it was trending online	I spend more time watching influencer content than brand advertisement online
1		
2	2	4
3	3	3
4	1	5
5	5	5
6	1	1
7	3	3
8	4	2
9	1	5
10	1	1
11	2	3
12	2	2
13	1	3
14	2	2
15	3	3
16	3	3
17	4	3
18	1	1
19	3	4
20	2	4
21	4	4
22	5	5
23	4	4
24	5	4
25	4	5
26	5	4
27	5	4
28	1	1
29	2	3
30	3	2
31	3	3
32	3	3
33	5	2
34	3	4
35	1	2
36	4	5
37	4	3
38	3	3
39	1	1
40	4	4
41	3	1
42	2	2
43	2	4
44	3	3
45	1	1
46	5	4
47	4	5
48	4	4
49	5	5
50	4	5
51	4	2
52	3	3
53	2	2
54	4	4
55	5	5
56		4
57		4
58		5
59		5
60		1
61		1
62		3
63		3
64		1
65		5
66		3