**How to promote Swiss watches on Chinese Social Media Platforms:**

**Impacts of Influencer Attributes on Consumer's Purchase Intentions**

Bachelor Thesis

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# Management Summary

China's immense economic growth during the past decades lifted over 800 million people out of poverty and promoted a significant development of the nation's digital infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic further pushed the digitalization trend, which resulted in an e-commerce user base of 812 million individuals spending over USD 950 billion in the first half of 2021. A perfect example of this economic growth is the luxury goods market, as it will be the largest in the world by 2025, according to a Bain and Company report. The combination of economic growth, a rapidly increasing digitalization trend and the COVID-19 pandemic are of great significance for the Swiss watch industry. Due to the sudden travel restrictions, Chinese luxury goods tourism declined drastically, and instead, an upsurge in Chinese luxury spending occurred domestically. As a result, exports of Swiss watches to mainland China have recorded an incline of 20.1% year on year, in 2020, translating to a total amount of roughly USD 2.6 billion. Every other of the industry's top ten export market regions, including the United States and Hong Kong, recorded severe export declines during the same time period. To react to this rapidly transforming market, the Swiss watch industry needs to adapt to China's immense digital landscape. With China's changes to an ever more digital market, a new opportunity arises. The popularity of social media has led to more and more brands working with micro-celebrities known as social media influencers. Through these influencers marketing professionals are able to have an impact on their audience. The influencers showcase and promote a specific brand or product and, in return, receive benefits from a company. In summary, social media influencers are the key to reaching vast amounts of potential consumers online. In order to provide the Swiss watch industry with recommendations on collaborating with the right social media influencer, this study analyzed the impact of six influencer attributes on consumers' buying intention. After conducting a survey with Chinese participants interested in Swiss watches, the findings show that the social media content characteristics of information and entertainment value, as well as the personal influencer attributes consisting of expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and perceived similarity, positively affect the consumer's buying intention.

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# 1 Introduction

In this first chapter, a background on the choice of topic is given. Moreover, the research question is stated, and its relevance is discussed.

## 1.1 Background Information

Since 1978, when China began to open up to the rest of the world and reform its economy, GDP has grown at an annual rate of over 10% on average, and more than 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty. According to the World Bank (2021), China is now classified as an upper-middle-income country. Despite the increase in both income and wealth inequality, Mainland China is predicted to overtake the United States as the world's largest economy in terms of GDP within a decade. Currently, the Chinese middle class accounts for 340 million people who earn between USD 15'000 and USD 75'000 per annum. Moreover, 96% of urban Chinese own estate, and over 2 million individuals have assets worth more than USD 1.5 million (Hongbin, 2021). This economic growth promoted a significant development of China's digital infrastructure and resulted in 1,011 million internet users – called netizens – as of June 2021. This number suggests that 71.6% of the population has internet access, with 99.6% of the netizens gaining access via their mobile phones.

The nation's fast-growing digitalization trends, together with the inevitable push the COVID-19 pandemic caused towards an ever more digitalized world, have led to record highs regarding online payments. China's internet retail user base had grown to 812 million. In the first half of 2021, national online retail sales reached 6'113.3 billion yuan (roughly USD 970 billion), rising 23.2% year on year. More specifically, online retail sales of tangible items increased 18.7% to 5'026.3 billion yuan (roughly USD 796 billion) (China Internet Network Information Center [CNNIC], 2021). In comparison, e-commerce sales in the United States reached a total of USD 437.2 billion in the first half of 2021 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2022).

Another impressive number related to China's digital infrastructure concerns the usage of social media. Despite foreign social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter remaining banned, China records 930.8 million active social media users on native platforms such as Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), Sina Weibo (the Twitter of China), WeChat (the Facebook of China), and numerous others (DataReportal, 2021). While social media networks such as Instagram are key marketing tools in the western world, they are still primarily perceived as creative hubs rather than

commercial ones. Currently, western social commerce is dominated by advertising rather than transactions. After all, influencer culture is the most potent force on Instagram, having been established on brand promotion. In China, on the contrary, social commerce sales account for roughly USD 350 billion in 2021 – nearly ten times the amount of those in the United States (Insider Intelligence, 2022). Conscious of the enormous marketing potential of such platforms, firms have worked to improve their online presence by using interference techniques. Marketers have started collaborating with influential social media users, or influencers, to create sponsored content aimed at their large social networks of followers (Reinikainen, Munnukka, Maity, Luoma-aho, 2020).

The Chinese market became particularly interesting for luxury goods brands as the economic growth sparked the Chinese appetite for such products. According to a Bain & Company report by Lannes and Xing (2022), personal luxury goods sales in mainland China increased 36% year on year to 471 billion yuan (USD 73.6 billion) in 2021. That represents more than twice the luxury goods consumption of 234 billion yuan in 2019, before the pandemic. In comparison, Bain & Company estimated the 2021 global luxury goods consumption to be USD 320.6 billion, which suggests that over 20% of all luxury goods were consumed in China that year. Due to the increased difficulties of traveling as a result of the pandemic restrictions, Chinese consumers are increasing their expenditure on luxury products at home. Taking these estimations into account, the report predicts China to become the largest luxury goods market in the world by 2025 (Lannes & Xing, 2022).

An excellent example of the Chinese hunger for luxury brands is seen in the Swiss watch industry. For several years, China's citizens have been the largest consumers of luxury timepieces. However, in order to avoid high sales taxes, the majority of their purchases were made in foreign destinations such as London, Zurich, or Dubai. In an interview with the New York Times, the CEO of the independent Swiss watch firm H. Moser & Cie stated that prior to the pandemic, China accounted for less than 1% of the company's worldwide revenues, but that half of its sales in Switzerland were to Chinese Nationals. This comment corresponds with a statement from Boston Consulting Group executive, Véronique Yang, that they estimate around 70% of Chinese luxury spending previously occurred in foreign markets (Swithinbank, 2021). With the spread of COVID-19 in late 2019, the world was thrown into disarray. The consequences of international travel restrictions resulted in an upsurge in Chinese luxury spending occurring domestically. Véronique Yang commented that in 2020 the percentage of Chinese luxury

spending abroad declined drastically to approximately 30% (Swithinbank, 2021). Subsequently, according to the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry, exports of Swiss watches to mainland China recorded an incline of 20.1% year on year in 2020, translating to a total amount of approximately CHF 2.4 billion (USD 2.6 billion). Every other one of the industry's top ten market regions, including the United States and Hong Kong, recorded severe export declines during the same time period. A further increase of Swiss watches exported to mainland China totaling almost CHF 3 billion (USD 3.2 billion) was recorded in 2021 (Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry, 2022). As Chinese luxury spending rapidly changed from consuming abroad to consuming domestically, brands have had to adapt their marketing strategies. While some launched physical storefronts or pop-ups in China, many chose to concentrate on the country's thriving digital market (Swithinbank, 2021).

Using social applications and websites has been an ongoing global trend for some time now, especially in China (Akram, Hui, Khan, Yan, 2018). Closely linked is another fast-growing trend, social commerce, which has emerged in recent years (Tongmyong University & Jung, 2014). Social commerce, commonly referred to as social business, is an e-commerce activity that takes place on social networking platforms and primarily uses social media and Web 2.0 capabilities. Social commerce also refers to the use of social media to aid e-commerce transactions and operations. By integrating commercial and social activities, it also adds to social interactions and user content (Liang & Turban, 2014).

Individuals increasingly rely on social media sites to exchange information or buy goods and services (Fink, Koller, Gartner, Floh, Harms, 2020). Consequently, new opportunities arise for companies to attract customers and foster brand relationships via these platforms (Braojos-Gomez, Benitez-Amado, Llorens-Montes, 2015). Furthermore, with the surge in popularity of social media, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of micro-celebrities known as social media influencers (SMIs) (Torres, Augusto, Matos, 2019). As a result of publishing optically and vocally appealing videos, photos, and text on social media platforms, SMIs accumulate a significant number of followers, giving them a social effect comparable to that of conventional celebrities (Giakoumaki & Krepapa, 2020). It is via these SMIs that marketing professionals are able to have an impact on their audience. Companies collaborate with influencers by giving compensation or sponsored items, particularly those who have developed a solid reputation in brand-related sectors. In return, SMIs create and share advertising

containing personal and contextual stories with their followers, where they convey their thoughts about a product (De Veirman, Cauberghe, Hudders, 2017). The difference between employing a traditional celebrity and an SMI is that a celebrity is merely an actor in advertisements and appears according to a predetermined script in ad sequences, on billboards, and in other media (Hudders, De Jans, De Veirman, 2020). Influencers, on the other hand, graphically explain to target customers the process of utilizing brand products and even compare before and after results by integrating the items into real-world circumstances. This method creates a strong feeling of realism and brand affinity among target customers. Furthermore, brand managers might choose to work with SMIs as they are less expensive than well-known conventional celebrities (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

This fast-growing Social Media Influencer trend is particularly interesting when looking at China. Research performed by the Centre for International Governance Innovation found that social media influences the buying decisions of over 66% of Chinese consumers. This percentage is considerably higher than in any other nation. In the United States, for instance, only 38% of consumers indicated being influenced by social media (Robles, 2020). One key factor which has caused the acceleration of the influencer economy in China is trust. Consumers have a long history of being misled by counterfeit goods. Many individuals trust internet celebrities more than websites or companies because they depict themselves as regular citizens (Wernau & Woo, 2019).

The positive effects of influencer marketing have been highlighted in various studies (Hung, Tse, Chan, 2021). In a recent journal article by Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro, for instance, survey results were presented which confirm that by working with the right influencers, businesses can increase the amount and quality of their Internet audience traffic, as well as the level of consumer interaction (2020). The question now emerging is what the right influencer and the most effective setting for a particular brand are in order to maximize its return on investment (ROI).

**1.2 Research Question and Relevance**

To summarize the previous section, luxury brands must acknowledge the enormous market potential China provides. The relatively new yet ever-increasing megatrend of social commerce in China must be taken advantage of. Various studies in the field of influencer marketing examine the attributes and characteristics of influencers and their content and the correlating behavioral reactions of consumers (Li & Peng, 2021; Lou & Kim, 2019; Masuda, Han, Lee, 2022). However, to the author's best knowledge,

none of the studies focus on a single product or product category. Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, and Thrassou (2021, p. 625) claim that "[…] different contexts and products require influencers that exhibit different characteristics."

This study aims to analyze influencer marketing in the context of a single product category. It closes the gap in the research by examining whether previously explored influencer and content characteristics positively related to purchase intention can be universally applied or not. In conclusion, the research question of this paper is formulated as follows: What is the most effective influencer marketing setting to promote Swiss watches on Chinese social media platforms?

The aim of this research paper is to provide marketing specialists in the Swiss watch industry with a recommendation on what the most effective influencer marketing setting is to promote their products on Chinese social media platforms. Common metrics to measure the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing are brand awareness and, ultimately, purchase intention (Li & Peng, 2021). Filling this research gap is of great value for researchers in this field, as it is not only of high practical and managerial importance, but also forms a solid foundation for further research concerning influencer marketing for specific product categories.

## 1.3 Delimitations

The delimitations of this study include the division of the studied product category into further subcategories such as price ranges or different watch brands, as this would be too specific and would pose significant challenges in finding a representative sample.

## 1.4 Schematic Outline of the Remainder of the Study

After introducing the research by providing the reader an overview of the background information and stating the research question and aim of this study, the remainder of this paper elaborates on the chosen topic in the ensuing chapters. In the following section, the literature review is presented. Based on previous peer-reviewed studies and theoretical concepts, a conceptual framework including six hypotheses is created and described. Next, the methodology chapter elaborates on how the conceptualized theory is put to test. This includes the detailed design of the survey and the rationale of specific processes and techniques applied. The described methodology is executed in the results chapter. The data gathered is described, statistically analyzed, and the findings presented in a meaningful way. The findings are subsequently discussed and compared to previous studies. The conclusion chapter discusses the theoretical and

managerial implications of the findings of this study. Lastly, the limitations of the research are summarized, and recommendations for further research are given.

## 2 Literature Review

This chapter aims to analyze the theoretical understanding of the key variables of the research, which include influencer marketing and its characteristics. The theoretical understanding of the IM has been developed in the light of consumer socialization and source credibility theory. Additionally, the IM factors impacting consumer decision-making have been discussed. A conceptual framework has been developed based on the theoretical understanding to determine the relationship between Chinese social media influencer attributes and consumers' buying intention for Swiss watches.

## 2.1 Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing (IM) is regarded as a marketing strategy that makes use of digital and social media platforms to promote brand awareness among the targeted audience (Jahnke, Brix, Bruce, Fuchs, Hahn, 2018). Additionally, IM is referred to as a common practice that is being highly adopted by brands all across the globe to cooperate with influencers for paid marketing campaigns (More & Lingam, 2019). Influencers often tend to contribute new information and have the capability to affect the behavior and attitudes of consumers which can help them in making a purchase decision (Grafström, Jakobsson, Wiede, 2018). The idea of IM has gained immense momentum since 2016 as the credibility, and product/service-specific knowledge reliability of the influencers proved substantially beneficial for brand advocacy, promotion, and customer loyalty (Martínez-López, Anaya-Sánchez, Fernández Giordano, Lopez-Lopez, 2020). The trend of influencer marketing showed significant growth in the year 2017 and was listed as the biggest trend of the year (Ward, 2017). Since then, IM has become an important marketing tool to modify the purchase intentions of the potential and targeted audience.

## 2.2 Theories of IM

In this section, important theories on which influencer marketing is based are presented.

### 2.2.1 Consumer Socialization Theory

With respect to the customer socialization theory, the consumer adapts the behavior of an influencer through three distinct processes, namely reinforcement, modeling, and social interaction (Delafrooz, Rahmati, Abdi, Wright, 2019). During the modeling process, consumers imitate the behavior of the influencers, which alters their consumption patterns and buying behavior. The influencers, with their vast product knowledge and expertise, follow or use the specific product by describing its benefits. As

a result, consumers commonly relate this to the brand as they perceive influencers as brand advocates who, unlike celebrities, possess real-time information regarding the product (Martínez-López et al., 2020). During the reinforcement process, the consumers analyze the positive as well as the negative aspects of the endorsement made by the influencer and then make the purchase decision. This process is also linked to feedback and reviews from peers and other people in their social circle, which helps them to validate their purchase and ensure that they are making the right choice. The last process of this theory is social interaction, where the influencers use the social and digital media platforms to interact with the consumers to influence their buying behavior and purchase intentions (Delafrooz et al., 2019). Customer socialization generally occurs when people observe their surroundings and peers' consumption behavior when they shop together. The brand preference of peers can also be an influential factor (Delafrooz et al., 2019). Similarly, it has been stated that peers and family play an essential role when people seek data for a specific product (Sabermajidi, Valaei, Balaji, Goh, 2019). Customers commonly learn about a product or service by interacting with their peers and friends. The idea of influencer marketing is connected to customer socialization theory through word of mouth, as individuals begin to follow influencers online based on the suggestion of others. This is particularly seen amongst the youth of today (Sabermajidi et al., 2019).

### *2.2.2 Source Credibility Theory*

As denoted by Lowry, Wilson, and Haig (2014), source credibility theory states that the customers are much more likely to be persuaded when the source present is credible. The implementation of source credibility theory aims to assure trustworthiness, dynamism, and competence-based on the knowledge, intelligence, and expertise of the influencer (Cohen, Gaynor, Krishnamoorthy, Wright, 2022). The theory is illustrated in three models that could be used. The models included are the functional model, factor model, and constructivist model. With respect to definitions, the idea of source credibility has been seen as a situation where the believability of the message relies on the credibility and status of the sender in the eyes of customers (the receiver). Academia has shown that in the 20th century, there was a special emphasis placed on source credibility theory by marketers (Cohen et al., 2022). It has been denoted that the idea of credibility theory is concerned with formulating principles that help to execute effective marketing towards the viewers. The credibility of the source is the grounding principle that can either modify the purchase intention leading to a dynamic shift in the consumer behavior patterns, or

negatively affect the buying behavior in case of falsified information (Hsieh & Li, 2020). This shows that source credibility is an important factor and that people are more likely to be persuaded when the sources are credible. Presently, large social media platforms are some of the credible platforms which play a significant role in altering purchase intentions (Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, Dwivedi, 2020). The number of followers that influencers have on these platforms also serves as a validation of their credibility. In turn, consumers are more likely to perceive products and services that are being marketed by influencers with a higher following, as more reliable (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

## 2.3 Attributes Influencing Consumers' Purchase Intentions

Purchase intention refers to the likelihood of a customer being willing to buy a specific product (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The purchase intention of consumers has been used in various studies to examine their product perception (Spears & Singh, 2004). In a study regarding social media influencers conducted by Van-Tien Dao, Nhat Hanh Le, Ming-Sung Cheng, Chao Chen (2014), it was discovered that specifically perceived advertising value has a positive effect on online purchase intentions among users. The two key aspects which make up advertising value are defined as information value and entertainment value (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Various studies have confirmed that SMI characteristics such as expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and similarity, have a positive influence on consumers' purchase intention (Lou & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Masuda et al., 2022). In the following sections, these factors affecting consumers' purchase intention will be elaborated on.

### *2.3.1 Content Influence*

Content influence depicts the characteristic of content to obtain the customer's attention (Lu, Bock, Joseph, 2013). The content influence is focused on informative value and entertainment value.

#### 2.3.1.1 Informative Value

The concept of advertising informativeness evaluates the value of advertising and marketing to facilitate informed decisions and create positive purchase intention (Lou & Kim, 2019). The idea of informative value in the advertising content, has been described as the value of advertising to facilitate informed decisions of customers and to make purchase satisfaction levels strong (Lou & Kim, 2019). The process of establishing an exchange connection between marketers and customers might be impeded by advertising that lacks value. Additionally, it raises the possibility that customers may disregard the

advertisement or have an unfavorable view of it. Advertising with a high value, however, is anticipated to motivate customers to form positive views of the promoted product or brand (Lou & Kim, 2019). Grant, Clarke, and Kyriazis (2007) argue that with online retailers providing high-experience commodities – which often result in high involvement, as well as a large degree of perceived customer risk – there is a substantial lack of understanding of the information necessary to make an online purchase, on behalf of the consumer. In such cases, a credible information source might assist with both simple and complex products and help to provide a deeper understanding for the consumer (Grant et al., 2007). In line with the discussion, the following hypothesis has been generated:

*H1: Informativeness exhibited by the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers.*

### 2.3.1.2 Entertainment Value

The content influence could also be affected by the idea of entertainment value. Entertainment value is the value that adds pleasure to the experience of people when spending time on social networks and encountering social media marketing (Chen, Teo, Nguyen, 2019; Khalid, Jayasainan, Hassim, Chong, 2018; Pai & Arnott, 2013). One of the primary goals of choosing influencers is that they could involve the customers in their communication with the help of entertainment strategies and could create positive experiences by interacting with an online community which creates an element of entertainment (Hsu, Tien, Lin, Chang, 2015; Jackson & Wang, 2013; Törhönen, Sjöblom, Hassan, Hamari, 2019; Troizi, 2020). Thus, adding entertainment value to the marketing strategy could help to attract individuals to the product or service (Jackson & Wang, 2013; Törhönen et al., 2019). The literature also supports the idea that not only informative content but the way to offer value and attract the customer is through the use of entertainment content in the post (Abbas Naqvi, Jiang, Miao, Naqvi, Wu, 2020). The impact of entertainment on the generation of interest, and improvement of attitude, is significant and has been observed in various settings, including general internet use and websites. The inclusion of entertainment could enhance the influence of the content, and has been found to improve interactions, attitudes, and impressions towards brands on social media (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, Goodman, 2016). In line with the discussion, the following hypothesis has been generated:

*H2: Entertainment value added by the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers.*

### 2.3.2 Source Influence

#### 2.3.2.1 Expertise

Lou and Yuan (2019) stated that social media influencers are referred to as the content generators who generate the content based on domain expertise and have the ability to shape the attitude and purchase decisions of the customers. Unlike traditional celebrities who have gained fame from mass media, other social media influencers are referred to as grassroots and participate in non-reciprocal involvement with their fans (Lou & Yuan, 2019). There are many aspects of social media influencers that increase the source's influence. An essential one is the expertise of the source influence as customers are more influenced by the content of those influencers who have expertise in a certain field (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, Freberg, 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). With respect to social media marketing, the social media influencer's relationship with the users is more like a friendship than fandom, which is a competitive advantage for the influencers (O'Neil-Hart & Blumenstein, 2016). The idea of source expertise comprises the source knowledge and qualification to make judgments regarding a specific topic or subject. The source reliability model also confirms that influencers with high expertise are more persuasive than their peers with less expertise (Xiong, Cheng, Liang, Wu, 2018). In line with the discussion, the following hypothesis has been generated:

*H3: Influencer knowledge expertise positively affects the buying intention of the consumers.*

#### 2.3.2.2 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the source measures the message receivers obtain from the source with respect to sincerity, truthfulness, and honesty (Giffin, 1967). As defined by Moorman, Deshpandé, and Zaltman (1993, p. 82) trust is "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence." The credibility of a communicator or the source of a message is a key component in determining the communication's ability to persuade. The importance of source trustworthiness and credibility in the field of influencer marketing was also confirmed by Lou and Yuan (2019). In their research, they investigated the role of consumers' trust in the effectiveness of influencer marketing. They explored the relationship between the level of customers' trust and the effectiveness

of influencer marketing. According to the findings of this study, the informative value of influencer-generated posts and certain aspects of an influencer's credibility can have a positive effect on followers' trust in influencer-generated content posts. This, in turn, influences followers' awareness of the brand and their desire to make a purchase (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In line with the discussion, the following hypothesis has been generated:

*H4: Trustworthiness of the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers.*

### 2.3.2.3 Attractiveness

Attractiveness can be divided into two subcategories, namely, physical attractiveness and social attractiveness (Masuda et al., 2022). Physical attractiveness has been an essential feature of study in the field of attitude change, and it is a crucial characteristic of social media influencers as their followers are constantly exposed to them (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Rubin & Step, 2000). According to the findings of a study that looked at profiles for people using online dating services, perceived physical beauty was shown to improve trustworthiness. Similarly, the physical beauty of Airbnb hosts in online images has an effect on their perceived level of trustworthiness (Fleischer, Ert, Bar-Nahum, 2022). Furthermore, physical attractiveness positively impacts persuasion and, in return, stimulates consumers' purchase intentions (Chaiken, 1979). Lennon (1990) claims that a well-dressed person is also viewed as more attractive. Thus, the way people dress, depending on the contextual environment, also has a positive effect on persuasion and on the purchase intention of consumers (Bickman, 1974). Social attractiveness describes the likability of an SMI, meaning his or her qualities that create a favorable impression (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In addition, social attractiveness may be defined as the propensity of influencers to increase the emotional liking of their followers in ways that go beyond just amassing the number of likes they get on a social media site. It has been found that a very high social attractiveness has a favorable influence on credibility and parasocial connections, which in turn will result in a positive effect on consumers' buying intention. This is due to the fact that extremely high social attractiveness may boost customer loyalty (Masuda et al., 2022). In line with the discussion, the following hypothesis has been generated:

*H5: Attractiveness depicted by the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers.*

### 2.3.2.4 Similarity

According to Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack, and Zahid (2018, p. 339), "Similarity is a perceived resemblance between the sender and the receiver". When people are similar to one another, they are more likely to experience higher levels of interpersonal attraction, trust, and understanding than when they are unlike one another (Martensen et al., 2018). The resemblance of demographic attributes, lifestyles, and interests is referred to as similarity (Li & Peng, 2021; Ruef, Aldrihc, Carter, 2004). According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and Azer and Alexander (2020), influencers are viewed as accessible by followers. The influencers are perceived as long-distance friends as consumers tend to relate to their lives on a personal level and are able to relate to them with high similarities (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018; Gannon & Prothero, 2018). When consumers perceive they have common interests, goals, or traits with an influencer, they are much more inclined to adapt their views, emotions, and behaviors and put them into action. This is largely done, as per Chapple and Cownie (2017) and Alexander et al. (2020), when SMIs provide personal content on their social media platforms, which enables their image to seem more 'average', humanized, approachable, real, and dependable. Hence, the similarity between the influencer and their audience impacts the buying patterns. In line with the discussion, the following hypothesis has been generated:

*H6: Similarity between the influencer and consumer positively influences buying intention.*

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical underpinning has led to the understanding of the key variables and the role of the influencers in altering the purchase intentions of the consumers. The consumer socialization theory and the source credibility theory led to the identification of the key factors exhibited by the influencers which affect the buying intentions of the consumers. Based on previous literature, the factors have been bifurcated into content influence and source influence. The source and content influence are the independent variables where the informative value and entertainment value demonstrated by the influencers help in modifying the purchase intention of the consumers, which is the dependent variable of this research. Similarly, with respect to source influence, the expertise, attractiveness, similarity, and trustworthiness of the influencer help in affecting

the buying intentions of the consumers. The proposed conceptual framework of this study is shown below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*
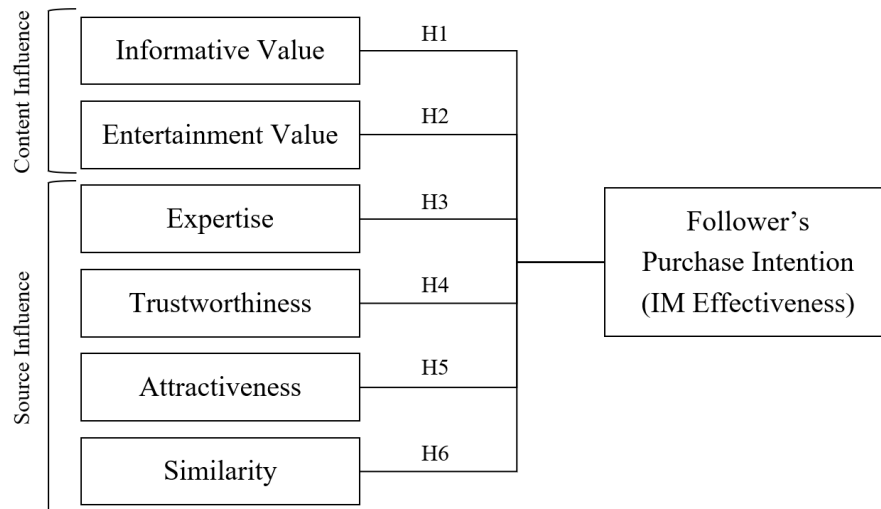
## 3 Methodology

Research methodology describes the overall systematic approach employed in the process of attempting to address a research problem. When discussing research methodology, it is necessary to analyze both the research method and the logic for the method's selection (Kothari, 2004). Hence, methodology refers to the entire strategy adopted in a scientific study, with an emphasis on the broad principles of inquiry that steer a study, which is founded on its fundamental theoretical and philosophical premises (Sim & Wright, 2000). Therefore, this chapter discusses the methodological approach of this bachelor thesis. First, the research design is discussed and justified. Following, the questionnaire is presented in detail. Lastly, the statistical analysis is described in detail.

### 3.1 Research Approach

It is essential to understand the nature of the link between theory and research since it may be utilized to give a foundation and reason for ongoing study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Sim and Wright (2000) noted that one of the primary goals of the research is to increase theoretical knowledge; this may be accomplished by building on current knowledge around an issue or by expanding understanding into an unexplored field. In general, the inductive and deductive research approaches are the two most prevalent and effective ways of comprehending the link between theory and research, in which research seeks to either test an existing theory or construct a new one (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### *3.1.1 Inductive vs. Deductive Research*

Inductive and deductive research models operate in opposing directions, with inductive research beginning with what is referred to as the theoretical starting point (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This starting point consists of a collection of theoretical concepts or assumptions that will serve as the foundation for planning the study and determining the observations or data that will be relevant to the research topic. Because the purpose of inductive research is not to test a theory, no particular theory is used as a starting point, and hence no hypothesis is required (Sim & Wright, 2000). In other words, the inductive research strategy can be described as a theory-building research approach.

Deductive research, however, starts with an established hypothesis that the researcher intends to test. The researcher derives a hypothesis from the theoretical framework, which must then be subjected to empirical testing (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The term empirical refers to a method of studying reality that emphasizes the importance of information received via experience and the senses. In other words, it

implies that concepts must undergo rigorous testing before being called knowledge. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the deductive research approach is the most common. It is typically a linear process in which each step follows logically after the previous one. Once the process of data collection has taken place and the data has been analyzed, empirical findings can be generated that should then either support or refuse the theoretical hypothesis. In a final step, knowledge gained provides the means for revising the theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

This research focuses on influencer marketing characteristics and their influence on the consumer's buying intention. As influencer marketing is a relatively new concept, there are limitations to the information currently available. Nonetheless, similar studies regarding the effect of SMI characteristics on customers' purchase intention have been conducted in recent years (Hung et al., 2021; Li & Peng, 2021; Lou & Kim, 2019; Masuda et al., 2022; Xiao, Wang, Chan-Olmsted, 2018). Hence, a deductive research approach is employed for this study in order to verify if previous findings hold true in this research context. In conclusion, a series of hypotheses will be developed based on a conceptual framework consisting of existing theories, which will then be empirically tested.

### 3.1.2 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

There are two standard methods of collecting and analyzing data for research purposes, namely the qualitative and the quantitative approach. Qualitative research focuses on discovering and comprehending the meanings that people or groups attach to a social or human issue (Creswell, 2021). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a qualitative approach can be defined as a research technique that prioritizes words instead of numbers in the collecting and analysis of data. It primarily stresses an inductive approach to the link between research and theory, with a focus on theory development rather than hypothesis testing (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Quantitative research, in contrast, is considered to be a deductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Quantitative researchers believe that by breaking the world down into smaller, more manageable components, they may form a greater understanding of it. In these smaller subgroups, observations may be conducted and hypotheses tested and validated.  The researcher first presents a theory, which is subsequently validated via a series of experiments; the findings of these evaluations are then utilized to draw conclusions about the theory's accuracy (Rovai, Baker, Ponton, 2014). The use of mathematically based methodologies for data collection and analysis is a distinguishing element of this methodology. In most cases, surveys or

polls are used to collect numerical data and generalize it for a group of individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To summarize, as this scientific research follows a deductive approach, the hypotheses are tested by employing a quantitative research strategy.

## 3.2 Research Purpose and Time Horizon

Research, according to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), may be carried out for a variety of purposes, including exploratory, descriptive, evaluative, or explanatory. Exploratory research is an effective method for asking open questions in order to ascertain what is occurring and gain insight into a subject of interest. There are several techniques for conducting exploratory research, such as a literature review, interviewing experts, or focus group interviews. Due to their experimental character, these interviews are prone to be unstructured (Saunders et al., 2019). The goal of descriptive research is to provide a detailed profile of events, people, or circumstances. The questions asked for descriptive research usually start with 'Who', 'Where', 'What', 'When' and 'How' (Saunders et al., 2019). The objective of evaluative research is to assess something's performance. For example, this might be reviewing an advertising campaign, a personnel policy, or a pricing plan (Saunders et al., 2019). The last objective, called explanatory purpose, examines the cause-and-effect relationship between variables by testing particular hypotheses to form a comprehensive understanding of a problem (Saunders et al., 2019). As the study aims to explain the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables IM characteristics and consumer purchase intention, the purpose of this research is explanatory.

Another critical aspect of the research design is its time horizon. Saunders et al. (2019) distinguish between longitudinal and cross-sectional research. Cross-sectional studies can be described as a snapshot captured at a certain point in time, whereas longitudinal studies are more analogous to a diary or a series of snapshots that capture occurrences over time (Saunders et al., 2019). Since the research question and given time constraint imply an analysis at a single point in time, this research can be defined as cross-sectional.

## 3.3 Data Source

When conducting research, the data needed for the analysis can be collected from either primary or from secondary data sources. Primary research is defined as a kind of research that is based on the collection of original data for a specific study (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The most significant advantage of primary research is obviously that the

data is reliable as it is collected first-hand, and, more importantly, the questions can be tailored to the study's specific aim (Taylor, 2022). More and more, the data collected through primary research studies are made accessible to the research community. When a researcher reuses this data, it is then called secondary data (Hox & Boeije, 2005). Advantages of secondary data collection are the need for fewer time and financial resources compared to primary data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As specific data is required to answer the research question, primary data is key for this research. Despite primary data collection consuming more resources, it is more valuable than secondary data, as it is often more reliable and accurate, which strengthens the study (Taylor, 2022).

## 3.4 Data Collection Method

As previously defined and justified, this study requires a quantitative research approach, where numerical data is collected from a group of people (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Quantitative data may be gathered in a number of ways. A frequently used source is surveys conducted on paper or electronically (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2019; Sheard, 2018). Additionally, quantitative data may be obtained via other methods such as interviews, observations, or automated procedures such as web server log data (Sheard, 2018). As mentioned above, this research is classified as cross-sectional as it is concerned with the investigation of a specific phenomenon at a certain point in time (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2019), cross-sectional research often adopts the survey approach. Hence, the application of a survey to collect the required data is appropriate for this study.

According to Malhotra (2020), the survey technique of data collection is based on asking respondents about their behavior, goals, attitudes, awareness, motives, as well as demographic and lifestyle attributes. Structured questioning refers to the degree of uniformity enforced on the data collection process. For structured data collection, a formal questionnaire is created, and the questions are asked in a pre-defined sequence. The respondents' understanding of the true purpose determines whether the survey is classified as direct or indirect (Malhotra, 2020). In a direct approach, the aim of the research is revealed to responders or is otherwise evident from the questions asked. The structured-direct survey, which comprises delivering a questionnaire, is the most popular form of data collecting. The majority of questions in a standard questionnaire are fixed-alternative questions that require the responder to choose from a predefined set of answers (Malhotra, 2020).

Using this survey approach has various benefits. To begin with, the questionnaire is straightforward to conduct, and large groups of people can be questioned, which provides more statistically accurate results (Jones, Baxter, Khanduja, 2013; Malhotra, 2020). Second, the data received is credible as the replies are confined to the choices given. The use of fixed-response questions lowers the variability in findings that might be generated by discrepancies between interviewers. Finally, data coding, analysis, and interpretation are all relatively straightforward (Malhotra, 2020). Disadvantages, according to Malhotra (2020), include respondents being unable or unwilling to provide the requested information. Respondents may be unaware of their motives for choosing certain brands or acting in a particular manner. Consequently, individuals may be unable to respond accurately to questions regarding their intentions (Malhotra, 2020). Furthermore, respondents may be hesitant to answer if the information sought is sensitive or personal. The use of structured questions and predetermined options for responses has the potential to undermine the reliability of some types of data, such as beliefs and emotions. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, the survey technique is by far the most common form of primary data collecting, as the benefits exceed the negatives. This is due to the fact that surveys are very easy to conduct (Malhotra, 2020). In conclusion, the structured-direct survey method consisting of a questionnaire with fixed-alternative questions that require the responder to choose from a predetermined set of answers is applied for this study.

### 3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Data can be collected through different channels such as mail, telephone, electronically, or personally (Malhotra, 2020). In this specific study, however, certain hurdles arise when choosing a suitable method. The author of this paper is based in Switzerland, but the study requires analyzing the behavior and attitudes of people in China using Chinese social media networks. As the researcher maintains no relationship of any kind with someone living in China, contacting a valid sample size of individuals through any of the above-mentioned channels is difficult. Peng and Nunes (2008) confirm this by claiming that due to cultural, contextual, and political differences between the West and China, difficulties may occur during a participative research process in China, which are generally not experienced and reported in the West. They add that failing to understand and overcome these differences may lead to unsuccessful recruitment of participants for a study (Peng & Nunes, 2008). Thus, the researcher of this study decided

to follow the lead of a similar study analyzing SMI's source characteristics and its effect on consumers' purchase intentions conducted by Li and Peng (2021). In their study, 510 valid questionnaires were collected through a professional online survey company called Wenjuanxing (https://www.wjx.cn/) (Li & Peng, 2021). The survey company, like its western counterparts such as Surveymonkey, offers templates to accelerate the creation of surveys, compatibility with Chinese social media networks, possibilities for incentive distribution, and assistance with participant recruitment. Additionally, gathered data may be exported in a variety of standard file formats, which is vital for statistical analysis (Mei & Brown, 2018). Wenjuanxing, formerly called Sojump, has been frequently used by social science researchers in China (Mei & Brown, 2018). After contacting the customer service of Wenjuanxing via email, the process was explained to the researcher, and the fees for the company's services were presented. The company's sole purpose for this research is to distribute the questionnaire until the predefined sample size is reached and then return the responses back to the researcher. The survey design, which includes sample size and survey questions, is defined by the researcher. As the process of ordering the sample is straightforward and the fees incurred by the researcher moderate, the online survey company Wenjuanxing will be the data collection instrument for this study.

### 3.6 Sampling

Sampling is the process of identifying a subset of a population for the purpose of conducting research. Due to time, money, and access constraints, it is challenging to acquire data from the entire population of interest in the majority of research studies, so a sample is collected (Turner, 2020). Before defining a sample size, it is vital to define the population from which the sample is taken. This is called 'the target population' and describes the actual group of focus of the study (Saunders et al., 2019). The population for this research is defined as individuals who follow at least one SMI that showcases Swiss watches on any Chinese social media platform. The definition of this population allows for the exclusion of those without prior experience with a social media influencer that promotes the study's analyzed product category and makes sure that the sample excludes non-Chinese social media platforms. Furthermore, the target population excludes people who explicitly state that they do not like Swiss watches. Regarding this study, the target population consists of a vast number of individuals, which makes sampling a subset of this group the only realistic option (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019; Turner, 2020).

According to Saunders et al. (2019), there are two types of sampling techniques: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. By using probability sampling, every person in the population has an equal chance of being chosen for the research. In contrast, individuals in a non-probability sample are chosen using non-random criteria, and not every person has a chance of being included in the study (Saunders et al., 2019). Since the questionnaire will be distributed through Wenjuanxing, there will be no direct control over who participates in the study, provided prospects fulfill the participation requirements by passing the control questions. As a result, a probability sample cannot be conducted, and a non-probability sample will be employed instead.

Non-probability sampling is divided into the sub-categories of quota sampling and convenience sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 193) claim that the goal of a quotas sample is to "[...] produce a sample that reflects a population in terms of the relative proportions of people in different categories, such as gender, ethnicity, age groups, socioeconomic groups, and region of residence, and in combinations of these categories."

The method of convenience sampling is more likely to be cost- and time-efficient, as the researcher applying this method simply uses the sample units available to him or her (Malhotra, 2020). Saunders et al. (2019, p. 324) argue that the convenience sample "[...] is prone to many sources of bias [...]", considering that "Cases appear in the sample only because of the ease of obtaining them; consequently, all you can do is make some statement about the people who felt strongly enough about the subject of your question to answer it [...]". However, Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 191) state that "[...] convenience sampling probably plays a more prominent role than is sometimes supposed". Undoubtedly, convenience samples are more widespread and popular in the areas of business and management than samples stemming from probability sampling (Bryman, 1989). Thus, by utilizing Wenjuanxing, this research applies the method of non-probability convenience sampling.

### 3.6.1 Sample Size

Sample size refers to the individual observations included in a research project (Malhotra, 2020). Generally speaking, the larger the sample size is, the greater the accuracy of the study due to a smaller sampling error. As a result, the sample size chosen for a study is crucial as too small a sample provides unreliable findings. In contrast, extensive samples require a significant amount of time and financial resources, which has

to be taken into account (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Contrary to probability sampling, where the margin of error, the confidence level, the standard deviation, and the target population is taken into account to gauge an appropriate sample size, there are no rules to calculate a non-probability convenience sample size (Saunders et al., 2019). However, the strategy of reviewing previous studies conducted in similar ways is an appropriate indicator for defining the sample size for this research (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2020).

Previously conducted studies that have applied the survey method to study the effect of influencer marketing characteristics on consumers' purchase intention have used distinct sample sizes. Masuda et al. (2022), who conducted a similar study regarding SMI's attributes' impact on purchase intention, analyzed a sample size of 313 participants. A study regarding factors that affect the credibility of Youtube influencer marketing by Xiao et al. (2018) was based on eight hypotheses, and collected a valid sample of 497 cases. In a study conducted by Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell (2011) with a framework model based on similar independent variables to this research, they examined celebrity endorsement, brand equity, and brand credibility based on a sample of 244 participants. Finally, when Li and Peng (2021) researched SMI's path affecting target customers to purchase promoted brands, they also gathered their data through Wenjuanxing and collected a valid sample of 510 questionnaires.

Nonetheless, according to Wilson Van Voorhis and Morgan (2007), when studying relationships, the rule of thumb is that the sample size ought to be more than 50 in order to perform correlations or regression analyses with multiple independent variables. They also propose that for evaluating multiple correlations, the sample size could be calculated as $N > 50 + 8m$ (where N is the sample size, and m is the number of independent variables). Thus, according to this calculation, the appropriate number of samples for this study is $N > 98$ ($50 + 8*6 = 98$) (Wilson Van Voorhis & Morgan, 2007). Considering the sample size formula resulting in a minimum sample of $N > 98$ (Wilson Van Voorhis & Morgan, 2007), and taking into account that previous comparable studies analyzed a sample of 313 (Masuda et al., 2022), 497 (Xiao et al., 2018), 244 (Spry, Pappu, Cornwell, 2011), and 510 respectively (Li & Peng, 2021), an average sample size of N=332 can be determined. This is done as there are no rules to calculate a non-probability convenience sample size and no consensus on a minimum (Saunders et al., 2019). Besides this, the peer-reviewed research with comparable research questions and aims vary in sample size from study to study. In conclusion, considering the time and money

constraints as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011), the researcher decided to aim for a sample size of N=300.

## 3.7 Questionnaire Design

In previous sections of this study, the data collection method, the data collection instrument, the target population, and the sample size were determined. As a data collection method, the structured-direct survey method consisting of a questionnaire with fixed-alternative questions was identified as suitable. To collect the required data, Chinese online survey company Wenjuanxing was hired. The target population for this research was defined as individuals who follow at least one social media influencer who promotes Swiss watches on his/her Chinese channel. Finally, to analyze the target population, a non-probability convenience sample with the size of N=300 was chosen. With this setting defined and justified by the researcher, the design of the questionnaire will now be discussed in the following section.

Within the survey approach, the questionnaire is among the most frequently employed data gathering procedures. Because each participant is asked to answer the same set of questions, it is an efficient technique to gather answers from a large sample before statistically analyzing it (Saunders et al., 2019). The difficulty of designing a questionnaire lies in the fact that no scientific principles exist for doing so (Malhotra, 2020). Nonetheless, according to Saunders et al. (2019), various researchers provide guidelines for structuring a questionnaire. The questionnaire's design will have an effect on response rates, as well as the reliability and validity of the data obtained. These may be maximized by a careful question design, a clear and appealing visual presentation, a brief explanation of the aim, pilot testing, and a well-planned and performed delivery (Saunders et al., 2019).

The response rate is calculated by dividing the total number of persons who completed a questionnaire by the total number of participants in the sample group, including those who started the survey but did not complete it (Saunders et al., 2019). A low response rate needs to be avoided for several reasons. With a reduced response rate, the initial sample group falls shorter. This might have a negative impact on the margin of error, as well as the findings' reliability and accuracy. Apart from statistical inaccuracies, poor response rates indicate that prospective respondents are uninterested in completing the questionnaire (SurveyMonkey, 2022b). Reliability alludes to the characteristics of replicability and consistency. In other terms, the reliability of a study is determined by

whether or not it can be replicated and produce the same results (Bryman, 1989). Validity refers to a questionnaire that gathers accurate data that actually measures the concepts required to answer the research question (Saunders et al., 2019). The reliability and validity testing are described in detail in section 3.9.

### *3.7.1 Introducing the Questionnaire*

According to Saunders et al. (2019), the questionnaire should be accompanied by an introductory text which clearly explains the purpose of the research and offers instructions. For this study, the questionnaire is introduced as follows:

> **Social media influence on buying decisions for Swiss watches**
> Watches manufactured in Switzerland have a long tradition and are desired around the world. In 2021, China accounted for 13% of the total Swiss watch export, which translates into CNY 20 billion. Many different factors lead to buying or not buying a Swiss watch. Today, many consumers follow social media influencers who present the desired product and influence people in their buying decision. As part of my research activity at the ZHAW School of Management and Law, I would like to investigate the impact of the characteristics of Chinese social media influencers on the purchasing intention of potential Chinese consumers.
>
> **Data Privacy**
> This survey serves exclusively as a basis for scientific work. Your information will be recorded anonymously and treated confidentially at all times. Only the aggregated data will be analyzed in this study. It is not possible to draw conclusions about individual persons. Your valuable participation is of great importance for the validity of the study. Please answer all questions by the end of the survey, even if you do not intend to buy a Swiss watch in the near future.
>
> Thank you very much for your support!

### *3.7.2 Operationalization and Measurement of Variables*

Operationalization is one of the widely used terms in research in which the theory is mostly explained and defined in the form of a table for the purpose of organizing data in a clear manner (Saunders et al., 2019). Bryman and Bell (2011) claimed that for the provision of measurable concepts, an indicator should be assigned to each concept that is used for measurement purposes. These measurements are summarized in Table 1. The questionnaire includes different types of questions, which are presented in a specific order.

To begin with, targeting the right population must be assured. Screening questions, also known as screeners, enable respondents to self-identify with certain qualities or habits and are best utilized at the beginning of the survey to select a relevant

population (Pollfish, 2022). In this particular questionnaire, the participants are asked if they like Swiss watches and if they follow at least one SMI who showcases Swiss watches. In case the participants state they do not like Swiss watches and/or do not follow any SMI on any Chinese social media platform, the survey closes automatically, and the answer sheet is rated as invalid. The screening question regarding the specific reasons the participants like Swiss watches is not designed to filter out participants but rather to stimulate their thinking process.

Next, informative questions regarding the participant's social media behavior are asked. These questions provide additional interesting data to the study and further stimulate and guide the respondents' thoughts. However, the informative questions do not investigate the hypothesized relationships.

Following, in the main body of the questionnaire, items in the form of Net-Promoter-Score (NPS) questions are presented to measure the six hypotheses of this study. According to Ramshaw (2022), the NPS scale "[...] is denoted with numbers but anchored at each end by words that are at opposites making it a Likert Scale". Instead of a traditional Likert scale with five or seven points, the NPS scale has 11 points that range from 0 "extremely unlikely" to 10 "extremely likely". Likert scales give a potential range of replies to a statement or question, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement or level of sentiment about the statement or question, ranging from one extreme to the opposite extreme (Ramshaw, 2022). Likert Scales offer the advantage of allowing various degrees of opinion, or no opinion at all. The scale assumes that the response is linear, meaning that the difference between "extremely unlikely" and "unlikely" is the same as "extremely likely" and "likely". This results in quantifiable data that can be evaluated rather easily (McLeod, 2019a). The first three NPS items on the questionnaire measure the dependent variable of the six hypotheses. To guide the participants as smoothly as possible through the survey, the first three items are introduced by a sentence stating: "With the following question, try to think about these influencers you follow that showcase Swiss watches." Next, the six independent variables are measured by three NPS items per variable. Hair (2010, p. 676) claims that three items per variable are the minimum needed to ensure coverage of a construct's theoretical domain. The two variables measuring content influence are introduced by the sentence: "Please try to think about these influencers again. What kind of content (photos, videos, live-stream) do they share?". Following, the four variables measuring the source influence, in other words, the characteristics of the influential person, are measured by

again employing three NPS scale items per variable. To ensure that respondents remain focused on SMI's showcasing Swiss watches, the source influence items are introduced with the sentences: "Please try to think about these influencers again. How are they as a person?"

At the end of the survey, the participants were asked to provide their demographic information comprising age, gender, income, and nationality. The demographic items do not serve as a measurement of the hypothesized cause-and-effect relationships but add valuable insights to the study.

### 3.7.3 Operationalization Table

Table 1 displays the questionnaire as a whole. The theoretical construct describes the type of item. Next, the coded item number is displayed, so the subsequent data entry into SPSS is simplified. The data measurement presents the options survey participants had to choose from and how it measures answers. The explanation column describes the underlying theory or the reasoning for a question. Lastly, the questionnaire item itself is the question as it is presented to the participant. The question items are divided into the sub-categories screening questions, informative questions, items that measure the dependent variable Buying Intention, items that measure the independent variables regarding content influence, items that measure the independent variables regarding source influence, and lastly, demographics questions. The instructions provided in the questionnaire are also described in the operationalization table.

**Table 1**

*Operationalization Table*

| Screening Questions | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
| Screening Question | SQ1 | Single-Choice:<br><br>• Yes<br>• I do not care for them<br>• No (Invalid) | Depending on their answers, screening questions can qualify or exclude respondents from the survey. Screening questions allow for the elimination of responses that do not belong to the target population (SurveyMonkey, 2022a). | Do you like Swiss watches? |
| Screening Question | SQ2 | Multiple-Choice:<br><br>• I like them because the brands are from Europe<br>• I like the quality<br>• I like the prestige<br>• I like them because they are a status symbol<br>• Other reasons | | What do you like about Swiss watches? |

| Screening Question | SQ3 | Single-Choice:<br><br>• Yes, at least 1<br>• Yes, at least 2<br>• Yes, 3 or more<br>• No (Invalid) | | Do you follow any influencer on any social media platform who showcases Swiss watches? |
|---|---|---|---|---|

### Informative Questions

| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Informative Question | IQ1 | Multiple-Choice:<br><br>• WeChat<br>• Douyin<br>• QQ<br>• Baidu tieba<br>• Sina Weibo<br>• Xiaohongshu<br>• Kuaishou<br>• QZone<br>• Meipai<br>• Douyin Huoshan<br>• Others | These questions add interesting additional information to the research. They are, however, not needed to analyze the relationship between the variables of the conceptual framework. | On which platforms do you follow them? |
| Informative Question | IQ2 | Single-Choice:<br><br>• Less than 1 hour a week<br>• 1-5 hours a week<br>• 5-10 hours a week<br>• More than 10 hours a week | | How much time do you spend on these social networks selected above? |

### Measuring the Dependent Variable
Instructions: "With the following question, try to think about these influencers you follow that showcase Swiss watches."

| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention (Dependent Var.) | BI1 | Net-Promoter-Score (NPS) Scale:<br>0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Purchase intentions refer to the chance or potential of customers purchasing a certain good (Lou & Yuan, 2019). | Assuming I had the money, I would buy a Swiss watch presented by the influencer. |
| Buying Intention (Dependent Var.) | BI2 | NPS Scale:<br>0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Purchase intentions refer to the chance or potential of customers purchasing a certain good (Lou & Yuan, 2019). | The influencer makes me want to buy a Swiss watch. |
| Buying Intention (Dependent Var.) | BI3 | NPS Scale:<br>0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Purchase intentions refer to the chance or potential of customers purchasing a certain good (Lou & Yuan, 2019). | I plan on / I dream about buying a Swiss watch shown by the influencer. |

### Measuring Content Influence
Instructions: "Please try to think about these influencers again. What kind of content (photos, videos, live-stream) do they share?"

| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Informative Value (Independent Var.) | IV1 | NPS Scale:<br>0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Information about a product that aids in facilitating a purchase decision adds value to the advertisement (Lou & Kim, 2019). | The content they share often includes product specs and/or brand history. |
| Informative Value (Independent Var.) | IV2 | NPS Scale:<br>0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Information about a product that aids in facilitating a purchase decision adds value to the advertisement (Lou & Kim, 2019). | The influencer presents the capabilities of the watch (e.g., durability, quality, technical facts) |

| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Informative Value (Independent Var.) | IV3 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Information about a product that aids in facilitating a purchase decision adds value to the advertisement (Lou & Kim, 2019). | The quality of the content helps in making an informed decision about the product |
| Entertainment Value (Independent Var.) | EV1 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Entertainment adds important value to advertising (Abbas Naqvi et al., 2020). | The content is very entertaining. |
| Entertainment Value (Independent Var.) | EV2 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Entertainment adds important value to advertising (Abbas Naqvi et al., 2020). | The content is very funny and enjoyable. |
| Entertainment Value (Independent Var.) | EV3 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Entertainment adds important value to advertising (Abbas Naqvi et al., 2020). | The content often triggers my emotions. |

### Measuring Source Influence
Instructions: "Please try to think about these influencers again. How are they as a person?"

| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expertise (Independent Var.) | E1 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | The source reliability model confirms that influencers with high expertise are more persuasive (Xiong et al., 2018). | They seem like real watch experts. |
| Expertise (Independent Var.) | E2 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | The source reliability model confirms that influencers with high expertise are more persuasive (Xiong et al., 2018). | They know a lot about the watches they show. |
| Expertise (Independent Var.) | E3 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | The source reliability model confirms that influencers with high expertise are more persuasive (Xiong et al., 2018). | They know all the brands, models, and features of the watches they present. |
| Trustworthiness (Independent Var.) | T1 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Source trustworthiness has a positive effect on followers' trust in brands, which in return affects purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). | I personally trust the opinion of the Influencer. |
| Trustworthiness (Independent Var.) | T2 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Source trustworthiness has a positive effect on followers' trust in brands, which in return affects purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). | The influencer shares his honest opinion because nobody would follow him if he did not. |
| Trustworthiness (Independent Var.) | T3 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Source trustworthiness has a positive effect on followers' trust in brands, which in return affects purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). | I think if I were talking to the influencer in private, he/she would have the same opinion about the watches he/she presents. |
| Attractiveness (Independent Var.) | A1 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | A well-dressed person is presumed to be more attractive and more persuasive (Bickman, 1974; Lennon, 1990). | The influencer is always well-dressed. |
| Attractiveness (Independent Var.) | A2 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Physical attractiveness positively impacts persuasion and, in return, stimulates consumers' purchase intentions (Chaiken, | The influencer is very handsome/pretty. |

| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1979; Masuda et al., 2022). | |
| Attractiveness (Independent Var.) | A3 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Social attractiveness describes the likability of an SMI and has a positive effect on a consumer's buying intention (Masuda et al., 2022). | The influencer seems very likable. |
| Similarity (Independent Var.) | S1 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Similarity refers to the resemblance of demographic attributes, lifestyles, and interests. Consumers that perceive similarities between them and the influencer tend to adapt the SMI's behavior and put it into action (Azer & Alexander, 2020; Chapple & Cownie, 2017; Li & Peng, 2021). | The influencer has a lifestyle similar to the lifestyle I have or want. |
| Similarity (Independent Var.) | S2 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Similarity refers to the resemblance of demographic attributes, lifestyles, and interests. Consumers that perceive similarities between them and the influencer tend to adapt the SMI's behavior and put it into action (Azer & Alexander, 2020; Chapple & Cownie, 2017; Li & Peng, 2021). | It seems that the influencer has a similar background as I have (e.g., language, culture, the way he was raised) |
| Similarity (Independent Var.) | S3 | NPS Scale: 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely | Similarity refers to the resemblance of demographic attributes, lifestyles, and interests. Consumers that perceive similarities between them and the influencer tend to adapt the SMI's behavior and put it into action (Azer & Alexander, 2020; Chapple & Cownie, 2017; Li & Peng, 2021). | It seems like I have a lot in common with the influencer (e.g. physically, opinions, interests) |

| **Measuring Demographics** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theoretical construct | Item # | Data Measurement | Explanation | Questionnaire item |
| Demographics Question | DQ1 | Single-Choice:<br><br>• 18-24<br>• 25-40<br>• 41-60<br>• Over 60<br>• I do not want to say | Demographic analysis collects and analyzes broad demographic information of a target group to draw further conclusions (Hayes, 2021). | How old are you? |
| Demographics Question | DQ2 | Single-Choice:<br><br>• Female<br>• Male | Demographic analysis collects and analyzes broad demographic information of a target | What's your gender? |

| | | • other<br>• I do not want to say | group to draw further conclusions (Hayes, 2021). | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demographics Question | DQ3 | Single-Choice:<br><br>• Less than 5000 RMB<br>• 5'001 – 10'000 RMB<br>• 10'001 – 20'000 RMB<br>• 20'001 – 30'000 RMB<br>• Over 30'000 RMB<br>• I do not want to say | Demographic analysis collects and analyzes broad demographic information of a target group to draw further conclusions (Hayes, 2021). | What's your monthly salary? |
| Demographics Question | DQ4 | Single-Choice:<br><br>• Chinese National<br>• Foreign National | Demographic analysis collects and analyzes broad demographic information of a target group to draw further conclusions (Hayes, 2021). | What's your nationality |

### 3.7.4 Translating Questions

As English is not a native language in China, but the questionnaire will be distributed in China, translating it from English to Chinese has to be considered. Saunders et al. (2019) claim that it is crucial for cross-border studies that all participants understand the exact meaning behind the questions. Concern should be given to lexical-, idiomatic-, and experiential meaning, as well as grammar and syntax while translating the original questionnaire. The idiomatic meaning is when a group of words in one language, when translated word for word, make no sense in another language, such as 'to call it a day'. Words and phrases such as 'dual career household' might not be understandable for non-native speakers, which is known as experiential meaning. Finally, grammar and syntax deal with how words and phrases are arranged in sentences to provide clear communication (Saunders et al., 2019). For this study, the questions were translated utilizing the services of the web-based translator machine DeepL. After the translation with DeepL, a fellow student with Chinese roots, who is fluent in Chinese and English, reviewed the translated questionnaire paying attention to the previously mentioned concerns and, if necessary, adjusted it. A second review was then performed by the supervisor of this study, a Chinese national fluent in English.

### 3.7.5 Pilot Testing

A pilot test with participants who are comparable to those who will actually finish the questionnaire should be conducted prior to using the questionnaire as a data collection tool. The goal of the pilot test is to fine-tune the questionnaire so that participants will have no difficulty responding to questions when they are administered. Additionally, it aids in the development of an initial evaluation of the validity of the questions and the potential reliability of the information obtained (Saunders et al., 2019). Due to the fact

that there will not be an interviewer present to clarify any uncertainties, pilot studies are especially important when conducting research which employs a self-completion questionnaire (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bell and Waters (2014) suggest examining the duration of completing the survey, the clarity of instructions, the clarity and ease of the questions, as well as the layout and content of the questionnaire while performing the pilot test.

In this particular study, the pilot testing was done by sending the questionnaire to two of the author's acquaintances who are based in Switzerland and consider Chinese as their native language. After completing the pilot survey, it was concluded that the duration needed to complete the questionnaire was between five and ten minutes. Revilla and Höhne (2020) suggest that the ideal length for an online survey is between 10 and 15 minutes, which corresponds with the pilot questionnaire. After implementing minor changes, the probands both agreed that the instructions of the survey were clear, the order of the questionnaire items logical and helpful to guide participants, the items clearly formulated, and the questionnaire visually appealing.

## 3.8 Data Analysis Method

In this section, the statistical analysis approach is explained in detail. The valid responses from the questionnaire can be used to test if the hypotheses hold true or not. The aim of this statistical analysis is to translate the responses into numbers that depict the relationship between SMI characteristics and customer buying intention.

### 3.8.1 Types of Variables

Before describing the mathematical approach to evaluate the responses, the possibilities of statistical analysis must be outlined. Depending on the type of variable, different statistical analyses are appropriate. A variable can be defined as any trait, characteristic, number, or quantity that changes over time or may take on various values in different contexts (Bevans, 2021). When exploring the conceptual framework of this study, seven variables can be found. The six content and source influence characteristics are independent variables, as they influence or cause an outcome. The outcome in this study, the purchase intention, can be defined as a dependent variable (Bhandari, 2022).

Generally speaking, variables may be divided into two main categories, namely categorical and numerical variables. Saunders et al. (2019, pp. 567–568) describe categorical data as "[...] data whose values cannot be measured numerically but can be either classified into sets (categories) according to the characteristics that identify or

describe the variable or placed in rank order". When further subdividing categorical variables, the data can be classified as nominal (descriptive) and ordinal (ranked). With nominal variables, it is impossible to rank them or even attribute numerical values to them, as they are purely descriptive. Ordinal variables are more precise than nominal ones, as they can be ranked in order. However, the distance between the ranking cannot be measured with ordinal data, such as a ranking between positive, neutral, and negative (Saunders et al., 2019). Numerical data are variables where the distance between the units can indeed be measured or counted. Numerical data is more precise than categorical data, and because each data value can be assigned to a numerical scale, a broader set of statistical analyses can be employed (Saunders et al., 2019). Numerical data can be further divided into continuous and discrete variables. With continuous variables, such as weight in kilograms, it is possible to measure but not count them since there are infinitely many possible values between measurements. Discrete variables such as the number of cars produced can be measured and counted, and unlike continuous variables, there is a concept of next or previous value in place (Choueiry, 2022).

### 3.8.2 Variables of this Study

As outlined in previous sections, this study is based on a conceptual framework with six hypotheses examining a cause-and-effect relationship of six independent variables' influence on one dependent variable. The relationships can be analyzed after gathering data through a questionnaire with fixed-alternative questions based on a Likert scale. Hence, to perform appropriate statistical analyses with the gathered data, the variables must be categorized. The issue of how to categorize Likert scale data has caused controversial discussions in academic circles (Harpe, 2015). Various well-respected authors such as Miller and Salkind (2002) argue that Likert scales are purely ordinal in character, and thus parametric analytic methodologies presuming quantitative, or at least interval level measures, are inapplicable. However, Harpe (2015, p. 842) claims that forbidding numerical analyses for ranked data may be unduly restrictive in practice as considerable research has shown that numerical techniques are viable when data are not purely interval. Wu and Leung (2017) claim that increasing the number of Likert scale points will bring the data closer to being continuous, as more points result in more precise measures. They suggest increasing the Likert to 11 points so it is closer to normality and interval scales (Wu & Leung, 2017). As the variables in this study are measured by employing an 11-point Likert scale, also known as the NPS scale, the variables described

in the hypotheses are treated as continuous numerical data, which allows for a wide range of statistical analyses.

### 3.8.3 Data Coding, Cleaning, and Data Analysis Tool

To analyze data collected from a questionnaire statistically, it needs to be coded. By assigning a code to each question and each possible answer in the survey, usually a number, the data can be entered into the analysis tool faster and with fewer errors (Saunders et al., 2019). As the questionnaire for this study solely contains structured questions, it can be coded prior to conducting the fieldwork (Malhotra, 2020). The codes utilized in this study are presented in the operationalization table in the column 'Item #'.

Data cleaning includes performing consistency tests, dealing with missing replies, and clearing outliers. Controls for consistency identify data that is either outside of a predetermined range, logically inconsistent, or has extreme values. Data values that are outside of the allowed range are unacceptable and need to be changed. Missing replies reflect independent variables that are unknown because participants did not reply, offered confusing answers, or their responses were not correctly recorded. When answers are insufficient, they can be substituted, or the case can be deleted (Malhotra, 2020). One way of substituting missing or out-of-range answers is by inserting the mean resulting from the other participants' answers. That way, statistical values such as the variable mean and the correlation remain the same or at least do not change much (Malhotra, 2020).

To statistically evaluate the collected data, SPSS, short for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, is employed for this research. SPSS is the most extensively used statistical research analysis computer software, and has the advantage of being easy to use (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### 3.8.4 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics is a kind of data analysis that helps explain, illustrate, or summarize data so that patterns may be identified. However, descriptive statistics do not involve drawing conclusions about the hypotheses. Descriptive statistics can be divided into the measure of central tendency and the measure of dispersion, also called the measure of spread (Saunders et al., 2019).

The central tendency can be measured in different ways. The most common are the mode, which is the value that occurs most frequently, the median, which can be described as the middle value of a dataset ranked ascending in order, and the mean, which

is simply the average of all data values. Except for the mode, the central tendency can only be calculated with numerical data. (Saunders et al., 2019).

The dispersion is used to describe how the data values are dispersed (spread) around the central tendency. Typical measurements include the range, which is the difference between the lowest and highest values, the interquartile range, which describes the spread of the middle half of the distribution, and the standard deviation, which measures the dispersion of a dataset relative to its mean. The dispersion, again, should only be calculated for numerical data (Malhotra, 2020).

In addition to measurements of central tendency and spread, measures of shape aid in comprehending the nature of the distribution. Knowing that the data values are normally distributed is important, as some statistical analyses are specifically designed for it. By studying skewness and kurtosis, the shape of a distribution may be evaluated. According to the normal distribution, there should be no deviations from the symmetrical bell curve in any given collection of data. If the curve is displaced to one side or the other, it is said to be skewed (Malhotra, 2020). Malhotra (2020, p. 471) describes skewness as "[...] the tendency of the deviations from the mean to be larger in one direction than in the other". Skewness between 1 and -1 is regarded as excellent, whereas skewness between 2 and -2 is acceptable (George & Mallery, 2007). Kurtosis is a statistical metric that specifies how much the tails of a distribution diverge from the tails of a normal distribution. It measures a curve's peakedness, where a kurtosis of zero means the data values are normally distributed. Thus, a kurtosis deviating from zero, either negatively or positively, indicates a less symmetrical distribution of the data values (Malhotra, 2020). According to George and Mallery (2007), a kurtosis in the range between 1 and -1 is desirable, although a range between 2 and -2 would also be acceptable. The descriptive analysis is presented in section 4.5.

### 3.8.5 Analyzing the Relationship Between Two Variables

The main goal of this research is to analyze six hypotheses, represented by six relationships. All six hypotheses state that a change of the independent variable in one direction causes a change of the dependent variable in the same direction. In statistical terms, this would be described as a positive correlation between the dependent and the independent variable (Saunders et al., 2019). In case the change of a variable in one direction would cause a change of the other variable in the opposite direction, there would be a negative correlation. If the change of one variable does not affect the other variable

in any way, there would be no correlation, meaning there is no relationship between the two variables (Saunders et al., 2019). To summarize, this research examines the existence of a correlation between two variables and if this correlation is positive or negative. In case there is a positive correlation between the independent and the dependent variable, the hypothesis is accepted. In case there is no significant correlation between them, or there is a correlation but a negative one, the hypothesis is rejected. To test the hypothesis, a correlation analysis is performed. The variables of this study were previously defined as continuous variables, which allows for a Pearson's product-moment correlation (Saunders et al., 2019). When applying correlation and regression analyses, different values can be calculated. First, there is the correlation coefficient, denoted as r, which indicates the strength of a correlation. This coefficient might have a value anywhere between -1 and +1, where a variable of 0 indicates that there is no relationship at all, and the two variables are completely independent. A correlation of +1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, meaning the two variables are inextricably linked, and if the value of one variable increases, the other value will also increase by the same amount. A value of -1, on the other hand, shows a complete negative correlation. This indicates that the two variables are inextricably linked, however, when the value of one variable increases, the other value will decrease by the same amount. In business research, the coefficients will never be exactly 1 or -1, as the research analyzes human behavior, which is never an exact science (Saunders et al., 2019). Besides the strength of the relationship, the p-value, also called the probability value, is an important figure. The p-value indicates statistical significance, that is, a number between 0 and 1 describing the likelihood of the null hypothesis being true. A null hypothesis states that there is no relationship between two variables and therefore is the opposite of the hypotheses stated in this study. In conclusion, the closer p-value is to 0, the stronger the evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis. Generally, a p-value smaller than 0.05 is considered statistically significant, allowing for the acceptance of the hypothesis stating a relationship between two variables (McLeod, 2019b). Lastly, according to Forst (2022b), the standard error is a vital goodness-of-fit measure for regression analysis. The standard error of the mean quantifies how much the sample mean may deviate from the population mean. That is, how well any given sample's mean resembles the true mean of the population (Frost, 2022b). To summarize, the hypotheses are tested by the employment of correlation and regression analyses. A significance with a p-value lower than 0.05, as well as a positive correlation coefficient, leads to the acceptance of a hypothesis.

Furthermore, the standard error represents how accurately the coefficient predicts results for the entire population compared to the sample of this study. The hypotheses are tested in section 4.6.

## 3.9 Quality Criteria

To ensure the quality of a research study, the validity and reliability must be measured and checked (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2019). In the following section, these quality measures are elaborated upon.

### 3.9.1 Validity

The degree to which a procedure is accurate is referred to as its validity. A technique may be regarded as valid if it accurately measures what it purports to and if the findings closely match those in the real world. The four main types of validity are construct validity, content validity, face validity, and criterion validity (Middleton, 2022).

The goal of construct validity is to ensure that the technique of measurement is consistent with the concept being researched. The indicators and measures must be carefully created based on relevant existing knowledge in order to attain construct validity. As a result, the survey of this research should only contain questions that assess well-established indicators of purchasing intention in relation to social media influence (Middleton, 2022). The content validity of a questionnaire is evaluated by determining whether or not it accurately represents the concept. To deduce accurate findings, the survey must include all significant aspects of the issue it is trying to assess, and it should not contain any irrelevant concepts (Middleton, 2022). The variables employed in this study all stem from carefully selected peer-review literature concerning research in similar fields, which therefore guarantees the construct and content validity of the study. A survey's face validity is determined by whether or not it accurately represents the substance of the topic being studied (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011) recommend asking other individuals, preferably experts, whether the measure seems to capture the idea of the underlying research aim. This was done by coordinating the questionnaire with the author's supervisor, who has years of experience with research papers. Hence, the face validity of this study is assured. The last validity type, criterion validity, according to Bellamy (2015), records the extent to which a measure correlates with the gold standard for this measurement. However, the difficulty with survey question items lies in the general lack of an ideal benchmark measure. A comparison with similar

studies and a questionnaire created by the supervisor is therefore the right choice to check face validity.

### 3.9.2 Reliability

The term reliability refers to the degree to which a process is repeatable. The measurement is acknowledged as reliable if the same result can be attained using the same procedures under the same conditions (Middleton, 2022). One of the most frequently used reliability measures is Cronbach's alpha. It tests the internal consistency of the items designed to measure one and the same variable. It is composed of an alpha coefficient with a value ranging from 0 to 1, where a high value indicates that the question items are internally consistent. Generally, Cronbach's alpha lower bound limit is considered 0.7 (Saunders et al., 2019). However, according to Samuels (2015), the lower bound limit of 0.7 is intended for scales between four and six points. When applying a scale with more items on it, as is the case for the variables in this research, the acceptable lower bound value for Cronbach's alpha might decrease (Hair, 2010; Samuels, 2015). Hinton, Brownlow, McMurray, and Cozens (2005, p. 363) go as far as claiming that an alpha value between 0.5 and 0.75 is still a moderately reliable scale, while items with an alpha below 0.5 are considered to have low reliability. In this particular study, each variable in the conceptual framework was measured by three items to ensure coverage of a construct's theoretical domain (Hair, 2010). So, assuming the three items measuring the variable "Expertise" have an alpha coefficient of 0.5 or above, they all measure the same variable to a certain degree, thus are internally consistent enough to accept reliability (Hair, 2010; Hinton et al., 2005; Samuels, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019).

A further quality criterion is a multicollinearity between the independent variables (Malhotra, 2020). Frost (2022a) describes the correlation of two independent variables in a regression model as multicollinearity. He classifies multicollinearity as problematic because "[...] independent variables should be independent. If the degree of correlation between variables is high enough, it can cause problems when you fit the model and interpret the results" (Frost, 2022a, para. 2). The concept dictates that when changing the value of one independent variable, the others should not (Frost, 2022a). However, correlations between independent variables indicate that changes in one variable are connected to changes in another. Significant correlations make it more difficult to modify one variable without affecting another. Due to the tendency for independent variables to move synchronically, it becomes challenging for the model to asses the relationship

between each independent variable and the dependent variable separately (Frost, 2022a). The reliability tests of this study are presented in section 4.4.

<div align="center">**4 Results**</div>

In this chapter, the results obtained from the analyzed data are presented. Firstly, the process of the data collection is briefly exhibited. Next, descriptive statistics are used to present the data in a meaningful and easily understandable way. This includes the description of the respondents' demographic attributes, the central tendency and the spread around it, as well as the shape of the distribution. Moreover, the relationship between the monthly salary and social media platforms used, is examined by employing a cross-tabulation. Next, the reliability of the data utilized to test the hypotheses is measured. In a final step, the hypotheses are tested, and the test results are discussed and compared with past research.

## 4.1 Data Collection Review

The data collection process of this study encountered certain hurdles due to the fact that the author of this paper is based in Switzerland, but the study requires an analysis of the behavior and attitudes of people in China using Chinese social media networks. Language barriers, China's domestic internet regulations, and the lack of contacts abroad led the author to hire a professional online survey company named Wenjuanxing. After the fee was paid, the company collected the required sample within five days. As presented in Figure 2, a total of 658 answer sheets were collected, however, only 323 passed the screening questions. After cleaning the data, a valid sample of N=286 remained. As this study aimed for a sample of N=300, the result of the data collection service was satisfying, was completed at a fast pace, and recorded an average daily completion rate of 43%, illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Data Collection Completion Ratio*

|  | Passing Answer Sheets | Total Answer Sheets | Completion Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Day 1 | 0 | 0 |  |
| Day 2 | 8 | 44 | 18.2% |
| Day 3 | 101 | 210 | 48.1% |
| Day 4 | 71 | 151 | 47.0% |
| Day 5 | 143 | 253 | 56.5% |
| Day 6 | 0 | 0 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Total | 323 | 658 |  |

*Note.* Adapted from the Wenjuanxing data collection report.

**Figure 2**

*Data Collection Process*
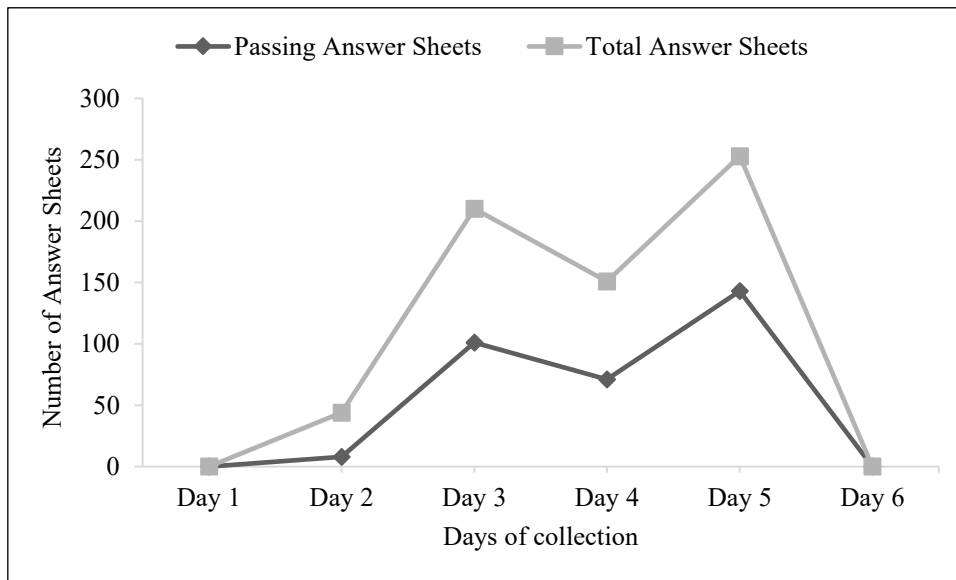


## 4.2 Demographics of Respondents

The valid sample of N=286 represents a target population of Chinese nationals who follow at least one SMI that showcases Swiss watches. The target population is further narrowed down by excluding people who explicitly state that they dislike Swiss watches. The sample can be categorized into broad demographic characteristics such as age, gender, monthly salary, and nationality, as presented in Table 3. Regarding age, 13.6% of the participants are between 18 and 24 years old. The most frequently recorded age category, exactly 82.5%, are participants aged between 25 and 40 years. This is a rather surprising result, as the researcher expected the mode value to be 18 to 24 years. Just 10 respondents claimed to be between 41 and 60 years old, which translates into 3.4% of the total sample. Unsurprisingly, there were no participants older than 60 and just one individual who refused to reveal his or her age. The gender ratio results in 72.0% female participants and 28.0% male participants. Interestingly, the gender ratio is almost identical to the research sample of Li and Peng (2021), who conducted a similar study and also utilized the services of Wenjuanxing. The data gathered also includes respondents' monthly income. Only 6.6% reported earning less than 5'000 RMB (730 USD). 35.0% stated a monthly income between 5'001 and 10'000 RMB (730-1'460 USD), and 40.6% claimed to earn between 10'001 and 20'000 RMD (1'460 – 2'920

USD). A smaller number of participants, exactly 12.9%, earn between 20'000 and 30'000 RMB (2'920 – 4'380 USD). Lastly, 12 people claimed their monthly income was higher than 30'000 RMB (4'380 USD). In comparison, the national average salary in 2020 was around 8'100 RMB (1'200 USD). IT-sector employees had a 2020 average monthly salary of 14'700 RMB (2'100 USD), whereas workers in the agricultural sector earned around 4'000 RMB (580 USD) on average (Textor, 2021).

**Table 3**

*Demographics of Respondents*

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|
| *Age* | | |
| 18-24 | 39 | 13.6% |
| 25-40 | 236 | 82.5% |
| 41-60 | 10 | 3.5% |
| Over 60 | 0 | 0.0% |
| I do not want to say | 1 | 0.3% |
| | | |
| *Gender* | | |
| Female | 206 | 72.0% |
| Male | 80 | 28.0% |
| Other | 0 | 0.0% |
| I do not want to say | 0 | 0.0% |
| | | |
| *Monthly Salary (RMB)* | | |
| Less than 5000 | 19 | 6.6% |
| 5'001 -10'000 | 100 | 35.0% |
| 10'001 - 20'000 | 116 | 40.6% |
| 20'001 - 30'000 | 37 | 12.9% |
| Over 30'000 | 12 | 4.2% |
| I do not want to say | 2 | 0.7% |
| | | |
| *Nationality* | | |
| Chinese | 286 | 100.0% |
| Foreign National | 0 | 0.0% |

**4.3 Social Media Behaviour**

Before the hypotheses are tested, the gathered data is described. After the first screening question, which filtered out people disliking Swiss watches, the participants were asked why they like Swiss watches. Participants were able to choose multiple

answers. The results in Table 4 show that with 91.6%, almost all participants find the quality of the timepieces appealing. This is not surprising, as the quality is what makes watches the one of the most – if not the most – famous products from Switzerland. However, the prestige and status these products represent also provide a reason to like them, with 77.3% and 62.9% respectively choosing this option. The brand being European or Swiss seems less important, as only 49.3% of all respondents selected that option.

**Table 4**

*Reasons for Liking Swiss Watches (Multiple Choice)*

|  |  | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| What do you like about Swiss watches? | I like them because the brands are from Europe (Switzerland) | 141 | 49.3% |
|  | I like the quality | 262 | 91.6% |
|  | I like the prestige | 221 | 77.3% |
|  | I like them because they are a status symbol | 180 | 62.9% |
|  | Other reasons | 0 | 0.0% |

Then, the participants were asked about their social media behavior. Firstly, the participants were asked if they follow any influencer who showcases Swiss watches on any social media platform. The question was coded as a screening item where participants had to choose between a number of zero and three or more influencers they followed. If respondents chose zero, they excluded themselves from the target population, and the answer sheet was rated as invalid. As displayed in Figure 3, 33.9% of the participants that passed the screening questions reported that they followed at least one. More than half said that they followed at least two SMI, which indicates a rather high level of interest in Swiss watches. Additionally, 14.7% claimed to follow three or more SMIs that showcase timepieces imported from Switzerland.

The next questions were follow-up questions. The first follow-up question stated: "On which platforms do you follow them?" The intention of this multiple-choice question was to gain additional knowledge on what the most prominent networks are to promote Swiss watches. As illustrated in Figure 5, the most popular social media platforms to promote Swiss watches are Xiaohongshu and Douyin Huoshan, with around 80% of participants choosing them. Xiaohongshu, also called Little Red Book, was founded in 2014 and has become China's most popular platform for luxury and fashion shopping.

When compared to other e-commerce platforms, Little Red Book is distinguished by its emphasis on a one-of-a-kind combination of trustworthy user-generated content, word-of-mouth advertising, and the development of online communities (Chan, 2022). With its 100 million monthly active users and a female gender rate of 90%, the social commerce platform unsurprisingly leads this ranking (Chen, 2021). Douyin Huoshan and Douyin belong to the same company named ByteDance. Outside of China, Douyin is known as TikTok. Houshan was an independent short video app from ByteDance, however the company is in a step-by-step process of combining it with its other app Douyin. In 2020, as a first step in bringing the two platforms together, ByteDance changed its name from Houshan to Douyin Huoshan (Xu, 2020). In the domestic market, Douyin's live-streaming and short-video ads have established themselves as a fashionable battleground for companies. Douyin is far more marketed than TikTok in the United States, with a large presence of diverse e-commerce influencers and over 600 million monthly active users in China (Wang, 2021). Next in the ranking is Sina Weibo, with 61.5%. It is known as the Chinese version of Twitter and counts over 511 million active users. In contrast to Little Red Book, the gender ratio on Weibo is very balanced (Leung, 2018). The last platform in the ranking with substantial potential for promoting Swiss watches is WeChat, with 36.4% of participants using it. WeChat is a Chinese chat, social networking, and payment app. With over 1.2 billion monthly active users, it is the country's largest social media site and among the top ten worldwide (Manners, 2021).

Figure 4 describes the time participants spend on social media. This was examined by another follow-up question, and the results show a rather balanced time behavior. Only 1.8% claimed to spend less than one hour on the platforms they indicated in the previous question. The remaining portion of participants can be almost equally divided into three categories. One-third claim to use the networks one to five hours a week. Another third claim to spend five to ten hours weekly on social media sites. And the last third invests over ten hours a week in social media. In comparison, the average time spent on social networks is estimated at almost 90 minutes per day in China (Spencer, 2022).

**Figure 3**

*Number of SMIs followed*



**Figure 4**

*Time spent on social media*
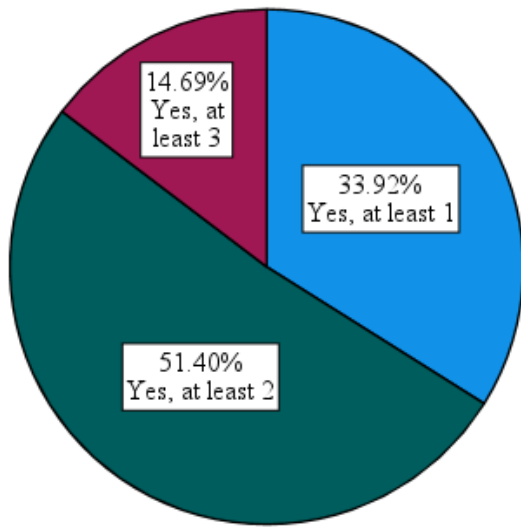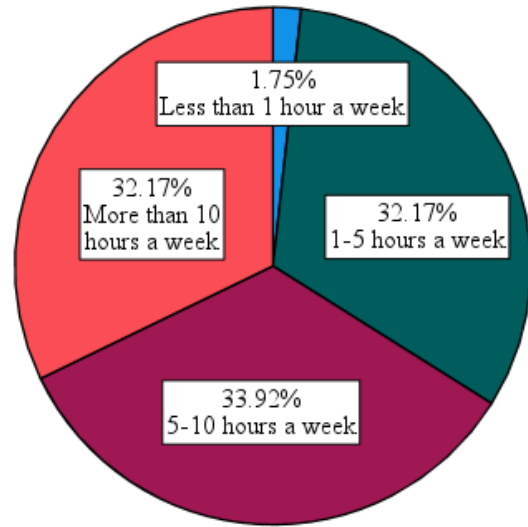


*Note.* The question asked was: "Do you follow any influencer on any social media platform who showcases Swiss watches?"
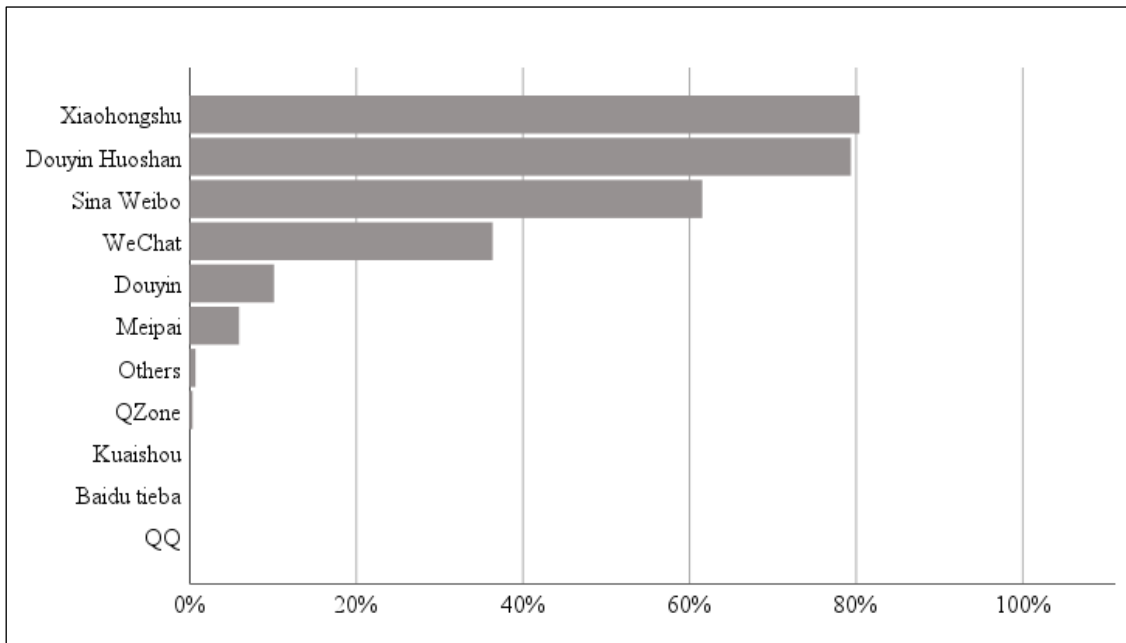
*Note.* The question asked was: "How much time do you spend on these social networks selected above?"

**Figure 5**

*Platforms utilized to follow Influencers that showcase Swiss watches*



*Note.* The question asked was: "How much time do you spend on these social networks selected above?"

### 4.3.1 Cross-Tabulation: Demographics and Social Media Behaviour

With the data gathered concerning the participant's demographics and their social media behavior, patterns of relationships can be analyzed. The researcher wanted to examine if salary influences the type of social media platform used. As the data is strictly categorical, applying a regression analysis is impossible. Therefore, a cross-tabulation was applied to visually display possible patterns (Saunders et al., 2019). The focus lies on the most utilized platforms, Xiaohongshu, Douyin Huoshan, Sina Weibo, and WeChat. As displayed in Figure 6, there are no striking values suggesting the salary of individuals has an effect on what social media channels they use.

**Figure 6**

*Social Media platforms divided into salary categories*
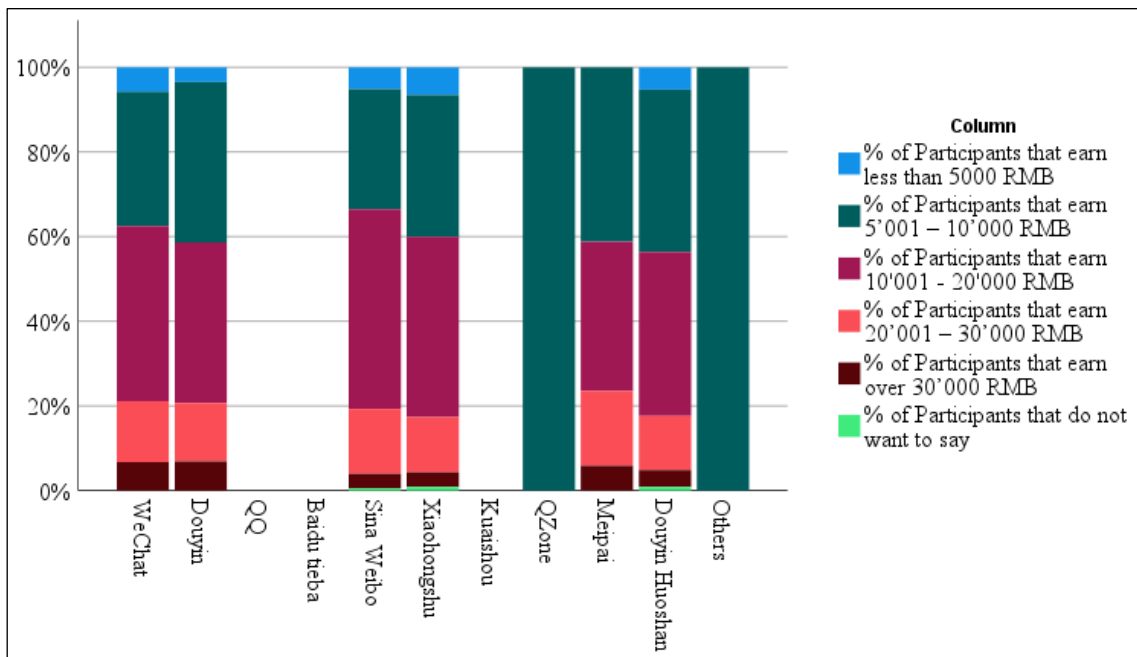
## 4.4 Reliability Check of Hypotheses Variables

conceptualized theory of this study consists of an independent variable called Buying Intention and six independent variables, including Informative Value, Entertainment Value, Expertise, Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, and Similarity. Each variable in the conceptual framework was measured by three items to ensure coverage of a construct's theoretical domain (Hair, 2010). In this section, the reliability of data is analyzed. As discussed in the methodology, reliability refers to the consistency of measurement. A measurement is acknowledged as consistent when the same result can be achieved under the same circumstances over and over again (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Middleton, 2022; Saunders et al., 2019). In the first step, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the three NPS scale items measuring one variable in the conceptual framework. The alpha coefficient ranges between 0 and 1, where 1 indicates a perfect internal consistency. Thereafter, an alpha value between 0.7 and 0.9 shows high reliability, a value from 0.5 to 0.7 indicates moderate reliability, and everything below 0.5 must be rejected as the measurement is not reliable (Hinton et al., 2005). Table 5 displays the alpha value calculated for each group of items. The analyses show high reliability regarding Entertainment Value and Similarity. The measurement of the variables Buying Intention, Information Value, Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness resulted in moderate but still acceptable reliability.

**Table 5**

*Reliability Statistics*

| Variable | Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items | N of Valid Cases |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention | .646 | 3 | 286 |
| Information Value | .588 | 3 | 286 |
| Entertainment Value | .801 | 3 | 286 |
| Expertise | .545 | 3 | 286 |
| Trustworthiness | .593 | 3 | 286 |
| Attractiveness | .552 | 3 | 286 |
| Similarity | .732 | 3 | 286 |

Next, a second reliability test was performed concerning the multicollinearity between the independent variables. When two independent variables are highly correlated, it is difficult to modify one without influencing the other (Frost, 2022a). With the independent variables moving in unison, "It becomes difficult for the model to estimate the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable

independently [...]" (Frost, 2022a, para. 3). A widely used measure to test multicollinearity is the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF assesses the cumulative impact of the regressors' dependences on the variance of each variable in the model (Paul, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019). VIFs begin at 1 and are unlimited. 1 means that this independent variable has no correlation with others. VIFs between 1 to 5 indicate a moderate correlation but are not severe enough to necessitate intervention. VIFs higher than 5 indicate critical levels of multicollinearity with doubtful coefficient estimates and p-values (Frost, 2022a). As presented in Table 6, all VIFs are between 1 and 5, with the highest value being for Trustworthiness. To summarize, neither the Cronbach's alpha test, nor the multicollinearity diagnostics provided results indicating the measurements are not reliable. Hence, each measurement can be accepted as reliable without further improvements and the hypotheses can be tested with gathered data.

**Table 6**

*Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]*

| Variable | Collinearity Statistics | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Tolerance | VIF |
| (Constant) | | |
| InformationValue | .775 | 1.291 |
| EntertainmentValue | .660 | 1.515 |
| Expertise | .527 | 1.898 |
| Trustworthiness | .445 | 2.249 |
| Attractiveness | .633 | 1.579 |
| Similarity | .561 | 1.782 |

*Note.* a. Dependent Variable: BuyingIntention

**4.5 Data Overview: Description of the Hypotheses Variables**

Now that it is assured that the data gathered is reliable, the data is statistically described with the help of SPSS to give the reader an overview. To do so, the central tendency of the data and the spread around it, as well as the shape of the data distribution, are described in this section. The dependent and independent variables of the conceptual framework, namely Buying Intention, Information Value, Entertainment Value, Expertise, Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, and Similarity, were all measured by an 11-point NPS scale where 1 is defined as extremely unlikely and 11 as extremely likely. As each variable was measured by three internally consistent items on the questionnaire, the

mean of the three items was calculated. As a result, each variable of the conceptual framework is represented by one numerical value between 1 and 11.

In Table 7, the data's central tendency, the dispersion, as well as skewness and kurtosis are presented. Interestingly, the mean, median, and mode are the highest for the variables Buying Intention and Information Value. The highest standard deviation occurs for Expertise and Similarity, both with a rounded value of 1.7. This can be interpreted as 68% of all values deviating in a range of +/- 1.7 from the mean of 7.6 and 7.0, respectively. In other words, regarding the variables Expertise and Similarity, most participants responded within a broader range of different points on a scale between extremely unlikely to extremely likely. Minimum and maximum values in the table represent the most extreme values participants chose, and the range shows the difference between them. As displayed in the boxplots in Figure 7, there were very few answer sheets that included extreme values after the cleaning of the data, also called outliers. Outliers are visualized as small circles on the boxplot and indicate values that are outside 90% of the data dispersion. The skewness and kurtosis describe the shape of the data distribution. To apply the correct statistical calculations for the gathered data, the data must be distributed normally. As all skewness and kurtosis values are in the range between 1 and -1, the data of every variable in this study has a normal distribution (Malhotra, 2020).

**Table 7**

*Central Tendency, Dispersion, and Shape of the Distribution*

|  | Buy. Int. | Info. Val. | Enter.Val. | Expert. | Trustw. | Attract. | Simil. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | 9.1084 | 9.2517 | 7.9103 | 7.6305 | 7.7331 | 8.6795 | 6.9860 |
| Median | 9.3333 | 9.3333 | 8.0000 | 8.0000 | 7.6667 | 8.6667 | 7.0000 |
| Mode | 9.33 | 9.33 | 7.67 | 8.67 | 7.67 | 8.67 | 7.00 |
| Std. Deviation | 1.07402 | .97989 | 1.35253 | 1.73976 | 1.35244 | 1.17289 | 1.72036 |
| Skewness | -.718 | -.841 | -.398 | -.589 | -.172 | -.432 | -.420 |
| Std. E of Skwns | .144 | .144 | .144 | .144 | .144 | .144 | .144 |
| Kurtosis | .535 | .670 | .050 | -.007 | -.230 | -.302 | .114 |
| Std. E of Krts | .287 | .287 | .287 | .287 | .287 | .287 | .287 |
| Range | 5.67 | 4.67 | 7.00 | 8.33 | 7.00 | 5.67 | 8.33 |
| Minimum | 5.33 | 6.33 | 3.67 | 2.33 | 4.00 | 5.33 | 2.00 |
| Maximum | 11.00 | 11.00 | 10.67 | 10.67 | 11.00 | 11.00 | 10.33 |
| Percntl. 25 | 8.3333 | 8.6667 | 7.0000 | 6.3333 | 6.6667 | 8.0000 | 6.0000 |
| 50 | 9.3333 | 9.3333 | 8.0000 | 8.0000 | 7.6667 | 8.6667 | 7.0000 |
| 75 | 10.0000 | 10.0000 | 9.0000 | 9.0000 | 8.6667 | 9.6667 | 8.0833 |

**Figure 7**

*Boxplots of Variables*
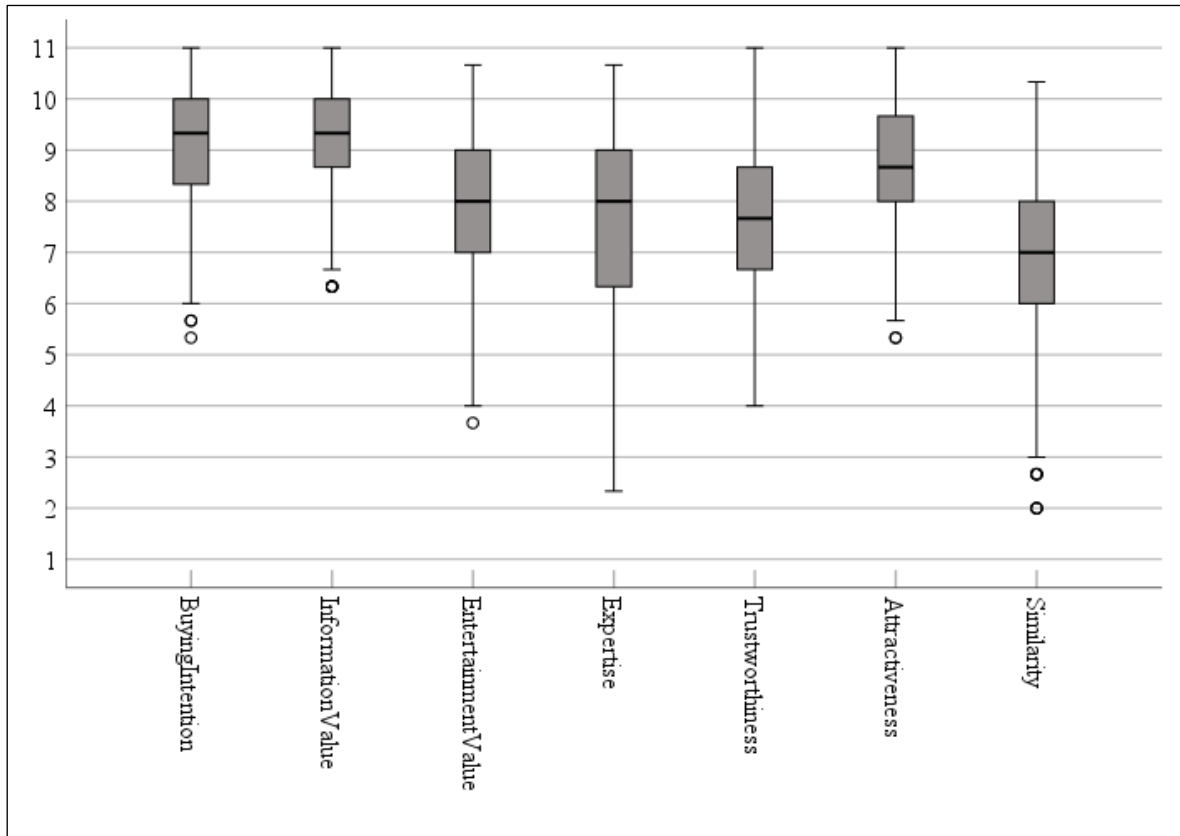


## 4.6 Hypotheses Testing

This section examines the six hypotheses of this research by applying a linear regression analysis for each hypothesis consisting of one independent value and the dependent value, Buying Intention. By doing so, the strength of each cause-and-effect relationship can be assessed (Saunders et al., 2019). Following, the results of each correlation and regression analysis are presented.

### 4.6.1 Informativeness Positively Affects Buying Intention

The first hypothesis concerns the content of the influencer and states that informativeness exhibited by the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers. As presented graphically in Figure 8 and numerically in Table 8, a positive relation indeed exists between the information value and a customer's buying intention. Furthermore, the increase of the fitted regression line, as well as the positive coefficient

of .483, indicates a positive relation. Lastly, a p-value smaller than 0.001 leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. In conclusion, hypothesis H1 is accepted.

**Figure 8**

*Fitted Trend Line of H1*
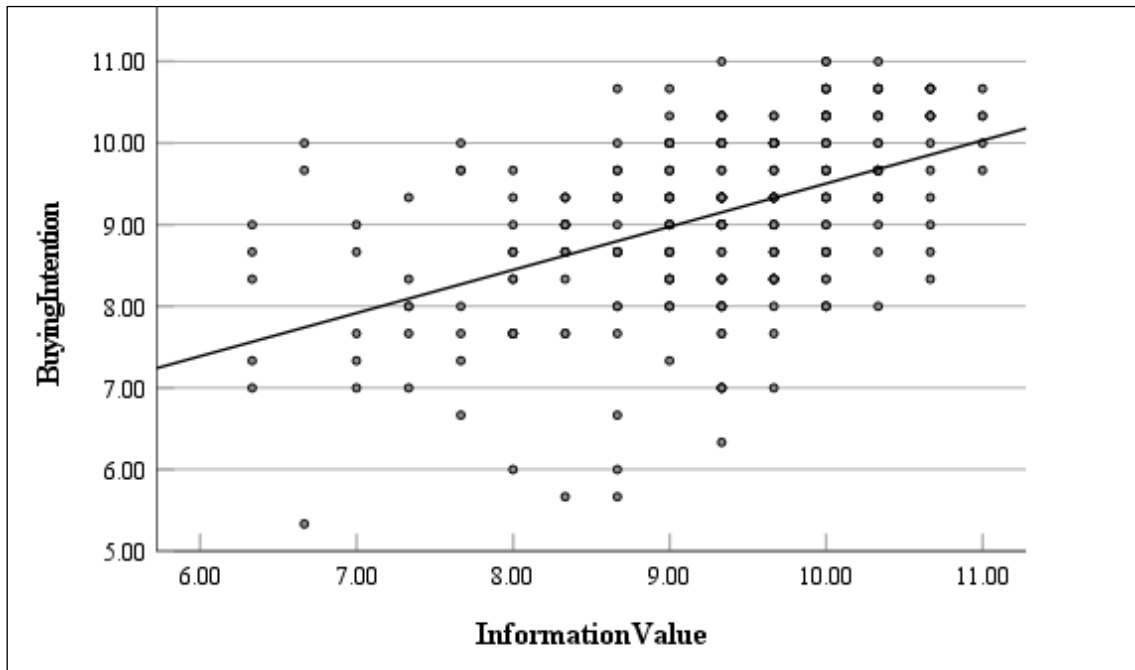


**Table 8**

*Correlation between Buying Intention and Information Value*

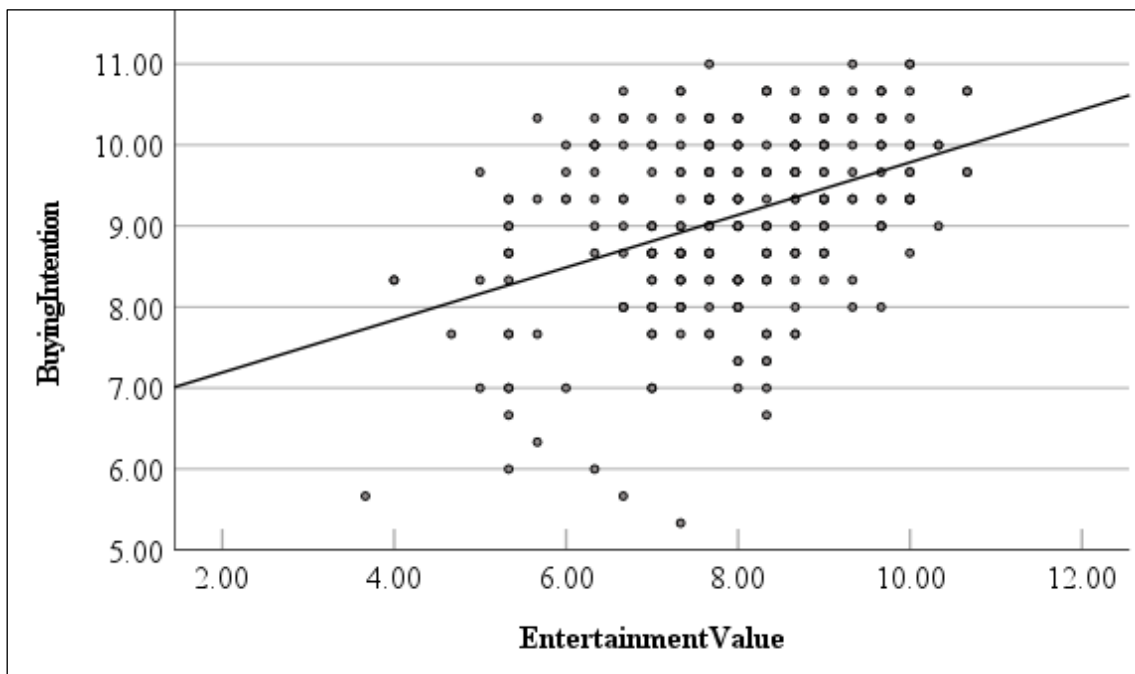| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention[a] | | | |
| Information Value | .483 | .057 | <.001 |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable

### 4.6.2 Added Entertainment Value Positively Affects Buying Intention

The second hypothesis states that added entertainment value on behalf of the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers. The scatter plot in Figure 9 illustrates that the trend line increases from left to right, which indicates positivity. Table 9 shows that the relationship between consumers buying intention and entertainment value is connected by a positive correlation with a coefficient of .408 and a standard error of .043. The relationship is positive and statistically significant, which results in the acceptance of hypothesis H2.

**Figure 9**

*Fitted Trend Line of H2*



**Table 9**

*Correlation between Buying Intention and Entertainment Value*

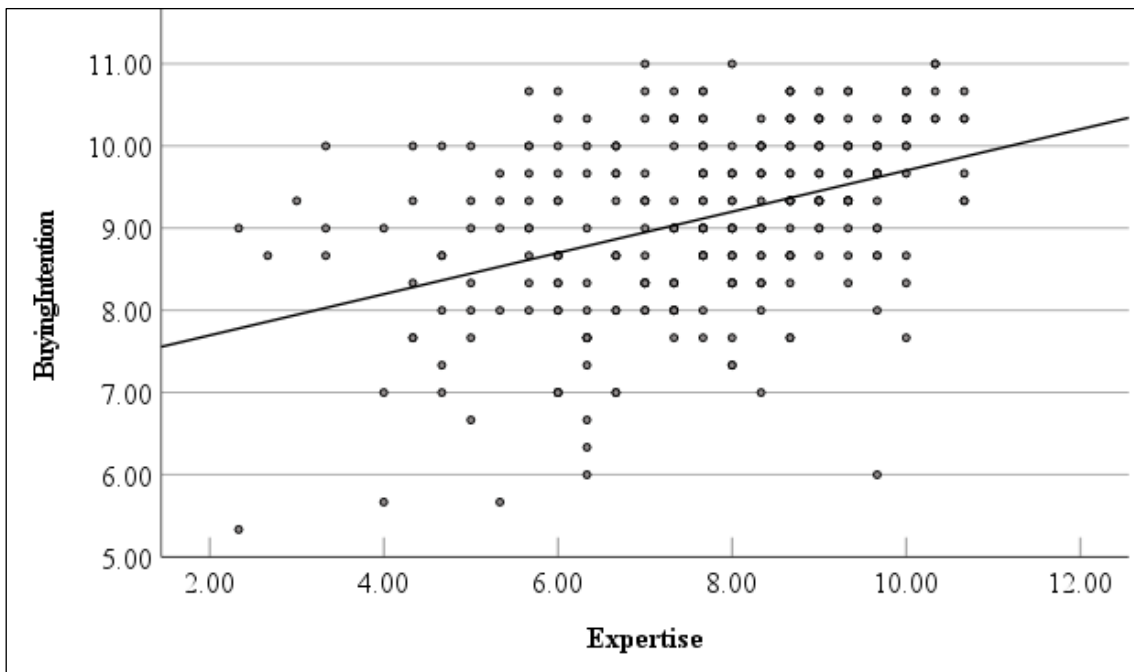| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention[a] | | | |
| Entertainment Value | .408 | .043 | <.001 |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable

### 4.6.3 Expertise Positively Affects Buying Intention

Hypothesis H3 claims that influencer knowledge or expertise positively affects the buying intention of the consumers. As displayed in Figure 10 and Table 10, again, a positive relationship can be observed. The positive correlation coefficient of .406 indicates that the influencer expertise indeed positively affects the consumer's purchase intention to a certain degree. With a p-value smaller than .001, the null hypothesis is proven insignificant, which in turn leads to the acceptance of hypothesis H3.

**Figure 10**

*Fitted Trend Line of H3*



**Table 10**

*Correlation between Buying Intention and Expertise*

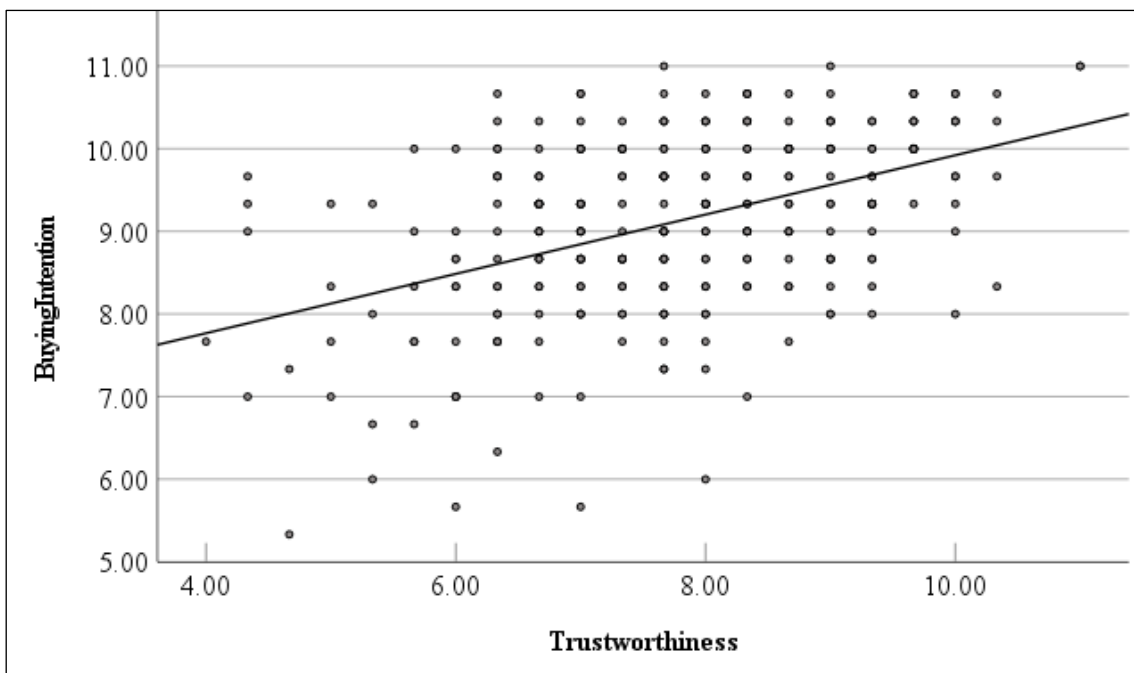| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention[a] | | | |
| Expertise | .406 | .033 | <.001 |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable

### 4.6.4 Trustworthiness Positively Affects Buying Intention

Hypothesis H4 concerns the influencer attribute trustworthiness. It states that the trustworthiness of the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers. The trendline in Figure 11 and the positive coefficient of 0.452 in Table 11 indicate once more a positive relationship between the two variables in the hypothesis. As the relationship is statistically significant, hypothesis H4 is accepted.

**Figure 11**

*Fitted Trend Line of H4*



**Table 11**

*Correlation between Buying Intention and Trustworthiness*

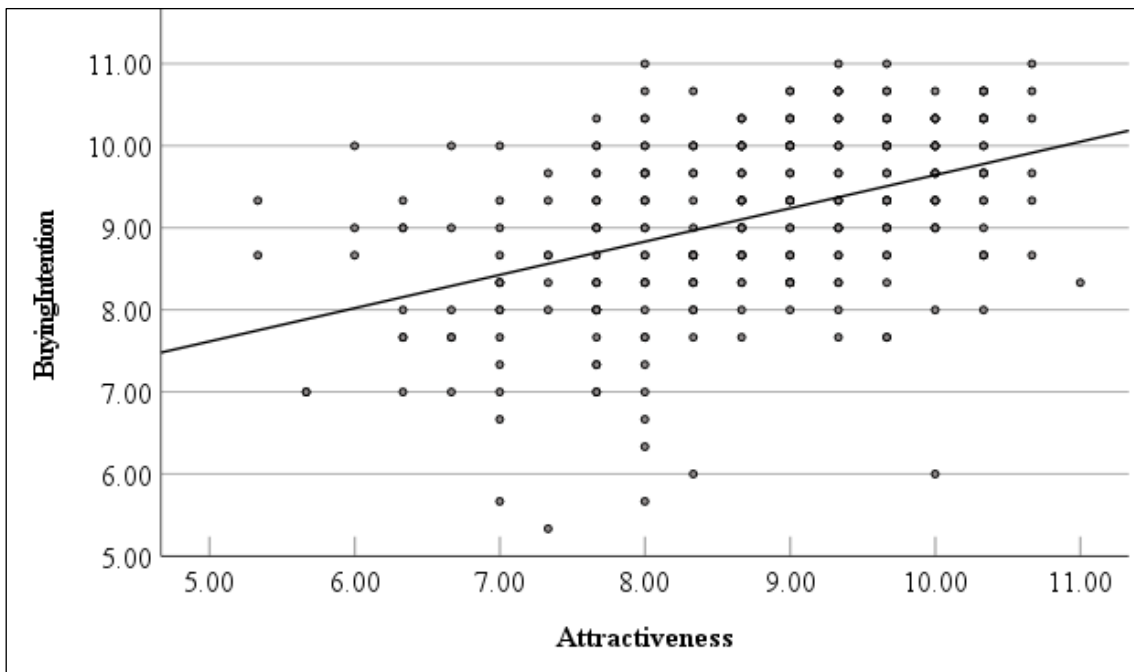| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention[a] | | | |
| Trustworthiness | .452 | .042 | <.001 |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable

### 4.6.5 Attractiveness Positively Affects Buying Intention

In this section, hypothesis H5 is examined. It states that the attractiveness depicted by the influencer positively affects the buying intention of the consumers. The results presented in Figure 12 and Table 12 are confirmation that there is a positive relationship between the variables. The coefficient indicates a correlation strength of .443 with a standard deviation of .049. Lastly, the statistics show no significance for the null hypothesis, which leads to the acceptance of hypothesis H5.

**Figure 12**

*Fitted Trend Line of H5*



**Table 12**

*Correlation between Buying Intention and Attractiveness*

| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention[a] | | | |
| Attractiveness | .443 | .049 | <.001 |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable

### 4.6.6 Similarity Positively Affects Buying Intention

The last hypothesis, H6, states that the similarity between the influencer and consumer positively influences buying intention. Similarities could be common interests, goals, or traits that the consumer shares with the influencer. Figure 13 displays positivity with the fitted line increasing from left to right. The correlation coefficient of .325 in Table 13 confirms a positive but relatively weak relationship between similarity and buying intention. However, the p-value displays statistical significance for hypothesis H6, which leads to its acceptance.

**Figure 13**

*Fitted Trend Line of H6*
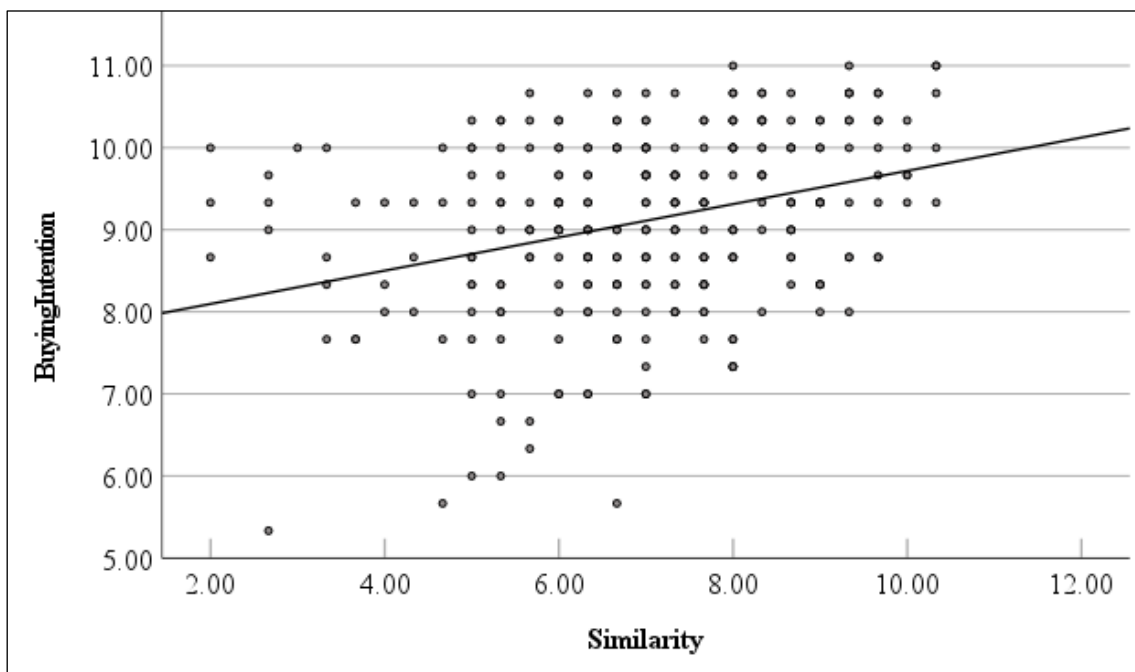


**Table 13**

*Correlation between Buying Intention and Similarity*

| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buying Intention[a] | | | |
| Similarity | .325 | .035 | <.001 |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable

## 4.7 Discussion of the Results

Social media influencer marketing is growing at a fast rate, especially in China, where in 2021, online retail sales grew by 23.2% year on year (CNNIC, 2021). In accordance with this increasing trend, various researchers (Li & Peng, 2021; Lou & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Masuda et al., 2022) have studied the impact of SMI attributes on consumers' buying intention. None of them, however, focused on a single product category showcased by these SMI's. According to a Bain & Company report by Lannes and Xing (2022), China may have surpassed the United States as the world's largest luxury goods market by 2025. Hence, by conciliating the two trends of social commerce and the growing hunger for luxury goods in China, this study focuses on a single product category: Swiss watches. In this section, the results of the relationship analysis are discussed and compared to previous studies that did not focus on a specific product.

As presented in Table 14, all six hypotheses are accepted. Regarding content influence, the strongest correlation has been observed between information value and buying intention, with a coefficient of .483. This means from all the independent variables, Informativeness has the strongest influence on consumers' buying intention. Adding entertainment value to the content that showcases Swiss watches also positively influences consumers' buying intention, but the relation is slightly weaker with a coefficient of .408. The results regarding content influence are in line with the study of Lou and Yuan (2019), which confirms that the information and entertainment value of SMI posts positively affects consumers' trust in the posts and leads to an increased buying intention. Comparing the studies leads to the conclusion that including information and entertainment value in SMI's posts is vital to increase the buying intention for any product, including Swiss watches. The first variable measuring the effect of source influence attributes, expertise, is also acknowledged to affect buying intention positively. The calculation concluded that the variables are positively correlated with a coefficient of .406. This result is in line with Masuda et al. (2022) and Lou and Yuan (2019), whose research also shows that influencer expertise directly or indirectly affects buying intention positively. Lou and Yuan (2019, p. 68) concluded that "It is conceivable that influencers' expertise in specific areas makes them qualified to promote certain brands or products effectively". Next, hypothesis H4, with a positive correlation coefficient of .452, indicates that trustworthiness positively relates to the buying intention of consumers. This is aligned with Masuda et al. (2022) and Lou and Yuan (2019), who also recognized trustworthiness as a positively influencing attribute for SMIs. Attractiveness, which

includes physical and social attractiveness, is another attribute considered to affect buying intention positively. The correlation coefficient measures the strength of this relationship as .443. This confirms the results of previous studies (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Masuda et al., 2022). The weakest influence on consumers buying intention has the variable similarity. This means that from the analyzed SMI characteristics, the perceived similarity is not as important to the consumers as other characteristics. However, with a positive correlation coefficient of 0.325, it still has an influence, albeit a weaker one. The observation that perceived similarity influences buying intention positively was observed in previous studies (Lou & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Masuda et al., 2022) as well. In conclusion, the outcome of this study provided similar results as previous research that examined the impacts of influencer attributes on consumers' purchase intentions. The claim of Vrontis et al. (2021, p. 625) that "[…] different contexts and products require influencers that exhibit different characteristics." could not be proven when comparing this study with previous ones that did not focus on a particular product category.

**Table 14**

*Results of the conceptual framework analysis*

| Hypothesis | Positive Affection | B | Sig. | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Informativeness → Buying Intention[a] | .483 | <.001 | Accepted |
| H2 | Entertainment Value → Buying Intention[a] | .408 | <.001 | Accepted |
| H3 | Expertise → Buying Intention[a] | .406 | <.001 | Accepted |
| H4 | Trustworthiness → Buying Intention[a] | .452 | <.001 | Accepted |
| H5 | Attractiveness → Buying Intention[a] | .443 | <.001 | Accepted |
| H6 | Similarity → Buying Intention[a] | .325 | <.001 | Accepted |

*Note*. a. Dependent Variable

## 5 Conclusion

This research investigated the impact of social media influencer (SMI) content and source characteristics on consumers' buying intention. The characteristics examined included information and entertainment value of the content posted by the SMI, as well as the source attributes of expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity, depicted by the influencer. This information was summarized in a conceptual framework and based on previous literature. The conceptual framework consists of six hypotheses, each stating a positive cause-and-effect relationship. The aim of this research is to provide recommendations to the Swiss watch industry regarding the most effective influencer marketing setting to promote their products in China. A survey with a valid sample size of N=286 was conducted to test the six hypotheses. The target population was narrowed down to consumers who like Swiss watches and follow at least one SMI showcasing these luxury goods on any Chinese social media platform. The analysis resulted in the acceptance of all six hypotheses. The result of this study is in line with previous studies analyzing the effect of SMI's attributes on consumer behavior without a product-specific focus. Following, the theoretical and managerial implications of this study are discussed.

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study's theoretical contribution adds valuable conclusions to the social media marketing research field by examining cause-effect relationships between SMIs and consumers. By summarizing frameworks from recent related studies into one conceptual framework, this study complements previous research on a very current topic. This study is the first to examine SMI attributes' effect on consumers' buying intention while focusing only on a single product category - a focus not seen in previous studies. The underlying theory of the conceptual framework of this study is based on well-researched marketing and consumer behavior theory. However, social media influencer marketing is a relatively new phenomenon, and there is a general lack of research. Furthermore, with the rapidly evolving digitalization, the phenomenon is very dynamic and fast-growing. In conclusion, this research is a valuable contribution to the field but also underlines and complements the findings of previous studies.

### 5.2 Managerial Implications

Regarding the managerial implications, the findings of this study could prove valuable for marketing managers seeking to promote Swiss watches through Chinese social media influencers. Additionally, it could serve as a guide for Swiss watch brands

looking to collaborate with Chinese social media influencers in order to penetrate the luxury market on its fast-growing digital front, by providing insight on selecting the right partners and creating strategically valuable content. The study proposes that marketers collaborate with SMIs possessing expert knowledge of the product, a trustworthy appearance, physical and social attractiveness, and similarities that are shared with the target audience. According to this study, the similarity is slightly less important than the other SMI characteristics. Regarding strategically valuable content, the SMI should be instructed to post product-relevant content that contains high information and entertainment value in order to positively influence consumers' purchase intention. The study reveals that regarding content, high informativeness has a slightly stronger impact than a high entertainment value. An additional recommendation can be concluded regarding the most suitable social media platforms to promote Swiss watches in China. The research shows that most individuals utilize the platforms Xiaohongshu, Douyin Huoshan, and Sina Weibo when looking for Swiss watches. When participants were asked on which platforms they follow SMIs showcasing Swiss watches, around 80% responded with Xiaohongshu and Douyin Huoshan, and over 60% stated they would do so on Sina Weibo. An additionally interesting fact for marketing specialists is that the study found no patterns suggesting the salary of individuals has an effect on what social media channels they use. In conclusion, the research recommends allocating the social media marketing budget mainly to the social media platforms mentioned above.

# 6 Limitations and Further Research

This last chapter discusses the limitations of this research, which may have impacted the results. Recommendations for future research regarding influencer marketing are also made.

## 6.1 Limitations

As with other research, several limitations occurred that must be noted. The first drawback was the use of a non-probability sampling approach, which implied that not everyone in the population had an equal chance of being included in the sample, and so the findings do not have a high generalization ability toward the target population. This suggests that the outcome should be evaluated with this in mind. Moreover, the gender ratio of the sample consists of 72% female participants, which may affect the results as the sample does not fully represent the demographic ratios of the population. It is also important to mention the reliability tests. Although Cronbach's alpha of all measurements, according to Hinton et al. (2005), were within the acceptable limit, the variables Information Value, Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness were on the lower bound of acceptability. This moderate internal consistency might also affect the results of this study. Lastly, although the price range of Swiss watches is significant, it was not considered a factor in the research. Further specification of the product range may have resulted in a different outcome.

## 6.2 Future Research

This research complements previous studies on SMI attributes affecting consumer buying intention. Additionally, the study explores a new path within the research field based on the assumption that different products require influencers that exhibit different characteristics. Thus far, the study was unable to prove this assumption, which is why further research in this direction is required. Applying the same study to another product category or even a single product would likely result in interesting findings. A potential approach would be to repeat the study with a large probability sample in order to analyze the relations with an actual representative sample of the population in order to observe if this would generate the same results. Considering a marketing manager's perspective, it would be very helpful to repeat the study for Swiss watches in different price categories to test if prices would impact the results.

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# 8 Appendices

## 8.1 Appendix A: Questionnaire in Chinese

### 社交媒体对瑞士手表购买决定的影响

瑞士制造的手表有着悠久的传统，在世界各地都受到人们的青睐。2021年，中国占瑞士手表出口总额的13%，折合人民币为200亿元。

许多不同的因素导致了购买或不购买瑞士手表。今天，许多消费者都在关注社交媒体上的网红，他们介绍的产品并影响消费者的购买决定。作为我在ZHAW管理和法律学院的研究活动的一部分，研究中国社交媒体网红的特性对中国潜在消费者购买意向的影响

#### 数据隐私
这项调研只用于科学研究，并根据瑞士联邦数据保护法 (DSG) 和欧洲通用数据保护条例 (GDPR)规定对您的个人数据保密。 您的所有回答都是匿名的，数据信息无法直接追溯至具体的个人。您的宝贵参与对研究的有效性具有重要意义。请在调查结束前回答所有问题，即使您不打算在近期内购买瑞士手表。

#### Data Privacy
This survey serves exclusively as a basis for scientific work. Your information will be recorded anonymously and treated confidentially at all times. Only the aggregated data will be analyzed in this study. It is not possible to draw conclusions about individual persons.

非常感谢您的支持!

**1.** 您喜欢瑞士手表吗? [单选题] *
- ○ 喜欢
- ○ 我并不在意瑞士手表
- ○ 不喜欢

**2.** 您因为什么原因喜欢瑞士手表? （多选题）[多选题] *
- ☐ 因为它是来自于欧洲（瑞士）的品牌
- ☐ 因为它的质量
- ☐ 因为它的声望
- ☐ 因为它是一种身份的象征
- ☐ 其他原因

**3.** 您是否在任何社交媒体平台上关注介绍关于瑞士手表的网红? [多选题] *
- ☐ 有是，至少1个
- ☐ 有是，至少2个
- ☐ 有是，3个或3个以上
- ☐ 没有

**4.** 您在哪些社交平台上关注他们? （多选题）[多选题] *
- ☐ 微信
- ☐ 豆瓣网
- ☐ QQ
- ☐ 百度贴吧
- ☐ 新浪微博
- ☐ 小红书
- ☐ 瓜州
- ☐ QQ空间
- ☐ 美拍
- ☐ 抖音
- ☐ 其他

**5.** 您每周花多少时间在以上选择的社交网站上？[单选题] *

○ 每周少于1小时

○ 每周1-5小时

○ 每周5-10小时

○ 每周超过10小时

**回答以下问题时，请考虑您所知道的展示瑞士手表的网红博主们的特性。**

**6.** 如果我有钱，我就会购买网红推荐的瑞士手表。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**7.** 网红推销展示的瑞士手表有让我想买一块瑞士手表的冲动。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**8.** 我打算/我梦想着购买网红推荐过的瑞士手表。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**请试着再想想这些社交媒体网红们。他们都分享什么样的内容（照片、视频、直播）？**

**9.** 他们分享的内容通常包括产品规格和/或品牌历史[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**10.** 网红会介绍手表的功能（如耐用性、质量、功能）[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**11.** 网红会介绍手表的不同设计样式[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**12.** 内容非常具有娱乐性。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**13.** 内容非常有趣并且令人愉快。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**14.** 这些内容经常引发 我的情绪变动。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**请试着再想想这些社交媒体的网红们，他们是怎么样的一个人？**

**15.** 他们似乎是真正的钟表专家。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**16.** 他们对自己展示的手表非常了解。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**17.** 他们了解所有的品牌、型号和他们所展示的手表的特点。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**18.** 我个人相信这些网红们的意见[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**19.** 影响者分享他的真实想法，因为如果他不这样做，就不会有人关注他。[单选题] *

**不可能**　○ 0　○ 1　○ 2　○ 3　○ 4　○ 5　○ 6　○ 7　○ 8　○ 9　○ 10　**极有可能**

**20.** 如果我和网红私下交谈，他们也会对展示的手表有着跟屏幕前同样的看法[单选题] *

**不可能** ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 **极有可能**

21. 展示手表的社交网红总是穿着时尚[单选题] *
**不可能** ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 **极有可能**

22. 这位网红长得非常英俊/漂亮。[单选题] *
**不可能** ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 **极有可能**

23. 这位网红似乎总能引起我的共鸣。[单选题] *
**不可能** ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 **极有可能**

24. 网红的生活方式与我拥有或想要的生活方式相似。[单选题] *
**不可能** ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 **极有可能**

25. 网红的成长背景与我相似（如语言、文化、他他们的成长方式）。[单选题] *
**不可能** ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 **极有可能**

26. 我似乎与这些网红们有很多的共同点（例如，相貌、意见、兴趣）。[单选题] *
**不可能** ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 **极有可能**

27. 您的年龄[单选题] *
○ 18-24
○ 25-40
○ 41-60
○ 61岁以上
○ 我不想说回答

28. 你的性别[单选题] *
○ 女性
○ 男
○ 其他
○ 我不想说回答

29. 你的月薪是多少？[单选题] *
○ 低于5000元人民币
○ 5,000 - 10,000人民币
○ 10'001 - 20'000人民币
○ 20'001 - 30'000人民币
○ 超过30,000元人民币
○ 我不想说回答

30. **你的国籍是什么？** [单选题] *
○ 中国
○ 外国国民