

# From Clicks to Carts: Examining the Mediating Role of Attachment in the Relationship between Influencers and Consumer Purchase Intentions on Live Streaming Platforms

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## Abstract

*Internet celebrities are rapidly reshaping economics and marketing dynamics on online platforms such as live streaming. This trend has made influencers a crucial marketing technique for many businesses. This study focuses on influencers and their characteristics, engaging in a comprehensive discussion of their complex relationships. It hypothesizes that the three key characteristics of celebrity influencers—similarity, professionalism, and interactivity—directly influence attachment and purchase intention. Additionally, the research explores how attachment mediates the relationship between influencer factors and purchase intention on live streaming platforms. A cross-sectional design and statistical analysis were employed, using a sample of 130 online consumers. The results suggest that similarity, professionalism, and interactivity directly effect on purchase intention. However, while professionalism and interactivity have a direct effect on attachment, they do not significantly influence the relationship with similarity. However, when mediated through attachment, similarity gets partially mediated whereas professionalism and interactivity have observed full mediation. The total effect is highest for similarity. Overall, the study found attachment to be a significant mediator among these influencer characteristics. These findings suggest that celebrities, product developers, advertisers, and online platform owners need to prioritize influencer credibility and competency to succeed in online marketing through live streaming platforms. This study provides new insights into marketing approaches, contributing to the field of consumer behaviour research both practically and theoretically.*

**Keywords:** *Internet celebrities, Influencer, social media, Live streaming, Attachment, Purchase intention, Professionalism, Similarity, Interactivity.*

## Introduction

Celebrity culture has a long history, stretching back centuries from ancient Athenian celebrities discussed by Plato to the Hollywood actors of the 20th century. However, the 21st century witnessed a seismic shift in celebrity dynamics with the advent of social media. Social media introduced a new breed of celebrity known as Do-It-Yourself (DIY) celebrities, ordinary individuals who rose to fame through the internet and social media platforms. This phenomenon gave birth to the Wanghong economy, or internet celebrity economy, as observed in China, where internet celebrities or influencers became pivotal figures driving a massive business model (Hu, 2023). This underscores the significant role of internet celebrities in the global economy, acting as catalysts for commerce and business profitability. Despite facing criticism, internet celebrities wield unparalleled influence over people's perceptions and behaviors. The internet has not only facilitated the rise of these celebrities but also fueled the growth of commerce, a trend that received a considerable boost following the 2020 pandemic (Duan et al., 2022). By 2023, the market value of the influencer industry soared to \$21.1 billion, marking a threefold increase from 2019 (Dencheva, 2023). Today, internet celebrities and their dedicated followers are increasingly becoming pivotal in product marketing, particularly in live streaming platforms, where engagement and authenticity reign supreme.

Live streaming, defined as the simultaneous broadcast and consumption of digital media in real-time, is witnessing a surge in popularity among both viewers and marketers (Soedarsono et al., 2020; Appel et al., 2020; Ceci, 2024). Initially popularized by gaming, live streaming has now diversified into e-commerce and social media, attracting the attention of internet celebrities (Ceci, 2024). Major social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have emerged as key platforms for live purchasing during streaming events, with significant percentages of internet users engaging in live purchases on these platforms (Statista Research Department, 2022). For instance, 58% of users make live purchases on

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Facebook, followed by 45% on Instagram, and 15% on TikTok and YouTube respectively (Statista Research Department, 2022). Moreover, studies indicate a growing interest among users in live branded content, with 72% of TikTok users expressing interest in learning about product releases through live streams (Ceci, 2022). Additionally, research by GlobalWebIndex highlights that 70% of viewers are inclined to purchase products recommended by influencers, underlining a notable shift in consumer behavior towards real-time and interactive content experiences (GWI, 2021). From a commercial standpoint, internet celebrities offer strategic marketing channels for engaging with target audiences in real-time through live streaming content.

The shift in consumer behavior can be attributed to how internet influencers effectively engage with their followers. Gomes et al. (2022) emphasize the significance of interactivity as a tool used by online celebrities to engage with their audience. Building on this, Naderer et al. (2021) suggest that shared interests between influencers and their audiences create a sense of connection due to perceived similarity effects. Furthermore, Xu and Lyu (2022) delve deeper into the concept of cognitive capital, which includes factors such as professional experience and knowledge, contributing to stronger engagement between celebrities and viewers in virtual interactions. It is the combined effect of these elements—interactivity, similarity, and professionalism—that has proven to be highly effective in influencing consumer behavior. This tripartite mechanism must resonate deeply with followers to significantly impact their behavior.

The marketing landscape is constantly evolving, driven by technological advancements such as social media, which has introduced radical dynamics to the highly competitive market. Live streaming platforms have accelerated this shift, rapidly transforming consumer behavior and driving revenue. According to McKinsey data, live purchasing behavior has surged in categories like clothing, groceries, and personal care, with consumers increasingly favoring online shopping over traditional retail channels (McKinsey & Company, 2023). For instance, Sun (2022) highlights Li Jiaqi's remarkable feat of selling 150,000 lipsticks in just five minutes during a live streaming session. Similarly, top Alibaba influencers like Austin Li and Viya generated over US\$149.4 million in non-refundable pre-sales deposits on the 11.11 pre-sale period (Hallanan, 2020). However, Meng et al. (2021) argue that the success of live streaming hinges not solely on viewership numbers but on the influence of the celebrities endorsing the products. This sentiment is echoed by Zhou et al. (2019), who note that product sales from live streaming promoted by online celebrities far surpass those of other promotional events. Özer et al. (2022) further connect this high purchase intention to the attachment and endorsement cultivated by internet celebrities. However, the underlying reasons and mechanisms driving this attachment remain unclear. There exists a research gap regarding whether characteristics such as similarity, professionalism, and interactivity of internet celebrities foster a sense of attachment that ultimately drives purchase behavior among their followers. The precise pathways through which these internet celebrities influence consumer decision-making, transitioning from passive content consumption to active purchases, remain insufficiently understood. As competition intensifies for market share, brands must increasingly leverage internet celebrities and live-streaming platforms, underscoring the importance of addressing this gap. Informed strategies are essential, and gaining a deeper understanding of these mechanisms is paramount for brands to effectively capitalize on this trend.

Hence, this study aims to answer the following objectives: (1) to determine if better interactivity characteristics of internet celebrities serve as a more effective influencing mechanism that drives attachment, subsequently resulting in higher purchase behavior; (2) to explore if followers perceive similarity as a major factor of attachment to an internet celebrity, thereby driving their purchase intention; and (3) to evaluate if followers find the professionalism of an internet celebrity convincing enough to build attachment, thus increasing their purchasing behavior.

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

This section examines the antecedent factors (similarity, professionalism, and interactivity) on the focal construct of attachment, as well as the consequence factor of purchase intention. Additionally, the mediation effects of attachment on the relationship between the antecedent and consequence factors were developed. Hypotheses were developed based on an extensive literature review of these relationships.

### *Consumers' Attachment to Influencers*

Emotional connections between individuals and objects are common in human experiences. Vahdat et al. (2020) note that consumers often form and maintain attachments with brands or individuals they have emotional associations with. Attachment, as described by Kang et al. (2017), encompasses affective elements that evoke emotions, with affection, passion, and a sense of belonging identified as key dynamics by Alnawas et al. (2018). Gómez-Suárez & Veloso (2020) characterize attachment as an emotional or intellectual connection between two entities.

In the context of live streaming, consumer attachment to influencers refers to the emotional bond and sense of connection viewers establish with influencers during live sessions. This attachment is nurtured through ongoing interactions and the perceived genuineness of the influencer, fostering trust and loyalty (Wang & Li, 2020; Park & Lin, 2020). The interactive nature of live streaming, featuring real-time communication and direct engagement, amplifies this attachment by fostering intimacy and immediacy between the influencer and the audience (Wang & Li, 2020; Chen & Lin, 2018). Studies indicate that stronger attachment correlates with more positive attitudes toward the influencer and higher purchase intentions (Chen & Lin, 2018; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Additionally, the relatability and authenticity of the influencer play crucial roles in attachment development, enhancing the influencer's credibility and trustworthiness (Park & Lin, 2020; Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018). This emotional connection significantly influences consumer behavior, shaping decision-making processes and fostering loyalty to the influencer's recommendations (Xu & Wu, 2020; Lim, Cheah, & Wong, 2017).

### *Similarity Characteristics of Influencers*

Similarity refers to the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as sharing values, lifestyles, or interests with an internet celebrity. It involves seeing a media figure as akin to oneself (Stein et al., 2022), often stemming from recognizing common characteristics or aspiring to emulate the celebrity (Giles, 2002). Naderer et al. (2021) propose that influencers may feel familiar to viewers, evoking a sense of similarity akin to encountering a friend. This perceived similarity is often linked to shared interests between followers and influencers (Naderer et al., 2021; Martensen et al., 2018). Followers may identify with the influencer, emulate their behavior, or aspire to share their activities (Gräve, 2017), reflecting a personal identification with certain attributes of the celebrity.

In the realm of live streaming, the similarity traits of influencers significantly influence audience attachment and purchase intent. Perceiving oneself as similar to an influencer in demographics, values, or lifestyle can bolster the efficacy of influencer marketing. When viewers identify with an influencer, they tend to trust their recommendations and feel a personal connection, increasing engagement and the likelihood of purchasing promoted products (Chu & Kim, 2011; Lee & Watkins, 2016). This perceived similarity fosters relatability and credibility, heightening the persuasiveness of the influencer's endorsements (Jin & Phua, 2014). As influencers share personal details and experiences during live streams, this real-time interaction further strengthens the sense of similarity and connection, cultivating deeper emotional bonds and loyalty among followers (Wang & Li, 2020).

### *The Relationship Between Similarity and Consumers' Attachment to Influencers*

The formation of deep attachment with the audience is integral to influencer dynamics and hinges on how followers perceive their role models. Recognizing similarities between themselves and internet personalities can evoke a sense of closeness or connection akin to an attachment relationship. This attachment, often termed a parasocial relationship, involves one-way interaction where viewers feel attached due to homophily, the tendency to bond with similar others (Horton & Wohl, 1956; McPherson et al., 2001). When audiences view internet celebrities as relatable or appealingly similar, they may develop parasocial relationships, reflecting attachment dynamics where viewers feel connected to these celebrities.

In the realm of live streaming, the interaction between similarity and attachment to influencers profoundly shapes consumer behavior. Similarity, defined as followers' perception of resembling the influencer,

significantly influences emotional attachment. Shared demographics, values, interests, or lifestyles often contribute to perceived similarity, fostering a sense of connection and understanding between followers and influencers (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Lim et al., 2020). When followers perceive influencers as relatable, they are more inclined to develop attachment and trust, leading to stronger emotional bonds (Jin & Phua, 2014; Lim et al., 2020). This bond is reinforced during live streaming sessions, where real-time interactions and personal disclosures contribute to followers feeling part of the influencer's community (Wang & Li, 2020; Kang et al., 2021). The authenticity and immediacy of live streaming provide a unique platform for nurturing perceived similarity and attachment, significantly influencing followers' attitudes and behaviors, including their purchasing decisions (Chu & Kim, 2011; Xu & Ye, 2020). Hence, to explore the effect of celebrity similarity on attachment, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

*H1a: The similarity of influencers will have a significant positive impact on consumers' attachment to the influencers on live streaming platforms*

#### *The Relationship Between Similarity of Influencers and Consumers' Purchase Intention*

Bui (2017) introduced the similarity-attraction principle, suggesting that individuals are drawn to others who share similarities in interests, lifestyles, personalities, and backgrounds. In this study, celebrity similarity has been assessed based on lifestyle and interest similarities. Lifestyle has been identified by Kim & Min (2016) as a critical determinant of similarity between influencers and viewers. Gómez Macías and Rungtaridworakarn (2018) characterized lifestyle similarity as a perceptual likeness, while Coad et al. (2017) explored the dynamics of buyer-seller lifestyle similarity, revealing its significant relationship with purchase decisions. Herjanto and Amin (2020) underscored the substantial impact of lifestyle similarity on repurchase intentions. von Mettenheim and Wiedmann (2021) delved deeper into the theory of viewers' actual selves versus their ideal selves, highlighting how the effectiveness of celebrities in promoting a brand hinges on identification. Consumers often perceive certain influencers as ideal self-versions who share their common interests. Shoenberger and Kim (2023) found that perceived homophily, or the sharing of similar moral and value interests, influences followers' purchase intentions. Therefore, to measure the effect of internet celebrity similarity on purchase intention, the following hypothesis has been proposed.

*H1b: The similarity of influencers will have a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention on live streaming platforms*

#### *Professionalism characteristics of Influencer*

The concept of professionalism among internet celebrities is a subject of intense scholarly debate, particularly regarding its influence on decision-making. Xu and Kim (2022) define professionalism as the perceived expertise of internet individuals in product understanding, while Song and Lee (2021) suggest it involves significant knowledge and experience within specific fields, facilitating informed judgments. Essentially, professionalism refers to internet celebrities' ability to operate above average in certain areas. Evaluations of celebrity professionalism consider factors such as content quality and engagement with audience feedback.

In live streaming marketing, professionalism among influencers has garnered significant attention. Xu and Kim (2022) define it as the perceived knowledge and competence displayed in presenting products during live streams. This underscores influencers' role in providing insightful information and making informed judgments. Song and Lee (2021) and Bakar et al (2007) emphasize that professionalism extends to influencers' depth of experience and expertise in their fields, highlighting the importance of effective communication and engagement. Overall, professionalism in live streaming marketing underscores credibility, expertise, and proficiency as crucial elements in shaping consumer behavior and purchase decisions.

#### *The Relationship Between Professionalism and Consumers' Attachment to Influencer*

Research indicates a positive correlation between influencer professionalism and follower attachment. Shao (2023) discovered that social media influencer (SMI) professionalism significantly boosts consumer attachment to SMIs. Similarly, Aziz et al. (2023) identified credibility determinants as key indicators of influencer professionalism, influencing brand attachment. However, literature on professionalism as a determinant of attachment remains scarce, particularly in media studies. Therefore, empirical exploration is crucial to ascertain whether higher levels of professionalism among live streaming influencers foster audience attachment.

In the context of live streaming marketing, the association between professionalism and influencer attachment is a focal point for researchers. Professionalism, defined as influencers' perceived knowledge and competence in presenting products or services during live streaming sessions (Xu & Kim, 2022), significantly shapes consumer behavior and attachment dynamics. As influencers demonstrate professionalism by offering insightful information and engaging with audience feedback, consumers perceive them as credible and trustworthy (Xu & Kim, 2022), fostering stronger emotional bonds and attachment (Song & Lee, 2021).

Evidence suggests that influencers' professionalism positively impacts attachment by enhancing perceived expertise and credibility (Xu & Kim, 2022). When influencers display professionalism through content quality and engagement, consumers develop admiration and trust, deepening attachment (Xu & Kim, 2022). Consumers may also view influencers as role models, further solidifying attachment and loyalty (Song & Lee, 2021). Understanding the link between professionalism and influencer attachment is vital for brands and marketers leveraging influencer marketing in live streaming, as it drives consumer engagement, loyalty, and purchase intentions.

*H2a: The professionalism of influencers will have a significantly positive effect on consumer attachment on live streaming platforms*

#### *The Relationship Between Professionalism and Consumers' Purchase Intention*

Influencer professionalism significantly influences purchase intention, as demonstrated by findings from Chen and Yang (2023) and Xu and Kim (2022). Greater professionalism perceived in influencers correlates with higher purchase intention among viewers (Lee & Ha, 2020). This professionalism is closely tied to credibility, defined as the impartial and objective presentation of viewpoints or opinions by information providers (Xu & Kim, 2022). Credible influencers are more likely to drive purchase intention, as consumers trust and engage with their recommendations (Sesar et al., 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020). Thus, influencer professionalism emerges as a key determinant of purchase intention.

Research on influencer professionalism's impact on purchase intention in live streaming marketing underscores its significance (Xu & Kim, 2022). Professionalism, characterized by influencers' expertise and credibility in presenting products or services during live streams, shapes consumer behavior and purchase intentions (Xu & Kim, 2022; Song & Lee, 2021). Consumers are more inclined to trust influencers who demonstrate professionalism through content quality and responsiveness to feedback, leading to increased purchase likelihood (Xu & Kim, 2022). Additionally, influencers perceived as knowledgeable and competent are seen as authoritative figures, influencing consumer perceptions of product quality (Xu & Kim, 2022). The credibility and trustworthiness associated with professionalism further drive purchase intentions, as consumers are more likely to act on recommendations from credible influencers (Xu & Kim, 2022; Song & Lee, 2021). Understanding this relationship is crucial for brands leveraging influencer marketing in live streaming, allowing them to prioritize influencers who exhibit professionalism and credibility to effectively engage consumers and drive purchase behavior. Therefore, following hypothesis can be proposed here:

*H2b: The professionalism of influencers will have a significantly positive impact on consumers' purchase intention on live streaming platforms.*

### *Interactivity characteristics of Influencer*

Influencer interactivity encompasses the dynamic exchange of communication between influencers and their audience during live streaming sessions. It involves various forms of engagement, including responding to comments, addressing questions, conducting polls, and initiating discussions in real-time (Chen & Lin, 2018; Sun et al., 2021). This interaction is characterized by the responsiveness and frequency of engagement demonstrated by influencers, as they actively participate in dialogue and exchange information with their followers (Gong, 2021; Xu & Kim, 2022). The interactivity of internet celebrities is gauged by their level of engagement with followers' real-time interactions during live-streaming events (De Jaegher, 2010). This interactive process creates a sense of immediacy and connection, fostering stronger relationships and enhancing audience engagement (Wang & Li, 2020). By tailoring content to audience preferences and addressing viewer concerns in real-time, influencers can increase viewer retention, drive brand awareness, and cultivate loyalty among their audience (Mohamad et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2020). Ultimately, influencer interactivity plays a fundamental role in live streaming marketing, enabling influencers to connect with their audience on a personal level and effectively convey brand messages, thereby enhancing the overall viewing experience and driving brand engagement.

### *The Relationship Between Interactivity and Consumers' Attachment to the Influencer*

Social interaction or interactivity can significantly contribute to the development of attachment. Interactivity involves both one-way and two-way communication, engaging followers with social media content creators. According to Saldanha et al. (2023), social media interaction fosters a sense of intimacy, connectedness, perceived friendship, and identification among consumers. Influencers establish social connections through interpersonal interaction, cultivating a sense of belonging within the follower-creator relationship (Yang et al., 2021). Chen et al. (2023) note that interactive marketing strategies employed by internet influencers satisfy followers, leading to emotional connections. Gong (2021) suggests that platforms with higher interactivity are more likely to foster emotional attachment between followers and internet celebrities. Studies by Mesch and Manor (1998) have demonstrated that interactive friendships on social platforms result in stronger attachments. Therefore, maintaining interactivity characteristics is crucial for internet celebrities to sustain relationships with users, serving as an essential component in building successful relationships between both parties. Ultimately, interactivity nurtures emotional attachment between influencers and viewers, driving attachment between influencer and followers. To measure the relationship between attachment and interactivity, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H3a: The interactivity of influencers will have a significantly positive impact on consumer attachment with influencers on live streaming platforms.*

### *The Relationship Between Interactivity and Consumers' Purchase Intention*

Social interaction in social media has been shown to influence consumer behavior, particularly in dynamics such as purchase intention, which can be influenced by influencer social interactivity. Numerous studies have highlighted interactivity as a significant positive factor affecting purchase intention (Xu et al., 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2023; Sun & Min, 2022). For instance, research by Summerlin and Powell (2022) revealed that products marketed with interactive strategies exhibited a 54% higher purchase intention. Additionally, Liu et al. (2020b) noted that the flow experience triggered by interactivity induces positive emotions, which in turn impact attachment, leading to reduced product evaluation and quicker decision-making (Ozer & Gultekin, 2015). Moreover, studies have shown that interaction with streamers enhances online consumers' perceived hedonic shopping behavior (Liu et al., 2020a), while others have found positive experiences in in-app game purchases (Goli & Vemuri, 2021) and heightened virtual reality shopping due to flow experience (Lu & Hsiao, 2022). Consequently, prior research consistently indicates a positive correlation between interactivity and purchase intention. Therefore, this study proposes a hypothesis to further investigate this relationship:

*H3b: The interactivity of influencers will have a significantly positive impact on consumers' purchase intention on live streaming platforms.*

*The mediating effect Influencer's Attachment with the consumer*

The attachment of the influencer serves as a mediator in the relationship between the antecedent and consequence variables. Firstly, the influencers play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly through the lens of similarity and purchase intention (Jin & Ryu, 2020). The concept of similarity refers to the perceived resemblance between the consumer and the influencer, which often enhances the consumer's identification with the influencer (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This identification can significantly impact purchase intention, the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product endorsed by the influencer (Kim & Kim, 2021). A key mediator in this relationship is the emotional attachment the consumer feels towards the influencer (Lim et al., 2017). When consumers perceive a high degree of similarity with an influencer, they are more likely to develop a strong attachment to that influencer (Schouten et al., 2020). This attachment fosters trust and affinity, which can amplify the influencer's persuasive power, thereby increasing purchase intention (Hudders et al., 2021). Studies have shown that the emotional bond formed through attachment intensifies the consumer's positive response to the influencer's endorsements, making them more likely to purchase the recommended products (Jin & Ryu, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consequently, the attachment not only bridges the similarity and purchase intention but also enhances the overall effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies (Breves et al., 2019).

Second, influencers' professionalism significantly impacts purchase intention, mediated by the emotional attachment consumers develop towards these influencers. Professionalism, characterized by the influencer's expertise, credibility, and quality of content, enhances consumer trust and respect (Lou & Yuan, 2019). When influencers demonstrate high professionalism, consumers are more likely to form strong emotional attachments to them (Jin & Ryu, 2020). This attachment acts as a mediator by translating the perceived professionalism into a stronger purchase intention. Essentially, the emotional bond formed through attachment intensifies the consumer's trust in the influencer's recommendations, making them more likely to purchase the endorsed products (Hudders et al., 2021). Research indicates that the quality and professionalism of an influencer's content not only directly affects purchase intention but also strengthens the emotional connection, which in turn amplifies the influence on consumer behavior (Lim et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Additionally, influencers who consistently demonstrate professionalism in their engagements foster a deeper emotional attachment, further reinforcing the consumer's purchasing decisions (Schouten et al., 2020; Breves et al., 2019). Thus, the attachment between the consumer and the influencer is crucial in converting professionalism into effective marketing outcomes (Schouten et al., 2020; Jin & Ryu, 2020).

Third, the interactivity of influencers significantly impacts purchase intention, mediated by the emotional attachment consumers develop towards these influencers. Interactivity, characterized by the influencer's engagement, responsiveness, and two-way communication with their audience, enhances consumer involvement and perceived connection (Lim et al., 2017). When influencers demonstrate high interactivity, consumers are more likely to form strong emotional attachments to them (Hudders et al., 2021). This attachment acts as a mediator by translating the perceived interactivity into a stronger purchase intention. Essentially, the emotional bond formed through attachment intensifies the consumer's trust and affinity towards the influencer, making them more likely to purchase the endorsed products (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Research indicates that the level of interactivity not only directly affects purchase intention but also strengthens the emotional connection, which in turn amplifies the influence on consumer behavior (Jin & Ryu, 2020). Moreover, influencers who engage in interactive communication foster a deeper emotional attachment, further reinforcing the consumer's purchasing decisions (Schouten et al., 2020; Breves et al., 2019). Thus, the attachment between the consumer and the influencer is crucial in converting interactivity into effective marketing outcomes (Breves et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2017). Thus, following hypothesis have been suggested:

*H1c: The attachment of an influencer significantly enhances the relationship between similarity and purchase intention among online customers on a live streaming platform*

*H2c: The attachment of an influencer significantly enhances the relationship between professionalism and purchase intention among online customer on a live streaming platform*

*H3c: The attachment of an influencer significantly enhances the relationship between interactivity and purchase intention among online customers on a live streaming platform*

#### *The Consequence: Purchase Intention*

Purchase intention signifies consumers' inclination to make a purchase based on their beliefs and attitudes (Xu and Kim, 2022). It translates subjective perceptions into actions, representing the likelihood of consumers' actual purchase decisions (Younus et al., 2015). Purchase intention is the culmination of the consumer's evaluation process within the communication pathway between consumers and marketers.

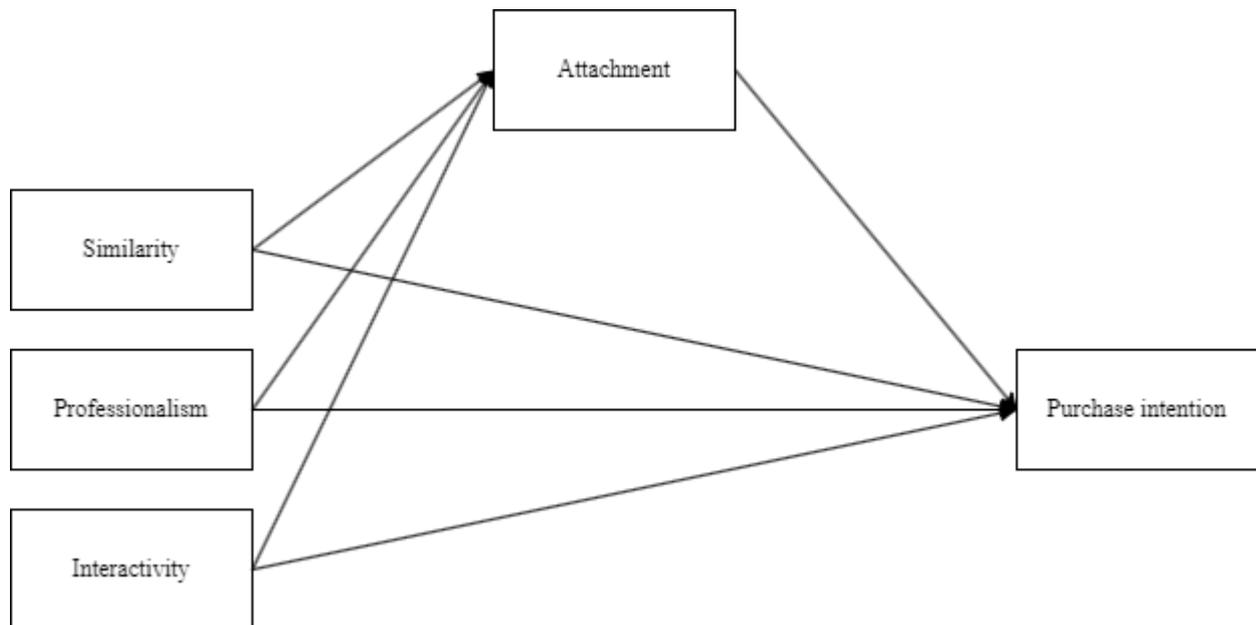
In the context of live streaming, purchase intention refers to consumers' deliberate decisions to purchase products or services influenced by their interactions during live streaming sessions (Chen & Lin, 2018; Kang et al., 2021). Factors such as the immediacy of live demonstrations, real-time engagement with influencers, and the interactive nature of the platform shape this intention. Direct communication allows consumers to seek instant feedback, enhancing their confidence in purchasing decisions (Park & Lin, 2020; Sun et al., 2019). Moreover, the authenticity and relatability of influencers foster trust and emotional connections, further driving purchase intentions (Wang & Li, 2020; Zhou et al., 2021). The sense of community and social presence experienced during live streams also influences consumers' willingness to purchase, as they feel part of a shared experience (Xu & Wu, 2020; Huang et al., 2020). Collectively, these factors underscore the influential role of live streaming in shaping consumer purchase behavior.

#### *Relationship between attachment and purchase intention.*

Research indicates that attachment serves as a crucial link between followers and influencers, facilitated by the provision of hedonic resources, trust, and satisfaction (Liu et al., 2020). This underlying mechanism of attachment has been associated with consumer behaviors such as purchasing premium products (Yuanita & Marsasi, 2022) and experiencing an increasing urge to buy as attachment grows (Lin & Ku, 2018). Consumers who feel emotionally connected are more inclined to make purchases and decisions compared to those who do not, suggesting that brand attachment influences purchase intention.

On live streaming platforms, influencers' attachment plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions. This attachment, characterized by emotional bonds and familiarity, amplifies the persuasive impact of influencers' endorsements. In live streaming, influencers engage with their audience in real-time, fostering intimacy and trust. As consumers develop stronger emotional connections with influencers, they are more likely to value and act on their recommendations, resulting in increased purchase intention (Chen & Lin, 2018). The interactive nature of live streaming further enhances this dynamic, enabling immediate feedback and engagement, thus making marketing messages more personalized and convincing (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). Parasocial relationships formed during live streaming sessions significantly influence consumers' purchasing decisions by increasing the credibility and relatability of the influencer (Hu et al., 2017). Consequently, attachment to influencers during live streaming is a critical driver of consumer behavior and contributes to the effectiveness of marketing strategies on these platforms (Wang et al., 2021). Hence, the following hypothesis can be suggested:

*H4: The attachment of influencers will have positive significant with the social media user on their purchase intention on live streaming platforms*

*Conceptual framework***Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

Existing studies on influencer marketing have primarily focused on social media platforms rather than delving exclusively into the nuances of live-streaming dynamics. However, as the marketing landscape evolves rapidly, live streaming has emerged as a pivotal platform for brands to engage with a wider audience. Consequently, there is a growing need for research that specifically addresses the unique characteristics of the live-streaming audience and their influence on purchase intention. While some studies, such as that by Xu and Kim (2022), have examined internet celebrity traits like professionalism, interactivity, and similarity in the context of purchase behavior, the role of attachment as a mediating factor has been largely overlooked. Trust and satisfaction have been the predominant mediation factors explored in previous literature. Therefore, there exists a notable gap in the literature that necessitates exploration of these celebrity characteristics from an attachment perspective. Bridging this gap will provide valuable insights into how influencer characteristics shape consumer behavior. To address this gap, a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) is proposed, which posits that attachment serves as the mediator between these predictors and purchase intention. This framework aims to enhance understanding of the mechanisms through which attachment can be cultivated with celebrities, thereby informing future brand strategies for more effective influencer marketing initiatives.

**Methodology**

The research design adopted a cross-sectional approach due to time constraints necessitating immediate data collection. Pragmatic decisions were made to determine the sample size based on practical considerations, resulting in the inclusion of 130 valid responses. The questionnaire comprised 6 demographic items and 13 variable-based questions, distributed electronically across multiple social media platforms to target respondents. This sample size aligns with Roscoe's (1975) criteria of  $30 < n < 500$  for an acceptable sample size, as advocated by Memon et al. (2020), and is consistent with similar studies such as those by Sun et al. (2021) and Xu and Kim (2022). Internal consistency of the items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha reliability test, with values exceeding 0.7, as recommended by Kennedy (2022). The alpha coefficient ranged from 0.766 to 0.862, indicating consistent measurement of the concepts under study.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, and the mediation analysis followed Barron and Kenny's Mediation model (1986), which consists of four sequential steps (see Figure 4). Firstly, Step 1 explores the association between the independent variables (IVs) and the dependent variable (DV). Next, Step 2

examines whether the mediator is significantly predicted by the IVs. Step 3 assesses the extent to which the mediator predicts the DV through a bivariate regression model. Finally, Step 4 involves estimating the indirect effects, including the mediator, on the relationship between the IV and DV (see Figure 2).

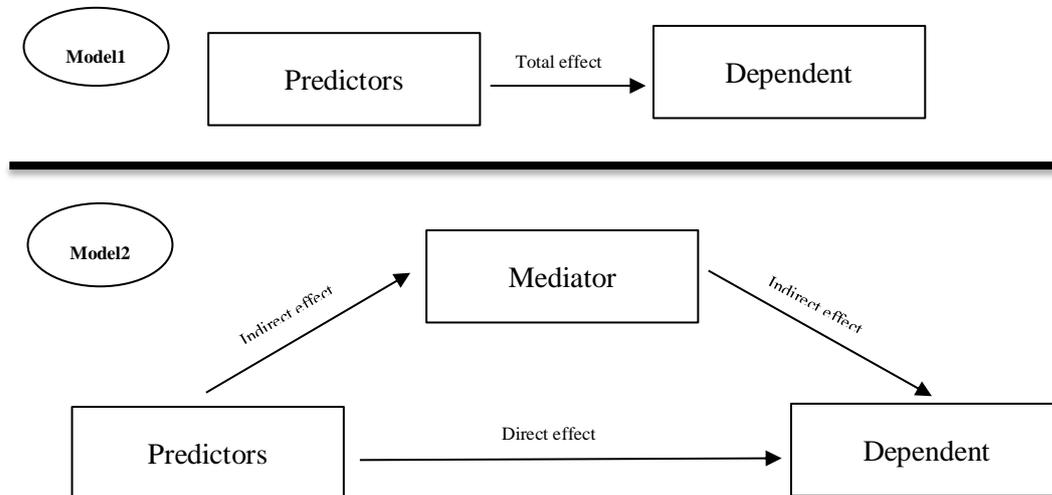


Figure 2: Baron and Kenny's mediation model

Source: (Baron & Kenny, 1986)

Table 1: Demography of the respondent

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
<b><i>Gender</i></b>		
<i>Male</i>	64	49.2
<i>Female</i>	64	49.2
<i>Prefer not to Say</i>	2	1.5
<b><i>Age</i></b>		
<i>18-24</i>	18	13.8
<i>25-34</i>	86	66.2
<i>35-44</i>	18	13.8
<i>45-54</i>	6	4.6
<i>55-64</i>	2	1.5
<b><i>Education</i></b>		
<i>High School or equivalent</i>	16	12.3
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	38	29.2
<i>Master's degree</i>	66	50.8
<i>Doctorate or professional degree</i>	10	7.7
<b><i>Employment Status</i></b>		
<i>Employed full-time</i>	96	73.8
<i>Employed part-time</i>	10	7.7
<i>Self-employed</i>	16	12.3

<i>Unemployed</i>	6	4.6
<i>Student</i>	2	1.5

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 provide insights into the demographics and online shopping behavior of the sample. The sample comprised 64 men (49.2%) and 64 women (49.2%), indicating a balanced representation across genders. The majority of respondents fell within the 25–34 age bracket (66.2%), reflecting the typical age distribution of users on social media platforms where the questionnaire was distributed. In terms of education, the sample exhibited a diverse range of qualifications, with most respondents holding Master's degrees (50.8%), followed by Bachelor's degrees (29.2%), and a smaller percentage with High School or equivalent qualifications (12.3%). This diversity in educational backgrounds suggests a rich knowledge pool within the sample. Additionally, the majority of respondents reported being employed full-time (73.8%), while others identified as self-employed (12.3%) or part-time workers (7.7%). Overall, the demographic composition and consumer behavior patterns observed in the sample indicate its representativeness of a larger and more diverse population.

### *Inferential statistics*

Baron and Kenny's (1986) method suggested four steps towards mediation analysis which was implemented to test the hypothesis. Table 2 suggests that step 1 is the direct effect model whereas IVs i.e. interactivity, professionalism and similarity have been used to predict the purchase intention of the live-streaming audience. In Step 1, the model summary indicates that all together IVs account for 49% of the variance of purchase intention. Therefore, professionalism, similarity and interactivity as predictors have significant associations with purchase intention. Moreover, at  $F_{40.33}(p < 0.001)$ , the direct effect regression model is overall significant. At the same time, Similarity ( $\beta = 0.278^{**}$ ), Professionalism ( $\beta = 0.221^{**}$ ) and Interactivity ( $\beta = 0.145^{**}$ ) all have a direct and significant relation with purchase intention (Figure 5). Henceforth, from this direct effect model it is evident that  $H_1^a$ ,  $H_2^a$ , and  $H_3^a$ , all the hypotheses without mediation factor are acceptable at  $p < 0.05$ . According to Baron and Kenny (1986), being significant at  $< 0.05$  validates the acceptance of the first step. Therefore, all the predictors have a direct effect on purchase intention without any mediation effect. Contextually direct effects (Unstandardized Beta) are 0.278 for similarity, 0.221 for professionalism and 0.145 for Interactivity. In layman's terms, for every one-unit increase in an equivalent unit, similarity brings a 0.278-unit increment in the intention of purchase, while professionalism and interactivity correspond to 0.221-unit and 0.145-unit increases in the live streamer's purchase intention.

**Table 2: Model summary**

Model	Path	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F Value	Sig.	Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	t Value	Sig.
Step 1	IV->DV	0.70	0.49	40.335	0.000*				
		0	0		*	Similarity: 0.278	0.076	3.641	0.000*
						Professionalism: 0.221	0.091	2.422	0.017*
						Interactivity: 0.145	0.066	2.205	0.029*
Step 2	IV->MV	0.87	0.76	134.54	0.000*				
		3	2	8	*	Similarity: 0.025	0.067	0.370	0.712
						Professionalism: 0.339 and	0.08	4.221	0.001*
							0.058	10.72	*
								0	

						interactivity: 0.621			0.001* *
Step 3	MV->DV	0.62 5	0.39 0	81.985	0.000* *				
						Attachment: 0.488	0.053	9.055	0.000* *
Step 4	IV->MV->DV	0.71 3	0.50 8	40.335	0.033*				
						Similarity: 0.273	0.075	3.621	0.000* *
						Professionalism: 0.148	0.096	1.540	0.126
						Interactivity: 0.011	0.090	0.127	0.899
						Attachment: 0.215	0.100	2.159	0.033*

	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Similarity	0.278119	0.058	0.336
Professionalism	0.220759	0.031	0.251
Interactivity	0.144806	0.023	0.167

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

In Step 2 of the analysis of mediation, Baron and Kenny (1986) suggest that the direct effect of predictors on mediators should be estimated. Here, in step two, the association between the IVs and the mediator variable attachment has been estimated. As the table suggests, the combined impact of professionalism, interactivity and similarity explains the 76.2% variance in attachment level. This only indicates that 76.2% of the predicted changes in consumer purchase intention can be explained by these three independent factors of celebrity influence. Moreover, with an F-value of 134.548, this model is also significant at  $p < 0.001$ . The unstandardized beta coefficient suggests that professionalism has the largest direct effect ( $\beta = 0.339$ ) on attachment. This is followed by interactivity ( $\beta = 0.621$ ). However, the effect of similarity is considerably low ( $\beta = 0.025$ ). In general, professionalism and interactivity seem to highly influence the attachment over the similarity between the internet celebrity and the followers. Nevertheless, step 2 validates there is a direct relationship between predicting factors and mediators which calls for the third step.

In Step 3 of the mediation analysis, examining the direct influence of the mediator variable on the dependent variable needs to be done (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Here, the table suggests that the mediating factor attachment has been regressed with purchase intention to check if there is a significant relation exists. This is important because it helps to understand that any mediation effects observed in the final model cannot be justified by the direct influence of a mediator. The table suggests that the model summary and influencer attachment as predicting factors can explain 39% of the variance in purchase intention ( $F = 81.985$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). At  $p < 0.05$ , this model is also significant considering the positive correlation between the two factors. The coefficient for attachment ( $\beta = 0.488$ ) represents a strong positive effect between influencer attachment and purchase intention. This indicates a single unit increase in the attachment is going to influence a 0.488 unit increase in the purchase intention. This is significantly good in terms of carrying out the final mediation model. Internet celebrity followers who have attachments with influencers on live-streaming platforms are more likely to have higher purchase intentions. Hence, confirmation on step 1, step 2 and step 3 direct

relationship as per Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation model, the final step is regressing these three predicting factors against purchase intention with a mediating effect of influencer attachment.

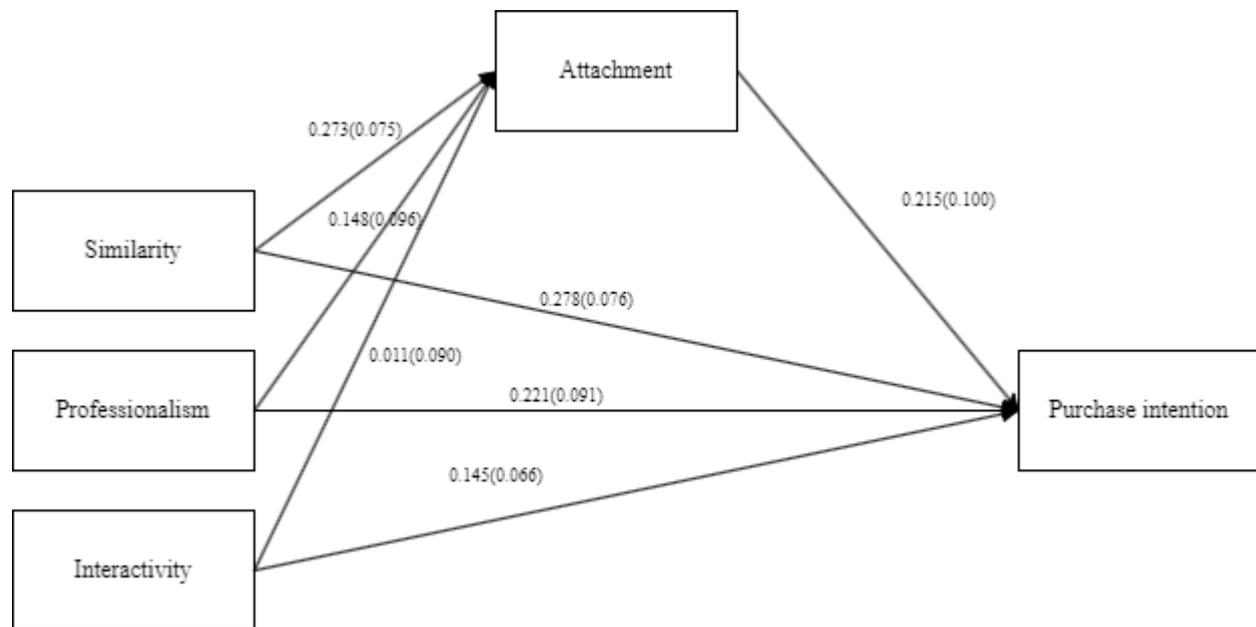


Figure 3: Direct and indirect effects

In Step 4 of the mediation analysis, the final model considers the indirect effect of the IVs on the purchase intention under the influence of influencer attachment as a mediation channel. Here, the mediation model explains 50.8% of the changes in outcome variable purchase intention. Now, considering the step 1 model which explained about 49% of the outcome variance, the mediating factor has certainly increased the model fit. The indirect effect through attachment is significant at  $p=0.03 < 0.05$  along with a beta of 0.215. However, the model shows that similarity is still significant at  $p < 0.05$  whereas the remaining two predictors professionalism ( $p=0.126$ ) and interactivity ( $p=0.899$ ) do not facilitate any significant relation with the purchase intention. Therefore, it can be said that influencer attachment partially (H1c) mediates the relationship between influencer similarity and purchase intention ( $t^{\text{direct}}_{3.641} > t^{\text{indirect}}_{3.621}$ ). At the same time, influencer attachment fully mediates the relationship between professionalism (H2c) and purchase intention as well as interactivity (H3c) and purchase intention. The table also suggests the direct, indirect and total effects of the predictors on purchase intention. Considering the total effects of 0.336, influencer similarity has the highest influence on purchase intention thus followed by professionalism (0.251) and interactivity (0.167). The other direct and indirect effects have been showcased in Figure 3. Nevertheless, influencer attachment does indeed mediate the relationship among influencer professionalism, interactivity, similarity and purchase intention.

## Discussion

*Consumers are influenced to make purchases on live-streaming platforms by internet celebrities who share similar interests.*

Influencers, or internet celebrities, are essentially ordinary individuals whose prominence stems from increased exposure. Consequently, there shouldn't be a stark contrast between typical consumers and celebrity influencers. This notion, as highlighted by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), underscores the inherent similarity between internet celebrities and their followers. Research findings consistently indicate that the perceived likeness between consumers and influencers significantly predicts purchase behavior. When consumers share common attributes like interests or lifestyles with an internet celebrity, they are more inclined to purchase products endorsed or used by that celebrity, validating the observations of Hussain et al. (2023) regarding the impact of personality similarities on purchase intention. Tong et al. (2023) further assert that internet celebrities' knowledge, charisma, and lifestyle directly influence consumer

behavior, with purchase intention being particularly heightened when attachment is involved. This study suggests that the mediating role of celebrity attachment can be a pivotal factor in purchase intention, as evidenced by Shah et al.'s (2023) findings indicating that consumers who perceive similarities with influencers tend to develop strong emotional attachments, thereby enhancing purchase intention. This emotional bond, described by My-Trinh and Huong-Linh (2021) as a form of virtual friendship bonding, deepens as followers feel increasingly attached to influencers. Consequently, consumers are more likely to mirror their interests and lifestyles after celebrities whom they perceive as similar to themselves. This mutual virtual relationship, strengthened by attachment involvement, significantly influences purchase decisions, as consumers are more compelled to follow celebrity recommendations as their attachment grows. Therefore, in the context of influencer-consumer relationships, attachment warrants serious consideration due to its indirect yet substantial impact on purchase intention.

*When consumers perceive professionalism in internet celebrities, their purchase intention increases as a result of the attachment they feel towards these influencers.*

The professionalism of internet celebrities was assessed based on knowledge and credibility dimensions. While there was a significant direct effect of professionalism, attachment fully mediated the relationship with purchase intention. This suggests that followers are more inclined to make online purchases when they perceive an internet celebrity as professional. Essentially, the perceived professionalism stemming from knowledgeable and credible information sharing directly influences consumers' purchase decisions. This aligns with Shah et al.'s (2023) findings, indicating that the quality information provided by influencers enhances credibility and subsequently boosts purchase intention. Similarly, Pérez-Cabañero et al. (2023) found a positive relationship between influencer expertise and purchase intention, with attachment fully mediating this connection, thereby elucidating consumer purchase behavior. Followers are drawn to professionalism and its influence due to their attachment dynamics with internet celebrities. Consumer emotional dynamics play a significant role in driving purchase decisions when followers perceive certain celebrities as highly professional, knowledgeable, and credible. The development of a parasocial relationship with a celebrity, perceived as professional, can be attributed to the emotional attachment angle. As noted by Stever (2017), this attachment often arises from prolonged exposure to a celebrity's content, which fosters trust and ultimately leads to attachment. Therefore, consumers are more likely to base their purchase decisions on their emotional attachment to an internet celebrity rather than solely on professionalism.

*When considering the interactivity of influencers, consumers' purchase intention increases due to their attachment to internet celebrities.*

The interactivity of internet celebrities has been framed within the context of social interaction and flow experience dimensions. The findings indicate a direct and significant relationship between interactivity and purchase intention, suggesting that when influencers exhibit interactive behavior, it positively impacts purchase decisions. This can manifest as responding to follower comments or engaging with the live-streaming audience in real time. This finding is consistent with Jiang's (2023) research, which also found that appropriate interaction positively influences purchase intention. Consequently, social interaction indeed has a positive effect on purchase intention. However, attachment fully mediates the relationship between influencer interactivity and purchase intention. The complete mediation of attachment by influencer interactivity on purchase intention underscores the crucial role of the emotional bond forged between influencers and followers in the purchasing process. While interaction initially captures followers' attention, it is emotional attachment that solidifies the consumer-influencer relationship, ultimately leading to increased purchase intention. Therefore, prioritizing genuine interaction with the audience can foster higher attachment, thereby enhancing consumer purchase intention.

## Conclusion

The research underscores the multifaceted nature of internet celebrities' influence on followers, suggesting direct associations with influencer characteristics or mediation through other channels. In this study, characteristics like similarity, professionalism, and interactivity were examined as influencers, with their

effects mediated by influencer attachment. The findings revealed that these characteristics are either fully or partially mediated by attachment, with similarity having the most significant impact on purchase intention, indicating that shared interests or lifestyles drive this behavior. While attachment plays a crucial role, similarity also exerts its influence.

Professionalism, defined by knowledge and credibility, impacts followers' purchase intention through emotional attachment. Internet celebrities must not only cultivate expertise but also foster emotional connections to maximize viewership. Likewise, creating an interactive live-streaming environment can enhance purchase intention, but social interaction and engagement strategies must prioritize building emotional and personal attachment. Authentic interaction can foster this attachment, increasing follower participation in purchases.

Overall, attachment-based live streaming or influencer marketing is pivotal for driving purchase intention in a virtual, real-time engagement-based platform. Marketers and brands should focus on establishing genuine relationships with followers, leveraging common beliefs, professionalism, and interaction elements to forge emotional connections. Internet celebrities can enhance their success by cultivating an emotionally connected fan base, crucial for both marketers and influencers as purchase intention heavily relies on attachment. Ultimately, the success of the Wanghong economy hinges on these attachment dynamics, with internet celebrities effectively leveraging the emotional aspect of viewers to bolster their influence and engagement.

#### *Theoretical and practical implication*

The discussion highlighted a gap in existing literature, emphasizing the need for research that focuses on the association between attachment and influencer characteristics, rather than trust. This study addresses this gap by examining the roles of similarity, professionalism, and interactivity within attachment mediation. By demonstrating the mediating role of attachment in the relationships between influencers' characteristics and followers' purchase intention, this study extends our understanding of these complex pathways. Additionally, it contributes to a more generalized theoretical framework in marketing, communication, and social studies (Adamu et al., 2018).

The success of the Wanghong economy hinges on the selection of effective marketing strategies that resonate with customers. When brands opt for modern social media-based marketing over traditional methods, it becomes crucial to identify influencers capable of fostering attachment through professionalism, similarity, or interactivity. This study validates the significance of leveraging attachment in social media marketing effectiveness (Mohamad et al., 2018). While this research may not directly influence policy change, it can certainly impact brand strategy and marketing dynamics. Brands are expected to adjust their marketing efforts by selecting influencers who possess these three characteristics along with fostering attachment points.

#### *Limitation*

This study has two notable limitations that warrant attention. Firstly, its cross-sectional design may have overlooked temporal changes and causality, limiting the depth of analysis. Secondly, the small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the influencing factors examined in this study are not comprehensive enough. Other influencer characteristics, such as attractiveness and gender, as well as consumers' traits, have not been adequately addressed, potentially impacting the mediation model. Future research should aim to overcome these limitations by enlarging the sample size and considering a broader range of influencer and consumer characteristics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

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## Appendix: Questionnaire

Professionalism	1. The influencers I watched had expert knowledge of the product	Xu & Kim (2022)	IPK
	2. I think the product information provided by influencers is true and accurate		IPC
Interactivity	3. The influencers I watched in the live commerce room were always quick to respond to comments from netizens	Xu & Kim (2022) Sun et al. (2021)	IISI
	4. When I watch influencers live commerce, I have no thoughts other than buying stuff		IIFE
Similarity	5. I only watch with live streamers who have similar interest in products	Xu & Kim (2022)	ISI
	6. I only watch live streamers whose lifestyle I want to achieve in the future		ISLS
Attachment	7. I feel emotionally connected to some influencers	Zhang & Choi (2022)	IA1
	8. Some influencers are very special to me		IA2
	9. Sometimes I miss some influencers		IA3
Purchase Intention	10. Watching influencers make me want to buy	Zhang & Choi (2022)	PI1
	11. If there is a need to buy, I will first buy the goods recommended by influential people		PI2
	12. I buy things that influencers recommend again or more times		PI3
	13. I am mostly satisfied with my purchase		PI4