

UDC 332

## PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION AS A MEDIATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF BEAUTY INFLUENCERS TOWARDS PURCHASE INTENTION: A STUDY OF BEAUTY CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Nuriyanna Nuriyanna\*, Moeljadi Moeljadi, Yuniarinto Agung

University of Brawijaya, Indonesia

\*E-mail: [nuriyanna31@gmail.com](mailto:nuriyanna31@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Digitalization has revolutionized the marketing world, shifting marketers' focus on social media marketing. Social media marketing has opened new opportunities for many industries, including the beauty industry. The new trends in social media marketing is employing Beauty Influencers as product endorser. Beauty Influencers need to have good Trustworthiness, Expertise, Physical attractiveness, Respect, and Similarity. This study analyzed the role of Beauty Influencer (Trustworthiness, Expertise, Physical attractiveness, Respect, and Similarity) on Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction. This explanatory study involved 150 followers of Tasya Farasya on Instagram and Youtube as respondents selected using purposive sampling based on certain criteria. Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis was performed using SmartPLS software. The results of this study showed that Trustworthiness, Expertise, Respect and Similarity strongly affected Para-Social Interaction. Physical attractiveness showed no effect towards Para-Social Interaction. This study also found that Trustworthiness, Expertise, Respect and Similarity might affect Purchase Intention through para-social interaction. Unfortunately, Para-Social Interaction did not show similar influence on Physical attractiveness towards Purchase Intention.

### KEY WORDS

Beauty influencer, para-social interaction, purchase intention.

Digitalization has revolutionized marketing world within just two decades. Traditional marketing through TV and radio have been switched to digital platforms (Killian & McManus, 2015). Herhausen, Miočević, Morgan & Kleijnen (2020) mentioned that digitalization has brought positive effects on marketing, yet at the same time threatening some traditional business models. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate tools and digital technology towards the existing business model to help overcome difficulties in digital marketing (Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström & Freundt, 2020).

Digitalization occurs in many forms, including social media marketing (Herhausen et al, 2020). Social media offers an opportunity to create trust with bigger audience on a cheaper expense (Leeflang et al, 2014). Many industries have obtained benefits of social media marketing, especially the beauty industry.

Large women population in Indonesia is a lucrative ground for beauty industries to thrive. KEMENPERIN (Ministry of Industry) showed that cosmetic industry has grown by 20% on 2018 or four times greater from the one in 2017. The competition in beauty industry has encouraged business owners to use various marketing strategies to sell their products. A survey done by We Are Social (2020) showed that the use of social media is dominated by millennials and Z generation from the age of 18-34. The domination of these two generations in social media makes social media marketing an effective approach that can be employed by beauty industries.

Recent trend in social media marketing is by cooperating with celebrities as endorsers (Gupta, Kishore, & Verma, 2015). Several criteria should be possessed by celebrity endorsers including trustworthiness, expertise, knowledge of the marketed product, physical attractiveness, similarities with their audience, and they have to gain respect from their audience (Shimp, 2014). Many brands and businesses entities often collaborate with "popular figures" as their brand ambassador in social media. The term public figure in this

context is not limited on singers, actors, or athletes only (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Instead, the scope is broader, including anyone who has certain influence called as influencers (Abidin, 2018). Influencers are brand ambassadors in social media and they imposed a vital role in marketing (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Tasya Farasya is one of famous Beauty Influencers in Indonesia with large number of followers and viewers who share strong bond each other. This kind of relationship is referred to as ParaSocial-Interaction. Followers on social media go through the affective and internalization process of ParaSocial-Interaction with Influencers, leading to higher purchase intentions towards the products being endorsed by Influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Previous researches have noticed a significant effect of each characteristic of Beauty Influencers on Purchase Intention, yet contradictions also occur. Gupta et al (2015) showed that Expertise does not significantly affect Purchase Intention. Another research from Hani & Andre (2018) showed that Physical Attractiveness has no significant effect on Purchase Intention. Unfortunately, only few researchers have analyzed the simultaneous influence of the five characteristics, especially the Respect aspect, creating gaps that should be addressed through a study.

This gap then encouraged the researcher to add ParaSocial-Interaction as intervening variable in the model concept. Lee & Watkins, (2016) argued that ParaSocial-Interaction is an appropriate theoretical framework for studying the one-sided relationship between celebrities and fans, such on social media users. This study also follows up on research from Lee & Watkins (2016) in terms of developing the social media platform used, not only on Youtube but also Instagram. The aim of this experiment is to analyze the role of Beauty Influencers' characteristics (Trustworthiness, Expertise, Physical attractiveness, Respect, and Similarity) on Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction, especially on beauty content on social media.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Marketing Communication

Kotler and Keller (2016) explained that marketing communication is a means used by companies to inform, persuade, and remind consumers either directly or indirectly about the products and brands they sell. Companies might have different general objectives for their marketing communication programs such as informing customers about products, services, and terms of sale, persuading customers to choose certain products and brands, and encouraging action to buy products (Shimp & Andrews, 2013). Those goals can be achieved by applying various marketing communication platforms, including social media.

### Social Media Marketing

The newest and fastest growing channel for direct communication and sales is through digital platforms known as online marketing or internet marketing. The advancement of internet technology has involved marketers deeply into social media marketing. Kotler and Keller (2016) also agreed that social media makes an important component of internet marketing. Social media can be used as a forum for marketers to carry out marketing activities. Social media may pose as a process by which companies create, communicate and deliver online marketing offerings through social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships that enhance stakeholder value by facilitating interaction, sharing information, offering personalized purchase recommendations, and word of mouth creation among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services.

### Beauty Influencer

An influencer can lead public's opinion through reviews on certain brands and products. They could influence potential customers as well (Abidin, 2018). Influencers in beauty content are often referred to as Beauty Influencers.

### Beauty Influencers' Characteristics

Social media influencers are like traditional celebrities. They have developed their own personal brand in front of their audience. However, social media Influencers act as individuals and attract greater product engagement. They use their popularity for marketing purposes (Kay et al., 2020). The characteristics of Beauty Influencers include:

- a. Trustworthiness (Trust) refers to one's reliability, honesty and integrity.
- b. Expertise refers to special abilities, knowledge, or capabilities relevant to the brand being endorsed.
- c. Physical Attractiveness is a trait that refers to pleasant look based on the concept of attractiveness in the society.
- d. Respect is a quality that makes a person being admired or even appreciated for his/her qualities and achievements.
- e. Similarity with the target audience is the extent to which an Influencer matches the audience in terms of related characteristics.

### Para-Social Interaction

Para-Social Interaction can be defined as one-way communication without face-to-face meeting (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The relationship between influencers and users on social media is not unidirectional, because users can add comments and discuss content, and Influencers have can reply to messages and add comments. Influencers cannot really respond to all the requests of their followers and engage in discussions due to large number of followers and reactions they may gain on their social media (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This interaction is also regarded as Para-Social Interaction.

### Purchase Intention

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2014), Purchase Intention is consumer's behavior that appears as response to objects that indicate the customer's desire to make a purchase. Ferdinand (2014) explains that there are three indicators of consumers' purchase intention; intensity of information seeking, the desire to buy immediately and the desire for preference

### Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study analyzed six main constructs consisting of five independent variables; Trustworthiness, Expertise, Physical Attractiveness, Respect, Similarity, while Purchase Intention is the dependent variable. In addition, Para-Social Interaction is seen as an intervening variable as explained in Figure 1:

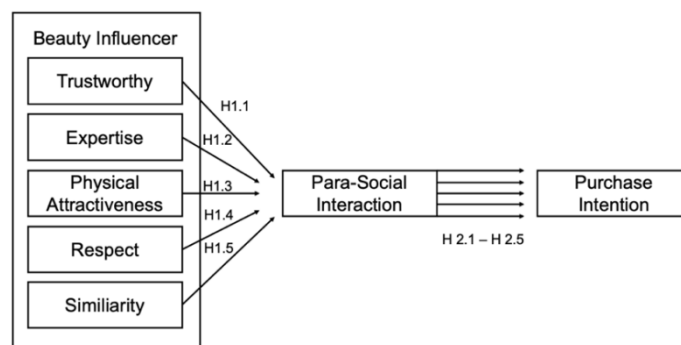


Figure 1 – Framework and Hypothesis of the Study

- H1.1: Trustworthiness has a significant positive effect on Para-Social Interaction;
- H1.2: Expertise has a significant positive effect on Para-Social Interaction;
- H1.3: Physical Attractiveness has a significant positive effect on Para-Social Interaction;
- H1.4: Respect has a significant positive effect on Para-Social Interaction;

- H1.5: Similarity has a significant positive effect on Para-Social Interaction;
- H2.1: Para-Social Interaction mediates the relationship between Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention;
- H2.2: Para-Social Interaction mediates the relationship between Expertise and Purchase Intention;
- H2.3: Para-Social Interaction mediates the relationship between Physical Attractiveness and Purchase Intention;
- H2.4: Para-Social Interaction mediates the relationship between Respect and Purchase Intention;
- H2.5: Para-Social Interaction mediates the relationship between Similarity and Purchase Intention.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study was conducted from April to May 2021. The population in this study included all followers of Tasya Farasya on Instagram and Youtube. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to select 150 respondents based on two criteria; women over the age of 18 years and women who follow Tasya Farasya on social media accounts (Instagram and Youtube). Questionnaires were distributed to collect the data of this study. The data were then analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Square (PLS) on SmartPLS 3.0 software.

All indicators used in this study refer to several previous studies. Trustworthiness was adopted from Gupta et al., (2015) which consists of three indicators Expertise was adopted from Gupta et al., (2015) which consists of two indicators. Physical Attractiveness was adopted from Sokolova & Kefi (2020) with one indicator. Respect was adopted from Shimp (2014) with one indicator. While Similarity was adopted from Lee & Watkins, (2016), consisting of two indicators. Whereas, three indicators of Para-Social Interaction adopted from Ding & Qiu (2017), Sokolova & Kefi (2020), Sakib et al., (2020) and Lee & Watkins (2016). Finally, the Purchase Intention was adopted from Ferdinand (2014) and Sokolova & Kefi (2020) with three indicators. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) based on Partial Least Square (PLS) was done to analyze the data using SmartPLS 3.0 software.

## RESULTS OF STUDY

Based on the results of data processing, of the total 150 respondents, 100% were female. Women are also the main target for the beauty industry. The majority of respondents aged between 18-25 years old or 80.7%. The remaining 19.3% aged between 26-35 years. This shows that Tasya Farasya's active followers on Instagram and Youtube are the millennial generation or generation Y and generation Z aging between 15-45 years. 77 respondents or 51.3% were students. While respondents working as private employees were 36 respondents (24%). Five respondents (3.3%) worked as Civil Servants, and 13 respondents (8.7%) were entrepreneurs, while 19 respondents (12.7%) worked other types of works.

Table 1 shows that the scale, magnitude and statistical suitability of this study have been accepted. The average variance extracted (AVE) value of all latent variables shows a score of 0.633 for Trustworthiness, 0.669 for Expertise, 0.873 for Physical Attractiveness, 1.000 for Respect, 0.786 for Similarity, 0.751 for Purchase Intention and 0.603 for Para-Social Interaction.

The Cronbach's alpha value for the reliability criteria in this study is quite high, where Respect has the highest Cronbach's alpha value. Sequentially, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the seven variables used in this study ranged from 0.710 to 1,000, showing that all variables were acceptable. The composite reliability (CR) values were 0.838, 0.858, 0.932, 1,000, 0.880, 0.923 and 0.932, where the overall value is > 0.80. Thus, all constructs are reliable were declared acceptable, both according to composite reliability and Cronbach's

alpha. The R-square value of the Para-Social Interaction variable is 0.5109 and the Purchase Intention is 0.3636.

Table 1 – Cronbach Alpha, Composite Alpha, AVE

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Trustworthiness	0.633	0.838	0.710
Expertise	0.669	0.858	0.753
Physical Attractiveness	0.873	0.932	0.855
Respect	1.000	1.000	1.000
Similarity	0.786	0.880	0.728
Purchase Intention	0.751	0.923	0.889
Para-Social Interaction	0.603	0.932	0.917

Source: Processed primary data, 2021.

Goodness of Fit (GoF) in this study was calculated using the  $Gof = \sqrt{AVE \times R^2}$ ;  $Gof = \sqrt{0.759 \times 0.437}$ ;  $Gof = 0.5761$  (57,61%). The results of the GoF calculation of 0.5761 indicate that the model can make good predictions. This means that the model has a high ability to explain the empirical data in this study.

The results of the analysis of the hypothesis testing the direct influence of Trustworthiness on Para-Social Interaction was found significant with a path coefficient of 0.274 and a t-statistic of 4.033 > t table (1.960). Based on these results, hypothesis 1.1 is accepted, which indicates that Trustworthiness has a significant effect on Para-Social Interaction. The influence of Expertise on Para-Social Interaction was found significant with a path coefficient of 0.151 and a t-statistic of t-statistic of 2.518 > t-table (1.960). Based on these results, hypothesis 1.2 is accepted, which indicates that Expertise has a significant effect on Para-Social Interaction. Thus, hypothesis 1.2 is accepted. However, Physical Attractiveness had insignificant influence on Para-Social Interaction, with a path coefficient of 0.023 and a t-statistic of 0.364 < from t table (1.960). Therefore, hypothesis 1.3 is rejected, indicating that Physical Attractiveness does not have a significant effect on Para-Social Interaction. Furthermore, Respect significantly affected Para-Social Interaction with a path coefficient of 0.192 and a t-statistic of 2.590 > from t table (1.960). Based on these results, hypothesis 1.4 is accepted. Meanwhile, the influence of similarity on Para-Social Interaction is known to be significant with a path coefficient of 0.320 and a t-statistic of 4.324 > t table (1.960). Based on these results, hypothesis 1.5 is accepted, which indicates that Similarity has a significant effect on Para-Social Interaction.

Analysis of the hypothesis which tested the indirect effect of Trustworthiness on Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction was found significant with a path coefficient of 0.165 with a t-statistical value of 3.755 > from t table (1.960). Based on these results, hypothesis 2.1 is accepted, indicating a role for Para-Social Interaction as a mediator of the influence of Trustworthiness on Purchase Intention. The role of Para-Social Interaction in mediating the influence of Expertise on Purchase Intention was found significant with a path coefficient of 0.091 and a statistical t value of 2.436 > t table (1.960). Hence, hypothesis 2.2 is accepted, stating that Para-Social Interaction mediates the influence of Expertise on Purchase Intention. Para-Social Interaction was found to have insignificant mediating role on the relationship between Physical Attractiveness and Purchase Intention with a path coefficient of 0.014 and a statistical t value of 0.362 < t table (1.960). Based on these results, hypothesis 2.3 is rejected, showing that Para-Social Interaction does not mediate the effect of Physical Attractiveness on Purchase Intention. Para-Social Interaction in mediating the effect of Respect on Purchase Intention was found significant with a path coefficient of 0.116 and a statistical t value of 2.504 > t table (1.960), accepting hypothesis 2.4. Therefore, Para-Social Interaction mediates the influence of Respect on Purchase Intention. The mediating role of Para-Social Interaction on the influence of Similarity on Purchase Intention was significant with a path coefficient of 0.193 with a statistical t value of 3.987 > t table (1.960). Based on these results, hypothesis 2.5 is accepted, indicating the presence of Para-Social Interaction as an intervening variable in the influence of Similarity on Purchase Intention.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### ***The Influence of Trustworthiness on Para-Social Interaction***

This study showed that trustworthiness significantly affects Para-Social Interaction. Thus, the greater the belief in Tasya Farasya's communication on social media (Instagram and Youtube), the stronger the Para-Social Interaction. Likewise, Sakib et al (2019) which also found that trustworthiness significantly influences Para-Social Interaction.

Tasya Farasya's honesty in making product reviews convinces her followers that the products being endorsed are precisely as explained and not exaggerated. A survey conducted by the ZAP Beauty Index in 2020 stated that women in Indonesia take Beauty Influencers as their role models in the field of beauty, especially for women aged 16-23 years who are the millennial generation according to the majority of respondents in this study. This indicates that the millennial generation (aged 18-25 years) trusts Beauty Influencers more as their reference source in the beauty field.

### ***The Effect of Expertise on Para-Social Interaction***

This study resulted in the finding that Expertise has a significant influence on Para-Social Interaction. This proves that the more expert a Beauty Influencer in making product endorsement on social media, the stronger the Para-Social Interaction. This finding is in line with research from Sakib et al (2019) which also shows that Expertise has a significant effect on Para-Social Interaction.

Easy-to-understand content will attract followers to always engage in the content. Contents that follow the global beauty trend always attract followers' attention. Beauty Influencers should take advantage of the digitalization era to make their content easily accessed by followers. The greater the intensity of Tasya Farasya in making beauty-related contents, the stronger the interaction on social media, leading to stronger Para-Social Interaction bonds.

### ***The Influence of Physical Attractiveness on Para-Social Interaction***

This study found that Physical Attractiveness has no effect on Para-Social Interaction. This shows greater physical attractiveness does not affect the strength of Para-Social Interaction on social media. This result supports Sokolova and Kefi (2020) who also found no significant influence of physical attractiveness on Para-Social Interaction. However, these findings are different from the one found by Lee and Watkins (2016) and Sakib et al (2019) which showed a positive and significant influence of Physical Attractiveness on Para-Social Interaction.

As found in this study that physical attractiveness has insignificant influence, the credibility or ability of a beauty influencer in endorsing beauty products might be the key instead. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) stated that celebrities who appear on traditional media such as TV and magazines tend to only prioritize perfect physical appearance instead of strong interactions. On the other hand, the role of beauty influencers on social media is to bring high-intensity interactions with their followers in order to keep them amused and engaged with the contents. It implies that perfect physical appearance should not be the only focus. Instead, influencers' abilities should be the main consideration. .

### ***The Influence of Respect on Para-Social Interaction***

This study showed that Respect has a significant influence on Para-Social Interaction. This shows greater respect for Tasya Farasya will be followed by stronger Para-Social Interaction on social media. This finding goes in line with Shimp (2014), stating that Respect is one common characteristics of influential beauty influencers.

The content uploaded by Tasya Farasya reflects her true personality that can attract and engage followers on Instagram and Youtube. It can be regarded that Tasya Farasya's attractive personality makes her a good role model for her followers, especially in the field of beauty. This also proves that Respect has an important influence, especially on Para-Social Interaction.

### ***The influence of Similarity on Para-Social Interaction***

This study resulted in the finding that Similarity has a significant effect on Para-Social Interaction. This shows that the more followers have in common with Tasya Farasya, the stronger the Para-Social Interaction built. The results of this study support the research conducted by Lee and Watkins (2016), Sokolova and Kevi (2020) and Sakib et al (2019). The three studies also revealed that Similarity has a significant influence on Para-Social Interaction.

In this study, similarity means shared mind set about certain characteristics such as ideal skin tone, skin type, age, gender, to ethnicity and religion. According to the findings of this study, Tasya Farasya's opinion about beauty products on social media share something in common with her followers which then affect the strength of Para-Social Interaction.

### ***The role of Para-Social Interaction in mediating the influence of Trustworthiness on Purchase Intention***

This study resulted in the findings of Trustworthiness significantly affects Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction. It indicates that followers' trust in what Tasya Farasya can lead to stronger Para-Social Interaction, which then increases the Purchase Intention for the products being endorsed. This results conform with the one found by Sakib et al (2019) which shows the mediating effect of Para-Social Interaction in the relationship between Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention.

When Tasya Farasya's followers trust her product reviews, they will maintain strong Para-Social Interaction which then increases their Purchase Intention. Para-Social Interaction between Tasya Farasya and her followers must always be maintained by always showing Trustworthiness in reviewing any product in order to increase the Purchase Intention. Product reviews should be made honest based on Tasya Farasya's feeling and thoughts about the product, without exaggerating it.

### ***The role of Para-Social Interaction in mediating the influence of Expertise on Purchase Intention***

Expertise was found to have a significant influence on Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction. This indicates that Tasya Farasya's expertise in endorsing beauty products on her social media can increase Para-Social Interaction which increases followers' Purchase Intention. Sakib et al (2019) also found similar finding that Expertise affects Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction.

A beauty influencer must have the ability to review certain product in understandable way. A beauty influencer must be smart in taking advantage of conditions and attracting the attention of as many followers as possible, including during the Covid-19 pandemic that occurred at the time this research was conducted. A beauty influencer should also maintain good interaction with followers, because during the Covid-19 pandemic, people tend to stay at home, leading to longer time spent on smartphone, especially in using social media. The data box (2020) revealed an increase in the use of social media applications in Southeast Asia by 38% in 2020.

### ***The role of Para-Social Interaction in mediating the influence of Physical Attractiveness on Purchase Intention***

This study showed that Physical Attractiveness did not have a significant impact on Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction. More beautiful look does not affect followers' Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction. Likewise, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) also found similar results. However, the results of this study also contradict the research of Lee and Watkins (2016) and Sakib et al (2019) which results showed that Physical Attractiveness positively affect Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction.

Physical attractiveness can become less important among followers who are selective in using beauty products and those who are more concerned with product quality (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). According to the ZAP Beauty Index (2020) there are several considerations before purchasing a product which include product safety, product reviews, product prices, labels (halal, cruelty free, paraben free) and the reputation of the beauty brand itself.

Consumers need to carefully determine the products that they will use. Therefore, despite the close relationship between Tasya Farasya and her followers, Purchase Intention is not affected by Tasya Farasya's Physical Attractiveness.

### ***The role of Para-Social Interaction in mediating the influence of Respect on Purchase Intention***

This study showed that Respect has a significant impact on Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction. This indicates that the respect from followers for Tasya Farasya can increase Para-Social Interaction which then improves their Purchase Intentions for beauty products being reviewed. This finding is in accordance with the theory proposed by Shimp (2014) that Respect is important for a beauty influencer.

Followers will value influencers' opinions more than other celebrities in traditional media (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Influencers who are valued by potential customers will generate greater influence on Purchase Intention (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

### ***The role of Para-Social Interaction in mediating the influence of Similarity towards Purchase Intention***

This study showed that Similarity has a significant impact on Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction. Greater similarity shared between with Tasya Farasya and her followers in terms of beauty products, Para-Social Interaction will improve as well, which then affects the Purchase Intention. Sokolova and Kehi (2020), Lee and Watkins (2016) and Sakib et al (2019) also found similar results. Therefore, Similarity affects Purchase Intention through Para-Social Interaction.

When a beauty influencer has the same skin type, skin tone, and mind set with the followers, it will be easier for followers to choose which beauty products that suit them. Hence, their interest in buying beauty products being endorsed increases as well. A beauty influencer need to explain in detail about their skin condition and how the beauty product reacts on their skin to help followers figure out how the product would work on their skin. Therefore, things in common shared between beauty influencers and their followers will create greater attention.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of this study show that Beauty Influencers need have a sense of Trustworthiness, Expertise, Respect, and Similarity which will strengthen Para-Social Interaction, leading to greater Purchase Intention. Physical Attractiveness of Beauty Influencers does not strengthen the Para-Social Interaction, thus it would not lead to greater Purchase Intention. Followers will consider several aspects of a Beauty Influencer such as Trustworthiness or trusted sources in reviewing beauty products, Expertise of Beauty Influencers in creating content, maintaining interaction on social media, personality, respect and the similarity with Beauty Influencers can strengthen the Para-Social Interaction, leading to greater Purchase Intention. Some other things are not the concern of Tasya Farasya's followers, including Physical Attractiveness. Physical attractiveness is not considered too influential since credibility or ability of a beauty influencer in reviewing beauty products are more important. Thus, followers will have greater trusts to her, rather than just admiring her physical beauty. In addition, followers who are looking for beauty products will be more concerned with the quality of the beauty product itself.

Recommendations for Future Research:

1. Future researchers should investigate further about Para-Social Interaction which may offer different concepts about the role of influencers on social media because in this study there is no evidence that Physical Attractiveness is related to Para-Social Interaction. The concept of Para-Social Interaction used in this study still adapts the concept of relationships among other celebrities or models;



2. Future researchers should investigate further and develop indicators and question items regarding Respect since only few researchers have examined the role of Respect in this context;
3. Future researchers are also encouraged to develop the object of research by examining the role of Beauty Influencers in other social media applications such as Facebook and TikTok.

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