

# Instagram influencers: The role of opinion leadership in consumers' purchase behavior

Farbod Fakhreddin<sup>a</sup> and Pantea Foroudi<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Marketing, Faculty of Human Sciences, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran ([f.fakhreddin@student.pnu.ac.ir](mailto:f.fakhreddin@student.pnu.ac.ir))

<sup>b</sup> Marketing, Branding, and Tourism Department (MBT), Middlesex University, London, UK ([P.Foroudi@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:P.Foroudi@mdx.ac.uk))

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## Abstract

Instagram has gained momentum in influencer marketing for cosmetic products. This study aims to examine the antecedents of social media opinion leadership and its effects on consumers' actual purchase behavior. The results based on a sample of 223 followers reveal that originality, quality, and quantity are essential elements leading a user to be perceived as an opinion leader. Besides, opinion leadership impacts consumers' purchase intention, actual purchase behavior, and purchase loyalty. These findings deepen our understanding of the effects of opinion leadership on consumers' purchase decisions. Moreover, the findings have beneficial implications for developing effective social media marketing communication strategies.

**Keywords:** opinion leadership; purchase intention; purchase behavior; cosmetic industry; Instagram

## **1. Introduction**

Social media has become a part of everyday life and turned into a prominent platform for gathering information on which consumers base their decisions. Opinion leaders are increasingly emerging as influential members of online communities and they have been shown to exert a notable amount of influence on consumption decisions (Thakur et al., 2016; Walter & Brüggemann, 2020). Opinion leaders or influencers are considered as experts or social connectors influencing other people's attitude regarding products and brands (Godey et al., 2016; Oueslati et al., 2021). In cosmetic industry, much evidence exists that major communication channels between companies and consumers have shifted to social media communities (Shen & Bissell, 2013). When marketing related brands, interaction and word-of-mouth on social media are primary sources of information acquisition and purchase intention (Kim & Ko, 2012). More than 90% of cosmetic brands have significant presence on social media platforms and among the current popular social networking sites, Instagram has experienced a notable steady increase in the number of young adult active users (ages 18-29) related to the cosmetic industry (Yesmail, 2015). Instagram has gained noticeable popularity since the number of its monthly active users has reached 1 billion and its active influencers account for a market size of 1.7 billion U.S. dollars worldwide (Statista, 2019c). Furthermore, this platform is decidedly popular among opinion leaders (influencers) due to the fact that it provides dominant benefits such as immediate content sharing and community creation (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Accordingly, companies involved in the cosmetic industry could crucially benefit from Instagram and engagement with its opinion leaders to market their products and influence their consumers' actual purchase behavior.

Cosmetics are various substances and preparations (excluding soap) that are applied to beautify, enhance, and protect the skin, hair, eyes, lips, or teeth (Ishak et al., 2019). Cosmetic industry plays a key role in the worldwide economy. The global market value of this sector has passed 420 billion U.S. dollars and it has experienced an average annual growth rate of 4.08% between 2004 and 2019 (Statista, 2020). Besides the cosmic growth of this industry, increasing consuming passion for beauty products and advancement of social networking sites have notably intensified competition between brands to reach their favorite position in the mind of consumers (Ishak et al., 2019). Contents, such as pictures of purchases and recommendations shared by social media users are effective sources of inspiration for consumers' purchases, and social media platforms considerably influence their purchase decisions (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018). Moreover, social influencers have important roles in social commerce of beauty products, and exchange of information about new trends, styles, products, and brands is the most influential factor on consumers' purchase behavior (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Due to the fact that Instagram has a high degree of penetration, offers windows to post aesthetically appealing and creative contents (photos, videos, stories, etc.), and affects consumers' purchase decisions (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018), it is reasonable to assume that opinion leadership on Instagram plays a crucial role in consumers' purchase behavior about cosmetic products. Furthermore, there is still a dearth of research on Instagram (Kim & Kim, 2019; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). While prior studies have mainly focused on the contents published on Instagram, motives for using Instagram, and the effects of the characteristics of the contents on interaction intention or purchase intention (e.g., Arora et al., 2019; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), the literature notably lacks the investigation of the influence of Instagram opinion leadership on consumers' purchase behavior (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Kim & Kim, 2019). Therefore, this empirical study is aimed at empirically analyzing

the influence of the characteristics of Instagram contents on opinion leadership and its consequent influence on consumers' actual purchase behavior and loyalty.

The advent of Internet and the prevalence of social networking sites have amplified the role of opinion leaders and the contents shared by them usually win their followers' trust (Turcotte et al., 2015). Thus, these trends have increased the importance of research into online opinion leadership. While most prior studies have analyzed online opinion leadership in more textual platforms, such as Twitter (e.g., Park & Kaye, 2017; Walter & Brüggemann, 2020) or blogs (e.g., Li & Du, 2011, 2017), research on more visual platforms, such as Instagram is scarce, particularly despite the fact that Instagram provides better creative tools for posting aesthetically appealing visual contents (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Concerning the antecedents of opinion leadership, popularity of influencers in terms of high numbers of followers increases their perceived opinion leadership (De Veirman et al., 2017). Moreover, originality and uniqueness of contents published on social media could affect influencers' perceived opinion leadership (Gentina et al., 2014; Moldovan et al., 2011). Furthermore, Arora et al. (2019) state that audiences' reactions in terms of the number of likes and comments and influencers' engagement regarding the number of posts play important roles in affecting the perceived opinion leadership. Though prior studies have analyzed these factors, a deeper understanding of the antecedents of opinion leadership is still needed in different contexts (Arora et al., 2019). Accordingly, the present work seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1. Are characteristics of Instagram accounts' contents (perceived originality, uniqueness, quality, and quantity) associated with perceived opinion leadership in the cosmetic sector?

RQ2. Is perceived opinion leadership on Instagram associated with consumers' purchase intention, behavior, and loyalty in the cosmetic sector?

Taking all this into account, it is both theoretically and practically important to have a deeper understanding about the roles played by opinion leaders in the cosmetic industry. Therefore, the present research contributes to the literature on opinion leadership in considerable ways. First, the current study empirically contributes to the theory of opinion leadership and adds to the existing body of knowledge on antecedents of social media opinion leadership and its impacts on consumers' purchase behavior. Arguably, research on influencer marketing in social media is still in its infancy, and though prior studies in the literature indicate the importance of influencer marketing in communicating brands' messages to consumers (e.g., Childers et al., 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), there is a paucity of empirical research examining antecedents of social media opinion leadership and its influence on consumers' purchase intention and behavior (Arora et al., 2019; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Second, the influence of social media opinion leadership on consumers' purchase behavior is empirically undiscovered as previous studies have merely shed light on the associations among opinion leadership and purchase intentions (e.g., Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Accordingly, the present study notably contributes to the literature by indicating whether social media opinion leadership leads to actual purchase decisions. Third, the current research provides empirical support for the application of the theory of opinion leadership in online contexts. Arguably, this theory has developed for offline interactions and prior studies have reported on the links between opinion leadership and purchase intentions in offline contexts (e.g., Cho & Workman, 2011; Goldsmith & De Witt, 2003; Klein et al., 2019). Therefore, this research contributes to the theory of opinion leadership by casting light on antecedents and behavioral consequences of opinion leadership in online contexts.

Moreover, the current study has noticeable implications for marketing and business practitioners, particularly the ones running their businesses in the cosmetic industry. First, the study's findings delineate processes through which an Instagram account turns to be an Instagram influencer and help them augment their persuasive power by casting light on characteristics of contents that result in perceived opinion leadership and consumers' purchase behavior. Second, the findings enable companies to identify the right influencer for promoting their brands or products; as a matter of fact, due to high financial risks of developing marketing communication strategies and complexity of choosing the right influencer (Choi & Rifon, 2012), intuitive managerial decisions might result in counterproductive consequences. Thus, the study's results about significant antecedents of social media opinion leadership and its consequences empower companies to develop and implement efficacious influencer marketing strategies. Finally, the study illuminates the path to successful collaboration between companies and influencers. Arguably, the findings equip them to gain a deep understanding regarding antecedents of influencer marketing and consumers' behavioral intentions and, thus, empower them to collaboratively develop and implement marketing communication strategies that bring about actual purchase outcomes.

Lastly, the present work is structured as follows: first, we present the literature and theoretical background of our research and then develop the research hypotheses. Second, we explain the research context and data collection procedures and then describe measurement validation processes. Third, we present the research results and discuss the pertinent findings. Finally, we delineate theoretical and practical implications of our study and provide directions for future research in order to cast light on crucial roles of social media opinion leadership in the cosmetic industry.

## **2. Literature review and hypotheses development**

### ***2.1 Theory of opinion leadership***

The present study has relied on the theory of opinion leadership in order to address the pertinent research questions (Dubois et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Turcotte et al., 2015; Zhang & Lee, 2013). The theory of opinion leadership stems from a study, conducted by Lazarsfeld et al. (1948), stating that contrary to previous assumptions that mass communications influence people's behavior directly, opinion leaders obtain information from mass media and, in turn, disseminate it directly among members of the public through word-of-mouth. This process, called "the two-step flow model of influence," was further developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). Extensive computer simulations of this process revealed that the influence was driven more by interactions among members of the social environment. Arguably, besides two-way dialogues with opinion leaders, the members vigorously communicated information and created information cascades similar to an avalanche (Solomon, 2018). Accordingly, the central premise of the theory of opinion leadership is that opinion leaders play important roles in media and communication ecosystem, and we witness the information cascades both in online and offline contexts; thus, the roles of opinion leaders in impacting their followers' opinions have become even greater resulting in significant influence on their associates' behavioral intentions (Dubois et al., 2020; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Turcotte et al., 2015).

In view of the theory of opinion leadership, opinion leaders are individuals who exert a noticeable amount of influence on other people's attitudes (Godey et al., 2016). They could be knowledgeable people about a particular topic (experts) or people who have vast social connections (social connectors) (Goldenberg et al., 2006). Opinion leaders are characterized as being a product or service maven, an active participant in online communities, or an aesthete

regarding purchase decisions (Leal et al., 2014). The theory of opinion leadership has emphasized the significant roles of opinion leaders in impacting their followers' behavioral intentions as they facilitate diffusion of information and influence people's consumption choices (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Song et al., 2017). As communication technologies have advanced markedly, more people prefer to communicate information through the Internet (Ishak et al., 2019), and this shift has elevated the importance of social media opinion leadership contributing to the distribution of information and influencing purchase decisions (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Therefore, these interpersonal communications and information acquisition through opinion leadership could significantly influence consumers' purchase decisions about cosmetic products as they often struggle with assessing the specifics or overall value of hedonistically important products or services (Song et al., 2017).

Opinion leaders are likely to influence their peers and followers since they are perceived as models for others and their shared information is found to be reliable, interesting and persuasive (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Prior studies indicate that consumers view information from interpersonal communications as a more dependable and credible source in comparison to mass media and advertisement, and they are skeptical about conventional brand-driven advertising, bypassing it as intrusive and disruptive content (De Veirman et al., 2017; Flynn et al., 1996). Thus, opinion leaders like celebrities might be found as highly arousing influencers affecting their followers' consumption choices and purchase decisions (Geng et al., 2020). On the other hand, we find opinion seekers who research products or services before purchasing them and they particularly seek information or advice from influencers (Zhao et al., 2018). Focusing on beauty opinion leadership, cosmetic products are regarded as consumer goods enhancing consumers'



appearance and status (Ding et al., 2019). Opinion leaders on social media play crucial roles in transmitting new trends and make-up styles to consumers since they are considered as beauty products enthusiasts and experts who are passionate about sharing their experiences (Ding et al., 2019). Moreover, beauty opinion seekers research the products vigorously and seek information from opinion leaders to avoid risks in the purchase process (Ding et al., 2019; Flynn et al., 1996; Song et al., 2017). Accordingly, interpersonal relationships developed through opinion seeking, giving, and passing have widely been recognized as crucial elements in influencing consumers' behavioral intentions regarding beauty products, and opinion leaders' knowledge and expertise in beauty products are regarded as credible sources of information (Chu & Kim, 2011; De Veirman et al., 2017; Ding et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2018). Furthermore, identifying crucial antecedents of social media opinion leadership and empirically analyzing the roles of social media opinion leadership in impacting consumers' purchase decisions are considered as noteworthy research agendas (Arora et al., 2019; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). That being the case, the current research is aimed at delineating the effects of Instagram accounts' characteristics (i.e. perceived originality, uniqueness, quality, and quantity) on perceived opinion leadership and casting light on the effects of opinion leadership on consumers' purchase intention, behavior, and loyalty, contributing to the theory of opinion leadership, particularly in the social media context.

## ***2.2 Antecedents of opinion leadership***

The present study emphasizes perceived characteristics of Instagram accounts as the main antecedents of opinion leadership. Prior studies in the literature indicate that characteristics of the generated contents on social media influence consumers' perceptions of opinion leadership (e.g., Arora et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017). Accordingly, the current study considers perceived originality, uniqueness, quality, and quantity as the main antecedent factors of Instagram opinion

leadership. Originality refers to the level of newness and peculiarities of contents as perceived by individuals, in comparison to other options (Moldovan et al., 2011). It indicates the extent to which the contents are perceived as creative, innovative, unusual, or sophisticated (Acar et al., 2017). Original products differentiate from existing ones in terms of newness and consumers view them as more interesting and surprising items (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). When the degree of interest or surprise aroused by the stimulus (content, product, etc.) is high, more people get involved in talking about it and they feel disposed to share their comments and anecdotes (Peters et al., 2009). Furthermore, the more original the contents or products are, the greater the generated word-of-mouth is and individuals are more willing to exchange their related information (Moldovan et al., 2011).

Opinion leaders are considered as innovative individuals tending to try out original, new, and unusual products and services; thus, other people find their ideas convincing and constantly seek their shared information (Thakur et al., 2016). These dynamic, curious, and venturesome individuals are willing to share their original experiences and information; therefore, they are increasingly perceived as opinion leaders and they influence others' purchase decisions (Akdevelioglu & Kara, 2020). In an empirical study, Park and Kaye (2017) demonstrated that Twitter opinion leaders post original contents more frequently and this original posting is a significant indicator of their perceived opinion leadership. Therefore, the originality of posts related to cosmetics could determine whether the poster is recognized as an influencer and, thus, we propose the first hypothesis as follows:

**H1:** Perceived originality influences perceived opinion leadership positively.

Uniqueness refers to a condition in which an individual considers themselves to be distinct from others, and it incorporates appealingly special or differentiated behavior absorbing others'

attention (Maslach et al., 1985). People who tend to express their uniqueness initiate publically observable behavior establishing their difference, and this perceived uniqueness results in a personal image appreciated by others (Gentina et al., 2016). This public individualization or uniqueness, the belief in possessing greater knowledge and tendency to express differentiated opinions or personal image, is an explaining factor that distinguishes opinion leaders from opinion seekers (Tsang & Zhou, 2005). A strong motivation behind opinion leadership and advice giving is to appear unique in one's social community (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008), so these influencers are in pursuit of differentness relative to others through creating a unique style, deviating from group norms, and avoiding similarity in order to enhance their self-image and social image (Tian et al., 2001). Moreover, uniqueness is found to be a significant attribute of opinion leaders voicing their ideas about fashion products (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Thus, we believe that the more unique the cosmetics-related Instagram posts are, the higher the degree of perceived opinion leadership is and we propose the second hypothesis as follows:

**H2:** Perceived uniqueness influences perceived opinion leadership positively.

The quality of online contributions is recognized as an important factor for constructing a user's reputation in their social circles and, in turn, it accounts for the user to be perceived as an opinion leader by the followers (Leal et al., 2014). Online opinion leaders, particularly high-status ones, represent themselves by sharing high-quality contents (photograph, video, writing, logo, etc.), and they employ this means to conveniently distinguish themselves from the crowd (Mangold & Bachl, 2018). To decide whether to follow an Instagram user as an opinion leader or not, characteristics such as quality, attractiveness, and composition of posts are of significant importance; that is, users follow Instagram accounts as opinion leaders, provided they post visually appealing, professional-looking, and high-quality contents (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Considering other aspects of the quality of posts, readability, objectivity, and comprehensiveness of the contents are regarded as key drivers of opinion leadership and influencers using affective, assertive, and linguistic diversity are more successful in benefiting from the perception of opinion leadership (Huffaker, 2010; Lu et al., 2013). In sum, the quality of the shared contents is a significant determinant that differentiates opinion leaders from non-leaders (Mangold & Bachl, 2018), so we propose the third hypothesis as follows:

**H3:** Perceived quality influences perceived opinion leadership positively.

Previous researches in the literature have revealed that opinion leaders are active users of social media platforms who vigorously engage in content sharing and posting. Self-reported opinion leaders are more active than their followers since they share a greater number of postings, replies, and opinion-giving messages (Tsang & Zhou, 2005). Self-reported opinion leaders, particularly in the context of Twitter, have strong social surveillance motivation and post contents enthusiastically on this platform, so the more users express their opinions publically, the more they are likely to be perceived as opinion leaders (Park, 2013). Specifically, when posting messages and replies to other online group members frequently (i.e., higher levels of communication activity in terms of number of posts and replies), individuals are more capable of influencing and changing others' opinions (Huffaker, 2010). In addition, as opinion leaders are considered experts in the fields in which they are involved, they are expected to post pertinent contents very often in order to establish their superior reputation in their social circles (Leal et al., 2014). Therefore, active social media users who have noticeable engagement in affecting others' opinions through greater numbers of posts and replies are increasingly recognized as influencers and, thus, we propose the fourth hypothesis as follows:

**H4:** Perceived quantity influences perceived opinion leadership positively.

### ***2.3 Opinion leadership and purchase behavior***

Previous empirical analyses in the literature have mainly focused on the relationships between perceived opinion leadership, social media interaction intentions, and purchase intentions (e.g., Loureiro & Sarmento, 2019; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), and the influence of perceived opinion leadership on consumers' purchase behavior merits empirical investigations (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Others' opinions, particularly those from opinion leaders, are important determinants of human behavior (Bearden et al., 1989). Individuals having low self-esteem are more receptive to opinions of others while being intent upon obtaining social approval and acceptance (Bearden et al., 1989; Kropp et al., 2005). Women, as main targets of cosmetic brands, are more susceptible to social influence, and they are more likely to purchase products endorsed by social media influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). Individuals getting involved with social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, positively benefit from enhancement of their self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011) and, in turn, this increased level of self-esteem brings about decrease in rationality and results in quick acts of following indulgent urges that could be impulse purchasing and excessive spending (Wilcox et al., 2010). Moreover, consumers engage in this impulse purchase behavior, particularly hedonic purchase decisions that could be related to cosmetics, to satisfy their needs for social acceptance and prestige (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012).

Previous empirical researches in the literature indicate that opinion leadership plays a positive role in influencing consumers' purchase intentions. Online opinion leaders significantly contribute to the diffusion of information among members of online platforms and the contents shared by these key nodes influence their peers and followers' purchase intentions (Zhu et al., 2016). Digital influencers have turned to be crucial brand communication tools and already started

shaping their followers' perceptions and behavior toward brands; in other words, the influencers not only help to generate brand engagement, but also directly influence the followers' purchase intentions regarding the endorsed brands (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). More specifically, Instagram users are inclined to form para-social relationships with beauty influencers and, in turn, they share the same values, beliefs, and interests while turning to be intent upon purchasing the featured products (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Moreover, social media influencer marketing activities tend to shape consumers' brand preferences and result in future purchase responses (Godey et al., 2016). Besides, individuals with higher degrees of opinion leadership influence the purchase intentions of their audience, leading them to be committed to specific brands (Baker et al., 2019). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses, and the relationships between research constructs can be seen in Figure 1.

**H5:** Perceived opinion leadership influences Instagram users' purchase intentions.

**H6:** Perceived opinion leadership influences Instagram users' purchase behavior.

**H7:** Perceived opinion leadership influences Instagram users' purchase loyalty.

**“Figure 1 about here”**

### **3. Method**

#### ***3.1 Research context and data collection***

To operationalize this research, data were collected conducting an online survey in Iran. Social networks have gained notable popularity in Iran and the penetration rate of these platforms in this Western Asian country is 56% (Statista, 2019a). Instagram is the second most popular social media platform hitting 24 million active users comprising 30% of the country's population (Financial

Tribune, 2018). Similar to other countries in the world, posting and sharing contents related to beauty and fashion form the major parts of Iranian users' Instagram activities (Statista, 2019b). Iran is the second leading market for beauty products in the Middle East with a sales value of more than 2.7 billion U.S. dollars and only skin care products have accounted for a sales value of 428 million U.S. dollars in this country (Statista, 2016, 2017). Accordingly, the country provides an appropriate context for achieving the research's objectives.

To be regarded as appropriate for the study, the survey's participants were required to be at least 18 years old and be active followers of Instagram influencers who were non-traditional celebrities narrating their personal lives and lifestyles and endorsing beauty products and services through content sharing and posting. Owing to the lack of a sampling frame fulfilling these requirements, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was utilized for the data collection process (Al-Debei et al., 2015; Alalwan et al., 2016; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Moreover, as the study's population was sizeable and omnipresent by nature, evaluating the target sample by methods of probability sampling appeared to be problematic and impractical (Alalwan et al., 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In fact, in studies of opinion leadership and followers' behavior in which the population is too large, employing random sampling techniques is almost impossible and researchers have predominantly applied convenience sampling techniques to these situations (Hsu et al., 2013; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Accordingly, in line with previous empirical researches analyzing followers' intentions and behavior and using convenience sampling procedures (Baker et al., 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Song et al., 2017), the utilized sampling procedure is relevant and acceptable for the multivariate data analysis purposes of this study.

To collect the data, an online self-administered questionnaire was distributed among consumers of cosmetic products. Through the provided direct link, participants accessed the online questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously and, in turn, the possible emergence of the social desirability bias was notably reduced. The survey was designed in a way that participants first faced the definition of an Instagram opinion leader and a note asking them to respond to the questions according to their mostly followed Instagram beauty influencer. Filtering questions were designed to control the aforementioned participants' requirements and failing to fulfil the criteria led them not to continue answering the remaining parts. Following the procedure used by Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019), participants were roused to forward the questionnaire to their contacts and share it on their social networks to generate a snowball effect.

Over a three-week survey period, 267 filled questionnaires were initially received; however, 44 were found to be incomplete and invalid for data analysis. Thus, a final sample of 223 respondents was obtained that resembles recent empirical researches on online opinion leadership (e.g., Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018; Magno, 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Wang & Yu, 2017). As the sample size falls in the range of 200 to 400 respondents, it could be considered appropriate for addressing issues of generalizability and representativeness, and it is accurate to be used for multivariate data analysis consisting of various constructs and structural relationships (Alalwan et al., 2016; Hair et al., 2016). Regarding the demographic profile of the respondents, females account for 66.8% of the sample (149 respondents) while 74 respondents are male (33.2%). Furthermore, 204 individuals of the total sample (91.6%) are aged between 18 and 45 years old (an average age of 30.94 years old). Finally, since an online survey was conducted in this study, non-response bias might be a concern. In line with pertinent studies in the literature conducting similar surveys (e.g., Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Magno, 2017), procedures for



addressing non-response bias recommended by Armstrong and Overton (1977) were followed. Accordingly, based on the time the online questionnaires were submitted by respondents, the present study compared early and late respondents on key variables and used the analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the homogeneity of variance among the variables. The results revealed no statistically significant differences for the variables, indicating that non-response bias was not a main concern.

### ***3.2 Measures***

To measure the constructs designated for the research model, pertinent measurement scales were adapted from previous literature. Concerning the antecedents of opinion leadership, a six-item scale was adapted from the study of Moldovan et al. (2011) in order to measure perceived originality, and to measure perceived uniqueness, a three-item scale was adapted from the study of Franke and Schreier (2008). In order to measure perceived quality, a single-item measure was employed following pertinent studies in the literature (e.g., Lee et al., 2000; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). Arguably, when the construct is concrete, there is no need to utilize a multi-item scale, and the single-item scale's predictive validity is as high as the multi-item scale's (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007, 2009). Moreover, when the construct is concrete and homogeneous, using a single-item scale is preferable since additional or redundant items affect the predictive validity of the scale adversely (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012; Drolet & Morrison, 2001). Opinion leadership was measured through the scale adapted from studies of Thakur et al. (2016) and Gentina et al. (2014). For measuring purchase intention, a pertinent scale was adapted from studies of Jain and Mishra (2018) and Wu et al. (2012). In order to measure the consumers' actual purchase behavior, in line with the approach of Sherman et al. (1997), a single item indicating the number of products purchased by the individual was developed. Finally, purchase loyalty was assessed through a pertinent scale

adapted from studies of Walsh et al. (2011) and Pereira et al. (2016). Except for the single item related to actual purchase behavior, a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree” was employed to measure each item in the questionnaire. The summary of the research’s questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

To further refine the questionnaire and ensure its content validity, we had a consultation process with academics and research peers. The initial instrument was first reviewed by the experts and feedback concerning its comprehensibility and consistency was provided, which resulted in some minor modifications. In addition, a pre-test including 20 graduate students was conducted in order to further examine the face validity and content validity of the instrument. Based on the feedback provided, minor modifications were made to the questionnaire’s wording and syntax in order for enhancing readability and comprehensibility. Furthermore, as the questionnaire was directed at Persian participants, it was first translated into Farsi and then back-translated into English by independent professional translators in order for minimizing concerns about conceptual equivalence.

**“Table 1 about here”**

### ***3.4 Common method variance***

Single-informant surveys are subject to common method variance (CMV) and, thus, this biasing threat ought to be addressed before final analyses (Fakhreddin et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Pinto et al., 2011). Following the procedures suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2012), both procedural and statistical remedies were taken into consideration. Concerning the procedural remedies, respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and they would not be

judged afterwards. In addition, to curb respondents' postulation about the associations among the research's constructs, questionnaire items were positioned randomly and their predetermined order was avoided. Regarding the statistical remedies, after conducting the survey, Harman's single factor test was used to examine the total variance explained by a single factor. The results of the unrotated factor solution revealed that the single factor accounted for 48.6 % of the total variance which was below the threshold of 50 % (Fuller et al., 2016; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Moreover, a marker variable test was conducted in line with the procedures recommended by Lindell and Whitney (2001). In doing so, the smallest correlation among the study's variables (i.e. 0.004, the correlation between respondents' age and perceived originality) was considered as an estimate for the marker variable. Employing the marker variable, CMV-adjusted partial correlations among the exogenous and endogenous variables were calculated, and this adjustment resulted in no difference in the statistical significance of the correlations. Accordingly, the applied procedures and statistical tests indicate that CMV is not a main concern in the present research.

### ***3.3 Statistical procedures***

A partial least squares (PLS) approach with SmartPLS software version 3.0 was used as the estimation procedure (Ringle et al., 2015). This approach is suitable for modeling latent variables without strict normal distribution requirements (Ringle et al., 2012). Furthermore, this procedure is specifically appropriate for situations in which the phenomenon under research is comparatively new and the central aim is to identify the key drivers of constructs (Hair et al., 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), as is the case with identifying the antecedents of Instagram opinion leadership and its consequences regarding consumers' actual purchase behavior and loyalty. In order to gain sufficient statistical power while using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), we followed the procedures recommended by Hair et al. (2016). Since the study's research

model encompasses the maximum number of four exogenous constructs directed at an endogenous construct, the sample size needs to exceed 113 to provide an  $R^2$  value of 0.10 and a statistical power level of 80% at the significance level of 5% (Cohen, 1992; Hair et al., 2016). Accordingly, the study's sample size (223 participants) fulfills the requirements of PLS-SEM and ensures robust and generalizable results.

Concerning convergent validity, a confirmatory factor analysis was utilized to demonstrate the validity of all constructs. The results corroborate the initial factor structure, indicating that all item loadings are above the recommended threshold of 0.7 and statistically significant at the 99% level (see Table 1). The internal consistency of constructs was validated through the analysis of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. The results indicate that all constructs score above 0.8 concerning the aforementioned measures and, in turn, they are all internally consistent (Hair et al., 2016). In addition, to further ensure the convergent validity of constructs, average variance extracted (AVE) was taken into consideration. The AVEs for all of them exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.5, demonstrating sufficient convergent validity (Hair et al., 2016). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis regarding the convergent validity of constructs are presented in Table 2.

**“Table 2 about here”**

In order to address issues of discriminant validity, the study first followed the procedures recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and compared the constructs' AVEs with the shared variance between them (inter-construct correlations). As Table 3 demonstrates the comparison, the square roots of AVEs are greater than the inter-construct correlations, confirming discriminant validity. Besides, the research analyzed the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations

considered to be more reliable for detecting issues of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). As Table 4 shows the results, all HTMT values are below the threshold value of 0.9, indicating the discriminant validity of constructs (Hair et al., 2016; Henseler et al., 2015). After conducting confirmatory factor analysis and ensuring convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs, bootstrapping analysis with 5000 subsamples was applied to examine the structural validity of the proposed research model (hypotheses testing).

**“Table 3 about here”**

**“Table 4 about here”**

#### **4. Results and discussion**

First, the study conducted the analysis on the final sample to assess the structural model. Table 5 shows the structural paths and the structural model’s predictive capabilities. Concerning the coefficients of determination ( $R^2$  values), the proposed model explains 63.3% of the variance of opinion leadership, 35.2% of the variance of purchase intention, and 38.5% of the variance of purchase loyalty, indicating sufficient predictive power and accuracy (Hair et al., 2016; Henseler et al., 2009).

**“Table 5 about here”**

After ensuring the predictive capabilities of the structural model, the hypothesized relationships were tested and the results are presented in Table 6. Concerning the antecedents of opinion leadership, perceived originality, quality, and quantity exert positive influence on opinion leadership; however, the influence of perceived uniqueness is not significant ( $\beta = 0.004$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, concerning the first research question pertaining to the associations among characteristics of Instagram accounts and perceived opinion leadership, the applied analyses reveal that while originality, quality, and quantity of the shared contents positively impact social media opinion leadership, uniqueness of contents does not play a significant role. Arguably, the results indicate that originality of Instagram posts rather than their uniqueness is a key factor leading the poster to be perceived as an opinion leader. That is, instead of being one of a kind and unique, being creative, innovative, and interesting seems to be crucial for becoming an online influencer in the beauty and cosmetic industry. This finding is in line with previous literature stating that creativity and newness of the shared contents play a key role in enhancing perceived opinion leadership (Akdevelioglu & Kara, 2020; Park & Kaye, 2017; Thakur et al., 2016). Furthermore, the results show that perceived quality and quantity of the Instagram posts scale up the perceived opinion leadership of the poster. That is, the higher the number of high-quality posts is, the more influential the poster is found to be by the followers. This finding is consistent with prior studies suggesting that online influencers tend to distinguish themselves by sharing visually appealing, professional-looking, and high-quality contents (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Leal et al., 2014; Mangold & Bachl, 2018) and they tend to be active social media users vigorously engaging in content sharing and posting (Huffaker, 2010; Park, 2013; Tsang & Zhou, 2005).

**“Table 6 about here”**

Regarding the consequences of opinion leadership on social media networks, the results indicate that social media opinion leadership is a significant determinant of consumers' purchase behavior. Accordingly, concerning the second research question relating to the associations among perceived opinion leadership and consumers' purchase behavior, the applied analyses reveal that social media opinion leadership positively impacts followers purchase intention, behavior, and loyalty. That is to say, not only does online opinion leadership influence the followers' purchase intentions to buy beauty and cosmetic products, but it significantly affects their actual purchase behavior and purchase loyalty. Arguably, Instagram opinion leaders increase their followers' intention to buy the recommended products and, in turn, the followers plan and decide to actualize their intentions. As the results demonstrate, this influence brings about actual purchases by the followers and at the point of purchase, they loyally prioritize the endorsed brands and products and also recommend them to their peers. This finding echoes previous studies stating that social media opinion leadership is a significant determinant of followers' purchase intentions (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and it also implies that online opinion leadership has a noticeable effect on companies' sales outcomes (Geng et al., 2020) as it affects consumers' actual purchase decisions and loyalty (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Godey et al., 2016).

Considering these results, perceived characteristics of Instagram accounts (perceived originality, uniqueness, quality, and quantity) might exert indirect effects on consumers' purchase intention, behavior, and loyalty, mediated by opinion leadership. As the present research primarily relies on the theory of opinion leadership stating that opinion leaders are essential elements of transmitting messages and ideas to individuals like consumers (Ding et al., 2019; Godey et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2018), and pertinent studies in the literature consistently indicate that opinion

leadership is a crucial mechanism through which brands can impact consumers' behavioral intentions (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Song et al., 2017; Turcotte et al., 2015), the primary focus is on the indirect effects of Instagram accounts' characteristics on consumers' purchase behavior through social media opinion leadership. Moreover, since the proposed theoretical model incorporates the indirect relationships and there are no direct links between the Instagram accounts' characteristics and purchase intention, behavior, and loyalty, the indirect effects are the same as total effects. Furthermore, this approach to mediation analysis is in line with prior studies in literature mainly focusing on indirect effects (e.g., Ott et al., 2016; Yang & Mundel, 2021). Accordingly, these likely mediated relationships were examined, using SmartPLS software version 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015). As Table 7 shows the results, opinion leadership mediates the effects of perceived originality, quality, and quantity on the three dependent variables (purchase intention, purchase behavior, and purchase loyalty). Nevertheless, the indirect effect of perceived uniqueness is not significant. These findings further indicate the crucial role of perceived social media opinion leadership on consumers' purchase behavior. Arguably, the more consumers perceive an Instagram opinion leader's posts as original, professional-looking, and high-quality contents, the more likely they are to purchase the endorsed cosmetic products loyally. Besides, active and frequent content sharing by these influencers lead the consumers to consider the approved beauty products as their primary choices at the point of purchase. These results are in line with prior studies indicating that influencer marketing activities and social media opinion leadership are effective determinants of consumers' purchase behavior as the favorable posts and contents on social media impact consumers' purchase intention and bring about their purchase responses (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).



## **“Table 7 about here”**

All in all, the study’s findings reveal that the perceived originality, quality, and quantity play predominant roles in developing opinion leadership on Instagram that, in turn, affects consumers’ purchase intention, behavior, and loyalty regarding cosmetic and beauty products.

### **5. Conclusion**

At the moment, businesses, particularly the ones involved in beauty and cosmetic industry, are approaching digitized communication to promote their products and brands and, in turn, social media and influencer marketing have become unavoidably crucial for designing marketing communication strategies. This study empirically examined the antecedents of Instagram opinion leadership and how the perceived opinion leadership influenced consumers’ purchase intention, actual purchase behavior, and purchase loyalty. Besides, the study analyzed the indirect effects of these antecedents (perceived originality, uniqueness, quality, and quantity) on consumers’ purchase behavior. Accordingly, the findings of this study could be fruitful for social media influencers helping them to augment their perceived opinion leadership and adopt more persuasive behavior. Moreover, companies and business practitioners find the results beneficial for understanding the process that leads an Instagram poster to be perceived as an influencer and bring about consumers’ loyal purchases. Thus, we present these theoretical and practical implications as follow.

#### ***5.1 Theoretical implications***

Despite the fact that social media is increasingly used for marketing purposes, social medial marketing research is still in its infancy (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kapoor et

al., 2018). More specifically, though prior studies on online influencer marketing posit that social media opinion leaders are important channels of brand-related communication and word-of-mouth (Childers et al., 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), there is still a dearth of scholarly research investigating the influence of online opinion leadership on consumers' purchase intention and behavior (Alalwan et al., 2017; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Accordingly, this study, grounded on the opinion leadership theory, adds to the current body of knowledge on influencer marketing by revealing the antecedents of Instagram opinion leadership (perceived originality, quality, and quantity) and its subsequent effect on consumers' purchase behavior. Moreover, while prior studies in the literature are merely obsessed with the influence of online opinion leadership on consumers' social media interaction intention, recommendation intention, or purchase intention (Arora et al., 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), this research revealed the significant influence of online opinion leadership and its antecedents (originality, quality, and quantity) on consumers' actual purchase behavior and loyalty. Thus, the current study has addressed the crucial undiscovered topic of the influence of online opinion leadership on consumers' actual purchase behavior and loyalty.

Additionally, this study applied the opinion leadership theory originally developed for offline interactions (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Solomon, 2018). While there are still studies in the literature applying this theory in offline contexts and examining the influence of offline opinion leadership on consumers' behavioral intentions (e.g., Cho & Workman, 2011; Goldsmith & De Witt, 2003; Klein et al., 2019), this research contributed to the theory of opinion leadership by revealing the significant role of influencer marketing in consumers' purchase behavior, particularly in online and social media contexts. Besides, this study casts lights on the

persuasive power of online opinion leaders as it reveals their influence on consumers' purchase intention, behavior, and loyalty, filling the void of scholarly research on influencer marketing and influencers' persuasive power impacting consumer purchase behavior. This research also contributes to the discussion about the antecedents of online opinion leadership and questions on whether the number of posts, number of likes, quality of posts, or other factors affect perceived online opinion leadership (Arora et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017). Accordingly, the findings indicate that not only the originality of the shared contents but their quality and quantity are influential factors contributing to the perceived online opinion leadership, thus adding to the current body of knowledge regarding social media opinion leadership. Furthermore, this research enriches our knowledge about opinion leadership on Instagram as a social media platform providing creative tools for posting aesthetically captivating visual contents. Arguably, though prior studies have focused on online opinion leadership on more textual platforms, such as Twitter (e.g., Park & Kaye, 2017; Walter & Brüggemann, 2020) or blogs (e.g., Li & Du, 2011, 2017), this study reveals that the perceived originality, quality, and quantity of Instagram posts contribute to Instagram opinion leadership and impact consumers' purchase behavior, thus extending our understanding of how an Instagram poster turns into an Instagram influencer and affects consumers' purchase decisions.

## ***5.2 Practical implications***

Online opinion leaders could be considered as effective communication channels transferring the information from the media or marketers to other individuals and consumers (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Accordingly, this role could bring about benefits to brands and the findings of this study help brands build up mutually beneficial relationships with influencers endorsing their products and services. Bearing in mind the perplexities of identifying appropriate

online influencers and the financial risk of developing marketing communication strategies using influencers (Choi & Rifon, 2012), companies need to be able to select the right digital opinion leader whose characteristics match the developed digital marketing strategies.

This study recognizes opinion leaders according to their published contents. Opinion leaders ought to share original contents to be perceived as creative and sophisticated influencers by their followers. This type of content leads the actual and potential followers to experience a state of flow and form positive attitudes while surfing the influencer's account and, in turn, it results in more positive and committed behavior (Herrando et al., 2018). In this way, an innovative and creative image is created that both absorbs the followers' attention and encourages future involvement with the brand. Besides, the shared contents should incorporate high-quality and visually appealing stimuli and appear on the platform more often. In this case, the professional-looking contents being posted frequently result in positive attitudes toward the account and endorsed products and foster individualization of the brand. Thus, companies had better consider the match between the opinion leader's lifestyle and published contents and their brand image and personality. Taking no notice of this point could result in counterproductive consequences. That is to say, if followers take in the fact that the endorsement activities are performed merely in return for financial rewards, their attitudes toward the company and brand will turn into negatives (Evans et al., 2017). Moreover, opinion leaders are aware of what best suits their followers; thus, companies ought to talk the aims and guidelines of their marketing communication strategies with them and get them to develop original and creative contents which best fit and engage their actual and potential followers. Accordingly, brands should not ask the influencers to directly endorse their products. Instead, they had better encourage them to authentically weave a brand and its products into their lifestyle and personal stories. In fact, there should be a constant collaboration

between the company and the influencer, where they engage in the process in early phases and provide the company with consulting ideas to achieve more original and innovative outcomes.

Furthermore, the findings of this study help companies understand the process through which influencers' posting and recommending brands change consumers' perceptions and purchase behavior patterns. The findings indicate that original and high-quality contents shared by influencers frequently impact consumers' actual purchase behavior and loyalty. This is a noteworthy finding for companies and brands interested in influencer marketing. This result reveals that investment and incorporation of online influencers in marketing communication strategies pay off, as their endorsement activities result in their followers' purchasing the product and staying loyal to the brand. Accordingly, business practitioners had better take into account the potential and persuasive power of online influencers for impacting consumers' purchase behavior patterns. Arguably, the more they invest on collaborating with opinion leaders to create authentic and innovative contents endorsing their brand, the more they benefit from increased levels of purchases and loyal purchase behavior by consumers. Therefore, through picking out this marketing communication tool, brands are capable of capitalizing on influencers' social influence and persuasive power to augment the effects of their marketing and advertising campaigns affecting consumers' actual purchase behavior. Thus, this marketing communication strategy brings about competitiveness of social media campaigns and financial return of the investment (Ananda et al., 2016; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

### ***5.3 Limitations and future research***

In spite of its significant theoretical and practical implications, this study has some limitations shedding light on noteworthy directions for future research. First, the study employed cross-sectional data, so followers' purchase behavior over time is not expected to be measured.

Accordingly, this research highly recommends researchers using longitudinal data and analysis to predict followers' purchase behavior over time and improve our knowledgeability about interrelationships between the variables. Second, even with the appropriate sample profile and sample size providing sufficient statistical power for the proposed research model and applied statistical analyses, the use of convenience sampling method is likely to hamper the representativeness of the target population and generalizability of the results. Therefore, future studies are highly encouraged to generalize this study's findings, employing random sampling techniques and extending the research to other populations, industries, and countries.

This research concentrated on examining the antecedents and purchase consequences of online opinion leadership on Instagram as a social media platform providing several facilities to post visually appealing contents. Thus, a notable future research opportunity is empirically investigating the impacts of online opinion leadership on consumers' purchase behavior contingent upon the type of social media platform. Moreover, this study emphasized non-traditional celebrities endorsing cosmetic products and brands, so future studies have the opportunity to consider traditional celebrities as influencers endorsing cosmetic or other types of products and services and to analyze the effects of their endorsement activities on consumers' purchase behavior. Finally, this study only considered perceived originality, uniqueness, quality, and quantity as the antecedents of online opinion leadership while there some other factors determining perceived opinion leadership. Therefore, future researches are highly encouraged to take into account other influencing factors, such as influencers' network and reputation, credibility, emotional attachment, and attitude homophily (Ladhari et al., 2020; Moldovan et al., 2017; Park & Kaye, 2017), and empirically investigate their impacts on online opinion leadership.

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On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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### Data availability statement:

The data that supports the findings of this study is openly available in [Harvard Dataverse] at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JX86Q4>

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**Table 1** Construct measurement items, descriptive statistics, and item loadings.

Variables with indicators	Mean	Sd	Loading
<b>Perceived originality adapted from Moldovan et al. (2011)</b>			
Publications on this Instagram account are original.	4.58	1.35	0.82
Publications on this Instagram account are novel.	4.99	1.29	0.85
Publications on this Instagram account are unusual.	4.54	1.32	0.71
Publications on this Instagram account are innovative.	4.81	1.21	0.84
Publications on this Instagram account are sophisticated.	4.54	1.35	0.76
Publications on this Instagram account are creative.	4.85	1.32	0.81
<b>Perceived uniqueness adapted from Franke and Schreier (2008)</b>			
This Instagram account is really unique.	4.59	1.41	0.89
This Instagram account is one of a kind.	4.02	1.49	0.87
This Instagram account is really special and different to others.	4.20	1.42	0.91
<b>Perceived quality adapted from Lee et al. (2000)</b>			
The quality of publications on this Instagram account is high.	4.95	1.35	N.A.
<b>Perceived quantity adapted from Kang and Kim (2006)</b>			
The number of publications on this Instagram account is high.	4.89	1.32	N.A.
<b>Opinion leadership adapted from Gentina et al. 2014; Thakur et al. (2016)</b>			
This Instagram account is a model for others.	4.85	1.43	0.74
This Instagram account is one step forward in comparison to others.	4.73	1.30	0.79
This Instagram account offers appealing visuals suggesting new ideas about beauty and cosmetics.	5.10	1.28	0.79
I use this Instagram account as a source of information on beauty and cosmetics.	4.72	1.36	0.75
This Instagram account convinces me to make up like the styles it suggests.	4.91	1.31	0.73
This Instagram account influences my opinions about beauty and cosmetics.	4.71	1.36	0.78
<b>Purchase intention adapted from Jain and Mishra (2018); Wu et al. (2012)</b>			
The probability that I would buy the beauty products suggested by this Instagram account is high.	4.75	1.35	0.86
I will try to buy the beauty products suggested by this Instagram account within the next 12 months.	4.57	1.48	0.89
I plan to purchase the beauty products suggested by this Instagram account within the next year.	4.58	1.50	0.86
If I were going to buy beauty products, I would consider buying the brands recommended by this Instagram account.	4.90	1.39	0.87
<b>Purchase behavior adapted from Sherman et al. (1997)</b>			
Within the last 12 months, how many beauty products suggested by this Instagram account did you buy?	2.86	2.52	N.A.
<b>Purchase loyalty adapted from Pereira et al. 2016; Walsh et al. (2011)</b>			
Whenever I purchase beauty products, I choose the ones recommended by this Instagram account.	4.48	1.46	0.87
I have no doubts to suggest the beauty products recommended by this Instagram account.	4.53	1.43	0.88

Whenever I purchase beauty products, I clearly have a preference for the ones recommended by this Instagram account.	4.53	1.42	0.90
The brands recommended by this Instagram account are my first choices whenever I purchase beauty products.	4.44	1.47	0.90

**Notes:** N.A.: Not applicable. Loading values are all significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 2** Convergent validity.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>CA</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
Perceived originality	0.88	0.91	0.64
Perceived uniqueness	0.87	0.92	0.79
Perceived quality	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Perceived quantity	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Opinion leadership	0.85	0.89	0.58
Purchase intention	0.89	0.92	0.76
Purchase behavior	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Purchase loyalty	0.91	0.94	0.79

**Notes:** N.A.: Not applicable; CA: Cronbach's Alpha; CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted.



**Table 3** Discriminant validity.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1- Perceived originality	<b><i>0.804</i></b>							
2- Perceived uniqueness	0.733	<b><i>0.893</i></b>						
3- Perceived quality	0.598	0.448	<i>N.A.</i>					
4- Perceived quantity	0.478	0.421	0.646	<i>N.A.</i>				
5- Opinion leadership	0.733	0.556	0.657	0.583	<b><i>0.767</i></b>			
6- Purchase intention	0.652	0.547	0.495	0.452	0.593	<b><i>0.875</i></b>		
7- Purchase behavior	0.277	0.320	0.169	0.148	0.224	0.315	<i>N.A.</i>	
8- Purchase loyalty	0.676	0.653	0.479	0.402	0.620	0.808	0.415	0.893

**Notes:** N.A.: Not applicable. The bold and italicized figures on the diagonal are square roots of the AVEs. Below-diagonal figures are the correlations between the variables and they are all significant at the 99% level.

**Table 4** Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Latent variables	1	2	3	4
1- Perceived originality				
2- Perceived uniqueness	0.831			
3- Opinion leadership	0.833	0.633		
4- Purchase intention	0.731	0.613	0.669	
5- Purchase loyalty	0.756	0.727	0.695	0.892

**Table 5** Structural model evaluation.

Construct/structural path	VIF	$f^2$	$R^2$	$Q^2$	$q^2$
<b>Perceived originality</b>					
Perceived originality → Opinion leadership	2.696	0.252			0.036
<b>Perceived uniqueness</b>					
Perceived uniqueness → Opinion leadership	2.198	0.000			0.000
<b>Perceived quality</b>					
Perceived quality → Opinion leadership	2.113	0.069			0.009
<b>Perceived quantity</b>					
Perceived quantity → Opinion leadership	1.783	0.057			0.007
<b>Opinion leadership</b>					
Opinion leadership → Purchase intention		0.544	0.633	0.344	0.035
Opinion leadership → Purchase behavior		0.053			0.001
Opinion leadership → Purchase loyalty		0.625			0.057
<b>Purchase intention</b>			0.352	0.252	
<b>Purchase behavior</b>			0.050	0.047	
<b>Purchase loyalty</b>			0.385	0.286	

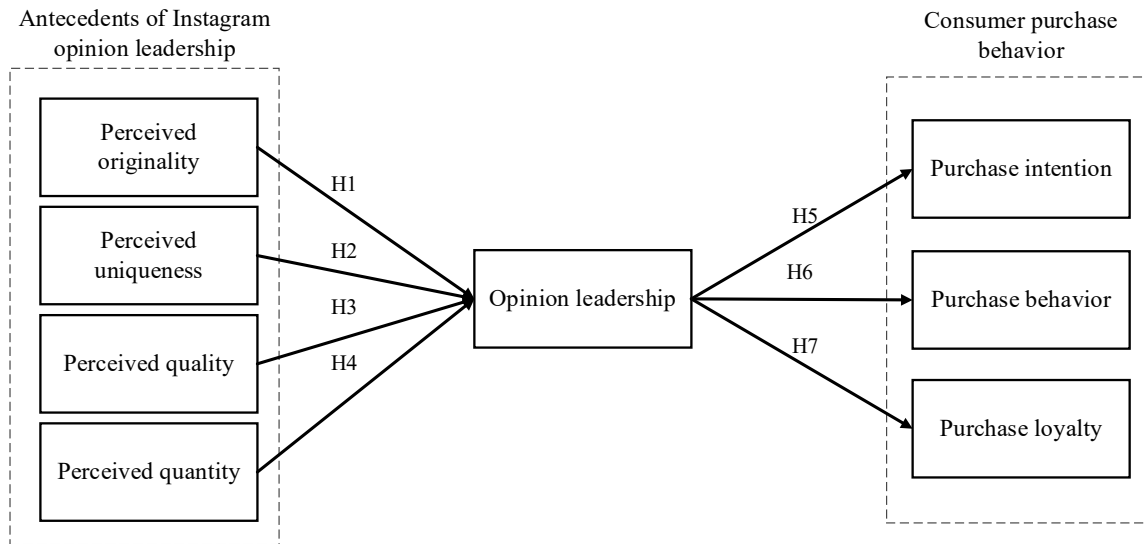
**Notes:** Final sample (N) = 223; VIF: Variance inflation factor;  $f^2$ :  $f^2$  effect size;  $R^2$ : Coefficient of determination;  $Q^2$ : Predictive relevance/Stone-Geisser's  $Q^2$  value (blindfolding procedure with omission distance of 7);  $q^2$ :  $q^2$  effect size.

**Table 6** Results of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis/Structural path	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	Result
H1 Perceived originality → Opinion leadership	0.505	7.204	0.000	Supported
H2 Perceived uniqueness → Opinion leadership	0.004	0.066	0.947	<b>Not supported</b>
H3 Perceived quality → Opinion leadership	0.230	3.966	0.000	Supported
H4 Perceived quantity → Opinion leadership	0.190	3.144	0.002	Supported
H5 Opinion leadership → Purchase intention	0.598	9.742	0.000	Supported
H6 Opinion leadership → Purchase behavior	0.226	4.324	0.000	Supported
H7 Opinion leadership → purchase loyalty	0.623	11.980	0.000	Supported

**Table 7** Indirect effects.

Indirect effect/structural path	Estimated indirect effect	t-value	p-value
Perceived originality→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase intention	0.303	5.578	0.000
Perceived originality→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase behavior	0.114	3.580	0.000
Perceived originality→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase loyalty	0.315	6.090	0.000
Perceived uniqueness→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase intention	0.003	0.006	<b>0.947</b>
Perceived uniqueness→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase behavior	0.002	0.065	<b>0.948</b>
Perceived uniqueness→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase loyalty	0.003	0.066	<b>0.947</b>
Perceived quality→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase intention	0.138	3.632	0.000
Perceived quality→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase behavior	0.052	2.967	0.003
Perceived quality→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase loyalty	0.143	3.750	0.000
Perceived quantity→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase intention	0.113	3.046	0.002
Perceived quantity→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase behavior	0.043	2.619	0.009
Perceived quantity→ Opinion leadership→ Purchase loyalty	0.118	3.061	0.002



**Figure 1.** Research model