UNLEASHING GREEN BEAUTY CRUSADE: ROLE OF INFLUENCER RELATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS, PRODUCT PERCEPTIONS, AND WARM GLOW

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has become a strategic imperative for brand building. Nevertheless, marketers need a comprehensive understanding of the full extent of its scope and effectiveness. This study analyses the strategic role of influencer marketing in driving brand advocacy and intention to purchase green cosmetic products. This study is novel as it explores brand advocacy and purchase intentions from the perspective of influencers' characteristics and perceived safety and efficacy of green cosmetic products while considering the moderating effect of warm glow. Data were collected from 504 participants using a purposive sampling technique over a period of three months. SEM followed by moderation analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings reveal that influencer-product congruence and influencer credibility influence perceived safety, whereas influencer credibility and parasocial interaction significantly influence the perceived efficacy of the product.

Consequently, both perceived safety and efficacy of the product influence brand advocacy, which, in turn, influences the customers' purchase intentions towards green cosmetic products. Our results further corroborate that warm glow significantly moderates the effect of perceived safety on brand advocacy as well as the effect of brand advocacy on intention to purchase. However, warm glow does not moderate the relationship between product efficacy and brand advocacy.

Keywords: Influencer-product congruence; Para-social interaction; Warm glow; Perceived efficacy; Perceived safety

1. Introduction

Sustainable consumption is gaining intensive momentum in the current business landscape (Ghazali et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2023), with consumers becoming more mindful of their consumption choices (Manchanda et al., 2023; Zollo et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2021). This shift is noticeable in the realm of green cosmetic products as well, where customers are becoming increasingly conscious of the ingredients used and actively seeking out products that are cruelty-free, sustainable, and ethically sourced (Lo et al., 2021; Bonifacio et al., 2024). Increasing awareness about green cosmetics among Indian customers has changed the overall demand structure of green cosmetic products, making it one of the most extensive offerings in the world (Lavuri et al., 2022). The Indian natural and organic beauty market is currently valued at $834.5 million, and annual demand is forecasted to rise by 7.83% till 2025 (Krishna, 2021). Natural "green" cosmetics are transitioning from being an alternative to becoming a necessity, setting a

benchmark for the contemporary production of beauty products across various categories ranging from colour cosmetics, styling products, personal care, fragrances, and haircare (Suphasomboon & Vassanadumrongdee, 2022). As the demand for sustainable products is on rise globally, cosmetic manufacturing companies are also making noteworthy changes in their product offerings (Testa et al., 2023) by focusing on natural ingredients and substituting traditional products with environment friendly products (Liobikienė & Bernatonienė, 2017).

Concurrently, the media is also experiencing a transformative development (Tafesse & Wood, 2021), with a multitude of consumers actively engaged in gathering and disseminating information on various social media platforms (Fariwar et al., 2023; Yuan & Lou, 2020; Kietzmann et al., 2012). Amidst this, the influencer marketing strategy has gained significant prominence, where influential personalities have garnered extensive popularity and followers on social media platforms, especially on Instagram (Leung et al., 2022). These influencers have garnered substantial followers, allowing them to endorse brands to their specific audience through sponsorships, product placements and endorsements (Yuan & Lou, 2020). One of the reasons for the increased awareness of green cosmetics among Indian customers can be significantly attributed to the skyrocketed use of Instagram for their promotion (Tazeen & Mullick, 2023). Instagram has witnessed remarkable growth with 1.08 billion users globally and 229.55 million users in India, ranking it among the countries with the most extensive user base (Menon, 2022). This expansive reach is amplified by the active engagement of beauty influencers (Xia et al., 2022) and the proficient use of visual storytelling through text and videos (Rodner et al., 2022). These elements on social media are playing fundamental role in determining consumer's cognitive journey and exerting a significant impact on their purchase decision (Akram et al., 2023). Especially, in the case of sustainable beauty brands, there is a growing interest on how these brands can harness influencer marketing to communicate their message of sustainability, natural product attributes and positive product declarations (Wu et al., 2023; Kılıç & Gürlek, 2023).

However, despite the surge in digital marketing avenues, the market value of green cosmetics remains as below as 15% of the global cosmetic industry (Ali et al., 2023). Regardless of the significant boost from influencer marketing in positioning sustainable cosmetics as an attractive option, the industry continues to grapple with scepticism (Ali et al., 2023; Francis, 2023). This changing landscape accentuates the need for an in-depth investigation of the factors manifesting consumer positive attitude towards green cosmetics (Lavuri et al., 2022; Sadiq et al., 2021). Furthermore, while the message of natural claims via social media has imparted a "natural-is-better" perception among customers, (Simao et al., 2022; Berry et al., 2017), there is a notable gap in the literature about how relational aspects of influencer marketing affect perceptions of efficacy and safety for these cosmetic brands (Farivar et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021). For instance, some authors posit that consumers perceive natural products as less effective (Scott et al., 2020), others argue that natural claims often enhance perceived quality, especially when highlighted on social media platforms (Li & Cao, 2020). Therefore, these assorted viewpoints indicate the need to examine consumer attitude towards the efficacy and safety of green cosmetic brands and how these perceptions foster positive brand associations on platform such as Instagram.

While earlier research on influencer marketing has addressed some imperative aspects including influencer's content (Tafesse & Wood, 2021), credibility (Janssen et al., 2022), product congruence (Belanche et al., 2021a), efficacy (Hudders et al., 2021), likeability (Taillon et al., 2020; Coelho.,2019), and influencer's sponsorship disclosure (Kim & Kim, 2021), there is a need for a comprehensive assessment of factors related to influencer-product and influencer-consumer relationships based on relevant theoretical backgrounds (Belanche et al., 2021b; Koay et al., 2023). Thus, this study expands on the Similarity-Attraction Theory to comprehend how consumers are more susceptible to influencers who mirror their own characteristics or values and are drawn towards their recommendations when making purchase decisions (Byrne, 1971).

Also, there is a research gap in investigating the impact of relational factors on the perceived safety and efficacy of green cosmetics, and their subsequent influence on brand advocacy and purchase intentions (Lavuri et al., 2022; Papista & Dimitriadis, 2019). Brand advocacy, which refers to proactively recruiting new customers and defending the brand against detractors, is relatively unexplored in the context of influencer marketing as well as green cosmetics (Choi et al., 2021). Likewise, warm glow, which relates to the positive emotion individuals feel when they support companies that implement sustainability initiatives, has also received limited attention in the current landscape of green cosmetics (Alhouti et al., 2021; Tezer & Bodur, 2020). This study investigates the boundary conditions for direct causal associations by introducing the warm glow concept, which refers to "satisfaction that goes beyond the benefits derived from the aggregate provision of a good through pro-environmental behaviour" (Boobalan et al., 2021). Overall, the current study aims to analyze how influencers' characteristics impact brand advocacy through perceived safety and perceived efficacy and ultimately impact customers' intentions to buy green cosmetic products. This research deduces some key theoretical implications and practical implications that can guide marketers in making informed decisions and refining their approaches to promoting green cosmetic products.

The rest of the paper is divided into several sections. First, we present the theoretical background and subsequently

articulate the hypothesis and conceptual model (as shown in Figure 1) for the current study. Next, we discuss the research methodology and data analysis, followed by a discussion of the results and findings. The paper concludes with theoretical and practical implications along with the underlying limitations.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Theoretical foundation

Similarity-attraction theory posits that individuals are predisposed to forming connections and relationships with those who exhibit congruence in values and personality traits (Byrne & Nelson, 1965). This theoretical framework suggests that interpersonal attraction is more likely to occur when individuals perceive shared similarities, thereby acting as a foundational prerequisite for meaningful interaction (Byrne, 1971; Shen et al., 2022). In the context of influencer marketing, this theory gains importance by leveraging the consumer-influencer relational approach, which elucidates the potential relevance of parasocial interaction, denoting the unilateral relationships cultivated by audiences with influencers (Xu et al., 2021). The critical role of similarity manifests in the influencer-audience dynamics wherein influencers, by embodying values or lifestyles resonant with their audience, further deepen the effect of dyadic association (Haobin et al., 2021). This, in turn, leads to heightened emotional connections and a sense of kinship, exerting a discernible influence on consumer behaviour and preferences (Han & Balabanis, 2023). It also suggests that when the influencer believes in and uses the product, it enhances the credibility of the natural claims (perceptions about efficacy and safety of cosmetic products).

Similarly, influencer credibility is closely tied to authenticity and trustworthiness of natural claims (Argyris et al., 2021). When an influencer's lifestyle, values, and preferences harmonize with the products they promote, it strengthens their credibility (Belanche et al., 2021a). This alignment implies a sincere endorsement, establishing the trustworthiness of advertising claims. Finally, influencer-product congruence as a reflection of the influencer-product relational approach refers to the alignment or compatibility between influencers and the products or brands they endorse. This congruence signifies the strategic alignment of influencers with products that resonate with their personal brand, values, and target audience (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Successful influencer-product congruence can ensure that the influencer's image aligns with the promoted product, thereby nurturing a more genuine connection with the customers and influencing their purchasing decisions (Koay et al., 2023; Yuan & Lou, 2020).

2.2. Hypothesis development

2.3. Perceived influencer-product congruence, perceived safety, and perceived efficacy

Perceived safety is the extent to which consumers trust that a product is free from chemicals and synthetic ingredients (Bauer et al., 2013) and being inherently harmless in nature (Fraccascia et al., 2023; Wang & Tsai, 2019). Previous studies have emphasized on the significance of perceived safety in influencing consumer decisions across several product types such as non-green products (Fraccascia et al., 2023; Wong & Rinderer, 2020), natural personal care products (Ghazali et al., 2017) and green products (Jan et al., 2019). Consumers are progressively concerned about synthetic chemicals and materials used in beauty and personal care products and their adverse effects on health and the environment (Patnaik et al., 2021). Research indicates that natural claims about products often enhance consumers' perception of safety (Li & Cao, 2020) and enable them to draw favourable inferences about product attributes (Berry et al., 2017). Such claims for personal care products may also engender a halo effect, which positively affects consumers' perceived efficacy (Simao et al., 2022). Perceived efficacy is consumers' expectations about the extent to which a product can deliver its benefits vis-à-vis its claims (Sundar et al., 2020; Vanbergen et al., 2020). It is the level to which consumer believe in the ability of the product to deliver desired results. The effectiveness of influencer marketing communications depends on the congruence between the influencers and the product they promote. A high congruence makes promotional communication more persuasive (Till et al., 2008) and positively influences what followers perceive about the product (Kim & Kim, 2021). When a relevant product is promoted by an expected influencer, users perceive the endorsement as genuine and authentic, leading to a higher affective or emotional engagement with the product (Kim & Kim, 2021). The positive association between the influencer and the product may generate a halo effect, where influencer's positive characteristics are transferred to the product, uplifting its authenticity in terms of safety and efficiency (Belanche et al., 2021a). While there is a dearth of findings related to the influence of influencer-green-product congruence on perceived safety and perceived efficacy, Belanche et al. (2021a) found that followers form positive perceptions about beauty products when exposed to a communication with a higher influencer-product congruence. In a different study, Lavuri et al. (2022) concluded that green advertisements for luxury organic beauty products have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention. Individuals with environmental knowledge have a positive attitude towards the promotion of green products, which in turn positively influences their purchase intention (Jaiswal & Kant, 2018). Extending these findings, it is expected that perceived influencer-product fit may positively influence perceived safety and perceived efficacy of green cosmetics. Consequently, it is proposed that:

H1: Followers' perceived influencer-product congruence positively affects their perceived safety of green cosmetics.

H2: Followers' perceived influencer-product congruence positively affects their perceived efficacy of green cosmetics.

2.3.1.   Perceived influencer credibility, perceived safety, and perceived efficacy

Perceived influencer credibility is the level of expertise and trust attributed to an influencer with respect to a specific product or communication (Goldsmith et al., 2000). This credibility significantly influences the effectiveness of the message on the endorsed brand (Schouten et al., 2020) and also establishes influencers as a credible source of information (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). It is also an antecedent to consumer's attitude and advertisement's overall effectiveness (Lee & Kim, 2020). Influencers maintain credibility among their followers by promoting products which reflect their expertise and interest (Stubb et al., 2019a). An influencer with higher perceived credibility is more persuasive and affects the followers' purchase intentions more strongly (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) with the help of product information s/he provides (Cosenza et al., 2015). Fashion and beauty influencers with high credibility in the field positively affect their followers' response towards the endorsed product/brand (Belanche et al., 2021a).

Moreover, information about a product's natural claims helps consumers develop perceptions about its safety and inferences about its attributes (Ghazali et al., 2017). Safety is one of the many reasons why female consumers buy green cosmetics (Singhal & Malik, 2018). Information related to natural and sustainable claims, often communicated for newly introduced personal care products (Culliney, 2020), positively influences the perceived efficacy of such products (Simao et al., 2022). Consumers use this information and their own belief system to compare green cosmetics with conventional ones (Ali et al., 2023). Huang & Guo (2020) concluded that a persuasive and compelling narrative from an influencer can positively impact consumers' engagement with the product/brand. An influencer, in close connection with followers, can be a persuasive source of information and potentially enhance consumer's perceived levels of product's safety and efficacy. When a credible influencer endorses a product, consumers trust its reliability and performance, leading to a stronger willingness to buy and try the product (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Followers' perceived influencer credibility positively affects their perceived safety of green cosmetics.

H4: Followers' perceived influencer credibility positively affects their perceived efficacy of green cosmetics.

2.3.2.   Perceived parasocial interaction, perceived safety, and perceived efficacy

Parasocial interaction is an imaginary and short-term connection between a media personality (such as an influencer) and their audience during media consumption (Dibble et al., 2016; Sherrick et al., 2022). This connection happens when the audience actively engages with a media person (Sherrick et al., 2022), developing a positive emotional bond between them (Hu et al., 2020). According to parasocial interaction theory and social cognitive theory, the credibility of sources or influencers and the similarity between them and their followers influence the latter's buying decisions (Ladhari et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The higher such a similarity, the more strongly followers identify with their influencer (Bu et al., 2022; Labrecque, 2014), and the higher the likelihood of interactions between the two (Bu et al., 2022; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Followers often compare themselves with influencers for self-improvement and make purchases based on their recommendations (Bi & Zhang, 2023; Lou & Kim, 2019). Digital personalities with stronger parasocial interactions with their followers have higher persuasion power, as their followers perceive them as more trustworthy and relatable (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). They feel a sense of safety and efficacy in the information and content being shared by these influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Chen et al. (2022) also found a positive correlation between parasocial interaction (among travel influencers and their followers) and the perceived authenticity of the shared information, ultimately affecting customer trust.

Information related to natural claims embedded in influencer marketing communication for a personal care product positively influences followers' perceived safety and perceived efficacy (Simao et al., 2022). Therefore, parasocial interaction can influence followers more strongly to seek such information and opinion from their influencers (Ladhari et al., 2020) and positively affect their attitude and behaviour (Tukachinsky et al., 2020). Several studies have concluded a direct relationship between parasocial interaction and customer's purchase intention (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022; Lee & Lee, 2022). Hence, it is expected that parasocial interaction between an influencer and his/her followers may have a positive effect on the followers' perceived safety and perceived efficacy of green cosmetics. It is proposed that:

H5: Parasocial interaction between the influencer and followers positively affects followers' perceived safety of green cosmetics.

H6: Parasocial interaction between the influencer and followers positively affects followers' perceived efficacy of green cosmetics.

2.3.3.   Perceived safety, perceived efficacy, brand advocacy, and purchase intention

Organic beauty products are often perceived as safe and effective when they are devoid of any chemicals or pesticide residues, often found in conventional beauty products, and their utility aligns closely with the promises made in their promotions (Pudaruth et al., 2015; Shimul et al., 2021). Whereas, brand advocacy is communicating positively about a brand, endorsing it to others, or even protecting it when it is criticised by others (Kemp et al., 2012). Such advocacy that involves consumer-to-consumer communication may occur offline or online (Wilk et al., 2020) and is often influenced by an emotional attachment and a positive attitude towards the brand (VanMeter et al., 2018). When beauty products are perceived as safe and effective, consumers may intent to purchase as well as suggest them to their family and friends by sharing positive reviews, and other related information (Lavuri et al., 2022; Casalo et al., 2017; Park, 2015; Bonn et al., 2016). Due to the intricate nature of green cosmetics and the challenges in evaluating their performance, individuals may seek assurance regarding their safety and effectiveness from a credible source (Ajayi et al., 2024). Subsequently, when the information and the product is considered dependable, individuals may share positive word of mouth, and thereby build trust and reliability around the green brand. Additionally, brand advocacy perpetuates itself (Cialdini, 1971) and positively influences the advocate's own intentions to purchase the brand (Choi et al., 2021). Individuals which actively support a brand, invest in its values and offerings, which, in turn, strengthen their own affinity towards the brand. This not only positions them as brand advocates but also positively influences their own intentions to purchase the brand. Therefore, it is expected that followers' perceived safety and perceived efficacy of green cosmetics may influence their brand advocacy, which may positively affect their purchase intention. Therefore, the authors propose that:

H7: Followers' perceived safety of green cosmetics positively influences their brand advocacy

H8: Followers' perceived efficacy of green cosmetics positively influences their brand advocacy

H9: Followers' brand advocacy of green cosmetics positively influences their purchase intention

2.3.4.   Moderating role of warm glow

Warm glow has become an important parameter to assess sustainable consumer behaviours (Rahnama Haratbar et al., 2024). Warm glow is the gratification or the feeling of fulfilment that people experience beyond the direct benefits resulting from their pro-environmental actions (Clark et al.,2003; Rahnama Haratbar et al., 2024). Precisely, consumers experience this feeling of intrinsic glow and psychological satisfaction when they indulge in socially acknowledged virtuous behaviour, such as consuming organic products over regular ones (Boobalan et al., 2021; Simao et al., 2022; Tezer & Bodur, 2020).

Warm glow, as a psychological advantage associated with pro-environmental actions, may also enhance the perception of safety and efficacy of a product. As a result, individuals may advocate and support brands that are perceived to be safe and efficient and, at the same time, provide them with the feeling of psychological satisfaction of doing something good for the environment (Rahnama Haratbar et al., 2024). Warm glow is not solely an individual's experience; it is also instigated by encouraging others to follow an environmentally friendly behaviour (Allison et al., 2013), such as advocating the green cosmetic product in the current context. Chan et al. (2021) also identified that experiencing a warm glow by travelling through an eco-friendly airline positively affected its corporate brand image. Also, consumers' level of concern for others in the environment is indicated by their altruistic value. In the case of green cosmetics, there is a direct relationship between their altruistic value and consumer's purchase behaviour (Quoquab et al., 2020).

Lin & Chang (2012) argued that environmentally conscious consumers may demand even more information about green products and not be affected by their natural claims on various aspects such as efficiency, safety, etc. Warm glow has been minimally associated with safety, efficacy and brand advocacy in past studies. Since followers' warm glow from green cosmetics may strengthen or weaken the relationship of perceived efficacy and safety with brand advocacy, it is imperative to test these relationships empirically. Additionally, warm glow has been found to influence green purchase intention for green-branded energy (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez, 2012) and non-profit products in case of cause-related marketing (Chaabouni et al., 2021). However, authors propose to analyse the impact of warm glow as a moderator between brand advocacy and intention to purchase in the case of green cosmetic products, a novel perspective with limited exploration in previous studies. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H10: Followers' warm glow for green cosmetics moderates the relationship between their perceived efficacy and brand advocacy

H11: Followers' warm glow for green cosmetics moderates the relationship between their perceived safety and brand advocacy

H12: Followers' warm glow for green cosmetics moderates the relationship between their brand advocacy and purchase intention
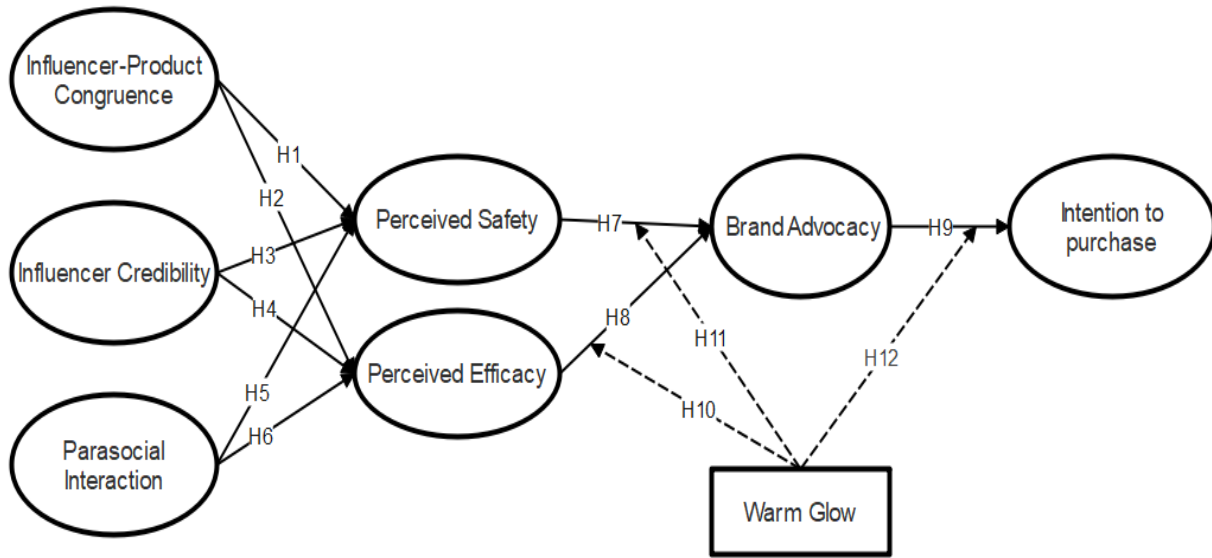

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Instagram has emerged as a prominent social media platform for captivating visuals through its extensive use of photos and videos. As a result, it has become the go-to platform for influencers to generate and disseminate creative, innovative, and influential content (Omnicore, 2021). In the case of beauty products, it is highly utilized platform by influencers platform due to its dynamic and visually appealing nature (Dos Santos et al., 2023; Janssen et al., 2022). In this research, authors observed the Instagram profiles of renowned Indian influencers with 30k followers or above who aggressively endorse green cosmetic products. They observed these accounts over a duration of three months and approached their followers, who were actively engaged by either liking or commenting on influencer's posts related to green cosmetics. These followers were contacted with a message explaining the significance of this research and a question seeking their intent to contribute. Followers, who expressed interest to participate in the survey were then approached for the final data collection. Furthermore, to confirm that respondents had a fair idea of green cosmetics and could rationally contribute to this study, three screening questions were added in the initial part of the questionnaire. These were - 'Are you aware about green cosmetics?', 'Do you like to follow influencers who endorse green cosmetic products?', 'Since how long have you been following beauty influencers endorsing green cosmetic products?'. The survey included only the respondents who answered 'yes' to the first two questions and 'more than 6 months' in the third question. The responses of the participants with any different answer were not included in the survey. In total, the authors shared the questionnaire with 689 female followers and were able to collect data from 504 respondents, which led to a response rate of 73.14%. The data was collected over a period of three months, March-May 2023. The final sample comprised 482 respondents, and 12 responses were excluded because of their incompleteness (Kline, 2011). Besides this, 10 responses were dropped as they stood as outliers after conducting Mahalanobis' Distance analysis through SPSS (Kline, 2011).

In order to measure the stated variables, a structured questionnaire with 30 statements was designed by adopting the scales for Parasocial Interaction (Hwang & Zhang 2018; 6 statements), Influencer Credibility (McCroskey & Teven 1999; 4 statements), Influencer-Product Congruence (Xu & Pratt, 2018; 4 statements), Brand Advocacy (Ahmadi & Ataei, 2022; 3 statements), Intention to purchase (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; 3 statements), Perceived Safety (Bauer et al., 2013; 4 statements), Perceived Efficacy (Vanbergen et al., 2020; 3 statements) and Warm Glow (Nunes & Schokkaert, 2003; 4 statements) from the previous literature. The entire questionnaire was divided into three sections, wherein the first section contained the filter questions, the second

contained the statements relating to the variables, and the third contained the socio-demographic aspects such as income, age, education and the approximate number of beauty influencers a respondent follows. Each variable was assessed on a seven-point Likert scale with 1 as strongly disagree and 7 as strongly agree. SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 were used to draw findings from the data obtained from the questionnaires. Details of the measures are presented in Appendix A.

3.2. Measurement validation

The scales were presented to a panel of social media marketing experts and two professors of digital marketing in order to verify the content validity of the measures. Experts were asked to rate the items on the scale of "not representative", "somewhat representative", and "clearly representative" of the construct in order to ensure that the statements genuinely measured the desired construct (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Furthermore, the questionnaire was pretested on a group of thirty-six women who followed beauty-focused influencers, and the identified inconsistencies were addressed for all the statements.

Secondly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to ensure the validity of the constructs. Convergent validity was assessed by determining Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Composite reliability is found to be between .815 to .899 which is above the threshold value of 0.60. Also, the average variance explained is greater than the threshold value of 0.50 for all the stated factors. Composite reliability is also greater than AVE which further confirms the convergent validity. Discriminant validity is a condition that is established when the average variance explained (AVE) is more than the maximum shared variance (MSV). As shown in Table 1, AVE is greater than the MSV for each factor, providing support for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Finally, the fit between the model and the data was assessed through measures of fit indices. While analysing the same, the indices were: $\chi2/df = 2.83$, CFI = 0.912, GFI = 0.971, AGFI = .865, RMSEA =0.076. All of the observed indices indicated a good fit between the model and the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 1. Convergent and Divergent Validity Assessment

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)
IC	0.815	0.543	0.354	0.915
IPC	0.883	0.613	0.134	0.946
PSI	0.846	0.584	0.169	0.989
BA	0.837	0.658	0.348	0.967
PS	0.826	0.674	0.172	0.956
ITP	0.832	0.781	0.372	0.993
PE	0.899	0.664	0.384	0.867
WG	0.861	0.594	0.143	0.974

Source: Gakingston's Microsoft Excel-based Validity Toolkit Output; IC- Influencer Credibility; IPC- Influencer-Product Congruence; PSI-Parasocial interaction; BA-Brand Advocacy, PS- Perceived Safety; ITP-Intention to purchase; PE- Perceived Efficacy; WG-Warm Glow

3.3. Common Method Bias

The authors followed two approaches to ensure that data was free from common method bias. Primarily, all the respondents were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity. Also, as Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggested, the construct items were randomly placed to disguise the interrelationship between the constructs. Secondly, Harman's one-factor test for common method bias was applied to determine the data collection biases. The single factor resulted in 23.42% of the variance, which again was under the threshold value of 50%, therefore ensuring the data was free from biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4. Results

4.1. Structural model results

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyze the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. According to the results, all the main effects with the paths leading from IPC to PS (β=.341, p value<0.05), IC to PS (β=.243, p value<0.05), IC to PE (β=.468, p value<0.01), PSI to PE (β=.436, p value<0.01), PS to BA (β=.542, p value<0.01), PE to BA (β=.497, p value<0.01) and BA to ITP (β=.631, p value<0.01) were significant. The path leading from IPC to PE (β=.112, p value=0.089) and PSI to PS (β=.041, p value=.983) were insignificant. This led to the acceptance of H1, H3, H4, H6, H7, H8, H9 and the rejection of H2 and H5. The results are presented in Table 2. Overall, the model resulted in an adequate model fit, and the indices were observed as $\chi2$/pdf = 2.91, CFI = 0.923, GFI = 0.915, AGFI = .834, RMSEA =0.092. All of the observed indices indicated a good fit between the model and the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 2. Estimates of Structural Equation Modelling

Paths	β	SE	CR	P value	Hypothesis status
IPC→PS	.341	.060	5.981	<0.05	Accepted (H1)
IPC → PE	.112	.056	2.089	0.089	Not accepted (H2)
IC→ PS	.243	.058	6.134	<0.05	Accepted (H3)
IC→PE	.468	.087	5.891	<0.01	Accepted (H4)
PSI→PS	.041	.049	3.046	.983	Not accepted (H5)
PSI→ PE	.436	.061	5.365	<0.01	Accepted (H6)
PS→ BA	.542	.089	6.289	<0.01	Accepted (H7)
PE→BA	.497	.084	7.596	<0.01	Accepted (H8)
BA→ITP	.631	.98	5.642	<0.01	Accepted (H9)

Source: Author's elaboration on findings; R square (perceived safety = 0.34; perceived efficacy=0.54; brand advocacy= 0.62; intention to purchase= 0.71)

4.2. Moderation analysis

Warm glow is analyzed as a moderator in the relationship of perceived safety, perceived efficacy with brand advocacy, and between brand advocacy and intention to purchase. The moderating effect of warm glow is analyzed by conducting moderation analysis using Model 1 in PROCESS macro with bootstrapping the effects 5000 times which resulted in the interaction terms at 95% confidence intervals. Table 3 reveals that warm glow significantly moderated the relationship between perceived safety and brand advocacy (β=0.22, p value=0.03), and brand advocacy and intention to purchase (β=0.19, p value=0.01). Whereas, in the case of perceived efficacy and brand advocacy, it showed an insignificant moderation effect in the stated relationship (β=0.04, p value= 0.35). Hence, H11 and H12 are supported while H10 is rejected in the findings.

Table 3. Results of moderation analysis

	β	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	Moderation status
PS→ BA	0.22	2.14	0.03	0.0432	0.3460	Yes
PE→BA	0.04	.68	0.35	-0.8791	0.01985	No
BA→ ITP	0.19	2.07	0.01	0.03786	0.27828	Yes

Source: Model 1 in PROCESS macro, SPSS output

5. Discussion

In recent years, there has been an evident surge in the collaborative endeavours between brands and influencers to integrate product promotion into the influencer's narrative seamlessly (Belanch et al., 2021a; Jin et al., 2019). Existing research on green marketing literature has mostly concentrated on antecedents and consequences of green advertising and green brand image (Lavuri et al., 2022; Rahman & Nguyen-Viet, 2023; Sharma, 2021). Scant attention has been paid towards the role of influencer marketing in establishing positive brand associations (Wu et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). Consequently, this study looks into the intersection of influencer marketing for green cosmetic brands amidst the intensive focus on sustainable consumption by investigating the effects of relational factors on customers' perceptions of such brands (Zhao et al., 2024).

Notably, the increasing preference for natural claims in sustainable products has culminated in the narrative of "natural as better" (Simao et al., 2022). However, a prevailing literature gap exists in how influencer marketing specifically shapes perceptions of efficacy and safety for green cosmetics brands (Farivar et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021). Subsequently, this study establishes causal linkages between influencer-based relational factors and consumers' perceptions of the effectiveness and safety of the cosmetic brands. Further, this study takes a novel stance by highlighting how these pathways can reinforce positive branding ramifications in the form of brand advocacy and purchase intention.

Considering the effects of relational factors, the findings reveal that influencer-product congruence significantly contributes to perceived safety but does not affect perceived efficacy of the product. One potential reason behind such inference is that with a higher level of influencer-product congruence, particularly in the context of green cosmetics, which are self-expressive products (Lee et al., 2022), consumers trust the influencer and believe that the organic products endorsed by them are harmless and synthetic-free. When there is a high level of congruence between the influencer's values, image and lifestyle with the product, the product is perceived to be safe. On the other hand, lack of congruence may lead to skepticism among customers and rear reservations about the authenticity of the product (Kim & Kim, 2021) which can negatively affect the customer's perception of the product's safety. This is in consensus with prior studies, which proposed that the alignment between influencers and endorsed products would be more conspicuous than in the case of celebrities (Schouten et al., 2019); von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021).

In the case of perceived efficacy, influencer-product congruence is found to play an insignificant role. One plausible explanation behind this could be that merely product congruence is not enough to persuade followers to accept the credence of an influencer as an authority or expert vouching for the effectiveness of a cosmetics brand. This is supported by the next finding, which indicates that to establish higher perceptions of efficacy, an influencer's credibility or expertise in the specific product category plays a rather critical role. In addition, shopping green cosmetics is a subjective purchase which may depend upon individual preferences such as personality traits, skin colour, texture etc. For instance, a gel-based organic primer may be effective for customers with oily skin but may be a better fit for customers with dry skin. Therefore, this finding offers unique insight into existing literature related to promoting sustainable consumption (Sharma, 2021; Kılıç & Gürlek, 2023) by underscoring that product efficacy of cosmetic brand does not rely on perceived alignment between influencer and product.

In the case of influencer credibility, it is found to significantly impact the product's perceived safety and efficacy. Influencer based endorsement implies that they have personally and thoroughly assessed the product, considering factors such as ingredients, manufacturing and the validity of its organic claims. Similar findings were observed by Woodroof et al. (2020), wherein influencer transparency was found to impact the consumer's perception of product efficacy as well as his/her purchase intentions. This is also in line with Hollebeek et al. (2014) which indicates that when followers perceive an influencer as credible, trustworthy, and sincere, they are more likely to engage with the influencer and perceive the promoted product positively.

Parasocial interaction is found to contribute to perceived efficacy of the product significantly but fails to impact perceived safety. One possible explanation could be that when consumers have a one-sided relationship with an influencer, they often develop a sense of connection and familiarity with them. Consequently, they tend to trust the influencer and believe that any products they endorse are effective and reliable. For instance, when an influencer endorses a skin care product, followers with parasocial interaction with this influencer may be more inclined to believe that the product works and is worth purchasing. On the other hand, in the case of perceived safety, consumers evaluate the safety of green cosmetic brands based on their ingredients, benefits, absence of chemicals, cruelty-free certifications, etc. Parasocial interaction, on the other hand, emphasizes the emotional connection between the consumer and the influencer, which may affect the consumer's behaviour and attitude indirectly but may not directly contribute to the perceived safety of green cosmetic products.

These findings are partially supported by De Veirman et al., (2017) which stated that followers primarily rely on the influencer's expertise and domain knowledge rather than establishing any personal connection with them. Also, parasocial interaction is a unilateral pseudo-relationship which creates an illusory experience for the audience (Hwang

& Zhang, 2018). Consequently, when products are presented by influencer, they may appear effective in the presentation but may need the means to assess the safety aspect of the product (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). This finding extends the recent stream of literature based on fashion vloggers to the green cosmetics industry, which advocates that credibility plays a more significant role in influencing purchase intentions, especially among female followers compared to parasocial interaction. (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Masuda et al., 2022). Thus, a thorough optimization involving nuanced comparisons is imperative as the interplay of these factors proves to be contingent on the specific marketing context.

Furthermore, it has been observed that the perception of safety and efficacy play a crucial role in driving brand advocacy which, in turn, significantly impacts consumers' likelihood to purchase green cosmetic products. This may be because consumers concern regarding the potential risks with traditional cosmetic products is growing. They are actively seeking organic alternatives perceived as safer, more effective and freer from harmful chemicals. Thapa (2023) reported similar findings, which stated that brand advocacy positively influenced the consumer online purchase intentions. This puts forward the unique set of antecedents driving brand advocacy in a contextual setting, which has never been explored in previous research. As observed in the meta-analysis by Bhati & Verma (2020), antecedents like affective commitment, brand identification and satisfaction are the widely studied variables that facilitate brand advocacy after actual use (Hsiao et al. 2015; Fullerton, 2011; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Schepers & Nijssen, 2018). This study propounds that in the case of cosmetics products where consumers are actively looking for green options, they tend to indulge in brand advocacy even without the actual usage as a consequence of their strong perceptions of the safety and efficacy of the product.

Finally, this study uniquely explores brand advocacy and purchase intentions from the perspective of influencers' characteristics and perceived safety and efficacy of green cosmetic products while considering the moderating effect of warm glow. This study addresses a notable gap in the existing literature. Massarutto et al. (2019) underscored that there is limited understanding of how warm-glow can integrate into a utilitarian framework through manifestation of moral motivations. Warm glow is found to moderate the relationship between perceived safety and brand advocacy and brand advocacy and intention to purchase. When an environmentally conscious consumer discovers an eco-friendly and safe cosmetic product, they experience a sense of appreciation and positive emotions towards the brand. As a result, their purchase intentions towards the brand become stronger, and they actively engage in behaviours that contribute to building the brand's reputation. These findings are also consistent with Boobalan et al., (2021) wherein warm glow drove stronger intentions among consumers to buy organic food.

6. Implications
6.1. Theoretical implications
The current research provides fresh perspective to the existing literature in multiple ways. Firstly, this study takes a novel stance by utilizing the Similarity-attraction theory to investigate the relationship between influencer's relational characteristics, product-related perceptions of safety and efficacy and subsequent customer purchase intentions. This study highlights how critical aspects of influencer-follower interaction in terms of perceived congruence, credibility and parasocial interaction trigger influencer trustworthiness of natural claims. Although these variables have been examined in seminal studies in various contexts (Shan et al., 2021; Hugh et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021), this research offers a nuanced theoretical extension to offer fresh perspective into 'influencer-led green cosmetics marketing' by eliciting causal mechanisms driving critical product-related perceptions. Through authentic alignment with consumer values and lifestyles, this study demonstrates the pathway of effective influencer marketing for green cosmetics industry, thereby unravelling complex consumer behaviours in digital marketing environments.

Secondly, there are several studies that have explored the influencers' characteristics and their impact on consumer brand engagement (Wei et al., 2022), but limited research exists on their relationship with perceived safety, efficacy, and brand advocacy. The present study fills this gap by examining influencer characteristics' contribution to customer's perception of product safety and efficacy, ultimately leading to brand advocacy and customer's purchase intentions. Amidst the increasing importance of understanding brand trajectory in diverse digital marketing avenues (Wang et al., 2019; Wong & Hung, 2023) through digital marketing, this research explores the spillover effect by substantiating the antecedent role of brand advocacy in driving purchase intentions for green cosmetics. Thirdly, this study introduces the concept of moral fulfilment or the "warm glow" experienced by consumers while advocating or purchasing green cosmetics. It validates the influence of warm glow on the relationship between perceived safety and brand advocacy, as well as brand advocacy and the intention to purchase. While previous studies (e.g., Winterich & Barone, 2011; Waites et al., 2020) have found the direct effect of warm glow effect for sustainable consumption in general, present research investigates the moderating effect within the realm of influencer marketing for green cosmetics.

6.2. Practical implications

The findings of the study offer insightful implications for social media managers, influencers and brand strategists. Firstly, we determine that parasocial interaction can favourably influence consumers' perceptions of efficacy, which in turn, facilitates brand advocacy for the green cosmetic brand. This is relevant for cosmetics brands that utilize influencer marketing to vouch for such claims, or that intend to upgrade or design their product portfolio to include a higher level of natural ingredients. In pursuance of this, influencer-viewer interactions must be managed actively by sharing behind-the-scenes glimpses of the influencer's daily life by including their skincare routine incorporating the green cosmetic brand. Influencers can share personal stories about their journey toward adopting sustainable beauty practices by emphasizing the positive impact of the endorsed green cosmetics on their lifestyle. Further, brands are suggested to conduct live Q&A sessions, tutorials, or product demonstrations to facilitate real-time interaction and create a sense of immediacy and personal connection. Further, marketing managers should consider creating a virtual community for fans to interact and foster a unique sense of belonging to an exclusive group.

Brands can further collaborate with influencers and followers to launch limited-edition releases of green cosmetics where consumers can be involved in the product development process. Brand can leverage gamified marketing activities by facilitating discussions related to ingredients, packaging designs and product names. Notably, gamification can contribute towards an additional layer of parasocial interaction where influencers can develop interactive challenges to let customers earn badges, rewards or discounts by completing certain tasks related to product knowledge or skincare routines. Similarly, influencers should partner with skincare professionals, dermatologists or beauty experts to display and vouch for relevant certifications or courses. They may publish annual sustainability impact reports in collaboration with identified brands to elicit the environmental footprint of green cosmetic brands. A more dedicated approach can involve spearheading Virtual Reality (VR) experiences where followers can be offered virtual tours showcasing ingredient-sourcing locations or educational modules on sustainable cosmetics.

As influencer-product congruence enhances perceived safety, brands should employ ambassadors or influencers who share a high fit by assessing value congruence. Selected influencers should showcase how the green cosmetic product seamlessly integrates into their daily beauty routine. Another recommendation is to leverage the laddering technique and focus on higher-order congruence, where brands can maintain visual congruence between the influencer's content style and the brand's aesthetic. Such visual consistency can contribute to seamlessly integrating the green cosmetic products into the influencer's content. Further, sharing aspects of the influencer's own green lifestyle, including eco-conscious habits, can facilitate better alignment with the green cosmetic brand's values. This could involve recycling routines, energy-saving practices etc.

Brand advocacy is facilitated by perceived safety and perceived efficacy, which in turn enhances purchase intention of green cosmetic brands. Hence, brands must work with influencers to create and nurture a community around the brand. This could include creating dedicated hashtags, forums or groups for followers. Also, brands should implement loyalty programs and offer exclusive discounts, privileged deals like early access to new products or special perks to incentivize word of mouth. Finally, as warm glow moderates the effect of perceived safety and brand advocacy, brand should voice its commitment to ethical practices and social responsibility by actively participating in sustainability-focused campaigns or initiatives. Brand strategists should build narratives around framing the use of green cosmetics as an empowering choice by accentuating how each purchase contributes to positive change. Social media developers should consider developing interactive tools or apps that allow consumers to track their purchases' environmental and social impact. This could include carbon footprint calculators, impact dashboards showing community contributions or updates on sustainability milestones achieved. Further, brands collaborating with influencers can introduce innovative loyalty programs that reward consumers for engaging in sustainable actions or creating awareness for green cosmetics. Incentives such as exclusive product previews, eco-friendly merchandise, or donations to environmental causes can acknowledge their contributions, ultimately fulfilling their warm glow.

7. Limitations

While this research offers crucial insights, there are a few limitations. Primarily, as this study focusses on influencer marketing of green cosmetics promoted on Instagram, future studies can explore how social media personalities at micro and macro level affect similar perceptions on diverse platforms like YouTube, Twitter etc. Secondly, this study adopts a purposive sampling technique, which has inherent limitations. To address these limitations, future studies may employ experimental research design and implement a more rigorous and reliable sample selection method. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the findings and conclusions of this research are specific to Indian customers, which may limit the generalizability of the study's implications. Lastly, the present research has focussed on a warm glow as the sole moderator. However, future studies may delve deeper into other cultural and social contexts and explore the influence of other socioeconomic and psychological factors in the form of moderators and mediators.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A. Details of constructs under the study (Source: Extracted from literature)

Constructs	Statements	Adapted from --
Parasocial Interaction (m=5.41; α=.817)	I feel connected to the influencer by engaging with his/her social media.	Hwang & Zhang (2018)
	I feel contented with the influencer's message shared on her social platform.	
	I can trust the information shared by the beauty influencer.	
	I feel captivated with the influencer's content on his/her social media.	
	I pity if influencer commits any mistake.	
	I find influencer's social media helpful as per my interests.	
Influencer Credibility (m=4.89; α=.866)	I find influencer I follow is skilled in her/his field	McCroskey & Teven (1999)
	I believe influencer I follow is effective in her/his work	
	I trust that influencers I follow are reliable.	
	I certainly believe that influencers' endorsements are a correct reference for making purchase choices.	
Influencer-Product Congruence (m=5.11; α=.873)	Influencer I follow has a good match with the endorsed product/ brand they promote.	Xu & Pratt, (2018)
	There is good compatibility between influencer I follow and the endorsed products/ brands	
	The congruency between the influencers I follow and their recommended brand/product is high.	
Brand Advocacy (m=5.02; α=.820)	I would recommend follow the endorsed brand to others	Ahmadi & Ataei, (2022)
	I like to convey the good things about the endorsed brand to my known people	
	I am generally able to persuade the other individuals to prefer the endorsed brand	
Intention to purchase (m=4.91; α=.812)	I would pursue the brand suggestions extended by the influencer.	Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019)
	I might purchase the brand as per the advice extended by the influencer.	
	I will purchase the recommended product/brand by the influencer in the future times as well.	
	I believe that the endorsed product does not contain any chemical residues	Bauer et al., (2013)

Perceived Safety (m=4.88; α=.856)	I believe that the endorsed product is free from any contamination	
	The endorsed products are free from any harmful ingredients	
	I trust that the endorsed product is safe to use	
Perceived Efficacy (m=5.12; α=.876)	I consider that the endorsed product is highly effective	Vanbergen et al., (2020)
	I trust that the endorsed product would perform its objective.	
	Ingredients in the endorsed product are effective	
Warm Glow (m=4.07; α=.854)	I feel appreciated when I buy green cosmetics as it assists me to save environment	(Nunes & Schokkaert, 2003)
	I believe in contributing to the human and nature well-being by purchasing green cosmetic products	
	I feel myself to be a superior consumer whenever I buy green cosmetic product	
	I think I may live better by consuming green cosmetics	