The Impact of Influencer Marketing: Insights from a Tik-Tok Celebrity Endorsement in the Cosmetic Surgery Industry

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Influence marketing often involves collaboration between brands and influencers, where influencers promote a brand's products or services to their followers. This type of marketing is highly effective in reaching specific target audiences, building brand awareness, and fostering trust and credibility, as it relies on the established relationship between the influencer and their followers. It is commonly used in various industries, including fashion, beauty, lifestyle, fitness, and technology, among others. Our study focuses on the little-explored area of influencer marketing, offering many research insights. We conducted an online survey of 180 active followers of a celebrity influencer on TikTok, who promoted an advertisement for facial plastic surgery. We used the structural equation method via Smart PLS software. The results show a positive impact of influencer marketing on authenticity, message sender credibility, persuasive understanding, perceived interactivity, and audience purchase intent. These results have allowed us to formulate managerial recommendations for companies.

Keywords: Influencer marketing; authenticity; credibility of the message sender, « persuasion knowledge »; perceived interactivity.

1. Introduction

Global technological changes have profoundly affected our lifestyles, habits, and expectations (Troisi, Fenza et al. 2022). Nearly half of the world's population regularly uses social networks. Therefore, it is essential for businesses to adapt to this new world by adopting more connected and digital marketing strategies rather than traditional methods(Forbes and Mahan 2017), in order to stay connected with their consumers (Schuiling 2017). Influencer marketing is an ideal solution, as it is inexpensive and highly effective in reaching large numbers of individuals (Lee 2016). It can be interesting to collaborate with influencers to promote your products.

Other people's opinions are often more trusted by consumers than advertisements launched by

companies for their products. Working with an influencer has the attractive benefit of spending a lot of time developing an optimal network of followers. If promoted by good influencers, products are more likely to be quickly purchased due to the high engagement of their audiences(Belanche, Casaló et al. 2021). The performance of a brand or company can be positively impacted by influencer marketing, which targets a select few individuals recognized for their ability to influence consumers (Ki, Cuevas et al. 2020). The research question is how much TikTok influencer marketing affects audience behaviour.

A precise structure had to be followed in order to conduct this research. The work is divided into two parts: the first part comprises the literature review, while the second part presents the results obtained and the necessary interpretations from the empirical study.

2. Literature review

The emergence of influencer marketing

Having an effective marketing strategy in place is crucial for businesses to attract attention online (Suleiman, Muhammad et al. 2020) . With the internet's arrival, brands of all sizes have flooded the online world with copious amounts of advertising, causing consumers to become more doubtful of self-promoting brands. Promoting a company's products and services through influencer marketing offers a more authentic approach (Dalstam, Nordlöf et al. 2018). Brands partner with social media influencers, who have dedicated and active followers, rather than relying on conventional advertising.   The likelihood of a successful marketing campaign can be greatly increased when consumers trust recommendations from influencers they admire and follow (Biaudet 2017).

The Internet has enabled consumers to communicate and share with people from all over the world through influencer marketing, creating a global exchange space that goes beyond spatial and temporal boundaries (Flores 2008) (Galan and Vignolles 2015). Companies have adopted influencer marketing as a key element of their marketing strategy, which is why it has become so important.

Influencers via TikTok

The new entrepreneurs of our modern world are now the influencers (Wielki 2020). Someone who has the power to influence is primarily known as an influencer. Above all, an influencer is someone who has the ability to affect the purchasing decisions of others through their authority, expertise, position, or relationship with their audience (Brown and Fiorella 2013). Moreover, there is a regular group of individuals who follow and engage with him or her.

Companies can work with these individuals as relational assets, not just marketing tools, to achieve their marketing goals (Berry 1995). There are various methods of categorizing the types of influencers(Gulberti 2019). One approach is to classify influencers based on their number of followers; while another is to categorize them according to the type of content they create (Alp and Öğüdücü 2018) (Ouvrein, Pabian et al. 2021). A third way is to determine the level of influence an influencer has on their audience (Arzhanova, Dovzhik et al. 2022). Finally, there are several ways to categorize the types of influencers.

3. Research Hypotheses

Influencer marketing and authenticity

The importance of authenticity in the self-presentation of web influencers is becoming increasingly evident, as it can help them gain visibility on their platforms. In terms of entrepreneurship, a study conducted by (Duffy and Hund 2015) revealed through a qualitative analysis of text and visuals from the 38 most popular fashion bloggers in the United States that digital social media influencers seek to present an "authentic" image by staging elements of their personal lives. This staging of self would allow them to appear more real and accessible to their audience. Being "real" means that the individual acts in accordance with themselves and expresses their thoughts and feelings in a consistent manner. To succeed as a micro-web celebrity, authenticity is a crucial element, as stated by (Marwick 2015). Influencer marketing strategies used by companies to promote their products and services via influencers encourage the importance of being oneself and authentic, which are emphasized by digital social networks. Each individual's identity is linked to authenticity, as stated by (Novicevic, Harvey et al. 2006). An authentic individual would behave in accordance with their beliefs and values. According to Novicevic and al. (2006), authentic self-presentation is not based on a universal understanding, but rather on an individual's personal understanding. Based on the consistency of a microcelebrity's discourse over time, this understanding is according to (Marwick 2015). The following hypothesis may arise from this reflection:

Hypothesis 1: Influencer marketing via TikTok has a positive impact on authenticity.

Influencer marketing and brand credibility

A brand or its message can be associated with credibility. The perception of credibility, according to (Erdem and Swait 2004), comes from the consumer and not from the brand itself. Credibility in influencer marketing depends on several factors that are distinct from the influencer's perceived authenticity. (Yuan and Lou 2020) states that an influencer's credibility is increased by their appeal, wealth, expertise, and relational qualities, which in turn increases the audience's trust in them. The audience and community perceive the influencer as a highly credible source of information, in other words. Trust and expertise are the two most important factors in determining the credibility of a message sender, according to several studies (Lou and Kim 2019).

In the context of influencer marketing, the opinions of an influencer – who is considered expert and unbiased - are more credible than traditional advertisements, according to (Herr, Kardes et al. 1991). However, in regard to TV advertising, the brand's credibility is perceived differently compared to the influencer marketing mentioned earlier. The brand, not a third party, is the origin of the broadcasted message in this case. Even if it is not always true, the brand can spread the message that it thinks it is best to encourage consumers to buy. The brand's credibility rating is therefore often questioned by the consumer (Munung 2004). We can put this hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Influencer marketing via TikTok has a positive impact on the credibility of a brand.

Influencer marketing and "persuasion knowledge"

The concept of "persuasion knowledge" can be defined as the set of knowledge and beliefs that a consumer has about the persuasion attempts carried out by marketers. According to (Friestad and Wright 1994), this involves a relationship between two parties: the consumer, as a target, and the marketer, as an agent. The concept focuses on how consumers' knowledge of persuasion influences their response to agents' attempts at persuasion in marketing situations. Consumers have their own goals to attain and recognize that to achieve them, they must interact strategically with marketers, who also have their own objectives. Recognizing sponsored content as advertising is critical to activating the "knowledge of persuasion." This can be achieved by adding a third-party disclosure to an influencer's sponsored content, which indicates that the influencer is promoting a specific brand in that particular content (Evans, Phua et al. 2017). When this information is disclosed, consumers are informed that the influencer's content contains advertising. With this information, they will be more likely to take a critical view of the sponsored product. Indeed, when consumers are aware of the practice of sponsored product placement, their purchase intention may decrease (Chaisurivirat 2009). We can then create the following hypothesis:

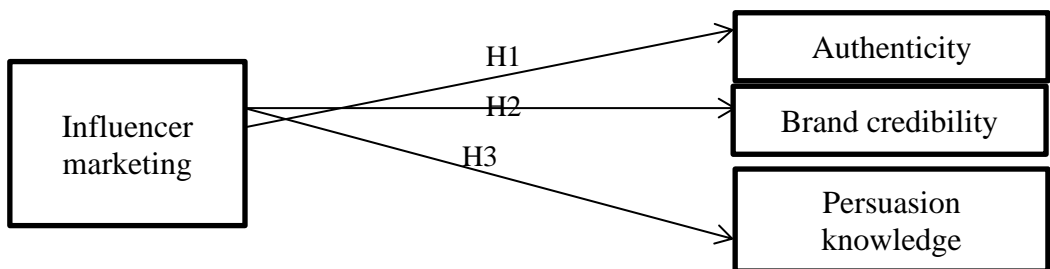Hypothesis 3: Influencer marketing via TikTok has a positive impact on "persuasion knowledge".

Figure 1. Research model

4. Research Methodology

Research Context

In today's society, physical appearance occupies a primordial place, because we live in a society of "images". This growing importance to appearance has made cosmetic surgery the most widespread and most requested surgical procedure. This practice, which was once considered illicit, was then reserved exclusively for therapeutic purposes. However, according to (Carpigo 2021), the demand for cosmetic surgery is now constantly increasing "Cosmetic surgery is a global phenomenon, which lends itself well to the multisite observational approach". Current social norms have led to the image of the person and his or her physical appearance being considered as criteria of quality and personal success. Thus, the model of beauty is often associated with aesthetics and cosmetic care (Delens and François). The body

has thus become the primary object of beauty, as (Le Breton 2008) points out. We will now examine how cosmetic surgery is addressed in the context of social networks (particularly TikTok) in relation to influencer marketing practices.

Sample selection

The questionnaire we used for this study includes a video of a famous influencer on TikTok presenting an advertisement for facial plastic surgery (Botox, facelift). We interviewed respondents who are relatively active on social networks, including TikTok. Our sample consisted of 180 people, 15% of whom were men and 85% of whom were women. Most of the respondents (65%) are in the age range of 25-40 years and almost 92% have a college education. We used structural equation modelling using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach for this study. This method is particularly suited to small samples, as pointed out by (Hair, Risher et al. 2019), which fits our case well.

Choice of measurement scales

In this study, we used measurement scales previously justified in the literature. The following scales were chosen: the authenticity measure, as defined by (Akbar and Wymer 2017); message sender credibility, as measured by (Dunaetz 2019); "persuasion knowledge," as measured by (Ham, Nelson et al. 2015). We used a 5-degree Lickert semantic scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

5. Results and discussion

Analysis of the results

Factor analysis allows us to determine the number of dimensions underlying a questionnaire.

However, it should be noted that factor analysis is not a single method, but a set of methods that can vary according to the hypotheses and data used (Evrard, Pras et al. 2009). Our study relies on the principal component analysis method to extract latent factors from the initial observable variables in order to obtain the maximum amount of information needed. All results are accepted (Table 1).

Table1. Results of the principal component analysis

Constructs/ Dimensions	KMO	Bartlett test Meaning	Explained Variance %.	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer marketing	0.702	661.357 ; p=0.000	80.964	0.810
Authenticity	0.718	666,814; p=0.000	83.487	0.847
Credibility	0.633	585.762; p=0.000	70.524	0.752
Persuasion knowledge	0.839	811.626; p=0.000	88.720	0.971

Once the reliability of the measurement tools has been confirmed, it is essential to verify the validity of the scales. According to (Penta, Arnould et al. 2005), an instrument is considered valid if it actually measures what it is supposed to measure. This implies checking whether the variable being measured is the underlying cause of the item's covariance (DeVellis and Thorpe 2021). For this purpose, the verification of construct validity relies mainly on the examination of convergent and discriminant validity (Table 2).

Table2. Reliability of scales

Constructs/ Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Influencer marketing	0.779	0.854	0.825
Authenticity	0.799	0.786	0.769
Credibility	0.888	0.768	0.864
Persuasion knowledge	0.792	0.901	0.874

Hypothesis testing and discussion

The objective is to test the significance of hypothesized relationships between latent variables. A link is considered significant if it has a Student's t-value greater than 1.96 (Sarstedt, Ringle et al. 2014) and if its associated p-value is less than 0.05. The research hypotheses are based on the findings from the literature review (Table 3).

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Assumptions	Relationships	β	T	P	Results
H1	Influencer marketing-> Authenticity	0.080	2.579	0.085	Confirmed
H2	Influencer marketing-> Credibility	0.075	2.225	0.020	Confirmed
H3	Influencer marketing -> Persuasion knowledge	0.079	2.501	0.052	Confirmed

Indeed, hypothesis H1, which assumes a positive impact of influencer marketing via TikTok on authenticity, is accepted with a β coefficient of 0.080. Authenticity is a rare virtue that can have beneficial effects on the brand by helping to improve its equity. Several empirical studies (Yuan and Lou 2020) (Beverland and Farrelly 2010) (Napoli, Dickinson et al. 2014) have shown that consumers have more favourable attitudes to authentic objects or brands than inauthentic ones.

Customers seek to interact with authentic, honest, and trustworthy individuals, especially in highly sensitive contexts such as cosmetic surgery. In fact, in the long term, authenticity is the best way for any organization to succeed.

Hypothesis H2, which assumes a positive relationship between influencer marketing via TikTok and brand credibility, is confirmed with a β coefficient of 0.075. An influencer's credibility is an important characteristic in determining whether or not the influencer is a good influencer to his/her community (AlFarraj, Alalwan et al. 2021). It is important to note that the level of trust the audience places in an influencer is a key component of his/her credibility, which directly influences the consumer's decision to follow that influencer or not. However, this credibility can only be forged if the influencer maintains independence from the brands and companies they collaborate and speak with (Khamis, Ang et al. 2017).

According to Hypothesis H3, the use of influencer marketing on TikTok has a positive effect on "persuasion knowledge," a claim confirmed by a β coefficient of 0.079. Persuasion campaigns conducted on social networks are more effective than other means (Evans, Phua et al. 2017), as users are constantly connected to them and are naturally exposed to ads on these platforms. Influencer marketing is considered an effective means of persuasion because it relies on a transparent experience: influencers who advertise share content with their audience. When the influencer's "persuasion knowledge" effect is strong, they are more likely to easily reach their audience (Van Cottem and STEILS 2021).

Today, the world is increasingly influenced by marketing standards. The major challenge for brands is to differentiate themselves by going back to the basics of a sincere and authentic relationship with their customers. This implies that influencers are authentic and that brands are credible. To get closer to consumers, companies have every interest in using influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is generally less expensive, so it's crucial to measure the financial balance between different marketing methods to get the best return on investment. It's important to find the right balance. Influencer marketing is very beneficial for brands, especially when values such as authenticity, credibility, and knowledge of persuasion are integrated into marketing strategies. These values have always been essential in marketing.

In this study, we observed that 85% of the respondents were women, compared to only 15% of men. Although this is widely known, it is worth noting that the evolution of modern values, such as the culture of physical appearance, the fear of again, and the search for eternal youth, has led to an increase in men's adherence to this phenomenon. Thus, increasingly men are now concerned with the issues of body, face, and physical beauty worship. In regard to cosmetic surgery, influencers have an important responsibility towards their followers and must provide clear and complete information. The transmission of this information must be done with certain specificity, because the field of plastic surgery is particular. Influencers must therefore be cautious when dealing with this delicate subject.

6. Conclusion

Today, companies are faced with a real challenge in regard to choosing a marketing strategy. In this study, we designed an online questionnaire and submitted it to a sample of 180 active members of TikTok, who follow an influencer known for posting an advertisement for facial plastic surgery. The results of the study indicate that influencer marketing has a positive effect on authenticity, credibility of the message sender and "persuasion knowledge".

This research highlights several key contributions:

Enhanced Understanding of Influencer Marketing Dynamics: This study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of influencer marketing, specifically within the context of promoting cosmetic surgery. By demonstrating the positive effects on authenticity and message credibility, your research deepens the understanding of how influencer endorsements can shape consumer perceptions and attitudes.

Identification of Transferable Findings: While focusing on the cosmetic surgery industry, our study opens the door to extrapolating findings to other sectors. This contribution enables marketers to apply the insights gained from your research to various product categories, such as food products, or even diverse fields like the electoral domain, facilitating more effective marketing strategies across different industries.

Future Research Direction: By acknowledging the limitations of the study, particularly the scope confined to TikTok and the cosmetic surgery domain, this research sets the stage for future research endeavours. It encourages scholars and marketers to explore influencer marketing in diverse contexts, spanning different social media platforms like Instagram or YouTube, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the broad implications and effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies.

Overall, our study contributes to the ongoing evolution of marketing strategies, offering a nuanced perspective on the significance of influencer marketing in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviour.

Like any scientific work, this study revealed some limitations, particularly regarding the research context, which was limited to cosmetic surgery. It would be possible to extend the research to other contexts, such as food products or the electoral field, as well as to other social networking platforms such as Instagram or YouTube. These limitations pave the way for future research in the field of influencer marketing, which represents a new, attractive, and interesting field to explore.

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