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# Consequences of influencer-created content on influencers' authenticity in the beauty and personal care industry

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## ABSTRACT

One challenge in creating a personal brand is convincing consumers that it is authentic. Brands perceived to be inauthentic will have difficulty engaging with consumers; thus, the brand may not be long-lasting. This is also important for influencers, as they are a type of personal brand. Therefore, it is essential to consider the authenticity that is necessary for influencers when creating their brands. This study adapts the dimensions of advertising content value, and it examines the direct and indirect effects on influencer authenticity and followers' trust, attitudes, and purchase intentions. The study reached out to 445 social media users interested in beauty and personal care products. The results indicate that the perceived entertainment and perceived informativeness of the influencer's post content have a significant positive effect on influencer authenticity. Moreover, the results also show that influencer authenticity plays an important role in trust in and attitude toward branded posts. Finally, trust in and attitude toward branded posts lead to purchase intention.

## ARTICLE HISTORY



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## 1. Introduction

The popularity of influencer marketing has increased lately (Statista 2023a) due to influencers' negative or positive effect on consumers regarding a brand (Statista 2023b). Influencers are people who have created their own brands on social media (Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2017). They reach other people on those platforms through the content they post (Gross and Van Wangenheim 2018), thereby creating their personal brand. Hines (2004, 60) defines the personal brand as being 'about recognizing who you are and what you do best and communicating that to clients'. The personal brand can increase consumers' positive emotional responses (Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer 2017), and the brand includes impression management (Chen 2013). However, building a personal brand is not an easy process (Labrecque, Markos, and Milne 2011). One difficulty in creating a personal brand is getting consumers to

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perceive it as authentic. Authenticity involves being honest with oneself and others (Wellman et al. 2020), and it holds significant ethical implications within the influencer marketing domain. Consumers may interpret the absence of authenticity among influencers as a possible deception in their commercial collaborations (Arnesson 2022); thus, consumers will not perceive the influencer as genuine, honest, or sincere (Pöyry et al. 2019), or they may view the influencers as artificial. If the influencer appears artificial, the brand is not expected to last long (Harris and Rae 2011) because consumers often consider a brand to be inauthentic if it conducts business that deceives them in order to increase its profits and prestige (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard 2020). Followers may respond negatively when they perceive that the influencer's message is tied to a hidden collaboration with a brand. The audience anticipates that influencers will maintain transparency, honesty, and ethical conduct in their interactions with them (Gamage and Ashill 2023). Thus, the ethics of authenticity keeps the influencers' identity at the forefront. An influencer's authenticity is a significant factor in their role as a brand ambassador (Wellman et al. 2020). It is important that the influencer creates an authentic personal brand for brand collaborations because an authentic and reliable influencer supports their effectiveness (Borchers and Enke 2021). Furthermore, being authentic is necessary for an influencer's success (van Driel and Dumitrica 2020) and to create influencer value (Hearn and Schoenhoff 2016). However, today, social media users are skeptical of influencers' commercial orientation, and they want influencers to have a high level of authenticity (Jun and Yi 2020). All this information shows the necessity of understanding the characteristics that create influencer authenticity, which is important for building personal brands and for supporting collaborations with nonpersonal brands.

Influencers are experts in creating effective and professional content (Enke and Borchers 2019) that engages consumers (Campbell and Farrell 2020). Influencers attract the consumers' attention with their content (Chen, Shang, and Li 2014). They have the power to reach and influence large audiences by creating regular content (Stubb, Nyström, and Colliander 2019). This content is a way to engage with followers, which adds value to a brand (Backaler 2018). In marketing communications, it is important to create a communication style and suitable content for the target audience's needs (Harris and Rae 2011). Thus, it is important to consider that influencer-created content positively influences strategic communication studies (Childers, Lemon, and Hoy 2019). According to research in the field of influencer marketing, people follow influencers because they are entertaining and share informative content (Ki et al. 2020); furthermore, they perceive influencers as more authentic than traditional media because they create emotional content and sincerity with their direct information (Coco and Eckert 2020).

Previous studies have largely overlooked influencer authenticity. To our knowledge, there has not been a focused examination on how influencers can cultivate their authenticity through their content. However, more recent research has explored influencer authenticity from two primary perspectives: the consumer perspective (Becker, Wiegand, and Reinartz 2019) and the brand perspective (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard 2020). In both cases, these studies assess the pros and cons of influencer authenticity relative to sponsorship agreements, yet they fall short of evaluating how influencer authenticity contributes to the development of a personal brand. They also neglect to explore how influencers can forge their own personal brands. Furthermore,

they omit a discussion on what is required for influencers to establish their authenticity as part of their personal brand. Creating a personal brand is crucial for influencers to maintain their followers and ensure effective collaboration.

Aw and Agnihotri (2023) underscore the evolving nature of influencer marketing, emphasizing the 'numerous opportunities and challenges' that persist in the context of new technologies and changing consumer behaviors. This dynamic environment underscores the importance of authenticity in maintaining relevance and effectiveness.

Among the studies addressing influencer authenticity, Zniva et al. (2023) focus on the personal characteristics of influencers such as uniqueness, longevity, scarcity, and consistency, considering these traits as indicators of influencer authenticity. However, their work overlooks the impact of content generated by influencers on the perception of influencer authenticity.

Furthermore, Dhun and Dangi (2023) highlight the critical role of influencer credibility and the alignment between influencer and brand values, pointing out that 'expertise, similarity, and congruence have a positive relationship with brand attitude' (p. 528), which further reinforces the necessity for influencers to cultivate authenticity through their content.

Content creation is pivotal for influencers on social media, as it sustains their presence. Investigating whether their content influences their perceived authenticity could inform strategies for effective content creation. To our knowledge, no study has yet explored the role of influencer-created content in enhancing influencer authenticity, a key aspect of personal brand building.

In addition, although past studies in influencer marketing have focused on the role of influencer content value in trusting the content (Lou and Yuan 2019), they do not focus on this value in terms of building influencer authenticity, which is one of the features that influencers should have (Backaler 2018). Therefore, this study will fill the gap in marketing literature in terms of understanding the role of perceived entertainment (PE) and perceived informativeness (PINF) of influencer-created content in influencer authenticity. Thus, influencers and marketers can focus on the correct influencer-created content features to establish efficient communication strategies.

In this study, we contribute to the influencer marketing literature regarding influencer authenticity. Accordingly, this study aims to provide an understanding on the role of PINF and PE in building influencer authenticity. Moreover, this study examines whether influencer authenticity creates trust in influencers' branded posts (BPs) as well as an attitude toward branded posts (ATBP) and purchase intention (PI). The study also shows the consequences of trust in branded posts (TBP) on consumers' PI. Moreover, this study considers BPs about beauty and personal care (BPC) products because we consider this category health sensitive (e.g., skin problems, allergic reactions). Thus, influencers' opinions are essential for followers when purchasing beauty products (Gerdeman 2019).

The study contributes to the literature on advertising content value by showing informativeness and entertainment as causal mechanisms of authenticity. Second, it contributes to the persuasion literature by demonstrating the impact of perceived authenticity, entertainment, and informativeness on ATBP and TBP. Finally, the study contributes to the theory of reasoned action by showing the relationship between trust, attitude, and PI.

## 2. Literature survey and hypothesis development

### 2.1. *Influencers' role on social media*

D. Brown and Hayes (2008) define an influencer as 'a third party who significantly shapes the customer's purchasing decision but may never be accountable for it' (p. 50). Influencers can constantly reach an extensive number of people who follow them on social media (Stubb, Nyström, and Colliander 2019) by creating content, which helps them build a relationship with their followers (Backaler 2018). Because today's consumers care about people's opinions and search for influencers' opinions about brands, influencers can become representatives or consultants of brands who boost the potential of social media for marketing activities (Stubb and Colliander 2019). Therefore, consumers search for the influencers' opinions about brands. Thus, influencers have an important role in shaping consumers' perspectives of a brand (Chopra, Avhad, and Jaju 2020). They can also affect consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and decisions (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017). In this context, marketers contact influencers to promote their products or brands in exchange for rewards, such as a free subscription for a \$1,000 promotion (Carter 2016) or a sponsored post (Childers, Lemon, and Hoy 2019) for which companies pay influencers or provide free products or services, trips, or other experiences (Campbell and Farrell 2020). In the realm of brand collaborations, it is important to acknowledge that outcomes can vary across distinct scenarios. For instance, it is important to note that influencer marketing outcomes can vary based on whether the collaborations are renowned or non-renowned. Specifically, partnerships with renowned brands tend to positively influence how the audience perceives the influencer's content, their intention to make purchases, and the credibility they associate with the influencer's messages (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al. 2022).

Influencer marketing-themed research has increased recently. These studies cover topics such as influencers' message strategies (Sharma 2023), parasocial interaction (Reinikainen et al. 2020), virtual human influencers (Deng and Jiang 2023), ethics of authenticity (Wellman et al. 2020), authentically fake (Lou et al. 2023), the role of influencers in livestreaming e-commerce (Wang and Zhang 2023), and the relationship between social comparison with influencers and impulsive purchasing (Mundel, Wan, and Yang 2023).

### 2.2. *Background information about the beauty and personal care (BPC) industry*

In this study, we selected BPC products as the industry group. Considering the fact that the product groups in this industry are sensitive to people's health, we assumed that people may consider these products' effects on their health and thus verify the information from various sources before purchasing them. The BPC industry includes categories such as cosmetics, skin care, personal care, and fragrances (Statista 2021a). The industry creates USD 505 billion in annual revenue (Statista 2020). Further, beauty-related content alone had 169 billion views on YouTube in 2018 (Statista 2021a). BPC companies invest in successful influencer marketing campaigns through paid, sponsored advertisements and by gathering reasonable engagement rates. For instance, Nivea worked with influencers under the hashtag #rethinksoft in 2019 (e.g., HilariaBaldwin and Colormecourtney), and

Dove worked with influencers for the #ArmsUp campaign in 2019 (e.g., NadineBaggott and Chiaranorischiorda). Nivea's campaign reached 21K users with an influencer (e.g., HilariaBaldwin), whereas Dove reached 45K users (e.g., Chiaranorischiorda).

## **2.3. Hypothesis development**

### **2.3.1. Advertising content value**

Advertising value involves the consumer subjectively evaluating the usefulness of advertising. Thus, it is a measure of advertising effectiveness (Ducoffe 1995). Haghirian, Madlberger, and Tanuskova (2005) explain that three dimensions shape the online-based advertising value of advertising message content: entertainment, informativeness, and irritation. The recipients' perception of the message as informative depends on the message providing the necessary information, being transmitted in a timely manner, and being relevant (Ducoffe 1995). Consumers' approval of ads is based on how well an informative message is conveyed. In addition, consumers' belief that the information conveyed is relevant supports value formation (Van-Tien Dao et al. 2014). Entertainment related to people's needs for 'escapism, diversion, aesthetic, enjoyment, or emotional release' indicates the likelihood of an advertisement being likeable (Ducoffe 1995). In interacting with computer-based media, a higher level of pleasure and interaction leads to positive emotions and moods among consumers (Haq 2009). Finally, advertisers' use of annoying, offensive, humiliating, and manipulative techniques results in irritation and reduces the effectiveness of advertising (Ducoffe 1995).

According to the concept of uses and gratification (U&G) theory, people use media to fulfill their specific motivations and purposes (Rubin 1994). People use social media because they seek information and entertainment (Buzeta, De Pelsmacker, and Dens 2020). This has similar results in terms of following influencers. People follow the influencers who have enjoyable personalities and who inspire and share informative content (Ki et al. 2020). For these reasons, these two values have become essential for many types of media that cater to their audiences' needs. With the increased popularity of the digitized news market, companies now try to satisfy their audiences' needs in various ways. They focus on the infotainment notion, which compromises the notions of entertainment and informativeness (Thussu 2015). Therefore, we only consider informativeness and entertainment as an influencer content value feature.

### **2.3.2. Perceived influencer authenticity (PIA)**

Vannini and Franzese (2008) define authenticity as 'the feeling and practice of being true to one's self or others' (p. 1621). Online authenticity is expressed as the individual's ability to feel and express their true self in social interactions (Lim et al. 2015). Perceived influencer authenticity (PIA), which becomes an important issue in online authenticity, has a multidimensional structure consisting of factors such as sincerity, honesty, endorsement, visibility, uniqueness, and expertise (Lee and Eastin 2021). Today, consumers look for authentic influencers, and they assume that inauthentic influencers only try to increase sales so they can increase profits (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard 2020). Because focusing on authentic influencers is key for brands to increase consumer trust (Jun and Yi 2020), branding principles are generally linked to authenticity (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003).

Authenticity can result from consumers' unique evaluations (Bruhn, Schoenmüller, and Schäfer Daniela 2012). Consumers use various cues when evaluating authenticity. By combining these clues, they reach a final assessment (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008). Marketing communication studies influence consumers' ideas about brand authenticity. A consumer's favorable judgements toward marketing communication studies can result in a positive opinion regarding the brand (Krishnan 1996), which means that focusing on marketing communication studies is an effective tool for creating brand authenticity (Dwivedi and McDonald 2018). In influencer marketing, successful content is counted as one of the advantages of strategic communication (Borchers and Enke 2021). Thus, successfully created content plays a key role in making influencers appear authentic. Digital contents, including information and entertainment, are effective in terms of brand engagement (Odoom 2023). Thus, influencers develop a unique style as they share information over time. To effectively connect with their target audience, it is crucial for influencers to be authentic in a way that matches the audience's style, language, and preferences (Deges 2018). Social media users typically follow influencers for fun rather than to see ads (L. Chen, Yan, and Smith 2023). To be seen as authentic, influencers should not only provide fact-based information (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard 2020) but also express their genuine satisfaction in creating content (Chen, Yan, and Smith 2023). Therefore, if influencers create strategic communication with the right content features in terms of advertising content value, such as informativeness and entertainment, it will help them create PIA for their personal brands. Thus, we assume that an influencer will build positive authenticity if they share content communicating why people should use social media and follow influencers. If followers believe influencers share informative and entertaining content, they may perceive the influencers to be authentic. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**H1:** The perceived informativeness (PINF) of an influencer's post content has a significant positive role in perceived influencer authenticity (PIA).

**H2:** The perceived entertainment (PE) of an influencer's post content has a significant positive role in perceived influencer authenticity (PIA).

### ***2.3.3. Consumers' attitude toward branded posts (ATBP)***

Attitude toward a behavior shapes people's negative and positive feelings (Hassan Fathelrahman Mansour and Mohammed Elzubier Diab 2016). Advertising can evoke pleasant and unpleasant feelings in people (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986). Attitude toward advertising has a significant effect through its use of several variables, such as advertising credibility, advertising perception, attitude toward an advertiser, and mood (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Attitude toward advertising measures the effectiveness of an advertisement (Hassan Fathelrahman Mansour and Mohammed Elzubier Diab 2016). Attitude toward online advertising is shaped via message content characteristics (Tsang, Ho, and Liang 2004). According to persuasion theory, emotion is a way to create positive results such as positive attitude (Lee and Hong 2016). Haq (2009) indicates that message content entertainment affects attitude toward online advertising positively. Zha et al. (2015) also show that message content characteristics that include entertainment have a direct positive effect on attitude toward online advertising. From a social media

standpoint, content perceived as humorous has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on attitudes (Yang 2022). Humor helps to capture audience's attention (Sharma 2023). This is primarily attributed to the fact that entertainment is one of the key sources of gratification for consumers (Odoom 2023). Specifically, entertainment holds a pivotal role in motivating individuals to engage with content produced by social media influencers on platforms such as YouTube (Sokolova and Perez 2021). Because associating influencers with being entertaining positively affects the attitudes of social media users (Herrando and Martín-De Hoyos 2022), a similar result can be seen in followers' attitudes toward influencers' BPs. In light of this information, we assume that the PE of an influencer's post content may also have a positive influence on ATBP. Thus,

**H3:** The perceived entertainment (PE) of an influencer's post content has a significant positive role in attitude toward branded posts (ATBP).

Persuasion knowledge theory states that consumers act for their benefit rather than for the marketers' if the source lacks transparency (Eisend and Tarrahi 2022). In other words, consumers' positive perceptions of authenticity help them cultivate their positive attitudes toward marketing practices. Previous studies have examined the relationship between the concepts of authenticity and attitude, and this relationship has been evaluated from different perspectives. For example, Jeon and An (2019) outline the relationship between corporate social responsibility and authenticity, Safeer et al. (2022) and Yang et al. (2021) describe brand authenticity, and Boisvert and Ashill (2022) explore luxury extension authenticity and attitude. The studies reveal that authenticity is a powerful element that positively affects consumer attitude (Busser and Shulga 2019). A similar result has been identified in the case of endorsers (Pöyry et al. 2019). In this context, when influencers come across as authentic, it tends to trigger positive emotions toward the brand and its advertising (Hudders and Lou 2022). Hence, we assume the following hypothesis:

**H4:** Perceived influencer authenticity (PIA) has a significant positive role in attitude toward branded posts (ATBP).

#### **2.3.4. Trust in branded posts (TBP)**

Trust refers to 'the perceived reliability of, dependability of, and confidence in a person, object, or process' (Fogg and Tseng 1999, 81), and it is attributable to individual feelings and knowledge (Seppänen et al. 2013). Considering that consumers tend to distrust advertising (Obermiller and Spangenberg 2000), the literature shows that trust is an important factor of persuasion and that it is vital for the relationship between consumers and sellers (Soh, Reid, and King 2007).

Brand authenticity (Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn 2017) and information authenticity (Shoffner and Koo 2020) include the cognitive processing of evaluation because authenticity follows the central route in persuasion when evaluating the message's authenticity. Thus, inauthenticity can create long-lasting, detrimental behavioral changes (Shoffner and Koo 2020). For example, when an endorser faces a public scandal, engaged consumers may activate their deep processing for the endorser's authenticity. This may lead to underestimating either the endorser's messages or the endorsed product (Kapitan and



Silvera 2016). In the case of having authenticity, this time, positive evaluation may arise. For example, authenticity encourages the audience's trust (Luoma-Aho et al. 2019) and creates a trustworthy relationship between followers and influencers (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard 2020). Moulard et al. (2016) state that brand authenticity boosts the perception of trust. In another study, Kim and Kim (2019) show that authenticity has a significant positive effect on trust.

The concept of trust is closely linked to influencer authenticity. When influencers come across as authentic, influencer trust (D. Y. Kim and Kim 2021) and brand trust are enhanced, for example (Jun and Yi 2020). Therefore, the authentic perception of influencers often results in higher levels of trust among consumers (Che, Cheung, and Thadani 2017). Hence, it can be inferred that influencer authenticity also has the potential to foster trust in branded content. In the realm of social media, authenticity pertains to the extent to which influencers maintain their genuine character while producing brand-related content in exchange for compensation (Kim and Kim 2021). Thus, if influencers are authentic, they are genuine about their branded content. Thus, we assume that followers have faith in a BP when influencers are authentic. In this context,

**H5:** Perceived influencer authenticity (PIA) has a significant positive role in trust in branded posts (TBP).

The informativeness of a message is part of argument quality because argument quality means the quality of information shared by online services (Rodgers, Negash, and Suk 2005). In persuasion, argument quality follows the central route (Reyes-Menendez, Saura, and Martinez-Navalon 2019). When a message is strong, increased elaboration strengthens persuasion (Coulter and Assistant 2004), and message evaluation has a positive result (Shin et al. 2017). Yang et al. (2020) show that argument quality is a significant starting point for trust and that it has a significant positive relationship with consumer trust in a post. Bakr et al. (2019) and Kim et al. (2010) indicate a significant positive relationship exists between informativeness and trust in advertising. From a social media perspective, influencers tend to achieve greater effectiveness when their communication strategies are focused on conveying informative content (Sharma 2023). Thus, if influencers' contents are informative, followers trust in their branded content (Lou and Yuan 2019). Hence, we assume the following hypothesis:

**H6:** Perceived informativeness (PINF) of an influencer's posted content has a significant positive role in trust in branded posts (TBP).

### **2.3.5. Purchase intention (PI)**

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) focuses on theoretical structures about individual motivation factors as determinants of the likelihood of performing specific behaviors (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). The theory lies in the assumptions that social normative perceptions and attitudes toward determined intentions best predict the behavior (Glanz, Rimer, and Viswanath 2008b). In the literature, based on TRA, studies have tested the relationship between PI and attitude (Tran and Nguyen 2022; Zhu et al. 2022). The study of Roh et al. (2022) extends TRA with the concept of trust. Gong (2021) and Gong and Li (2017) show that attitude toward the product is a positive factor that predicts PI. In

another study of intention, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) indicate that attitude toward a brand has a significant positive effect on PI. In the influencer marketing perspective, prior research has emphasized these concepts to investigate the link between attitudes and intentions (Belanche et al. 2021). Research findings demonstrate the positive effect of attitude toward advertisements by influencers on PI (Herrando and Martín-De Hoyos 2022). Therefore, we assume the following hypothesis in light of the positive relationship between brand/product attitude and PI.

**H7:** Attitude toward branded posts (ATBP) has a significant positive role in purchase intention (PI).

The marketing literature has adequately examined the relationship between trust and PI (e.g., Lu, Fan, and Zhou 2016; Nikbin et al. 2022; Qalati et al. 2021). For example, Chiu et al. (2012) examine this relationship and reveal that trust has a significant positive effect on PI. In the influencer marketing context, Lou and Yuan (2019) examine the relationship between trust in branded content and PI, and they reveal that TBP may significantly affect PI. In this context, the following is assumed:

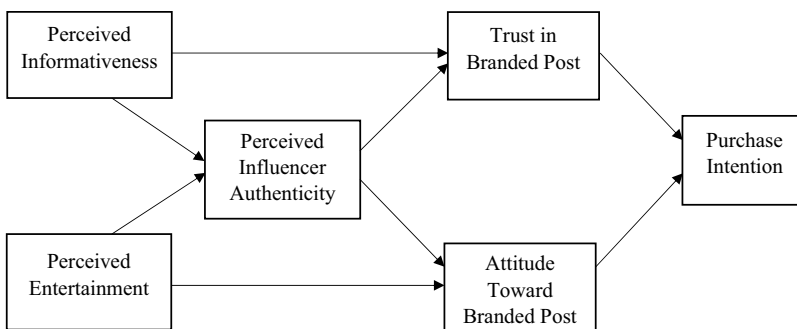
**H8:** Trust in branded posts (TBP) has a significant positive role in purchase intention (PI).

### 3. Research methodology

A quantitative research study was designed to achieve the research purpose. The data were collected from an online survey with a single cross-sectional descriptive research design. Single cross-sectional refers to the design in which a sample is obtained from the target audience, and the information gathered from this sample is collected only once (Malhotra 2007).

#### 3.1. Research model

The research model included six variables: PE, PINF, PIA, TBP, ATBP, and PI. Eight hypotheses were developed based on the extant literature, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Research model derived from the existing literature.

**Table 1.** List of constructs and items.

Constructs	Items	Adapted from
Perceived Informativeness	<i>I think the posts of influencers that I follow on social media ...</i> PINF1. provide relevant information. PINF 2. provide timely information. PINF 3. tell people about products when they need the information.	Ducoffe (1995)
Perceived Entertainment	<i>I think the posts of influencers that I follow on social media are ...</i> A1. fun. A2. exciting. A3. enjoyable. A4. delightful. A5. thrilling.	Lou and Yuan (2019)
Perceived Influencer Authenticity	<i>I think the influencers I follow on social media are ...</i> A1. genuine. A2. honest. A3. sincere.	Pöyry et al. (2019)
Trust in Branded Post	<i>The branded posts related to BPC products by influencers who I follow on social media are ...</i> T1. honest. T2. trustworthy. T3. genuine. T4. ethical. T5. sincere. T6. authentic.	Wu and Lin (2017)
Attitude Toward Branded Post	<i>The branded posts related to BPC products by influencers who I follow on social media are ...</i> AT1. good. AT2. interesting. AT3. pleasant.	Gong and Li (2017)
Purchase Intention	<i>Regarding the BPC products that the influencers I follow share on social media:</i> PI1. It is very likely that I will buy them. PI2. If I want to buy a BPC product, this would be it. PI3. I have a high probability of buying. PI4. I have a high willingness to buy.	Kim et al. (2012)

### 3.2. Measurement development

Table 1 lists all of the measured items. We measured PINF with three items adapted from Ducoffe (1995) and PE with five items adapted from Lou and Yuan (2019). We used three items to analyze the authenticity adapted from Pöyry et al. (2019). We measured TBP with six items (Wu and Lin 2017) and ATBP with three items (Gong and Li 2017). Finally, we used four items adapted from Kim et al. (2012) to test PI.

We designed the questions for trust and attitude to begin with the following introduction: 'The branded posts related to BPC products by influencers who I follow on social media are ...' The understandability of the items was tested with a pretest including 13 students, after which the items were reworded slightly. All the items were scored using 5-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

### 3.3. Data collection and sample characteristics

The questionnaire was prepared in Turkish and distributed in Türkiye. Before distributing the questionnaire, we obtained ethics committee approval from the authors' enrolled university's Social Science Institute. In addition, to eliminate translation problems and misunderstandings that could arise, the questionnaire was tested before the research

using 13 students. Furthermore, the comprehension problems that occurred in the questionnaire were eliminated.

The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Form. Thus, strong control measures were established to ensure the responses' quality and integrity. To reduce common method bias, participants needed to answer questions based on their self-reports. However, to enhance response accuracy, it is important to provide participants with information and instructions before the research. Participants' motivation increases when they have information before the research begins (Jordan and Troth 2019). To mitigate various challenges that could arise in the survey, we implemented several measures. First, we configured Google Forms to allow each participant to submit only one response, preventing multiple submissions from the same person. Second, we aimed to keep the survey simple and straightforward to prevent participants from providing reluctant or rushed responses. Finally, we informed participants at the beginning of the survey that their honest and personal responses were important for the study's results. The participants were reached using snowball sampling. This method is applied extensively in social science studies (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981), and it is a nonprobability sampling technique in which respondents are chosen randomly at the beginning. It is used when defining a population's features is difficult. After interviewing the initial group, the participants refer others to complete the sample size (Malhotra 2007). Thus, we first identified individuals who fit the sample frame and then asked them to reach out to other relevant individuals in the sample frame to distribute the questionnaire.

In addition to the snowball sampling method, we ensured that the initial participants (seeds) chosen had specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. This aligns with the principles of purposive sampling, which is effective in identifying and selecting individuals who are most likely to provide rich and pertinent data. Our aim was to gather data from active social media users interested in BPC products. This targeted approach ensured that the data collected were highly relevant to the study's objectives, which is crucial for robust structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. Purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on information-rich cases, ensuring the data are comprehensive and relevant to the phenomena under investigation (Palinkas et al. 2015). Furthermore, purposive sampling strategies are designed to include specific types of cases that are integral to understanding the research question, thus moving away from random sampling to achieve a more focused and relevant participant pool (Campbell et al. 2020). This method is particularly beneficial when participant characteristics are specifically aligned with the study's goals (Andrade 2021). Therefore, this strategy aligns with the broader objectives of our study and strengthens the methodological foundation of our research.

At the beginning of the survey, we informed participants about both influencer and personal care products, and we provided definitions about the terms. In this study, influencers are people who post content and have followers on social media. They can be celebrities or mega, macro, micro, and nano influencers (Campbell and Farrell 2020), and they can post their content on any social media platform. Thus, the study covers people who follow any type of influencer on any social media platform. To maintain the study's natural flow, no restrictions were imposed on participants regarding the type of influencers they followed. Participants were encouraged to consider the influencers they personally followed while responding. In the study, we aimed to reach individuals older than 18 who were social media users, who followed

**Table 2.** Sample demographics.

Gender	Age		Education Level		
Woman	68.80%	18–25	24%	Primary School	1%
Man	31.20%	26–33	53%	High School	5%
		34–41	15%	Undergraduate	65%
		42–49	5%	Master/PHD	29%
		50+	2%		

influencers, and who used BPC products. In our survey, we asked some filter questions to reach the target audience. These questions were about whether the participants had a social media account, whether they followed any influencers on social media, whether they used personal care products, and whether the influencers they followed shared posts about personal care products. Participants who answered one of these questions as ‘no’ were excluded by means of ending their survey. Furthermore, we asked them in the survey if they had ever bought a BPC product after an influencer shared it as a BP.

The commonly applied sample size rules indicate the sample size can be 10 times greater than the maximum number of inner or outer model linkages pointing to any latent variable in the model (Hair et al. 2014). Nevertheless, PLS-SEM yields robust results with higher levels of statistical power even when dealing with smaller sample sizes (Hair and Alamer 2022). PLS-SEM exhibits enhanced efficacy when the primary emphasis is prediction and theory development. In this case, smaller sample size is sufficient in contrast to covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) (Reinartz, Haenlein, and Henseler 2009). According to the information, we reached 445 participants, which meets the requirement of the SEM. Among the respondents, 68.80% of them were women. This ratio reflects the population because, in the influencer marketing context, Instagram is the most preferred platform among marketers (Statista 2019), and more than 50% of Instagram’s ad audiences consist of women (Statista 2021b). Therefore, the gender distribution of our sample is consistent with Instagram’s target audiences. Moreover, this ratio was deemed suitable, considering that the target audience for BPC products primarily comprises women. In addition, when the age groups are considered, 24% of the participants consisted of people between 18 and 25, 53% were between 26 and 33, 15% were between 34 and 41, and 5% were between 42 and 49 (see Table 2). More than 50% of social media users consist of people whose age is between 18 and 49 (Statista 2022). Thus, more than 50% of participants in this study were between 18 and 49.

We also asked the participants which types of influencers they followed in addition to the BPC category. Accordingly, food appeared as the most followed category (63.37%). In addition, we asked the participants if they had ever purchased a BPC product after an influencer shared a BP related to that BPC product. The results show that 45.39% of the participants had bought a product after seeing an influencer’s post.

In contrast, we asked about respondents’ preferred social media platforms through which they followed influencers. Instagram (71.7%) was used the most, followed by YouTube (16.6%), X (5.4%), Facebook (1.1%), Snapchat (0.7%), and TikTok (0.7%), whereas 3.8% preferred other platforms. Because Instagram is one of the most popular platforms in influencer marketing (Statista 2019), it is suitable that more than 50% of participants use Instagram.

## 4. Research findings

### 4.1. Nonresponse bias test

Nonresponse bias was tested using the extrapolation method, which is a widely used method to avoid nonresponse bias. The nonresponse bias test refers to the fact that respondents to a survey differ from sampled individuals who do not respond to the survey in any way. Because late respondents require more encouragement and their response time takes longer, the test assumes that late respondents share similar features with non-respondents (Clottey and Grawe 2014). Therefore, this method involves comparing early and late responses to identify dissimilarity in variables (Armstrong and Overton 1977). Thus, an independent-samples t-test was applied to compare early (280) and late respondents (165), as practiced in the Jusoh and Miryazdi (2015) study. The results showed there was not a significant difference between these groups at a 0.05 level. Thus, we inferred a response bias did not occur in this research.

### 4.2. Construct reliability and validity

Prior to testing the structural model, we evaluated its internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Construct reliability (Buzeta, De Pelsmacker, and Dens 2020) is a method of measuring internal consistency, and CR values over 0.70 are acceptable (Hair et al. 2014) as internal consistency is present. As can be seen in Table 3, all of the CR values were between 0.896 and 0.968. Therefore, considering all the values were above 0.70, they were acceptable.

**Table 3.** Assessment of scales for their reliability and convergent validity.

Constructs	Items	Loadings ( $\lambda$ )	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
Perceived Informativeness	PINF 1	0.903	0.893	0.896	0.737
	PINF 2	0.813			
	PINF 3	0.857			
Perceived Entertainment	EN1	0.826	0.880	0.899	0.613
	EN2	0.770			
	EN3	0.885			
	EN4	0.831			
	EN5	0.563			
Perceived Influencer Authenticity	A1	0.755	0.904	0.917	0.767
	A2	0.945			
	A3	0.915			
Trust in Branded Post	T1	0.867	0.966	0.968	0.830
	T2	0.940			
	T3	0.884			
	T4	0.864			
	T5	0.959			
	T6	0.945			
Attitude Toward Branded Post	AT1	0.920	0.921	0.921	0.795
	AT2	0.890			
	AT3	0.864			
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.947	0.955	0.956	0.842
	PI2	0.875			
	PI3	0.899			
	PI4	0.947			

**Table 4.** Assessment of discriminant validity (HTMT).

	PINF	PE	PIA	TBP	ATBP	R <sup>2</sup>
Perceived Informativeness						
Perceived Entertainment	0.6384					
Perceived Influencer Authenticity	0.6040	0.5561				0.4125
Trust in Branded Post	0.4520	0.3399	0.6068			0.3760
Attitude Toward Branded Post	0.4207	0.3730	0.4416	0.6968		0.2230
Purchase Intention	0.4001	0.2710	0.4131	0.6291	0.7578	0.5961

Cronbach's alpha is another way to understand internal consistency, and it is a measure of reliability (Wasko and Faraj 2005). According to Hair et al. (2014), Cronbach's alpha values over 0.70 are acceptable. All Cronbach's alpha values in this study were above 0.70 (ranging from 0.880 to 0.966); thus, they were acceptable. Therefore, the data had internal consistency.

Discriminant validity and convergent validity evaluate construct validity (Chin, Gopal, and Salisbury 1997). Convergent validity is measured by the average variance extracted (AVE) (Archetti, Savelsbergh, and Speranza 2016) and standardized factor loadings (Wasko and Faraj 2005). According to Hair et al. (2014), AVE values must be higher than 0.50 to be assumed as acceptable. Table 3 shows the AVE values ranged from 0.613 to 0.842, all higher than the cutoff value of 0.50 (Hair et al. 2014). In contrast, factor-loading values higher than 0.70 are considered acceptable (Benitez et al. 2020). Based on factor loadings of all items between 0.563 and 0.959, they were also acceptable.

Moreover, Table 4 provides the results to assess the discriminant validity. According to Henseler et al. (2015), if the Heterotrait – Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) values are under 0.85, the constructs establish the discriminant validity. In addition, Voorhees et al. (2016) stated that a cutoff of 0.85 provides the best evaluation and that it should be the standard for marketing publications. In parallel, the results showed that each construct was lower than 0.85.

### 4.3. Model's goodness of fit

We used the ADANCO 2.3.2 software to analyze the structural model. The hypotheses were tested with PLS, which is suggested for exploratory and early-stage research (Benitez et al. 2020). Given the study's emphasis on exploring relationships among constructs and its methodological approach, it is designed more for theoretical contributions than for generalizability to the entire population. Moreover, we specifically applied an extension of PLS – consistent PLS-PM (PLSc-PM) – because of its consistent prediction of linear and nonlinear latent variable models (Benitez et al. 2020).

To assess the model fit in PLSc-PM, a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and discrepancy values were estimated. To assume the model fits well, the SRMR values must be lower than 0.08 (Hu and Bentler 1999). The SRMR value for this study was 0.0403.

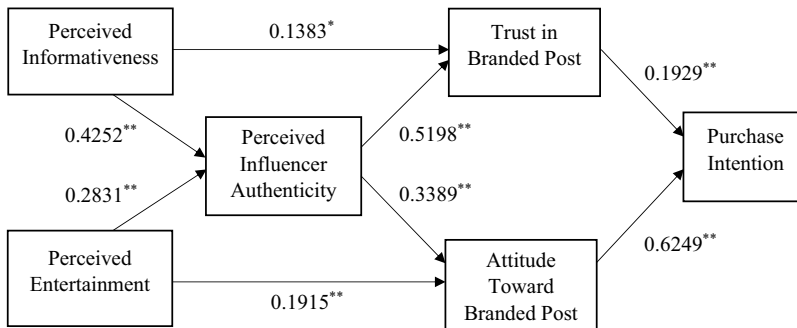
### 4.4. Path analysis and hypotheses testing

We applied PLSc bootstrapping for path analysis. We considered 4,999 subsamples with a 95% significance level as Hair et al. (2011) suggest. According to the results, the R<sup>2</sup> values – the explanatory power – of PI, ATBP, PIA, and TBP were 0.596, 0.223, 0.413, and

**Table 5.** Effect Size.

	PINF	PE	PIA	TBP	ATBP	PI
Perceived Informativeness			0.1859*	0.0195		
Perceived Entertainment			0.0824		0.0329	
Perceived Influencer Authenticity				0.2753*	0.1030	
Trust in Branded Post						0.0472
Attitude Toward Branded Post						0.4953**
Purchase Intention						

The  $f^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15\* and 0.35\*\* serve to denote a weak, moderate or strong influence of a predictor latent variable at the structural level, respectively.



**Figure 2.** Path coefficients (Direct effects). Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

0.376, respectively (see Table 4).  $R^2$  values higher than 0.10 are recommended before a latent construct can be deemed adequate (Falk and Miller 1992). Moreover, values between 0.33 and 0.67 indicate a moderated effect (Chin 1998). In addition, Table 5 indicates the  $f^2$  values. Each effect in the path model can be assessed regarding its effect size using Cohen (1988)  $f^2$ . The  $f^2$  effect size is determined by the increase in  $R^2$  in relation to the remaining unexplained variance of the endogenous latent variable. As per Cohen (1988),  $f^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively. Accordingly, although PINF has a moderate influence on PIA and PIA has a moderate influence on TBP, ATBP is a strong predictor of PI.

Based on the t-tests, all of the hypotheses were supported, as shown in Figure 2 and summarized in Table 6. According to  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ , PINF and PE have a significant positive role in PIA, respectively. Furthermore, PE and PIA were positively related with ATBP. Accordingly, although PIA and PINF positively lead to TBP, trust and attitude positively lead to PI.

## 5. Discussion

Given the importance of content features, it has become vital to understand their effects on PIA, which is important to build a strong relationship with a brand (Choi et al. 2015). Therefore, in this study, we proposed a new model to better understand influencer marketing in terms of influencer content features, PIA, and their consequences. The study examined the role of the dimensions of advertising content value, which are entertainment and informativeness, authenticity, attitude, trust, and PI. The study fills the knowledge gap about influencer marketing in terms of the PIA of a personal brand, which has not been adequately covered in the marketing literature (Chen, Yan, and Smith 2022).



**Table 6.** Structural model results.

	Path coefficient	Indirect effect	Total effect
PINF -> PIA	0.4252**		0.4252**
PINF -> TBP	0.1383*	0.2210**	0.3593**
PINF -> ATBP		0.1441**	0.1441**
PINF -> PI		0.1594**	0.1594**
PE -> PIA	0.2831**		0.2831**
PE -> TBP		0.1472**	0.1472**
PE -> ATBP	0.1915**	0.0959**	0.2875**
PE -> PI		0.2080**	0.2080**
PIA -> TBP	0.5198**		0.5198**
PIA -> ATBP	0.3389**		0.3389**
PIA -> PI		0.3120**	0.3120**
TBP -> PI	0.1929**		0.1929**
ATBP -> PI	0.6249**		0.6249**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

PINF: Perceived Informativeness.

PE: Perceived Entertainment.

PIA: Perceived Influencer Authenticity.

TBP: Trust in Branded Post.

ATBP: Attitude Toward Branded Post.

PI: Purchase Intention.

The results of the proposed model showed that the content value of influencers' posts significantly affects influencer marketing. Research has indicated the positive results of using the correct content to build a personal brand. Marketing communications have a significant effect on creating authentic brands (Dwivedi and McDonald 2018), and strategic communication depends on how successfully content is created (Borchers and Enke 2021). This study also supports this idea and shows that being an authentic influencer depends on successfully created content. The study shows that the content influencers create in terms of entertainment and informativeness can enhance their authenticity. Both fact-based information and reflections regarding their satisfaction (e.g., enjoyment) in their content build positive influencer authenticity (Chen, Yan, and Smith 2023). However, both types of content have different effects on influencer authenticity. The study has shown that, in addition to influencing the influencers' authenticity, informative content is more effective in influencing authenticity compared to entertaining content. This could be attributed to the idea that followers might perceive of them as more transparent because they share fact-based information (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard 2020).

In addition, as part of argument quality, PINF plays a significant positive role in TBP, as Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated. If followers perceive influencers' shared posts to be informative, they trust in the BP of influencers whose content focuses on BPC products. Here, the perception that influencers share fact-based information (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard 2020) plays an important role in trust, as former studies have shown (Kim and Kim 2019). Another result that previous research (Moulard, Raggio, and Folse 2016) and this study support is PIA affects TBP. Influencer authenticity develops concepts of trust. In situations in which the follower develops trust in the influencer's authenticity, one of the main results is that the follower believes authentic influencers are genuine about their compensation (Kim and Kim 2021). If influencers are authentic, consumers may develop TBP. In summary, according to the theory of attribution, consumers can generalize the characteristics of a brand across various domains (Kelley and Michela 1980).

This study's results also indicate that when followers perceive influencers' personal brand as authentic, they are likely to make a similar generalization and experience positive emotions associated with the BP that influencers share. These positive emotions can develop trust and a supportive attitude, as demonstrated by Kapitan and Silvera (2016).

In addition, we consider the influencer's content value to examine the features of influencers' content, such as the posts' informativeness and entertainment, and we consider the theory of reasoned action to test the relationship among attitude, trust, and PI. Our study shows that the PIA (Busser and Shulga 2019) and PE (Zha, Li, and Yan 2015) of a post positively shape ATBP. Finally, in support of previous studies, this study proves that ATBP and TBP shape PI. Therefore, this study's results support the idea that a positive attitude may develop if people perceive endorsers as authentic (Pöyry et al. 2019) and if they associate them as being entertaining (Herrando and Martín-De Hoyos 2022).

Finally, ATBP and TBP directly shape PI. Thus, the study proves that PI can increase if followers have positive ATBP (Herrando and Martín-De Hoyos 2022). Furthermore, as proven by Lou and Yuan (2019), PI may form in a positive way if followers trust in the influencers' BPs.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Implications

This study contributes to the interactive marketing literature that supports a two-way relationship (Wang 2021). The study theoretically contributes to the literature in terms of outlining strategies for building an authentic personal brand. Thus, the study focuses on the direct and indirect role of content value in authenticity, attitude, trust, and PI. In addition, the study considers advertising content value, U&G theory, and TRA. The study contributed to these theories in terms of influencer marketing.

Based on our study's results, the content value of influencers' posts plays an important role in influencer authenticity, trust, and attitude. Therefore, it is important for influencers to focus on this model when building an authentic personal brand and for managers to create efficient influencer marketing strategies. To establish authentic personal brands, they should enhance their storytelling skills regarding two important factors. If influencers want to build an authentic personal brand, they should share informative and entertaining content with their followers. However, informative content is extra effective in building a more authentic brand. Thus, they should regularly share informative content so that they appear more authentic. If influencers can come across as authentic, they will be better able to persuade their followers. Thus, they can easily create positive ATBP and TBP, and this will indirectly help them affect the product's PI.

In addition, there are many positive aspects of creating an authentic personal brand. Thus, marketers should work with authentic influencers who support building a positive TBP and ATBP. In the end, these might result in a positive PI. If the campaign objectives are to enhance positive attitudes and trust toward the advertisement, it may be suitable to collaborate with authentic influencers. Moreover, if brands aspire to boost their sales in the long term, they can establish enduring partnerships with influencers they perceive as authentic. Thus, marketers should first examine the

influencers' authenticity before collaborating with them. Therefore, they should conduct a preliminary assessment of influencer authenticity or apply reports to understand the followers' perception regarding the particular influencer's authenticity. Moreover, if marketers' or influencers' goal is to create either TBP or ATBP, it is necessary to pay attention to the characteristics of the shared content. If marketers want to build TBP, they can ensure the content of influencers who share BPs about their own brands is information driven. Thus, they can inform influencers to share more informative content. However, they can concentrate on entertainment-focused posts if they want to produce a positive attitude. For influencers to produce high-quality content and to align with brand strategies, it is essential for brands to provide them with the appropriate compensation. This compensation should be determined depending on the scope and size of the campaign or the number of followers the influencer has. Instead of compelling influencers to create content in exchange for compensation, they should grant them the freedom to provide unbiased feedback. Influencers can increase their chances of appearing authentic with the natural content they create. Otherwise, they may appear inauthentic.

## **6.2. Limitations and further research**

This research has its limitations. First, we only focused on BPs regarding BPC products. Considering that we did not focus on another sector, the results might differ for other industries. Second, we did not consider differences in gender, age, or nationality in this study. The results might differ when considering the differences between these groups. For example, because our sample consisted mainly of women, women's decisions may be biased in comparison to those of men. Third, we did not specify the type of influencers (e.g., micro or macro) in this study, and we considered only general influencers. Therefore, future studies could also consider these factors, especially regarding brand – influencer fit. In addition, most participants in the study were Instagram users. Different results may have been obtained if the study was conducted on numerous platforms. Although the sample size for this study has been deemed appropriate given the nature of PLS-SEM, it is worth noting that a larger sample size in future studies could lead to different outcomes. Moreover, although a single cross-sectional study is utilized for SEM, this approach often lacks practical applicability. Therefore, future research endeavors could explore alternative data collection methods to enhance the robustness of findings.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Ethics statement

The authors declare that all research conducted as part of this work involving human participants has been performed in strict accordance with the principles stated in the Declaration of Helsinki. We adhere to the highest ethical standards in conducting human research, ensuring the safety, dignity, and privacy of all subjects involved in our study. Prior to their participation, all subjects were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research and were made aware that they could withdraw their participation at any time before submitting their responses. Only those participants who voluntarily submitted their responses were included in the study.

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