

## *Social Media and Brand Credibility: Qualitative Content Analysis of Instagram Influencers in Beauty Sector*

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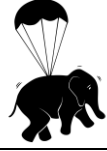
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### Abstract

Influencer marketing has become a crucial branding strategy as social media evolves within the digital landscape. In the beauty sector, it holds particular significance due to product demonstrations, where influencers lead and shape consumer behavior to establish brand credibility. This research examines the relationship between social media influencers and brand credibility on Instagram within the beauty industry by analyzing selected influencers' posts, videos and view patterns. The study aims to explore how influencers convey brand messages to build brand credibility and investigates factors that influence followers' perceptions, such as trustworthiness, loyalty and awareness. To this end, the top four female influencers, ranked by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce based on interaction rate, number of followers, content quality and brand collaborations, were selected through purposive sampling and analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method. The findings indicate that influencers benefit from market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation and digital marketing methods in maintaining brand credibility. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on influencer marketing and provide insights for marketers and brand managers leveraging social media to enhance brand credibility.

**Keywords:** social media, brand credibility, brand equity, influencer marketing, Instagram

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# *Sosyal Medya ve Marka Kredibilitesi: Güzellik Sektöründeki Instagram Fenomenlerinin İçerik Analizi*

## **Öz**

Sosyal medyanın dijitalleşme ile beraber hızla büyümesi, fenomen pazarlamasının önemli bir marka stratejisine dönüşmesine neden oldu. Marka kredibilitesi yaratmak amacıyla güzellik sektöründeki fenomenlerin sosyal medya hesapları üzerinden ürün tanıtımı gerçekleştirmesi, tüketici davranışlarını önemli ölçüde yönlendirmekte ve şekillendirmektedir. Bu çalışma, güzellik sektöründeki sosyal medya fenomenleri ile marka kredibilitesi arasındaki ilişkiyi, araştırma örneklemindeki fenomenlerin Instagram'daki gönderi, video ve görüntülenmelerinin incelenmesi yoluyla araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, fenomenlerin marka güvenilirliğini oluşturmak için marka mesajlarını iletme yaklaşımlarını da gözlem altına almıştır. Ayrıca takipçilerin algılarını etkileyen güvenilirlik, sadakat ve farkındalık gibi faktörleri de incelemektedir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Ticaret Odası raporunda, etkileşim oranı, takipçi sayısı, içerik kalitesi ve marka iş birliklerine dayanarak sıralanan ilk dört kadın fenomen, amaçlı örneklem yöntemi ile seçilmiş ve içerik analizi tekniğiyle incelenmiştir. Bulgular, marka kredibilitesi sağlayan fenomenlerin pazar odaklılık, girişimsel pazarlama, dijital pazarlama yöntemlerinden faydalandığını ortaya koyarken fenomen pazarlamasıyla ilgili gelişen literatüre katkı sunmaktadır. Aynı zamanda marka kredibilitesi için sosyal medyadan faydalanan pazarlama ve marka yöneticileri için de çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** sosyal medya, marka kredibilitesi, marka değeri, fenomen pazarlaması, Instagram



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Celebrities have long been regarded as credible sources for endorsing brands (Goldsmith et al., 2000). With social media usage reaching 4.89 billion users, a 6.5% increase from the previous year (Geysler, 2024), many celebrities have shifted from traditional mass media advertising to social platforms to collaborate with brands. Social media marketing has proven effective in boosting brand loyalty by fostering real connections between companies and customers through participation, engagement, and meaningful conversations (Kaur et al., 2018). Today, organizations are increasingly incorporating digital tools into their growth strategies, allocating portions of their marketing budgets to social media activities (KPMG, 2019).

Influencers play a central role in social media marketing, directly interacting with customers and significantly contributing to brand promotion. By building trust and positively influencing purchasing behavior, influencers are instrumental in brand credibility (Klassen et al., 2018). Many influencers have transitioned into public figures by consistently sharing engaging and appealing content, eventually achieving celebrity status (Lou and Yuan, 2019). When influencers produce relevant and authentic social media content, they gain trust and demonstrate expertise to their followers, which in turn impacts the purchasing decisions of millions of consumers in their target audience (Silvera and Austad, 2004).

Social media influencers are classified as macro-influencers, professionals, micro-influencers, or nano-influencers (Schaefer, 2019), and brands can select influencers based on their target market volume or marketing budget. Regardless of their category, influencers play a significant role in shaping brand credibility and enhancing consumer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993), with brand awareness (Aaker, 1991) and brand image (Kim et al., 2003) being key dimensions. Keller (2013) noted that celebrities with higher credibility can inspire brands that align with their personality and image. Today, influencers have assumed this role, helping brands create a brand image and increase brand awareness (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Gundlach and Murphy's (1993) description of brand credibility, which initially included celebrities, has been updated to reflect the role of social media influencers in building trustworthiness and loyalty.

While influencers are crucial in promoting brand equity, the beauty sector has seen significant growth through active social media marketing. According to Statista's 2023 report, the beauty sector is projected to grow by 45%, largely driven by engagement rates (Dencheva, 2024). Sophie Morris of Millharbour Marketing, in \*The Rise of Influencers\* report, highlights the importance of product demonstrations in the beauty industry, explaining that consumers want to see the application process. As a result, influencer marketing is particularly effective in this industry (Fashion and Beauty Monitor, 2016). The report also indicates that nearly 60% of marketing budgets in the fashion and beauty sectors are allocated to influencer marketing (Dayal, n.d.). Beauty-related posts, including makeup hashtags, reached 600 million engagements, with the majority coming from influencers (Cucu, 2023).



Existing studies focus on the interaction between social media marketing and brand credibility in the cosmetics sector (Hassan et al., 2021; Aziz et al., 2023), however, there is still a gap in industry-oriented research. It has been demonstrated that social media marketing positively impacts brand equity in the beauty sector (Warbung et al., 2023). This research investigates how Instagram influencers in the beauty sector create brand credibility, a crucial aspect of brand equity. Instagram, as the leading platform for beauty based on media impact value (Dencheva, 2024), was chosen for this study. Influencer rankings are based on research by Fallon, Medina, and Kubiak (Fallon et al., 2023) under the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, with key criteria including interaction rate, follower count, content quality, and brand collaborations. The methodology involves content analysis of posts, videos, and views from the Instagram accounts of the selected influencers.

The paper is organized as follows; first, the theoretical background and literature review are presented, followed by a description of the data and methodology, and then the findings are discussed. In the conclusion, the study compares its findings with previous research and evaluates them. The final section outlines the study's limitations, offers recommendations for future research, and provides managerial implications.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Aaker (1991) introduced the concept of brand equity through the lens of consumer perception, defining it as a combination of brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association. Keller (1993) further refined this concept by focusing on consumer-based brand equity, emphasizing the importance of positive customer attitudes. Brand credibility, a key component of brand equity (Singh and Banerjee, 2021), is essential for establishing consumer trust. It is defined as the degree to which a consumer believes in the trustworthiness of a brand based on their knowledge of it (Erdem and Swait, 2004; 2001). More specifically, "*brand credibility refers to the believability of product information conveyed by the brand, requiring consumers to perceive that the brand has both the expertise (i.e., ability) and the willingness (i.e., trustworthiness) to fulfill its promises*" (Erdem and Swait, 2004, p.192).

According to Hilligoss and Rieh (2008), credibility becomes significant when it is experienced directly, as this influences future consumer behavior through repeat purchases or product recommendations within their social circles (Hilligoss and Rieh, 2008). Positive recommendations and repeat purchases help foster brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991), forming a feedback loop that strengthens the connection between brand credibility and brand equity. In the context of social media marketing, this process creates brand value through both direct and indirect brand promotion via social media platforms (Kim and Ko, 2010). Consumers tend to trust influencers more than traditional advertisements (Pereira et al., 2014), with influencer credibility acting as a powerful force that drives consumers toward purchasing decisions (Lu and Seah, 2018). The persuasive power of influencers lies in their authenticity and the level of sincerity they project. This authenticity prompts brands to collaborate with influencers whose



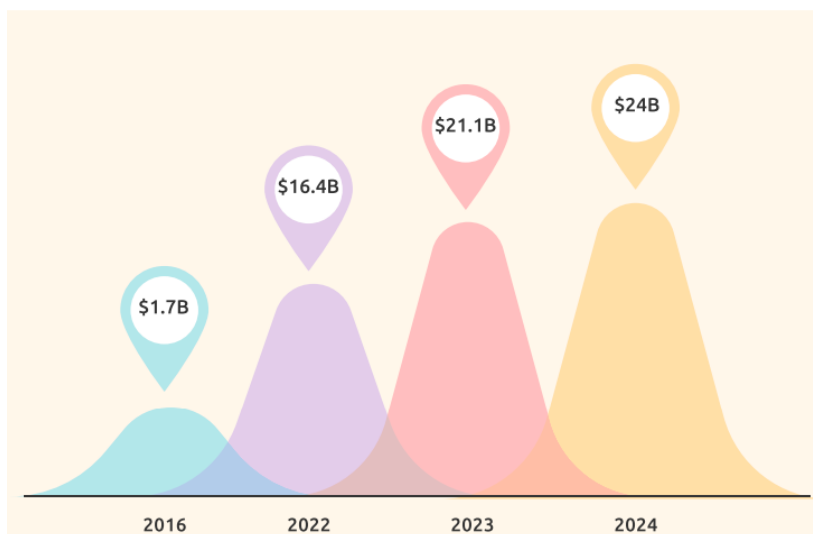
character aligns with the trustworthiness and relevance needed for their products (Venciute et al., 2023).

According to Heaslip and Caramela (2021), brands prefer collaborating with influencers primarily due to their brand credibility and other factors. Building trust is key, as influencers' committed followings make it easier for brands to access an engaged audience. Since followers often have a near-relationship with the influencer, this network becomes directly accessible to the brand. The audience may also consist of niche groups that align with the product range (Heaslip and Caramela, 2021), further contributing to brand awareness (Aaker, 1991).

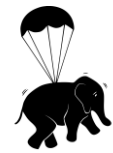
Influencers focus on creating high-quality, attractive, and engaging content. When an influencer develops content for a social media campaign in collaboration with a company (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), the company can also use this content directly on its own social channels. This approach is cost-effective and time-efficient, allowing brands to integrate content into their marketing strategy without requiring additional budget. Consequently, partnering with an influencer becomes a win-win situation for both parties: while the marketing budget compensates the influencer, the brand benefits from the influencer's audience and connections, which represent potential customers.

Furthermore, reference groups—those who influence others in their decision-making, cognition, or judgments about products (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013)—play an important role in influencer marketing. Influencers actively leverage reference groups when launching new products through their videos or posts. These posts often go viral, quickly building a reputation that reaches target consumers who may have never heard of the brand before (Heaslip and Caramela, 2021). Figure 1 illustrates the rapid growth of the influencer marketing market, which is expected to continue rising (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024).

**Figure 1.** The size of influencer marketing market



Source: Influencer Marketing Hub (2024)



Anna-Marie Solowij, founder of the online beauty retailer BeautyMART, once stated, “*An influencer is anyone who has the power and profile to make a difference to our opinion or that of our customers. Credibility is of ultimate importance. Someone may have a million social media followers, but if they don’t know what they’re talking about or are irrelevant to a brand’s followers, then those numbers have very little real value*” (Fashion and Beauty Monitor, 2016, p.10). Influencers, like Shayla, continue to grow their followers by aligning with the right brands that fit their persona and meet their audience’s needs (Heaslip and Caramela, 2021). While most influencers promote their own brands on their accounts, the increase in followers can have a multiplier effect, benefiting them in multiple ways.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1. Research Model

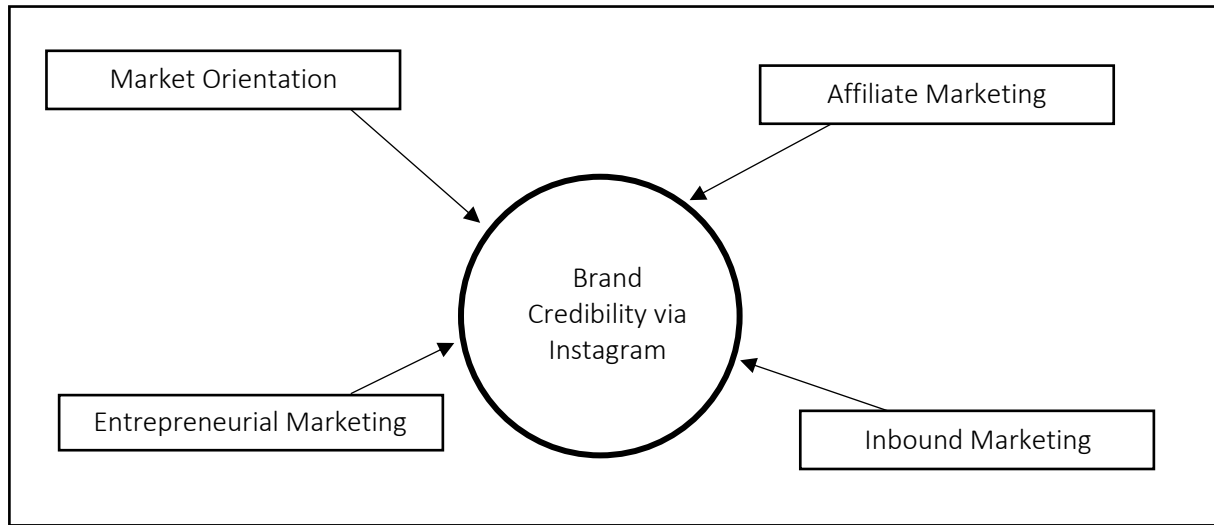
As a method content analysis involves specialized procedures. It is learnable and divorceable from the personal authority of the researcher. As a research method content analysis provides new insights increases a researcher's understanding of particular phenomena or informs practical actions. Content analysis is a scientific tool (Krippendorff, 2013, p.24) and a method for analysing the content of a variety of data such as visual and verbal data. It enables the reduction of phenomena or events into defined categories so as to better analyse and interpret them (Harwood and Garry, 2003, p.479). To better understand the influencer world content analysis method is preferred to gain deeper insights and focus on the underlying dynamics. According to the fundamentals of the qualitative research method Instagram is selected for the appropriate area among the other social media platforms in that the influencer characters act and interact with the audience most (Fallon et al., 2023). For sampling the most popular beauty sector influencers are selected based on purposive sampling method which is a theoretical sampling process (Patton 2014). The criteria for determining the level of influencers’ popularity are based on measurements from a reliable source as outlined in the related report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Influencer credibility is the primary criterion for selecting the right influencers to build brand credibility, as it fosters trust (Hassan et al., 2021; Leite and Baptista, 2022; Aziz et al., 2023). Trust, in turn, is the foundation of brand loyalty (Gundlach and Murphy, 1993). Influencer marketing not only enhances brand awareness and brand image (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020) but also strengthens brand credibility (Singh and Banerjee, 2021). These components collectively contribute to brand equity, which is cultivated through influencers' marketing activities. Given these considerations, the study aims to examine the role of social media in creating brand credibility, as outlined by the main research question (RQ) below and addressed using a research model, illustrated in Figure 2.

**RQ:** How do influencers use social media (Instagram) to create brand credibility?



Figure 2. Research model



### 3.1. Data Set and Data Analysis

Instagram was chosen as the primary platform for data collection throughout 2023 (Emplifi, 2024), as it holds the largest share of content activation and offers brands distinct advantages and awards compared to other social platforms (Emplifi, 2024). The ranking of influencers in the study sample was derived from research conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which measures influencer popularity (Fallon et al., 2023).

Given the rapid growth of the beauty sector, largely driven by social media engagement (Warbung et al., 2023; Dencheva, 2024), this study focuses on the global beauty industry. Since women dominate the beauty sector, only female influencers' Instagram accounts were analyzed, with observations conducted between December 2023 and March 2024. Each Instagram account was investigated based on photo and video posts, which are listed and categorized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Data observation and classification

Influencer Name	Social Media Platform	Observation Period	Observed number of posts and videos	Content classification of the posts and videos
Huda Kattan	Instagram	December 2023-March 2024	2715	make-up videos, reshare of fan videos, product testing
Nikkie de Jager	Instagram	December 2023-March 2024	2838	make-up videos, product critics, product testing
Zoë Sugg	Instagram	December 2023-March 2024	2150	daily life, baby care, nail art, clothing
Shayla Mitchell	Instagram	December 2023-March 2024	3833	make-up, work-out, nail art, product testing



The data collected from Instagram accounts were analyzed using content analysis, which examines visual and textual content (Opoku et al., 2006). According to the Social Media Marketing Benchmark Report, the most popular forms of content sharing are photo posts (41.7%) and video posts (38.2%) (Geysler, 2024). The Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report 2024 identifies views as the most common metric for measuring influencer marketing success (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024), with engagements/clicks and conversion/sales being excluded from the analysis. Therefore, this study focuses on the number of views for both photo and video posts.

#### 4. FINDINGS

As outlined in the introduction, the beauty sector was chosen for this research as it is the most preferred industry by brands for influencer marketing (Dencheva, 2024). The results show that all influencers in the sample are entrepreneurs, as they are founders of their own brands (Instagram Official Website, 2024), with this information prominently displayed in their profiles. This entrepreneurial behavior indicates that influencers adopt a market-oriented approach while promoting their own brands (Hills and Hultman, 2011). Although influencer marketing typically focuses on affiliate marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2017) through business collaborations, it is also evident that influencers freely market their own brands. This demonstrates how social media enables influencers to pursue a market-oriented strategy for their brands (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

In addition to Instagram, all the influencers—except for zoesugg—maintain active accounts on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter). It is observed that most influencers use social media extensively for marketing purposes, contributing to the rapid rise of the influencer marketing industry (Heaslip and Caramela, 2021). Instagram remains the primary platform where they are most active, with the largest audience compared to other platforms. Notably, nikkietutorials and hudabeauty also maintain active profiles on Facebook.

The content shared by these influencers is current, with posts being updated no later than a week before the observation period. Most of these posts include videos, and stories are shared daily. The video content is generally focused on beauty and fashion, though each influencer exhibits a distinct style. For instance, hudabeauty, makeupshayla, and nikkietutorial primarily share makeup videos, while zoesugg tends to share personal, everyday moments, especially involving her family and home life. Her beauty content focuses more on nail art and clothing rather than makeup application steps. A comparison of makeup videos reveals that hudabeauty and nikkietutorial often re-share fan videos, adding their own commentary to the video corners. On the other hand, makeupshayla primarily shares her own original makeup content along with nail art videos. Additionally, makeupshayla's content includes workout videos, setting her apart from the other influencers.

A noteworthy observation is that the influencers often share videos in which they personally use the products on their skin. This behavior enhances sincerity and trustworthiness, as the





application steps appear spontaneous and create a sense of authenticity—making them feel more like friends than celebrities. This approach fosters organic traffic through friend recommendations and reference groups (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013).

In addition to these common behaviors, each influencer's unique qualifications are explored in further detail in the following section. Specific information, such as age, nationality, and numerical data regarding posts, videos, and views, are summarized in Table 2. The total number of posts and videos is recorded as per the official Instagram method. Registration dates for Instagram are also provided, and it is noted that all four influencers began using Instagram around the same time. In the "#views" column, the number of views for each influencer's most-watched video is listed.

**Table 2.** Top 4 female influencers (Adapted from Fallon et. al., 2023 and Instagram Official Website, 2024)

Influencer Name	Account Name	#followers	Register	#views (max)	Nation	Age	Rank
Huda Kattan	hudabeauty	54.1M	2012	9.6M	U.S.	41	#1
Nikkie de Jager	nikkietutorials	19.5M	2011	42.5M	Dutch	30	#2
Zoë Sugg	zoesugg	9.3M	2011	16.6M	UK	33	#3
Shayla Mitchell	makeupshayla	3.3M	2012	48.5M	U.S.	37	#4





















Table 2 shows that the number of views each influencer has reached in a single post is quite high, ranging from approximately 10 million to 50 million. Interestingly, the highest number of views is attributed to makeupshayla, who has the lowest number of followers among the influencers. Conversely, one of the posts by hudabeauty, who has over 50 million followers, received the fewest views. This result supports the notion that content quality is the most important factor on social media. Regardless of the number of followers, a post can go viral globally if the content is valuable and engaging. This principle is fundamental to generating organic traffic through inbound marketing techniques (Halligan and Shah, 2014). The influencers employ different styles to stand out and establish their unique brand image, with their efforts to maintain sincerity and build a positive reputation being commendable. Since content is crucial for creating brand equity via social media, the use of inbound marketing by influencers is evident.

In Table 3, these efforts are categorized based on each influencer's priorities, revealing that they view these approaches as essential to strengthening brand credibility through trustworthy practices. As noted, influencers utilize digital marketing strategies, such as affiliate marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2017), both when working with other brands and when promoting their own. Additionally, it is clear that all influencers in the sample are entrepreneurs, as they are founders of their own brands, as stated in their Instagram profiles (Instagram Official Website, 2024). To maintain sustainable customer relationships over the long term, these influencers focus on marketing activities using a customer-oriented approach and current market intelligence



(Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990), alongside an entrepreneurial marketing mindset (Hills and Hultman, 2011). While trustworthiness is central to establishing brand credibility, some influencers have even attained public figure status and received recognition from various authorities for their sensitivity and care.

**Table 3.** Attitudes and qualifications of the influencers in common

	Huda Kattan	Nikkie de Jager	Zoë Sugg	Shayla Mitchell
Market Orientation				
Entrepreneurial Market Orientation				
Affiliate Marketing				
Inbound Marketing				
Awards				

#### 4.1. Huda Kattan

An analysis of Huda Kattan's Instagram account *hudabeauty* reveals that she maintains a highly active presence, posting 4-5 times per week and sharing at least 2-3 stories daily. Most of her posts center around products from her brand, *hudabeauty*. Additionally, she owns another brand called *wishfulskin*. In her profile, she identifies herself as "Makeup Artist and Blogger *huda*" and the "Founder of *wishfulskin*" reflecting her efforts to market both brands. She frequently shares product trials and posts informative videos demonstrating how to use and apply her products, often including before-and-after videos. In her initial trials, she uses her own face and skin as models.

Huda Kattan also re-shares videos posted by her followers, showing no bias in terms of nationality or ethnicity. Occasionally, she adds comments to these fan videos, offering further advice on proper product usage and application techniques. This interactive and inclusive approach enhances the authenticity and credibility of her brand (Hills and Hultman, 2011; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). Below are some images taken from Huda Kattan's official Instagram account.



Figure 3. Examples of Instagram shares of Huda Kattan

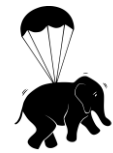


Huda Kattan's family is originally from Iraq, and she is a U.S. citizen. She actively engages in activism through her Instagram account, where she shares content protesting the violence and war in Gaza. Additionally, she has donated \$1,000,000 to Doctors Without Borders and Human Appeal, two global humanitarian organizations (Wikipedia, 2024). Her Instagram profile also provides an informative explanation stating that her cosmetic brands do not conduct animal testing. This compassionate and ethical approach allows her to connect with a broader audience and deliver more convincing content (Halligan and Shah, 2014).

Huda Kattan launched her first product—eyelashes—through Sephora in 2013 and founded her company in Dubai. Her ethnicity has garnered her followers and supporters from the Middle East, Asian Americans, and Americans, as well as people from various countries around the globe. Due to her wide-reaching influence, she was named one of the "ten most powerful influencers in the world of beauty" by Forbes magazine in 2017, and in 2020, she was included in Fortune magazine's "40 Under 40" list (Fortune, 2021). Huda also engages in affiliate marketing collaborations with other brands and is known to support young women entrepreneurs, such as through her partnership with *Kayali Fragrance*, founded by her sister, Mona Kattan (Dwivedi et al., 2017).

#### 4.2. Nikkie de Jager

Nikkie de Jager, known as nikkietutorials on social media, was born in 1994 and has been active on YouTube since 2008, starting at the age of 14. Her primary content focuses on makeup videos, where she applies various techniques to her own face. In 2017, she was recognized as one of the top ten beauty influencers. That same year, she won the "YouTube Guru" award at the Shorty Awards and was named the "Choice Fashion/Beauty Web Star" at the Teen Choice Awards. In 2020, she was named a goodwill ambassador of the United Nations (Nu, 2020). Following this, she became more active on Instagram and began engaging in affiliate marketing.

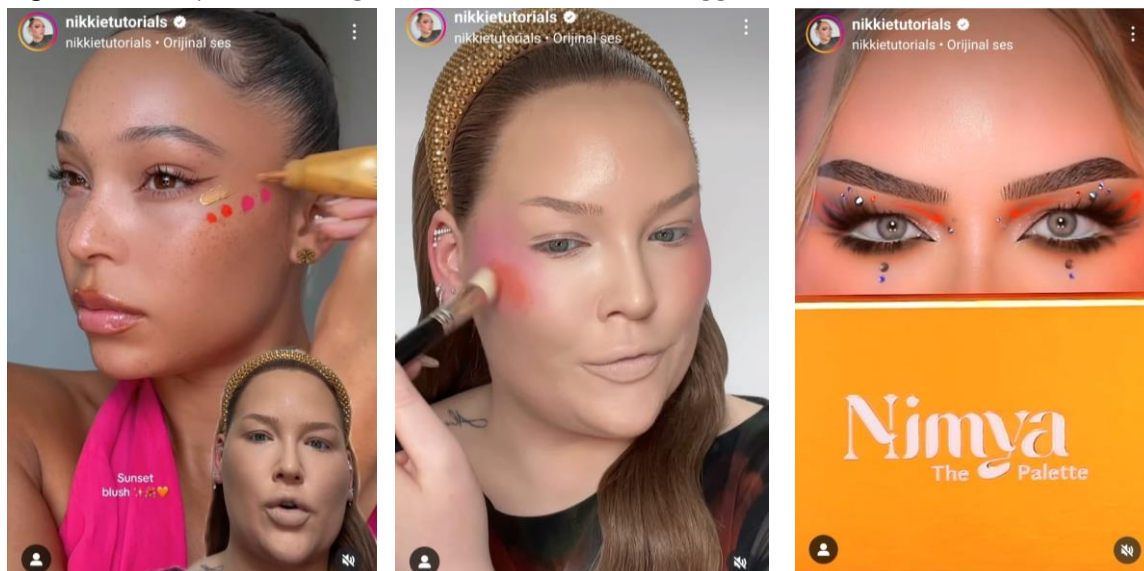


Nikkie collaborates with well-known brands like Maybelline and OFRA Cosmetics, promoting their products on her social media platforms. She has also partnered with Lady Gaga to promote Haus Laboratories, Lady Gaga's cosmetics brand, further supporting the affiliate marketing model (Dwivedi et al., 2017).

As detailed in Table 1, Nikkie de Jager primarily shares product testing videos. What sets her apart from other influencers is her willingness to critique other brands' products, backing her claims with personal skin tests. This approach enhances her uniqueness, credibility, and competitive edge (Narver and Slater, 1990). Under market orientation, she also demonstrates competitor orientation, which, combined with her creative content, leads to increased organic traffic (Halligan and Shah, 2014). In addition to her collaborations, Nikkie launched her own brand, Nimya, in 2021. After its launch, three products—Moisturizer/Primer Hybrid, Setting Spray, Cooling Ice Stick, and Glow Serum—became highlights, supported by fan videos that she re-shared on her Instagram account.

An analysis of nikkietutorials shows that Nikkie often shares makeup videos in which she applies the products herself, embodying entrepreneurial marketing efforts (Hills and Hultman, 2011). Additionally, she frequently re-shares videos of fans using Nimya products. Nikkie further engages her audience by inviting celebrities, such as Adele, to her home and featuring these interactions on her Instagram page. Below are some images from Nikkie de Jager's official Instagram account.

Figure 4. Examples of Instagram shares of Nikkie de Jager



#### 4.3. Zoë Sugg

Zoë Sugg, with nearly 10 million followers on Instagram, is a 33-year-old influencer who began her social media journey in 2009 at the age of 19 under the blog name Zoella. Her brother is also a YouTuber, and the two collaborate on several campaigns. Besides Instagram, Zoë is



active on YouTube, TV shows, podcasts, and in magazines. She also collaborates as a face model for various brands, promoting homeware, lifestyle products, hoodies, and phone cases through affiliate marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2017). In the image below, one of the brands she works with, Milking is featured.

Figure 5. Examples of Instagram shares of Zoë Sugg



Zoë is the co-founder of two technology-based products: a film app and a template app, which she actively promotes as an entrepreneur on her Instagram account (Hills and Hultman, 2011; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). Unlike other influencers, Zoë frequently shares content related to her private life and family, rather than focusing exclusively on beauty or makeup videos. This approach makes her appear more sincere and trustworthy, increasing organic traffic through a variety of content (Halligan and Shah, 2014). Compared to other beauty influencers, Zoë primarily posts about nail art rather than makeup or cosmetics, setting her apart from others in the field.

Zoë's influence in the beauty industry has earned her several accolades. In 2011, she won Best Established Beauty Blog and in 2012, Best Beauty Vlogger at the Cosmopolitan Blog Awards. Over the next two years, she was recognized as the UK Favourite Vlogger by the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards and received the Choice Webstar: Fashion/Beauty award from the Teen Choice Awards. In 2015, she won another Teen Choice Award in the same category (Wikipedia, 2024). Sensitive to mental health issues due to her personal struggle with anxiety, Zoë was named the first "digital ambassador" for the mental health charity "Mind" (Sabin, 2014). Although her early career focused on the beauty and cosmetics sectors—earning her numerous awards—her current Instagram content leans less toward product launches or makeup videos.

#### 4.4. Shayla Mitchell

Shayla Mitchell, known as makeupshayla, is a prominent 37-year-old African-American influencer in the beauty and cosmetics sector. She is also active on TikTok. On her Instagram



account, Shayla regularly shares makeup tutorials where she applies various techniques to her own face. Like other influencers, her actions reflect market-oriented behavior (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). What sets her apart is that she is the founder of a fitness brand, *season10*, rather than a cosmetics brand. Under the account *szn10fitness*, Shayla frequently posts workout videos, showcasing her entrepreneurial market orientation (Hills and Hultman, 2011).

Figure 6. Examples of Instagram shares of Shayla Mitchell



A deeper analysis of her Instagram page reveals that Shayla uses various cosmetic brands in her makeup tutorials. Notably, one of the brands she promotes is hudabeauty, the brand of Huda Kattan, the top-ranking influencer in this study. Additionally, Shayla collaborates with major brands like Clinique and L'Oreal through affiliate marketing efforts (Dwivedi et al., 2017).

Figure 7. Continuous examples of Instagram shares of Shayla Mitchell





In addition to beauty content, Shayla shares personal moments, often posting about her daily activities with her husband and dog. This type of content is common among other influencers in the sample. However, Shayla distinguishes herself by identifying as a "digital content producer" in her profile, separate from her brands, highlighting her skill in creating valuable and engaging content (Halligan and Shah, 2014). Shayla posts on Instagram 1 to 2 times per week, but she shares stories daily. Most of her Instagram posts are videos rather than photos. She joined Instagram in January 2012 and was verified by Instagram in July 2016. Her account is registered in the United States.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes significant theoretical contributions to the relevant literature by developing a conceptual model based on four theoretical approaches. The research framework incorporates (a) market orientation, (b) entrepreneurial marketing, (c) affiliate marketing, and (d) inbound marketing. These four concepts were integrated to address the research gap and achieve the study's objectives. The findings validate the empirical connections between these key elements and strengthen the understanding of how their combined effects contribute to brand credibility, a dimension that is not frequently explored in current literature.

The study revealed that all the influencers in the research sample own brands in the beauty and cosmetics sector, with the exception of makeupshayla, who also ventures into the sports sector. However, this is still closely related, as a healthy lifestyle can be positioned within the broader category of beauty and self-care. This demonstrates that the influencers are not only market-oriented (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990) but also entrepreneurial marketing-oriented (Hills and Hultman, 2011). Their entrepreneurial efforts, as brand founders, reflect their market orientation and contribute to the marketing of their own brands. This entrepreneurial activity fosters inspiration and empowerment (Brandstätter, 2011), which can accelerate followers' purchasing behaviors. The study establishes a critical connection between market orientation and an entrepreneurial approach, both of which are amplified by the influencers' use of digital marketing tools.

The results clearly demonstrate that influencers play a pivotal role in shaping consumers' purchasing intentions (Klassen et al., 2018) through content creation. As consumer behavior is heavily influenced by reference groups, it is evident that customers rely on social media recommendations from influencers with high viewership and follower counts (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013). While the influencers' impact is evident, their ability to create brand credibility through social media is also reflected in their content. By sharing intimate and genuine content, influencers strengthen their audience's trust and purchasing intentions. These findings support the conclusions of current studies (Hassan et al., 2021; Aziz et al., 2023; Leite and Baptista, 2022) regarding the influence of social media



credibility on purchasing behavior. Additionally, the study enhances the understanding of inbound and affiliate marketing, providing a foundation for future research.

The study further shows that the sample influencers have significantly large followings. Their content—both posts and videos—is current, relevant, and of high quality, resulting in a high number of views. Given that content is essential in generating organic traffic, the influencers' efforts clearly demonstrate that they successfully employ inbound marketing strategies (Halligan and Shah, 2014). To diversify their content, influencers also collaborate with other brands, aligning with an affiliate marketing approach (Dwivedi et al., 2017).

It is evident from the influencers' accounts that they are not just promoting products but also creating a brand image for themselves. Brand image, an essential dimension of brand equity (Kim et al., 2003), contributes significantly to brand awareness (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Analysis of their content shows that the influencers adopt a frank, friendly tone, building a personal connection with their followers. For example, makeup tutorials from influencers like hudabeauty, nikkietutorials, and makeupshayla involve direct application of products to their faces and skin, which fosters an atmosphere of trustworthiness. By using the products themselves, the influencers enhance brand credibility, reinforcing the idea that these products are reliable and effective.

## 5.2. Practical Contributions

In terms of practical implications, the identified factors and research framework related to social media influencers provide valuable insights for management in the cosmetic industry. These findings suggest effective strategies and practices for strategic investment. The industry should also emphasize influencers' online communication skills, which are crucial for fostering trust between influencers and their target customers. This trust ultimately leads to increased purchase behavior and higher customer satisfaction.

The influencers in the study are globally ranked at the top, and their engagement with social issues enhances their credibility. For instance, Huda Kattan is an outspoken activist advocating for Palestinian rights and regularly donates to Gaza. Zoë Sugg, who has struggled with anxiety, raises awareness about mental health. Nikkie De Jager serves as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations, while Shayla Mitchell has shared a heartfelt video about her challenging childhood in a cosmopolitan city. These socially conscious actions are seen as authentic and trustworthy, significantly impacting their followers' purchasing behaviors.

Zoë Sugg, in particular, shares posts and videos centered around her daily family life, which helps create a warm, relatable atmosphere for her audience. While most of her beauty-related content focuses on nail art rather than makeup, she uses her hands to apply products, which, like other influencers in the study, fosters trustworthiness.

An interesting finding is that the number of views for certain posts can surpass the number of followers, as seen in the cases of Huda Kattan and Shayla Mitchell. Huda has over 50 million





followers, with one of her posts garnering 9.6 million views. On the other hand, makeupshayla achieved 42.5 million views on a single post despite having only 3.3 million followers. This discrepancy could be attributed to the quality of video content and its viral potential. A high view count enhances an influencer's credibility, as their content reaches millions, making them highly attractive to marketers looking to influence purchasing behavior.

These findings offer a practical guide for cosmetic sector marketers, including experts, brands, and marketing directors, by emphasizing the attitudes and techniques of influencers. Influencers actively shape their followers' intentions and behaviors regarding cosmetic products. The research helps bridge the gap between marketers and influencers, enabling long-term customer relationships. Marketers should consider follower count, engagement, content quality, and brand collaborations, all of which are crucial factors highlighted in the study (Pereira et al., 2014; Lu and Seah, 2018).

## **6. LIMITATIONS and FUTURE RESEARCH**

Despite the significant conclusions reached, this study faced several limitations. Firstly, the content analysis was restricted to evaluating views and the content of posts and videos, excluding comments, likes, and reposts. Future studies could incorporate these additional engagement metrics for a more comprehensive evaluation. Secondly, the sample size and study duration may be considered limited and could be expanded in future research. However, the study still contributes significantly to marketing literature, particularly as digitalization continues to grow. Future research should consider employing quantitative methods and field studies to deepen the understanding of influencer marketing. Additionally, marketers are advised to allocate more of their marketing budgets to social media initiatives and influencer marketing, given its increasing relevance in the digital age.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

In summary, the study concludes that influencers use social media, particularly Instagram, to build brand credibility by aligning their image with that of the brand, thereby fostering trust. They establish credibility by applying newly launched products directly to their skin or face, which enhances their authenticity. The influencers frequently share posts and videos, often creating stories multiple times a day, with their Instagram accounts monitored daily throughout the observation period (December 2023–March 2024). Many influencers are also founders of their brands, with their entrepreneurial behavior as a source of inspiration and empowerment. Brand awareness is further amplified through viral marketing via posts and videos, with content quality being paramount—illustrated by an influencer with fewer followers achieving the highest number of video views (48.5 million). Additionally, influencers often share personal family moments alongside product trials, creating sincere and organic content. The public and authorities have recognized their activism and sensitivity to global issues. Beyond Instagram, influencers actively engage with audiences on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok. The influencers in this study align with the research model,



which emphasizes the importance of market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, affiliate marketing and inbound marketing efforts in building brand credibility through social media.

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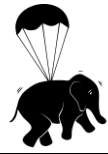
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