Beyond the Beauty Filter

A Quantitative Study Exploring Tiktokers' Role in Shaping Beauty Brand Image

by

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Abstract

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Keywords: TikTok, Beauty Industry, Brand Image, Authenticity, Content Quality, Sponsored Content, Influencer Marketing

Research Question: What is the impact of TikToker's authenticity and quality of TikToker's content on brand image in the beauty industry, and to what extent does the attitude towards sponsored content moderate these relationships.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of TikTokers in the beauty industry on brand image, focusing on the roles of TikToker's authenticity, quality of their content and consumer attitudes towards sponsored content.

Methodology: A quantitative approach with a deductive research design was employed. Data was collected through a digital questionnaire shared on various social media platforms, using convenience sampling. Data was analyzed using SmartPLS software.

Findings: The study found that TikToker's authenticity has a negative impact on the brand image in the beauty industry, however, quality of Tiktoker's content did not show a significant influence on brand image. The attitude towards sponsored content does not moderates the relationship between TikToker's authenticity and brand image, neither quality of content and brand image, since our findings are not statistically significant.

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of influencer marketing within the beauty industry on social media platforms. Our findings challenge the assumption that authenticity always enhances brand image, highlighting the dual nature of influencer marketing dynamics. Our research highlights the relationship between sponsored content and brand image, indicating that consumer attitudes towards advertising influence brand perception accordingly.

Managerial Implications: This study offers actionable insights for brands and influencers, advocating for strategic collaborations with authentic content creators aligned with brand values, since transparency emerges as a critical driver of a perceived brand image. By integrating these insights into their strategies influencer marketing strategies, brands can create and maintain meaningful connections with their target audience while having mutually beneficial partnerships that can enhance overall brand perception.

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1   Introduction

In the first chapter, we introduce the research topic by presenting a background and providing related concepts in order to familiarize the reader with the subject. It is followed by defining the research aim and purpose, concluding with an outline of the thesis.

Today, with the growing behavioral changes among consumers and the increased use of digital spaces for marketing, the beauty industry is undergoing a significant transformation (Mckinsey, 2018). Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as a dominant force, captivating users with its short-form video content and fostering a lively community of creators and consumers (Feldkamp, 2021).

As beauty brands navigate the fast-paced digital landscape, they encounter the dual challenge of captivating and retaining consumer attention and loyalty while maintaining authenticity and brand integrity. At the core of this challenge lies the importance of leveraging TikTokers' authenticity and content quality to establish genuine connections with their audience. From featuring relatable brand ambassadors to curating high-quality content, beauty brands strive to create engaging experiences that resonate with consumers on a deeper level. The authenticity and content quality of TikTokers play a major role in shaping brand image within the beauty industry (Haenlein et al., 2020).

This thesis aims to explore the impact of TikToker's authenticity as well as the quality of TikToker's content on beauty brands' image within the beauty industry. Through this research, we seek to understand the relationship between these factors and their influence on brand image and consumer perceptions of brands in the beauty industry. By examining these dynamics, we aim to provide insights that can help improve brand communication strategies in the digital landscape of the beauty industry.

1.1   Background and Problematization

If you have access to the Internet, it is more than likely that you have come across some sort of so-called social media influencer. According to Oxford Dictionary, influencer (in marketing) can be defined as: „A person who has become well-known through use of the internet and social media, and uses celebrity to endorse, promote, or generate interest in specific products, brands, etc., often for payment."(Oxford English Dictionary, 2007) Just under this definition, we can find a sentence "influencers can add serious credibility to your brand" which implies that influencers can shape brand image.

One of the most popular social media platforms nowadays is TikTok (Statista, 2024). The app was founded in 2016 and is continuously growing over the years, with a sudden rise during the

pandemic in 2020 (Ma & Yu, 2021). The platform has managed to gather 465.7 million active users in 2020 and in 2021 this number increased to 655.9 million active users (Statista, 2022). In 2023, TikTok was the most popular video type app (Statista, 2023).TikTok is a short-video platform, where users can create and upload their creations with the usage of music, filters and effects.TikTok creators, so-called TikTokers, typically showcase themselves engaging in everyday tasks such as going shopping or cooking, comedic skits or dance, oftentimes within their own homes (TikTok, 2024). This creates a more personal and can be perceived as a more real type of relationship with their followers. Given this, TikTokers can effectively advertise products and services in a more natural way, similar to recommending products to a friend (Barta et al., 2023). It allows TikTokers to be perceived more relatable to the viewer, gain their trust and increase the ability to influence them. (Barta et al., 2023). Therefore, it is not surprising that brands collaborate with them in order to create a positive brand image that can lead to sales and brand loyalty. Social media such as TikTok have become essentially a part of everyday life for many people, making social media one of the most important marketing tools (TikTok, 2022). Moreover, such influencer marketing relies on positive electronic word-of-mouth, the impact depends on TikTokers' perceived reliability, expertise, reputation or popularity. (Ismagilova et al., 2017).

With that being said, there is also a potential risk when it comes to partnering with TikTok creators, since consumers nowadays are more aware of how the app and paid collaborations work and the way that products are promoted online. With the increasing number of Tiktokers over the years, there can be a risk of a brand actually losing its good image by promoting their products or services when choosing inappropriate content creators. Viewers tend to watch Tiktokers that seem relatable and in a way authentic to them, therefore they can be influenced to try a brand that is promoted by someone that they relate to and it can also have the opposite effect- when a brand that they like is promoted by someone they can not relate to, they are not influenced to buy the product (Backaler, 2018). Additionally, considering TikTok's format, creators can express their opinions freely and easily, this can be both considered a blessing and a curse for brands. Since authentic creators use their voice in order to say their true point of view, it means that they may not only put the brand in a positive light if they decide to critique the product or service.

Authenticity on social media platforms, especially on TikTok, has been highly discussed in the recent years after some controversial TikToks about beauty products such as mascara, when viewers found out their favorite TikToker was wearing false eyelashes when trying on a new product and claiming it was the product's amazing false-lash effect (Business Insider, 2023). This situation has started a conversation about beauty brands and how they promote their products on TikTok, which is one of the main apps besides Instagram, where brands tend to promote their products by collaborating with Influencers.

Content quality on TikTok also plays a crucial role in the success of influencer marketing. Considering apps like TikTok, where attention spans are low, creators are striving to keep their viewers engaged with their videos by showcasing creative, informative and original content (Barta & Aldalibi, 2021). However, it is difficult to define what good quality content actually is, since it is subjective to each viewer. TikTok is a platform, where various videos appear- from informative news to pranks and both may be considered good quality videos by different target groups. Therefore, brands have to effectively choose the type of creator they want to collaborate with in order to reach the right target group that finds particular content of a high quality (Lou & Yuan, 2019). There is a risk of TikTokers not providing the quality of content that is preferred by the brand since each creator has their own unique way of creating their content. Therefore brands are put in a specific position, where they have to not only effectively

plan their strategy but also adapt to the specifics of each Influencer's content (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Considering examples like the one mentioned previously, brands may start to think about the actual effect of their collaborations with TikTokers- if it is actually better for them to promote their products using collaborations with TikTokers or if they can actually have a negative impact on their brand image. Positive brand image is crucial for a brand's success therefore such collaborations can have a huge impact on the overall future of brands in the beauty industry, which nowadays is highly competitive and trends are changing faster than ever.

1.2   Research Question and Aim

Previous research has explored several aspects of influencer marketing and the impact on consumer behavior (Gelati & Verplancke, 2022), other studies have also examined authenticity in social media influencers and the role of user-generated content in shaping brand image (Leiser & Gensert, 2019). With that being said, there is a lack of current research addressing the impact of TikToker's authenticity, the quality of their content and its overall impact on brand image specifically in the beauty industry. Therefore, there is a gap in understanding how these factors of TikTok creators such as their authenticity and quality of their content shape brand image of companies in the beauty industry.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the dynamics of influencer marketing within the beauty industry, with a specific focus on the role of TikToker authenticity and content quality in shaping consumer perceptions and brand image, while also exploring how those elements are moderated by viewers' attitude towards sponsored content. By exploring these factors, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of digital marketing and consumer behavior in the context of social media platforms like TikTok. Ultimately, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform strategic decision-making for beauty brands seeking to enhance their presence and engagement on TikTok.

Therefore, considering our research purpose, the research question is:

What is the impact of TikToker's authenticity and quality of TikToker's content on brand image in the beauty industry, and to what extent does the attitude towards sponsored content moderate these relationships.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the impact of TikToker authenticity and the quality of content on beauty brand image within the realm of influencer marketing on TikTok. Specifically, the study aims to unravel the following key objectives:

Firstly, it seeks to explain what is the impact of TikToker's authenticity on consumer perceptions of beauty brands on TikTok. By examining the authenticity of TikTokers' representation of beauty brands, the study aims to uncover its significance in shaping consumer attitudes and brand image.

Secondly, the research will investigate the role of content quality in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards beauty brands featured on TikTok. By analyzing the quality

of content produced by TikTokers in collaboration with beauty brands, the study aims to showcase its impact on brand image and consumer engagement.

Furthermore, the study aims to assess the moderating role of attitude towards sponsored content in the relationship between TikToker's authenticity, content quality, and beauty brand image. By exploring consumers' attitudes towards sponsored content on TikTok, the research seeks to understand how these attitudes may shape the impact of authenticity and content quality on brand image. There are several researches about the influence TikTok has on purchase intentions (Quang et al., 2023), however there is a gap when it comes to how TikTokers and their attributes such as authenticity and the quality of content actually influences brand image within the beauty industry as this industry currently is highly advertised on TikTok. Considering that TikTok is one of the main platforms used to advertise beauty brands nowadays, examining this relationship between brand image and TikTokers can be crucial for future marketing strategies that beauty brands will consider. Ultimately, the findings of this study aim to provide insights that can help shape the strategic decision-making process for the beauty brands to enhance their engagement on TikTok and shape their brand image, as positive brand image can ultimately lead to increased sales.

1.3   Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1: The introduction. This chapter serves as an introduction to the phenomenon being studied. It includes a background and problematization of the research, as well as the research aim and research purpose, which are the core of this study.

Chapter 2: The literature review. It presents previous research focusing on influencer marketing, TikTok platform and its dynamics, authenticity, content quality, brand image and consumer attitudes towards sponsored content. The review highlights recent academic and industry knowledge.

Chapter 3: The theoretical framework. It introduces the frameworks used for the research and explains the development of hypotheses presented and examined in the study.

Chapter 4: The methodology. This chapter describes research philosophy, research design, sampling and data collection methods as well as describes variables used in the study.

Chapter 5: The analysis. In this chapter, the findings from the data analysis are presented, it examines the relationships introduced in the theoretical framework and tests the hypotheses.

Chapter 6: The discussion. This chapter interprets findings in relation to existing knowledge and our established hypotheses. It also discusses the implications for theory and practice.

Chapter 7: The conclusion. This chapter summarizes the key findings and discusses their theoretical and managerial implications while reflecting on our objective and offers thoughts on the potential future research in influencer marketing.

2   Literature Review

In this chapter, we review the existing literature relevant to our study's focus on brand authenticity, quality, brand image, and sponsored attitudes. We examine key theories and previous research findings that provide a foundation for our theoretical framework. This review helps us identify gaps in the literature and situates our study within the broader context of existing knowledge, guiding the formulation of our research hypotheses.

The following literature has primarily been gathered from Lund University's extensive database, renowned for its collection of credible academic resources. Additional sources from Google Scholar have also been reviewed and incorporated. The initial search focused on understanding topics related to the research question. However, new perspectives discovered during supervision meetings led to continuous evaluation of additional sources. The theoretical framework consists mainly of peer-reviewed articles and journals published between 2010 and 2023, ensuring a contemporary perspective on the evolving world of marketing. Nonetheless, some older sources have been included for their reliability and depth. To complement the peer-reviewed literature and deepen the theoretical framework, additional books have been included. Keywords used in the search include "Influencer marketing," "Brand Image," "TikTok," "Social media influencer," "Sponsored content," and "User-generated content." These keywords were selected based on the research question, objectives, hypotheses, and variables of interest, guiding the selection of appropriate statistical analyses for data evaluation.

It's important to acknowledge that while social media and influencer marketing are relatively new fields of study, there is a significant body of industry knowledge within digital marketing. Unfortunately, due to the nature of this knowledge, corresponding academic references are not always available. This revision highlights our focus on recent academic literature while acknowledging the limitations of referencing well-established industry knowledge.

As previously mentioned, the goal of this study is to examine the relationship between the authenticity and quality of content created by beauty TikTokers and the brand image, moderated by consumer attitudes towards sponsored content.

2.1 TikTok (Social Media Platform)

Launched in 2016, TikTok's meteoric rise to become one of the most downloaded apps globally underscores its unique appeal (Dixon, 2022). By July 2021, it had surpassed beauty industry giants like Instagram and Facebook in downloads, achieving a milestone few apps have reached (Ceci, 2023). This rapid growth can be attributed to TikTok's focus on short-form video content, enabling users to create engaging and interactive experiences with music, filters, and special effects (Choudhary et al., 2020). Video lengths range from 15 seconds to 10 minutes, catering

to diverse user preferences. Furthermore, the platform encourages user engagement through interactive challenges, further boosting its popularity (Choudhary et al., 2020). This increasing popularity has caught the attention of businesses. Beauty brands recognize TikTok's potential to connect with younger demographics and promote their beauty products through captivating and authentic content (Choudhary et al., 2020). Companies like Chipotle, the NBA, and The Washington Post actively leverage TikTok as part of their digital marketing strategies (Choudhary et al., 2020). This trend highlights the platform's potential to expand brand reach and establish new customer connections. Several key advantages position TikTok as a valuable tool for beauty influencer marketing. Firstly, content created on TikTok can be easily shared across other social media platforms, amplifying its reach and exposing beauty brands to a wider audience, including those who do not actively use TikTok (Hayes et al., 2020). Additionally, unlike some platforms, TikTok videos are accessible from any web browser or Internet-connected device, further increasing their potential viewership (Hayes et al., 2020). Creators have tools to curate their online presence by restricting user comments and filtering negativity, allowing beauty brands to maintain a positive and respectful image (Hayes et al., 2020). TikTok has become a breeding ground for User-Generated Content (UGC), where beauty brands can collaborate with beauty influencers to create engaging and authentic content that resonates with target audiences (Geyser, 2022). This strategy allows beauty brands to leverage the established trust and connection beauty TikTokers have with their followers, fostering brand loyalty through genuine user-created content. TikTok's rapid rise presents a unique opportunity for beauty brands to engage with younger generations and build brand image through beauty influencer marketing. Its emphasis on short-form video content, user engagement, and ease of content sharing positions it as a valuable tool for reaching new audiences. The platform's focus on user-generated content enables beauty brands to leverage authenticity in building trust and loyalty with consumers. Building on TikTok's unique characteristics and potential for beauty influencer marketing, this study aims to explore the specific factors that influence the effectiveness of beauty influencer campaigns on this platform. Specifically, we will examine the aspects of beauty influencer authenticity and content quality, investigating how these factors impact brand image and consumer perception. As TikTok continues to grow, it provides a dynamic space for beauty brands to innovate their marketing strategies. Beauty TikTokers, known for their engaging and authentic content, play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving brand loyalty. By understanding the elements that contribute to successful influencer campaigns, brands can better harness the power of TikTok to connect with their audience. Moreover, the ability to share TikTok content across multiple platforms not only amplifies a brand's reach but also ensures that the brand message resonates with a wider audience. This cross-platform sharing capability is a significant advantage for beauty brands looking to maximize their digital presence. Additionally, TikTok's accessibility from various devices ensures that content can reach potential consumers wherever they are, further enhancing the platform's value for marketing purposes. TikTok's distinctive features and its focus on user-generated content make it an indispensable tool for beauty influencer marketing. By leveraging the authenticity and creativity of beauty TikTokers, brands can effectively build a strong brand image and foster deeper connections with their target audience. This study aims to explore the specific factors that influence the effectiveness of beauty influencer campaigns on this platform. Here, we will examine the aspects of beauty influencer authenticity and content quality, investigating how these factors impact brand image and consumer perception.

2.2   Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing stands as a vibrant and evolving strategy within the marketing landscape, offering companies a dynamic avenue to promote their products and services through collaborations with influential social media personalities (Bakker, 2018). In contrast to traditional advertising methods, influencer marketing presents a more direct and engaging approach to connect with target audiences, fostering deeper levels of engagement and interaction. This holds especially true for brands operating within the beauty industry, where influencer marketing emerges as a potent digital communication tool to achieve marketing objectives (Brown & Hayes, 2008). The collaborative efforts between brands and beauty influencers wield substantial potential to elevate consumer engagement, refine brand image and attitudes, and drive traffic to digital platforms. By leveraging the established credibility and influence of beauty influencers, brands can effectively amplify their message and resonate with their desired consumer demographics. The authenticity and relatability that beauty influencers bring to their content play a pivotal role in cultivating a genuine connection with their audience, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. When embarking on influencer collaborations, brands must exercise careful consideration in selecting the most suitable beauty influencers. Beyond mere follower counts, the ideal influencer should exhibit a strong alignment with the brand's values and resonate authentically with the target audience. This ensures that the partnership remains genuine and resonant, mitigating the risk of compromising the influencer's authenticity and credibility.

2.3   TikToker's Authenticity and Brand Image

The emergence of TikTok as a social media powerhouse has brought about a paradigm shift in influencer marketing, especially within the beauty sector. This section delves into the intricate concept of "Tiktoker's authenticity" and its potential ramifications on brand image. The notion of authenticity has long captivated the minds of philosophers spanning centuries. Socrates, a prominent figure in ancient Greek philosophy, introduced the term "authentes," denoting "self-authored" actions (Nicolotti & Magrin, 2020). This foundational concept set the stage for subsequent philosophical explorations that framed authenticity as a nuanced interplay between individual autonomy and societal influences. Existentialist philosophers further elaborated on this notion, proposing that authenticity entails an ongoing process of self-actualization through choices congruent with personal values (Hardt, 1993).

However, attaining such genuine authenticity can pose challenges, as societal norms and expectations often impose constraints on individual freedom. While there is no universally accepted definition of authenticity in marketing research (Södergren, 2020), it generally pertains to qualities perceived as truthful, genuine, and real (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). In the realm of social media influencers, authenticity transcends mere appearances. It encompasses the audience's perception that the influencer acts with autonomy and expresses themselves in a manner that feels sincere and relatable (Spiggle et al., 2012; Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2020). This authenticity can be cultivated through various cues, including the influencer's language use, level of self-disclosure, and the alignment between their online and offline personas.
The emergence of social media has expanded the notion of authenticity, particularly evident on

platforms like TikTok, which serve as curated spaces for self-expression. However, this curation prompts inquiries into the authenticity of online personas. Scholars posit that online authenticity often takes the form of a "performance" – a meticulously constructed narrative of one's inner self tailored for public consumption (Dumitrica & Gaden, 2015). Similarly, other researchers define online authenticity within political engagement as a performance emphasizing credibility, reliability, and transparency while encouraging audience interaction (Grow & Ward, 2013). This performative aspect of online authenticity raises intriguing questions regarding its potential implications for psychological well-being, an area traditionally central to the concept of authenticity. Challenging the simplistic notion that authentic self-presentation on social media inherently leads to enhanced well-being, it is highlighted that a "social positivity bias" prevails across various online platforms, where users tend to showcase their successes while downplaying their struggles. This curated online environment can exacerbate social comparison tendencies, potentially detrimental to the self-esteem of individuals who perceive themselves as falling short of the idealized online persona.

Thus, authenticity on social media is increasingly perceived as a strategic self-presentation approach, continually adapting to the features and expectations of the platform as well as the audience (Chen et al., 2023; Reinecke, L., & Trepte, S., 2014). This viewpoint resonates with the research of Uski and Lampinen, who emphasize that concepts like "being real" are molded by the unique norms of each platform (Uski & Lampinen, 2016). For instance, while authenticity on Facebook might involve avoiding excessive sharing, on platforms like Soundcloud, users may be encouraged to actively showcase their musical preferences (Barta and Aldalibi, 2021; Uski & Lampinen, 2016). TikTok, known for its predominantly young user base and reputation for "goofy" content, creates a unique social environment that shapes specific norms for self-presentation and authenticity. These social dynamics and audience expectations heavily influence how beauty TikTokers navigate the intricate concept of authenticity (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). The beauty influencer marketing landscape has experienced a significant transformation in recent years. Initially, influencer marketing relied on established celebrities and bloggers to promote beauty products. However, the advent of social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube has introduced a new generation of beauty influencers-ordinary individuals who built large followings by sharing their passions and expertise (Joshi et al., 2023). Brands quickly recognized the potential of these micro-influencers to connect with niche audiences in a more authentic and relatable manner compared to traditional celebrities (Sicilia & Lopez, 2023). TikTok's rapid ascent has significantly altered the landscape of beauty influencer marketing. The platform's unique features, such as its emphasis on short-form videos, music integration, dance content, and user-friendly editing tools, have empowered a new wave of beauty influencers to produce engaging and creative material (Geyser, 2023). These "TikTokers" often exude a sense of authenticity and relatability that appeals to younger audiences, making them highly attractive partners for brands aiming to reach Gen Z consumers (Singer et al., 2023). While TikTok promotes a sense of authenticity through its platform dynamics and youthful demographic, the introduction of brand partnerships adds complexity. Beauty TikTokers must balance maintaining their perceived authenticity while endorsing sponsored content. There is a shift in influencer marketing on TikTok from sporadic beauty product placements to more comprehensive campaigns that involve creating original content tailored to the brand (Zillich & Riesmeyer, 2021). This approach provides influencers with greater creative control, potentially enabling them to incorporate brand messages in a more seamless and genuine manner (Barta & Aldalibi, 2021). However, the distinction between authentic brand advocacy and inauthentic promotion can become blurred. Today's consumers are adept at identifying inauthentic marketing efforts. When a beauty TikToker's content becomes oversaturated with sponsored promotions, it can undermine their credibility and alienate their audience (Singer et al., 2023; Verbeet, 2022).

Authenticity holds significant sway over brand image, particularly within the realm of social media. When beauty influencers align with a brand's values and offerings, it enhances their perceived authenticity, exerting a profound emotional influence on consumers and fostering trust and credibility. Brands that meticulously select influencer partnerships stand to benefit from this positive association, effectively bolstering their brand image (Audrezet et al., 2020). However, influencers face the challenge of maintaining authenticity while integrating sponsored content. An excessive inundation of sponsored material can dilute an influencer's credibility and deter their audience. Brands that collaborate transparently with influencers, granting them creative freedom within the framework of brand values, contribute to a more genuine brand image. Authenticity cultivates a deeper emotional bond between influencers, brands, and consumer perception (De Kerviler & Butori, 2022).

While the notion of authenticity has received considerable attention in broader social media contexts, there remains a notable gap in research specifically addressing the correlation between authenticity among TikTokers and the brand image of beauty products within the rapidly expanding TikTok platform. Given the beauty industry's emphasis on image and aesthetics, our study holds promise for investigating the tensions between authenticity and brand integration within the TikTok sphere.

2.4 Quality of content and Brand Image

The perception of a brand is intricately tied to its ability to craft compelling content that aligns with the preferences of its intended audience (Lee et al., 2013). This is particularly significant on dynamic platforms like TikTok, where users encounter a vast array of content spanning diverse topics and creators. The platform's vibrant community fosters a continuous stream of varied content, lending it a dynamic atmosphere. This diversity empowers brands to interact with their audience in innovative and imaginative ways. However, it's crucial for brands to recognize that while high-quality content is essential on TikTok, it doesn't guarantee inherent value for viewers. Rather, viewers prioritize elements such as originality, creativity, entertainment value, informative content, aesthetics, and authenticity when assessing the quality of content. These attributes collectively define what constitutes quality on TikTok. Therefore, brands must strategically curate their content to resonate with the TikTok audience (Nagtzaam, 2022; Wang, 2020).

While providing informative content addresses user needs and cultivates a positive brand image (De Vries, 2012), effective social media marketing transcends mere information dissemination (Lee et al., 2013). Content marketing, a cornerstone of digital marketing strategies (Liadeli et al., 2023), revolves around creating valuable, relevant, and consistent content to engage and convert audiences (Content Marketing Institute, 2019). Social media platforms serve as optimal channels for disseminating this content, enabling direct engagement with the audience (Kanuri et al., 2018). Social media posts must strike a balance between providing information and fostering engagement (Lee et al., 2013). While content should inform about the product or service, successful strategies also incorporate personal elements and convey a sense of humanity behind the post to maximize reach and engagement (Kanuri et al., 2018). Although many studies on social media post effectiveness focus on metrics like likes, comments, shares, and completion rates, the quality of content is often overlooked. Yet, it can significantly influence these metrics, albeit indirectly (Wouters et. al, 2023; Grave, 2019).

Consistently publishing high-quality, informative content across blogs, websites, and social media platforms can position a company as a thought leader in its field. This approach not only builds trust and credibility but also fosters a positive brand perception (Oxford Academic, 2019). When businesses consistently deliver accurate, valuable, and engaging content, it enhances consumers' perceptions of the brand, thereby strengthening its image. Conversely, a strong brand image can reinforce the perceived quality of the content. Consumers are more inclined to view content as high-quality when it is associated with a reputable brand. Thus, the quality of content and brand image mutually reinforce each other, contributing to the overall strength and success of the brand (Oxford Academic, 2019).

There exists a notable research gap concerning the specific attributes that characterize effective content on social media, particularly on platforms like TikTok (Statista, 2024). While prior studies have investigated content effectiveness across various contexts (Anand & Shachar, 2009; Anderson & Renault, 2006), they fail to fully grasp the distinct dynamics of short-form, interactive video content prevalent on TikTok. This lack of comprehension regarding quality content on TikTok presents a valuable opportunity for our study.

2.5 Attitude towards sponsored content

2.5.1 Consumer Perception toward sponsored content

McGuire (1976) proposed a model for consumer information processing that has three key stages: acquiring, processing, and using information. These stages can be further broken down into five steps. First, consumers are exposed to the information, such as seeing a sponsored social media post. Second, they pay attention to the information, noticing the post and its content. Third, they try to understand the information, grasping the message and product being advertised. Fourth, they retain the information in memory and can retrieve it later, remembering the product when encountering a purchase situation. Finally, consumers use the information to make decisions, such as whether or not to purchase the advertised product. While these stages are not entirely separate, they provide a useful framework for understanding the obstacles that can impact consumer perception (Mazis & Staelin, 1982).

Wojdynski and Evans (2020) refined this model specifically for sponsored content. They suggest that a consumer's cognitive processing depends on two key steps for disclosure to be effective: attention and comprehension. A clear disclosure (e.g., "paid ad") grabs the consumer's attention and helps them recognize the content as advertising. Transparent communication of the disclosure (Boerman et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2017) allows for better comprehension of the information and its sponsored nature. This model highlights the importance of clear and open sponsorship for effective consumer processing of sponsored content.

2.5.2 Consumer Resistance towards sponsored content

When consumers become aware of the persuasive intent behind a message, they often exhibit resistance to the imposed persuasion (Wojdynski & Evans, 2020). This resistance towards sponsored content can be attributed to psychological reactance theory, which suggests that consumers dislike being persuaded without their consent (Lee & Kim, 2020). They value

autonomy, and when they perceive manipulation, they tend to employ resistance strategies in response (Kay et al., 2020). Moreover, encountering unwelcome persuasion attempts can evoke negative emotions towards the sponsored content, such as anger, irritation, and annoyance (Youn & Kim, 2019). Studies indicate that disclosing sponsorship can result in several adverse outcomes. It may foster a negative attitude towards the brand, potentially undermining its credibility as well as that of the influencer involved (Evans et al., 2017; Kay et al., 2020; S. Lee & Kim, 2020). Ultimately, these unfavorable consequences can influence consumers intention to purchase (Youn & Kim, 2019). Nevertheless, non-disclosure is also viewed as unethical from the consumer's standpoint, as it enables embedded advertising through covert messages (Wojdynski & Evans, 2020). Covert and embedded advertising are considered deceptive practices that infringe upon consumer rights (Campbell et al., 2000).

3 Theoretical Framework and Development of Hypotheses

This chapter presents the main theoretical framework that serves as the foundation for the study in order to predict the direct and moderating effects in question. The model consists of Tiktoker's authenticity, quality of (Tiktoker's) content and its direct effect on brand image. The moderating effect investigated is the attitude towards sponsored content.

3.1 Underlying Theoretical Framework

This part of our thesis aims to elaborate on relevant theories in order to develop hypotheses for our research in the following section. All of the proposed theoretical frameworks have allowed us to connect existing knowledge with our research and come up with hypotheses that will be considered throughout the thesis.

3.1.1 Source Credibility Theory

This theory, developed by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss in the 1950s, suggests that the audience's perception of the source's trustworthiness and expertise significantly impacts their reception of the message. It states that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

In our study, the source is the TikToker. When viewers perceive a TikToker as authentic, genuine, and relatable, they are more likely to trust the recommendations and content shared by that influencer. Authenticity fosters a sense of trust among viewers, as they believe the TikToker's motivations are sincere and aligned with their own interests rather than driven solely by commercial incentives (Audrezet et al., 2020)

Moreover, the expertise and quality of content of the TikToker also influences their credibility. Viewers are more likely to trust recommendations from TikTokers who demonstrate knowledge, experience, and proficiency in the beauty industry. This expertise can manifest in various ways, such as providing in-depth product reviews, offering expert beauty tips and advice, or showcasing advanced makeup techniques recorded in a good quality (Wang et al., 2017). In the context of our research, viewers' perceptions of the TikToker's authenticity and expertise directly impact their reception of the endorsed beauty brand. When viewers perceive the TikToker as authentic and knowledgeable, they are more inclined to positively evaluate the brand being promoted and may be more likely to engage with the content and perceive the brand in a more positive way (Audrezet et al., 2020).

3.1.2 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Cognitive Dissonance Theory, proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957, suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain internal consistency among their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. When they encounter situations where there is inconsistency or dissonance between these elements, they experience psychological discomfort and are motivated to reduce this dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

In the context of our research on influencer marketing in the beauty industry, Cognitive Dissonance Theory offers valuable insights into how viewers connect their existing perceptions of both the TikToker and the endorsed beauty brand. Let's consider a scenario: a viewer thoroughly enjoys the content created by a particular TikToker, finding them entertaining, relatable, and trustworthy. However, when this TikToker promotes a beauty product that the viewer doesn't perceive favorably, it creates cognitive dissonance (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The dissonance arises from the inconsistency between the viewer's positive feelings towards the TikToker and their unfavorable perception of the endorsed brand. To alleviate this discomfort and restore cognitive consistency, the viewer may be motivated to reassess their attitude towards the brand. They might engage in processes such as seeking out additional information about the product, rationalizing their initial impressions, or even adjusting their attitudes to align more closely with the endorsement (Festinger, 1957).

Ultimately, the viewer may be more inclined to view the endorsed brand positively, thereby reducing the cognitive dissonance and achieving a more consistent cognitive state. This process highlights the persuasive influence of TikTok influencers in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards endorsed brands, as viewers strive to reconcile their existing beliefs and behaviors with the messages conveyed by their favorite content creators. It can also have an opposite effect when they dislike Tiktoker, then they can associate such brands negatively as well (Harmon-Jones, 2019).

3.1.3 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo in the 1980s, offers valuable insights into how individuals process persuasive messages and make decisions. ELM proposes two distinct routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

1. Central Route Processing:

When individuals are highly motivated and possess the ability to critically evaluate the message content, they are likely to engage in central route processing. This involves carefully analyzing the arguments, evidence, and source credibility presented in the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In the context of our research, viewers who are deeply interested in beauty products or have prior knowledge about the brand may be more inclined to scrutinize the TikToker's endorsement and the product claims. They may evaluate the TikToker's authenticity, expertise, and

trustworthiness, as well as the quality of the content, before forming an opinion about the endorsed brand.

2. Peripheral Route Processing:

Conversely, when individuals lack motivation or cognitive resources to engage in central processing, they are more likely to rely on peripheral cues to form judgments. Peripheral route processing involves focusing on superficial aspects of the message, such as the attractiveness of the source (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) or the entertainment value of the content, rather than the substantive content itself. In the context of beauty industry sponsored content on TikTok, viewers may be "tricked" by factors such as the TikToker's perceived authenticity, charisma, or the creativity and humor displayed in the video, rather than critically evaluating the product claims or brand attributes.

In the beauty industry, where sponsored content is prevalent on social media platforms like TikTok, the processing of such content by viewers may often occur through the peripheral route. Given the nature of short-form video content and the entertainment-focused culture of TikTok, viewers may be more influenced by peripheral cues such as the TikToker's personality, style, and the overall appeal of the content, rather than engaging in deep cognitive elaboration of the product features or brand attributes.

3.2 Development of Hypotheses

According to Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) authenticity is a key dimension of source credibility. When viewers perceive a TikToker as authentic, genuine, and relatable, they are more likely to trust the recommendations and content shared by that Tik Toker. This trust in TikToker extends to the brands they endorse (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that a TikToker's authenticity positively influences viewers' perceptions of the endorsed brand's image. Therefore a following hypothesis was developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between Tiktoker's Authenticity and Brand Image in the beauty industry.

High-quality content reflects positively on the TikToker's expertise and professionalism, which are dimensions of source credibility according to Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). When viewers perceive the content as of high quality, they are more likely to view the TikToker as credible. Consequently, this positive perception of the TikToker can transfer to the endorsed brand, leading to a positive relationship between the quality of content and the brand image. It has led to developing such hypothesis:

H2: There is a positive relationship between Quality of Tiktoker's Content and Brand Image in the beauty industry.

This below hypothesis draws on Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model. According to Cognitive Dissonance Theory, individuals strive to maintain consistency in their beliefs and attitudes (Festinger, 1957).When viewers have a positive attitude towards sponsored content (indicating acceptance of the commercial nature of the endorsement), they

are more likely to decline any potential dissonance between their favorable perception of the TikToker and their attitude towards the endorsed brand (Festinger, 1957). Additionally, in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, if viewers are highly motivated to critically evaluate the content (as indicated by a positive attitude towards sponsored content), they may engage in central route processing, leading to a stronger influence of the TikToker's authenticity on the brand image.

H3a: Attitude towards sponsored content positively moderates the relationship between Tiktoker's Authenticity and Brand Image in the beauty industry.

In a similar way to H3a, this below hypothesis leverages Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model. When viewers have a positive attitude towards sponsored content, they are more likely to overlook any potential discrepancies between the content quality and their perception of the endorsed brand (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Lou &Yuan, 2019) Moreover, if viewers engage in central route processing due to their positive attitude towards sponsored content, they may attribute greater credibility to the TikToker's high-quality content, leading to a stronger influence on the brand image.

H3b: Attitude towards sponsored content positively moderates the relationship between the Quality of Tiktoker's Content and Brand Image in the beauty industry.

3.3 Research Model

In the figure 3.1 we present the developed research model. It includes all relevant variables present in the stated previously hypotheses.

FRAMEWORK

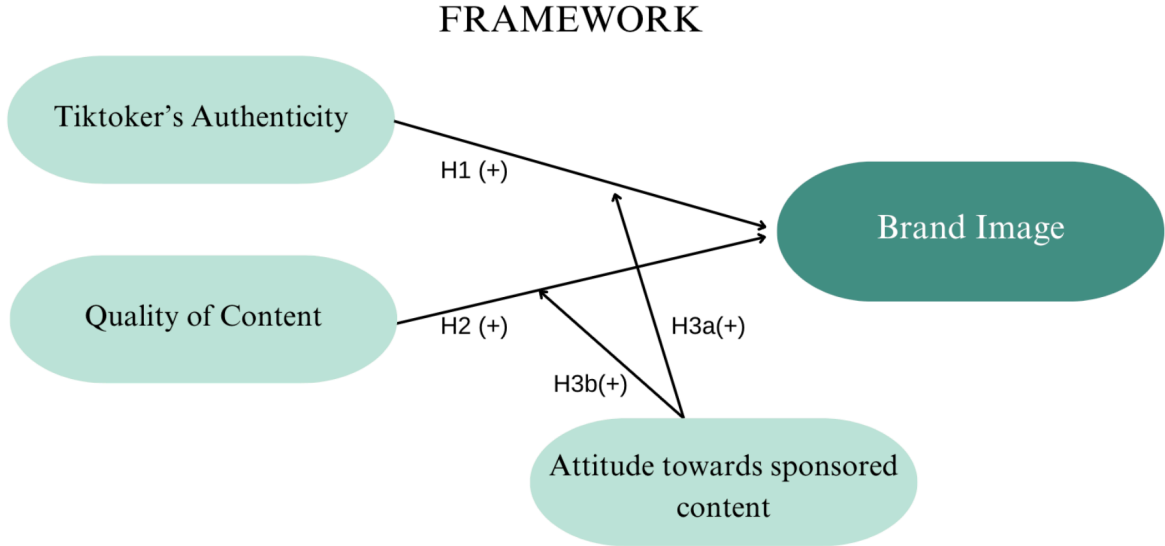*Figure 3.1 Research Model, Framework (Source: Own Depiction)*

Table 3.1 Variables of the research model and their sources

Variables	Sources
TikToker's Authenticity	(Ryu & Han, 2021; Savyak, 2023)
Quality of Content	(Ryu & Han, 2021; Savyak, 2023)
Brand Image	(Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Savyak, 2023, Isotalo & Watanen (2015)
Perceived Attitude	(Nosita & Lestari, 2019)

4   Methodology

This chapter details the research design and methodological approach we employed to investigate the relationships between brand authenticity, quality, brand image, and sponsored attitudes. We describe the data collection process, including the sampling techniques and instruments used, as well as the rationale for choosing SmartPLS for our primary analysis. Additionally, we outline the statistical methods applied to test our hypotheses, ensuring the reliability and validity of our measurements.

4.1   Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is a foundation of all studies. There are two main outlooks in research philosophy: ontology and epistemology. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Research philosophy not only helps researchers to identify and improve their work's quality but also has an impact on their creativity (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). With the appropriate use of research philosophy, researchers can establish a suitable research design while providing clear guidelines on how the research should be conducted, such as which type of evidence should be gathered by them and later on analyzed to provide the best response to previously established research questions. (Burns & Burns, 2008). Therefore, in this chapter we will firstly elaborate on the philosophical manners taken in this study in order to create the most suitable foundation for the research.

4.1.1   Ontology

Ontology, set as a branch of philosophy, acts as a fundamental assumption of the research about the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015) therefore ontology questions reality and how things can exist. Within ontology, Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) states four different dimensions of assumptions: realism, internal realism, relativism and nominalism. Because of research's quantitative approach, authors believe that internal realism describes the philosophical positioning in the most suitable way, as it assumes that a single reality exists, it mentions independent reality that is outside researchers' view (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). With that being said, indirect evidence can be shown through observation- this aligns with the research objectives for this study and therefore internal realism will help authors address the research question.

4.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is presented as the study of knowledge and ways of implementing it that helps researchers in choosing the most suitable methods for inquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). After establishing ontological positioning, authors have to set epistemological positioning as well to ensure the best approach for their study. Epistemology can be divided into positivism and social constructionism. Considering this study's internal realism ontology position, positivism is more suitable as the author's aim is to examine the phenomenon of truth from an objective standpoint in opposition to making subjective statements through feelings and understanding. By employing a quantifiable data collection method, this study aims to gather empirical evidence to support or reject proposed hypotheses. Positivism allows us to measure models with objective measures (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, it helps to provide a foundation for the quantitative research methods used in this study and is the most suitable choice for this research.

4.2   Research Approach

The deductive research approach adopted in the study involves testing specific hypotheses. It started with defining a theoretical framework outlining relationships measured in this study such as brand image, quality of Tiktoker's content, Tiktoker's authenticity and perceived attitude towards sponsored content. The deductive approach provides a clear framework for examining causal relationships. This study explores how Tiktoker's authenticity and quality of their content impacts brand image with the moderating effect of attitude towards sponsored content. These relationships between variables will be measured by a set of hypotheses, which will be tested with a quantitative approach. Quantitative researchers tend to apply a set of concepts to the research tool being used Burns & Burns, 2008. The study focuses on consumer's perspective and their behavior, which is suitable for the quantitative research strategy as it mainly focuses on the behavior of individuals which will be measured in this study. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Considering all the above, a quantitative approach was considered as the most appropriate for this study.

4.3   Research Method and Design

Quantitative research method acts as a foundation for this study, focusing on gathering and analysis of data. The use of statistical analysis enables researchers to examine relationships between set variables and test developed hypotheses (Bryman & Bell, 2015). With implementing quantitative analysis, this study is aiming to provide objective insights into how brand image is impacted by quality of content and creator's authenticity while considering moderating effect of perceived attitude towards sponsored content. Therefore it can contribute to a deeper understanding of such relationships and consumer behavior.

The most common form of a cross-sectional design is social survey research (Burns & Burns, 2008). The cross-sectional research design chosen for this study involves collecting data from a specific sample of participants collected at a single point of time (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It

was collected through an online survey using the Qualtrics platform, targeting individuals that are viewers of beauty content on Tiktok. For such research, cross-sectional design is essential, as the survey was mainly distributed on social media platforms and by doing so it could be collected simultaneously.

The survey was split into parts:

- In the first part there was a mathematical control question that allowed us to avoid bots.
- In the second part, respondents were asked about their demographics such as: gender, level of education and income
- In the third part, to ensure participation from our target audience, individuals actively engaged with beauty content on TikTok, this part began with two key questions:

  1.''Do you use TikTok?'' This initial question eliminated those who do not use the platform.

  2."Do you watch beauty videos on TikTok? (Beauty videos: videos that show skincare, makeup, fragrance etc.)" This question eliminated those who do not actively watch beauty videos on Tiktok platform.

- In the following part, participants were asked to provide their three favorite Tiktokers in the beauty industry. Asking participants to list their favorite beauty content creators on TikTok, a seemingly simple step, proved instrumental in refining the data collected for the following survey sections. (OECD, 2012). Inviting participants to reflect on their favorite beauty content creators on TikTok enhanced the context for their responses to the subsequent statements. This focus on personal experiences and preferences allows participants to provide richer and more relevant data. Additionally, focusing on specific individuals can help to mitigate potential biases that might arise from general opinions about the brand or the content of the videos on tik tok. By thinking about creators they trust and value, participants are more likely to provide honest and reliable answers in the following sections.
- In the next part, they were asked how they perceive beauty brands on Tiktok.
- In the sixth part, respondents were asked to rate statements about beauty Tiktokers they watch.
- In the next part, participants were asked about statements regarding quality of beauty creators' content they watch.
- In the last part, respondents were asked about their perceived attitude towards sponsored content.

The questionnaire was designed using Likert scale, a commonly used measurement tool. The scale consisted of seven response options: „strongly disagree", „disagree", „somewhat disagree", „neither agree or disagree", „somewhat agree", „agree", „strongly agree" described as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

By using Likert scale we aimed to capture various dimensions of participants' attitudes towards presented statements and receive their perception (Bryman & Bell, 2015).Likert scale was chosen since it is an appropriate method to measure abstract concepts that are difficult to measure such as attitude towards sponsored content that was examined in this study. (Burns & Burns, 2008)

4.4 Data collection method

The research design for this study is cross-sectional design, and the research method was addressed to be suitable in order for the design and the purpose to gather sufficient data. A survey research, according to Bryman and Bell (2015) is the data collecting method which falls within the cross-sectional category of a quantitative method. Using survey research, questionnaires serve as a specific instrument for collecting data from participants (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Consequently, the specific data collection method used in this study is a digital form, self-administered questionnaire. The survey was designed on Qualtrics online survey platform and it was shared to the participants through WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Linkedin (Social Media Platforms). Some groups on social media connected to beauty content on Tiktok were also considered for a larger sample watching the specific beauty content that we examine in this study. This type of survey and form benefits as of this study limited time. In order to construct a quantitative base of data, we choose a questionnaire since this method makes it possible to receive multiple respondents at the same time (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Additionally the respondents can read and answer the questions and statements by themselves, the risk of being biased is limited as the authors cannot influence the responses of the participants.

4.5 Sampling

When considering the choice of sample, Burns and Burns (2008) have described the process as a systematic sequence as follows: defining the population, selecting a sampling method as well as determining the sample size. All of the points will be discussed in this section.

Defining the population

In our study, the target population were users of TikTok that watch beauty content of any gender above the age of 18 (this was measured by their highest level of finished education) as since our whole study is based on this platform and specifically the beauty industry within the platform. Therefore, it was crucial that our respondents are active users of the app and follow beauty content creators to ensure that their answers are credible. Given the fact that mostly women are the viewers of such content, we were aware that our respondents that can answer our question will be women.

Selecting a sampling method

Considering the time limit and costs, we chose non-probability sampling. We opted for a convenience sampling method including our network on LinkedIn and other social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp) and their public groups. Our method also included a snowball type of sampling including word of mouth since it was the most effective choice considering our previously mentioned limitations such as time and budget (Burns & Burns, 2008). For this study, our sample had a diverse range of individuals including family members, classmates and users of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook since potentially all of the above could be a viewer of beauty content on TikTok.

Determining the sample size

When it comes to determining our sample size, we followed Roscoe's rule for multivariate data analysis, such as regression analysis that was conducted in our study. According to the rule, the typical sample size should be at least 10 times more than the number of variables (Sekran & Bougie, 2016) Considering that we had a total of 4 variables, we aimed at more than 50 participants. We were able to gather 226 responses, however considering the fact that most of the respondents are not active users of TikTok and do not watch beauty content on the platform, we were able to gather 96 full responses and could close the survey after a week of active data collection.

4.6   Operationalization and Measurement

Bryman and Bell (2015) emphasize that operationalization is conducted after defining the theoretical framework, methodology, research design, data source, collection method, and sampling strategy. This process defines the operational measurement of the variables (Saunders et al., 2016). Through operationalization, researchers can develop clear and theoretically grounded questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This ultimately strengthens the validity and reliability of the research findings. The below Table 4.1 outlines the operationalization used to construct the questionnaire for this study. You can find the complete questionnaire in Appendix A.

Table 4.1Variables, Types of Variables, Measurement Types, and Survey Questions

Variable	Type of Variable	Type of measurement	Questions
Brand Image	Dependent	Likert scale: 1= Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree	Q8
Quality of Content	Independent	Likert scale: 1= Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree	Q9
TikToker's Authenticity	Independent	Likert scale: 1= Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree	Q10
Perceived Attitude	Moderator	Likert scale: 1= Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree	Q11

In this study, there are four variables. One dependent variable, two independent variables as well as a moderator. All of the presented variables are latent variables, therefore they are indirectly measured by a set of statements.

4.6.1   Dependent Variable

Dependent variables can be described as the outcome or effect that researchers are interested in explaining or predicting. Dependent variable is influenced by changes in the independent variables.The dependent variable in this research is Brand Image, we want to measure what is the impact of other variables on brand image. It is measured by four items, derived from previously established scale (Ryu & Han, 2021; Savyak, 2023; Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Isotalo & Watanen, 2015; Nosita & Lestari, 2019). Items are measured by Likert Scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree). Dependent variable is measured in survey by below statements:

- "The brand is well-known.
- "The brand is trendy."
- "The brand has a reputation for good quality.
- "The brand is prestigious."

4.6.2   Independent Variables

Independent variable is the factor that is manipulated or measured in order to determine its effect on the dependent variable. They can cause or influence the outcome. There are two independent variables in our study: Quality of Content and TikToker's Authenticity. Quality is measured by five items, whereas Authenticity is measured by seven items. Items are measured by Likert Scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree). Statements were derived from previous research to ensure the best quality (Ryu & Hank, 2021; Savyak, 2023; Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Isotalo & Watanen, 2015; Nosita & Lestari, 2019). Quality of Content is measured in our survey by such statements:

- "They explain well the relationship between content, product, and brand."
- "They clearly communicate information about a product or brand.
- "They know and understand a product or brand well."
- "They give accurate information about the product."
- "They give all the information that I need about the beauty product."

TikToker's Authenticity is measured by such statements in the survey:

- "TikTokers actively communicate with consumers."
- "TikTokers value the relationship with their followers."
- "TikTokers are honest without lying."
- "TikTokers broadcast with sincerity."
- "TikTokers have their own special content."
- "TikTokers have their own personality and characteristics."
- "TikTokers fulfill their promises with followers well."

4.6.3   Moderator

Lastly, moderator is a variable that affects the strengths or direction of the relationship between independent variable and a dependent variable. It helps in understanding under which circumstances or for whom specific effects occur. The moderator in this study is Perceived Attitude (Towards Sponsored Content). As well as other variables, moderator's items are measured by Likert Scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree) and statements were based on previous research (Ryu & Han, 2021; Savyak, 2023; Cretu & Brodie, 2007;

Isotalo & Watanen, 2015; Nosita & Lestari, 2019). Perceived Attitude is measured by below five statements:

- "Sponsored content of beauty products on TikTok is unbiased."
- "Sponsored content of beauty products on TikTok is credible."
- "Sponsored content of beauty products on TikTok is reliable."
- "Sponsored content of beauty products on TikTok is trustworthy."
- "Sponsored content of beauty products on TikTok is believable."

Table 4.2 Corresponding Survey Variables, and Survey Questions

Type of variable	Variables	Survey Questions
Independent	TikToker's Authenticity	Tiktokers actively communicate with consumers
		Tiktokers value the relationship with their followers
		Tiktokers are honest without lying
		TikTokers broadcast with sincerity
		TikTokers have their own special content
		Tiktokers have their own personality and characteristics
		Tiktokers fulfill their promises with followers well
Independent	Quality of Content	The brand is well-known
		The brand is trendy
		The brand is having reputation for good quality
		The brand is prestigious
Dependent	Brand Image	The brand is well-known
		The brand is having reputation for good quality
		The brand is prestigious
Moderator	Perceived attitude towards sponsored content	Sponsored content of beauty products on Tiktok is unbiased
		Sponsored content of beauty products on Tiktok is credible
		Sponsored content of beauty products on Tiktok is reliable
		Sponsored content of beauty products on TikTok is believable

4.7   Quality of Research

The foundations of a strong research are reliability, validity, and replicability (Burns & Burns, 2008).While these terms may appear synonymous, they hold distinct meanings and involve different assessment methods (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This section delves into these research concepts, exploring their differences and evaluating how effectively this study meets their criteria.

4.7.1   Validity

Bryman and Bell (2015) emphasize validity as a main key of quality research. Internal validity, also known as causal validity, assesses whether the study's variables truly influence the outcome (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A pre-test of the questionnaire ensured the questions accurately measured the intended variables, thereby establishing internal validity.

Criterion validity, discussed by Bryman and Bell (2015) and Saunders et al. (2016), focuses on the appropriateness of the measurement tools used. Adopting validated measures from prior studies can enhance criterion validity, a goal achieved in this research through the operationalization process, which clarified the link between variables and corresponding questions. Generalizability, a key aspect of high-quality research, refers to the study's applicability to broader contexts (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Utilizing a representative sample of the population contributed to achieving generalizability in this study.

Furthermore, the research benefited from ecological validity, as participants engaged in their natural environment without manipulation (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This validity strengthens the study's connection to real-world social settings. Finally, content validity pertains to the comprehensiveness and relevance of the research content (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To ensure content validity, an expert in quantitative methods reviewed and refined the questionnaire, ensuring the questions were highly relevant to the research area.

4.7.2   Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurements used to capture concepts, ensuring the collected data reflects a stable reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Three key elements contribute to a study's reliability: stability, internal consistency, and inter-observer consistency.

Stability tests examine whether results hold true over time when the study is replicated with the same sample (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Our research explores how attitudes towards sponsored content influence the independent variables – perceived authenticity of the TikTok creator and the quality of their content. Furthermore, we examine how both these independent variables, along with the moderator (attitude towards sponsored content), ultimately affect the dependent variable – brand image.

Internal consistency, a crucial aspect of questionnaire design, ensures questions are correlated and do not generate conflicting responses (Saunders et al., 2016). Cronbach's alpha, a statistical method commonly used in quantitative research, assesses this internal consistency (Saunders et al., 2016). It measures the correlation between survey answers and provides a coefficient value between 0 and 1, indicating the degree of consistency (Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to Bryman and Bell (2015), a desirable alpha value falls between 0.6 and 0.8. Values below 0.6 suggest questions need revision or removal.

Inter-observer consistency, another concern in research with multiple investigators, addresses the potential for subjective interpretations leading to inconsistencies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Conducting a pre-test is crucial to achieving valid and reliable results, as it helps mitigate these issues.

Similar to reliability is replicability. While replication is uncommon in business research, it remains valuable (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Replication allows for the generation of additional evidence and results (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, a transparent research design facilitates replication with similar outcomes. Therefore, the concept of replication serves as a tool in this study to ensure both reliability and validity.

5 Data Analysis and Findings

In this section, we present the results of our data analysis conducted using SmartPLS and Jamovi. We discuss the path coefficients, T values, and p values for each hypothesis, interpreting these results within the context of our research model. This chapter also includes a robustness check using linear regression to confirm the consistency of our findings. The analysis highlights significant relationships between the constructs, providing empirical evidence to support or refute our hypotheses.

5.1 Data preparation

We proceed with the data collection via the platform of Qualtrics, which automatically generates a corresponding Excel Sheets workbook. In anticipation of the pilot test, a Jamovi software was created to facilitate data analysis. Each survey item was precisely categorized and labeled within the Jamovi program, mirroring the order in which they appeared within the Qualtrics. This approach ensured a smooth transition of data from Sheets to PLS-Smart. Upon receiving and importing the collected data into PLS-Smart, a thorough visual inspection was conducted to verify the absence of missing values or outliers, and to confirm the accuracy of the data import (Bell et al., 2022). The survey design enforced mandatory responses to all questions, preventing submission until completion. This strategy minimized the risk of incomplete responses and non-response errors (Malhotra et al. 2017).

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, give us valuable insights into the survey population, understand typical responses, identify relationships between variables, and examine the frequency of different answer choices.
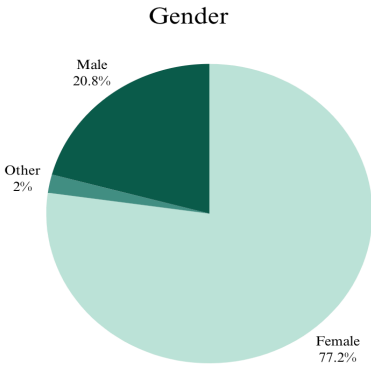
5.2.1   Survey Population

Figure 5.1Gender of the survey's participants (Source: Own Depiction according to data from questionnaire)

Our research focused on TikTok users who specifically engage with beauty content videos. While the overall survey received 222 responses, only 96 participants met our target criteria. This resulted in a final sample size of 96, with a breakdown of 156 women (65.8%), 42 men (17.9%), and 4 individuals identifying as "other" (1.7%) as shown in figure 5.1. Corresponds with the general trends observed on TikTok, where women are the majority of both content creators (55.3%) and overall users (61% female) according to Statista (2021, 2022).

The remaining 126 responses (56.3%) were excluded because they did not meet the key criteria of using TikTok and watching beauty content videos on the platform. Questions 5 and 6 in our survey served as screening questions to ensure participants aligned with our target audience.
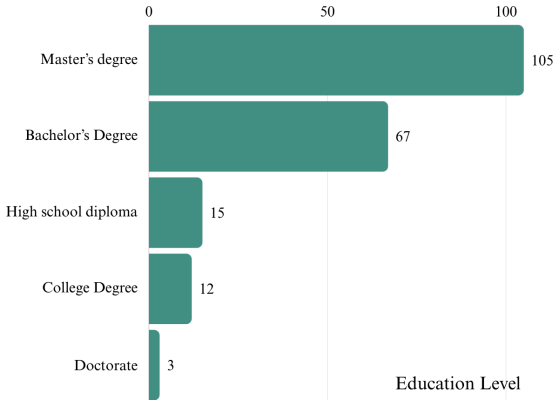
Figure 5.2 The level of participants' education (Source: Own Depiction, according to data gathered in our questionnaire)

As presented in figure 5.2, Master's degrees emerged as the most prevalent educational attainment level amongst our respondents, with 105 participants (59.7%) falling into this category. Bachelor's degrees were the next most common educational background, with 67 respondents (38.3%) holding this qualification. High school diplomas (8.5%) and College Degrees (6.8%) represented a smaller portion of the sample, with 15 and 12 participants only.

Figure 5.3 Income level of respondents (Source: Own Depiction)

In our research, we also asked participants about their income levels. The results revealed a distribution towards lower income brackets as shown in table 5.3, with 64% of respondents reporting an income below €25,000 annually. This finding presents an interesting point for discussion when compared to exist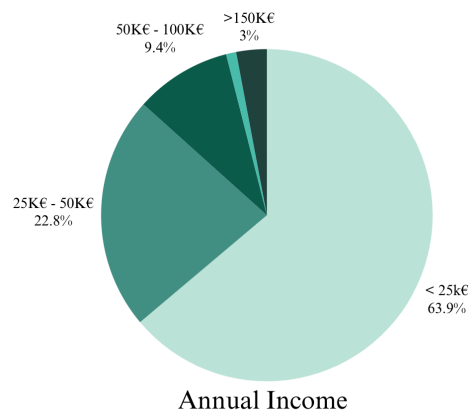ing research on social media usage and income levels. Pew Research Center (2017) suggests a correlation between higher income and social media use in the US, with a higher percentage of users earning over 69,000€ actively engaging on social media compared to those earning under 29,000€.

This difference could be due to a few reasons. Firstly, the focus on beauty content might attract a younger user base. A significant portion of TikTok users fall under 30 (47.4%), potentially reflecting lower income demographics compared to the broader social media landscape (Omnico Agency, 2024). Secondly, the income distribution might be specific to the region where we collected data.

It's important to remember that income is just one factor influencing social media usage. Demographics and interests likely also play a role. Overall, the income distribution within our sample offers a unique perspective on TikTok beauty content viewers. While it might not fully mirror broader social media trends, it provides valuable insights into this specific user segment.

5.3   PLS-SEM

We conduct this research in order to exam the indicate relationships between the variables in our model. We conducted Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) for its strengths in uncovering these relationships and their impact. PLS-SEM's focus on prediction (Hair et al., 2019) straighten up with our goal of understanding how changes in one variable might influence (cause an impact on) another. This method allowed us to assess whether these impacts were positive or negative. PLS-SEM's ability to handle complex models with numerous constructs and relationships was crucial for our research. Given its strong capabilities, we could effectively examine the interplay between a multiple factors and their potential positive or negative influences on the outcomes that we were studying (Hair et

al., 2019). Also the potential for a smaller sample size due to limitations within the population we studied was a consideration. PLS-SEM's effectiveness with both large and small samples ensured the validity of our results even with a potentially restricted sample size. This flexibility in handling sample size provided an additional advantage for our research design. The emphasis on examining relationships and their direction (positive or negative impact), the intricate nature of our model, and the potential for a smaller sample size all led us to choose PLS-SEM as the most appropriate analytical technique for our study. You can find in the Appendix B the full results from Smart PLS.

5.3.1 Deleted Items

In the process of our analysis, we found that some of the variables in our model had significantly low loadings. These low loadings indicated that these variables shared very little common variance with the latent construct they were supposed to measure. As a result, they contributed minimally to the explanatory power of our model.
Specifically, variables Q8_2, and Q9_1 had loadings of 0.560 and 0.607 respectively as you can see in the table 5.1 below, which were below the commonly accepted threshold. Given their weak associations with the latent construct, we made the decision to remove these variables from our model. This step was crucial to ensure the robustness and validity of our findings. We believe this decision enhances the overall quality of our research and provides a more accurate representation of the underlying constructs we aimed to measure. Future research may wish to further investigate these variables to better understand their low loadings in the context of our study.

Table 5.1 Deleted Items based on their loadings

Item	Item Wording	Loading
Q8_2 (Brand Image)	The brand is trendy	**0.567**
Q9_1 (TikToker's Authenticity)	They actively communicate with consumers	**0.607**

5.3.2 Measurement of Central Tendency

Table 5.2 Measurements of each item

Variable	N	Mean	Median	SD
Q8_1	96	4.49	5	1.16
Q8_3	96	4.61	5	1.13
Q8_4	96	4.32	4	1.44
Q9_2	96	4.34	4.5	1.75
Q9_3	96	4.2	4	1.75
Q9_4	96	4.23	4	1.72

Q9_5	96	4.6	5	1.8
Q9_6	96	4.77	6	2.01
Q9_7	96	4.35	5	1.7
Q10_1	96	5.11	5	1.19
Q10_2	96	5.49	6	1.03
Q10_3	96	5.31	6	1.28
Q10_4	96	5.49	6	1.11
Q10_5	96	5.13	5.5	1.28
Q11_1	96	3.23	3	1.48
Q11_2	96	3.53	3	1.47
Q11_3	96	3.43	3	1.46
Q11_4	96	3.35	3	1.47

This table summarizes the central tendency measures mean and median for each survey item. Each variable includes some statements, for Brand Image we have questions Q8_1, Q8_3, Q8_4, for Tik Toker Authenticity the questions Q9_2, Q9_3, Q9_4, Q9_5, Q9_6, Q9_7, for Quality of content perceived by Tik Tokers users the questions Q10_1, Q10_2, Q10_3, Q10_4, Q10_5 and last for Attitude towards sponsored content our last questions Q11_1, Q11_2, Q11_3, Q11_4.

The use of a 1-7 scale in this study minimizes the influence of outliers on the overall results.

5.3.3   Estimate Outer Model

Table 5.3 Measurement model results for first order constructs

Constructs and items	Item wording	Load.	α	ρA	C.R.	AVE	VIF
Brand Image			0.553	0.581	0.764	0.661	
Q8_1	The brand is well-known	0.720					
Q8_3	The brand is having reputation for good quality	0.811					
Q8_4	The brand is prestigious	0.623					
Authenticity			0.953	0.975	0.961	0.806	1.000
Q9_2	Tiktokers value the relationship with their followers	0.913					
Q9_3	Tiktokers are honest without lying	0.847					
Q9_4	Tiktokers broadcast with sincerity	0.902					

Item	Description	Loading					
Q9_5	Tiktokers have their own special content	0.903					
Q9_6	Tiktokers have their own personality and characteristics	0.916					
Q9_7	Tiktokers fulfill their promises with followers well	0.904					
Quality of Content			0.889	1.049	0.906	0.661	1.000
Q10_1	They explain well the relationship between content, product and brand	0.915					
Q10_2	They clearly communicate information about a product or brand	0.736					
Q10_3	They know and understand a product or brand well	0.833					
Q10_4	They give accurate information about the product	0.848					
Q10_5	They give all the information that I need about the beauty product	0.716					
Sponsored Content			0.958	1.018	0.969	0.885	1.000
Q11_1	SC of beauty products on Tiktok is unbiased	0.903					
Q11_2	SC of beauty products on TikTok is credible	0.947					
Q11_3	SC of beauty products on TikTok is reliable	0.972					
Q11_4	SC of beauty products on TikTok is trustworthy	0.939					

In our study, we examined four key variables, each of which was measured using three to six items.

For Brand Image, the loadings for each item ranged from 0.623 to 0.811, indicating that these items are moderately to strongly correlated with the 'Brand Image' latent variable, suggesting that they are good indicators of this construct. The Cronbach's Alpha for this variable was 0.553, while this value is above 0.5, it is generally considered to be on the lower end, indicating that the items may not be as internally consistent as desired. This could be due to a variety of factors, such as the items not being closely related enough or there being too few items. The C.R. = 0.764, indicates that the 'Brand Image' construct is reliable and the items that form it are consistent in their measurement and the AVE was 0.661. Since this value is above the threshold of 0.5, it suggests that more than half of the variance of the items is accounted for by the 'Brand Image' construct. This indicates a good level of convergent validity.

The same analysis was conducted for TikToker's Authenticity, Quality of content, and Attitude towards sponsored content. The results as in the table 5.3 above:

TikToker's Authenticity: The loadings, which are the correlations between the observed variables and the factors, range from 0.847 to 0.916. This indicates a strong relationship between the variables and the factors. Cronbach's α, a measure of internal consistency, is 0.953, suggesting good reliability of our scale. ρA could refer to Average inter-item correlation, and a high value of 0.975 suggests that the items have similar scores.

Quality of content: Loadings ranged from 0.716 to 0.915, suggesting a strong correlation between the observed variable and the underlying factors. The Cronbach's α value of 0.889 indicates a high level of internal consistency within the set of items. The C.R. is 0.906, signifying a high level of reliability of the construct. The AVE is 0.661, indicating that more than half of the variance of the indicators is explained by the construct.

Sponsored content: The factor loadings range from 0.903 to 0.972, suggesting a very strong correlation. The Cronbach's α value is 0.958, indicating excellent internal consistency within the set of items.The C.R. is 0.969, indicating excellent reliability of the construct. The AVE is 0.885, which is quite high, indicating that a significant majority of the indicators.

The analysis of our measurement scales using PLS-SEM provides encouraging results, indicating that the chosen items effectively capture the intended constructs. Also the analysis reveals strong psychometric properties for most constructs, particularly in capturing Tiktokers' Authenticity and Sponsored Content perceptions.

5.3.4   Model of PLS-SEM and path analysis

We used SmartPLS software to perform path analysis, examining the relationships between latent variables through both the inner and outer models. The outer model evaluated the connections between latent variables and their indicators, while the inner model focused on the relationships between the latent variables themselves.

SmartPLS was chosen for its ability to handle complex models, manage small to medium sample sizes, and deliver reliable results even when data does not conform to normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2011; Ringle et al., 2015). It is particularly useful for exploratory research and theory development, allowing us to investigate direct and indirect effects within our model (Hair et al., 2014).
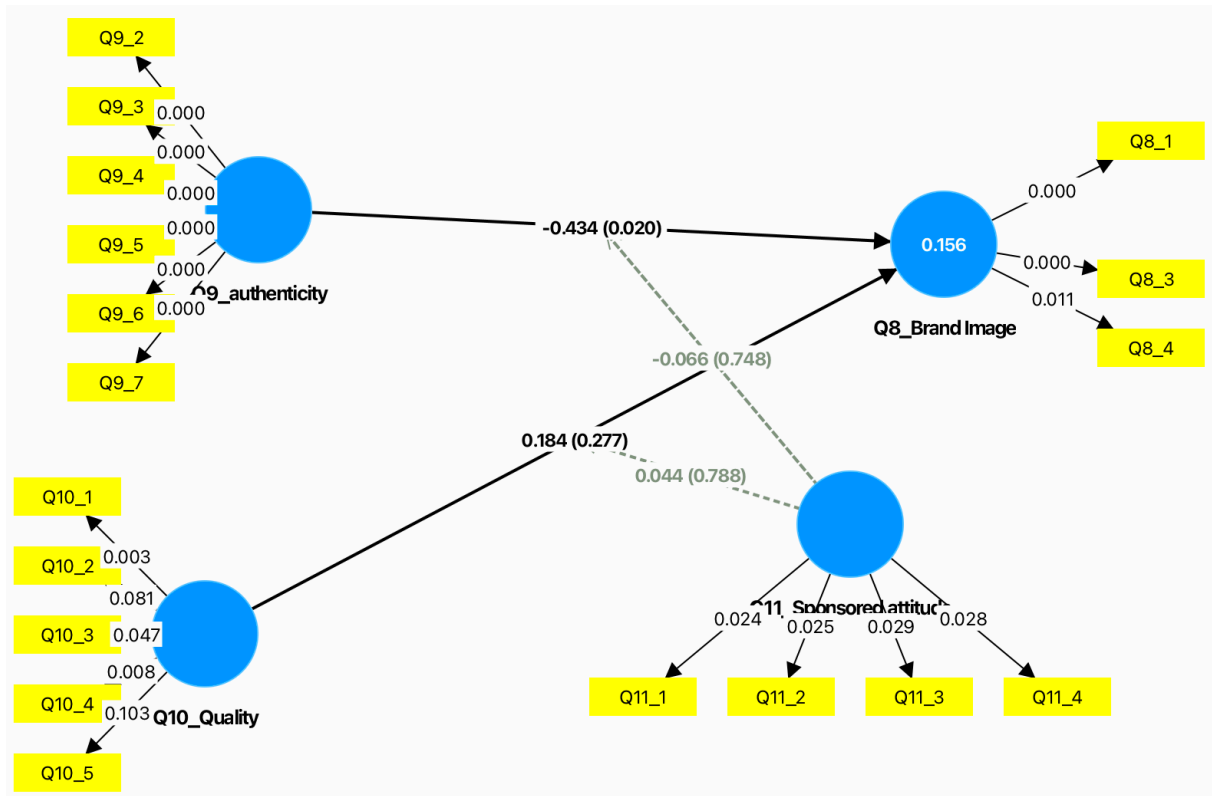
Figure 5.4 Model of PLS-SEM path analysis diagram (Source: SmartPLS software - Own Depiction)

The table below presents the path analysis results, revealing significant relationships for certain hypotheses while invalidating others. Specifically, the negative impact of authenticity on brand image and the positive influence of brand image on sponsored attitude were significant. Conversely, the relationships between quality and brand image, authenticity and sponsored attitude, and quality and sponsored attitude were non-significant. This analysis highlights the underlying dynamics between the variables, offering insights into strategic brand management decisions. With SmartPLS, we effectively assessed the structural relationships in our model, reinforcing our theoretical framework despite the absence of mediation effects (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 5.4 Path Analysis Results tables (Source: SmartPLS software - Own Depiction)

Path Analysis	Path Coefficient	T Value	p Value	Hypothesis	Validity
Q9_Authenticity → Q8_Brand Image	-0.434	-2.334	0.020	H1	Valid
Q10_Quality → Q8_Brand Image	0.184	1.090	0.277	H2	Invalid
Q9_Authenticity → Q11_Sponsored Attitude	-0.066	-0.322	0.748	H3a	Invalid

Q10_Quality → Q11_Sponsored Attitude	0.044	0.268	0.788	H3b	Invalid

5.4   Robustness Check and Jamovi Analysis

In addition to our primary analysis using SmartPLS, we conducted a robustness check by running our model in Jamovi. This step was essential to ensure the consistency and reliability of our findings across different statistical software. The results obtained from Jamovi closely mirrored those from SmartPLS, confirming the validity of our initial analysis. To further validate our findings, we performed linear regression to identify any significant effects that might not have been captured in the path analysis. This comprehensive approach allowed us to thoroughly examine and confirm the robustness of our results. Appendix C contains the detailed output from the Jamovi results.

5.4.1   Linear Regression Moderation (H3a, H3b)

In order to test the moderating effect of perceived attitude towards sponsored content (SC) moderates the relationship between brand image (BI) and TikToker Authenticity (TA), a moderation regression analysis was conducted. The moderation estimates analysis revealed that SC does not moderate this relationship ($p > 0.05$, $p = 0.319$). Examining the simple slope estimates, we observed a stronger negative relationship between BI and TA at low levels of SC ($b = -0.2388$, $SE = 0.0701$, $z = -3.404$, $p < 0.0001$). This indicates that when users have a negative perception of sponsored content in general, a less authentic TikToker presence has a more significant negative impact on brand image. Conversely, at high levels of SC, the relationship between BI and TA becomes very weak and statistically non-significant ($b = 0.0392$, $SE = 0.1179$, $z = 0.332$, $p = 0.740$). This suggests that when users are more accepting of sponsored content, TikToker authenticity has a negligible influence on brand image. Since the moderating effect of SC is not statistically significant, and the relationship between brand image and authenticity varies based on the level of SC, our hypothesis (H3b) that SC moderates the relationship between brand image and TikToker authenticity is **not supported**.

Table 5.5 Jamovi results of regression (Source: Jamovi)

Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Authenticity	−0.0998	0.0613	−1.630	0.103
Sponsored Attitude	−0.0565	0.0612	−0.924	0.356
Authenticity ✻ Sponsored Attitude	0.1010	0.0532	1.900	0.057

Table 5.6 Simple Slope Estimates results of our model in Jamovi (Source: Jamovi)

Simple Slope Estimates

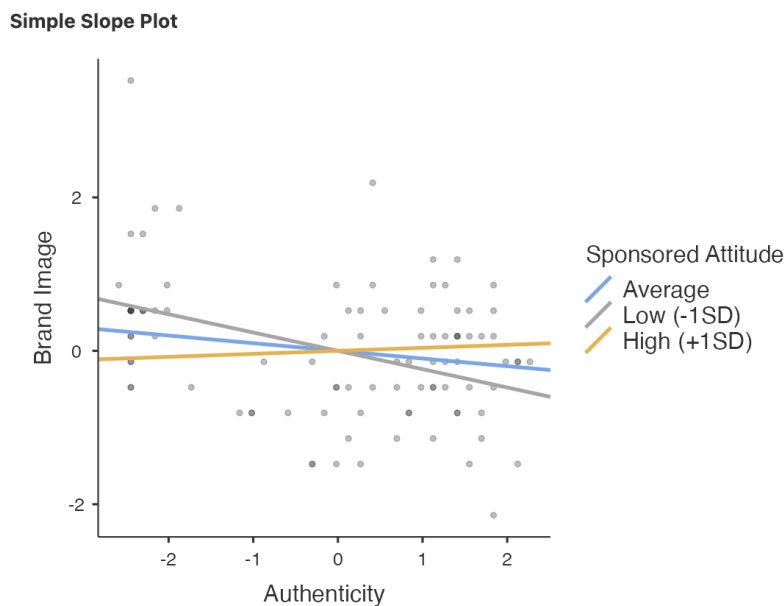|	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Average	−0.0998	0.0629	−1.588	0.112
Low (-1SD)	−0.2388	0.0701	−3.404	<.001
High (+1SD)	0.0392	0.1179	0.332	0.740

These results are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 5.5 lustration of findings in Jamovi (Source: Jamovi Software)
~~Software~~

Again to examine the relationship between Brand Image and Quality of content, a moderation regression was conducted. As can be seen in the moderation estimates, the perceived attitude towards sponsored content (SC) does not moderate the relationship between brand image (BI) and content quality (QC), (p>0.05 and p=0.319) . Looking at the simple slope estimates, at low levels of SC, the relationship between BI and QC is stronger (b = 0.2256, p < 0.047) and at high levels of SC, the relationship between BI and QC is weaker (b = 0.247, p = 0.878). Although there's a slight difference in the strength of the relationship (b values), the key point is the p-values. The significant p-value (p < 0.047) at the low SC level suggests a connection

between BI and QC. However, the non-significant p-value (p = 0.878) at the high SC level indicates a very weak or essentially no relationship. Since the relationship between BI and QC is not consistently influenced by the level of SC (stronger at low SC, negligible at high SC), the H3b that SC moderates this relationship is **not supported**.

Table 5.7 Jamovi results of regression (Source: Jamovi software)

Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Quality	0.1251	0.0946	1.323	0.186
Sponsored Attitude	−0.1023	0.0634	−1.614	0.107
Quality ✳ Sponsored Attitude	−0.0730	0.0733	−0.997	0.319

Table 5.8 Simple Slope Estimates results of our model in Jamovi (Source: Jamovi software)

Simple Slope Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Average	0.1251	0.0951	1.315	0.189
Low (-1SD)	0.2256	0.1137	1.983	0.047
High (+1SD)	0.0247	0.1600	0.154	0.878

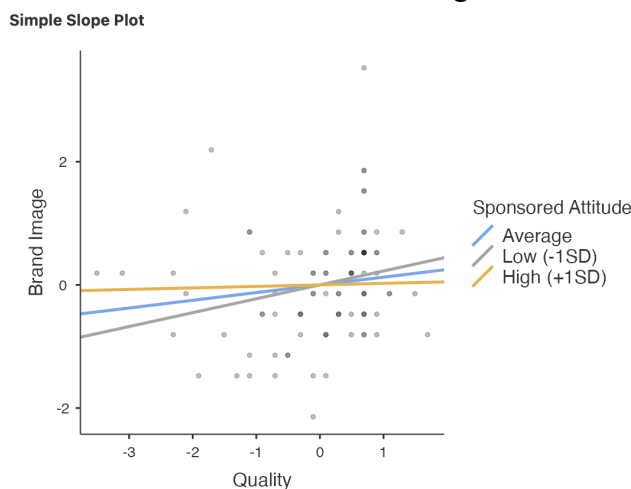These results are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 5.6 Ilustration of findings in Jamovi (Source: Jamovi software)

5.4.2   Linear Regression (H1,H2)

For our first two hypotheses in order to investigate relationships between continuous variables we performed linear regression. First we check for linearity and uncorrelated predictors by checking the correlation matrix of the predictors. As we see in the table below the VIF in the collinearity statistics is close to 1, which indicates very little to no multicollinearity problem between our independent variables.

Table 5.9 Assumptions checks - results (source: Jamove software)

Assumption Checks

Collinearity Statistics

	VIF	Tolerance
Authenticity	1.04	0.966
Quality	1.04	0.966

[5]

Visual inspection of the Q-Q plot for the residuals suggests that the data appears to be approximately normally distributed. This is because most of the data points fall close to the diagonal line.
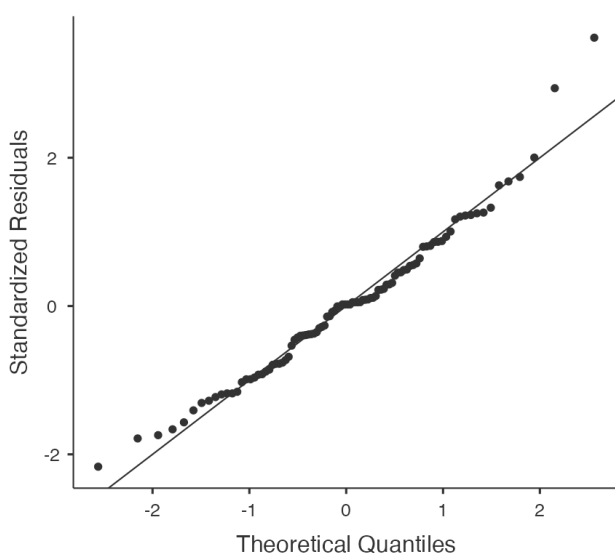

Q-Q Plot

Figure 5.7 Illustrations of results in Jamovi (Source: Jamovi software, Own Depiction)

Our analysis reveals a statistically significant relationship between brand image, perceived authenticity, but not on perceived content quality on TikTok (F = 6.80, p = 0.002). When considered together, these variables explain a moderate portion of the variance in brand image ($R^2 = 0.357$). After accounting for model complexity, the adjusted R^2 value suggests a more modest explanatory power (adjusted $R^2 = 0.128$). Looking at the individual variables, authenticity has a positive relationship with brand image (estimate = -0.176, p = 0.002). This indicates that as perceived authenticity increases, brand image tends to increase slightly. The coefficient's standardized estimate (-0.315) suggests a relatively weak effect. Similarly, quality has a positive relationship with brand image (estimate = 0.109, p = 0.226), but the standardized estimate (0.120) also indicates a weak effect. The lack of multicollinearity concerns (VIF for both authenticity and quality = 1.04) strengthens our confidence in interpreting these individual coefficients.While the model demonstrates a statistically significant influence of authenticity and quality on brand image, their individual effects seem

to be relatively weak. This might imply that other factors not included in the model play a more significant role.

Table 5.10 Model results (source: Jamovi software)

Model Fit Measures

				Overall Model Test			
Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.357	0.128	0.109	6.80	2	93	0.002

Model Coefficients - Brand Image

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	4.680	0.5800	8.07	<.001	
Authenticity	−0.176	0.0551	−3.19	0.002	−0.315
Quality	0.109	0.0895	1.22	0.226	0.120

5.5   Summary of the hypotheses after analysis

In brief, the analysis in the Table 5.11, evaluated the impact of TikToker and the content on brand image, but no initial hypotheses were supported. We also examined the moderator effect of viewer attitude towards sponsored content on these relationships, which also showed no significant results.

Table 5.11 Hypotheses

H1	There is a positive relationship between Tiktoker's Authenticity and Brand Image in the beauty industry.	Not Supported
H2	There is a positive relationship between Quality of Tiktoker's Content and Brand Image in the beauty industry.	Not Supported
H3a	Attitude towards sponsored content positively moderates the relationship between Tiktoker's Authenticity and Brand Image in the beauty industry.	Not Supported
H3b	Attitude towards sponsored content positively moderates the relationship between the Quality of Tiktoker's Content and Brand Image in the beauty industry.	Not Supported

6. Discussion

In this section we analyzed the findings of our analysis for each hypothesis. We will discuss these results considering the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework established earlier. The broader implications of these findings, both theoretically and practically, will be addressed in the conclusion.

6.1 Brand Image, TikToker's Authenticity and Quality of Content

The results of our analysis contradict the hypothesis that TikToker's authenticity has a positive impact on brand image in the beauty industry (H1). Instead, our findings indicate that authenticity has a negative impact on brand image in the beauty industry. This result connects to a previous research by De Kerviler and Butori (2022), which suggested that authenticity fosters a deeper emotional connection between TikTokers, brands and consumers' perception. While this emotional connection may resonate a sense of community within viewers of beauty content on TikTok and therefore they may feel connected with the beauty influencer promoting such beauty brands, our results imply that this connection may also lead to negative perception of the brand.

Authentic TikTokers build their reputation on being candid with their audience. If that is the case, then when reviewing a product that they genuinely do not like or find it lacking, they will communicate that with their audience. Considering this, such negative reviews, while being authentic and honest, which is appreciated by their followers, can lead to a negative perception of the presented brand among their audience (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consumers that find certain TikToker authentic, will most likely trust their opinion which can have a negative impact on the brand image and harm it. This phenomenon might be the reason why we observed a negative impact of TikToker's authenticity on brand image. (Jin et al., 2019) This effect can be seen particularly in the beauty industry, where personal experiences with products and honest reviews play a crucial role in shaping consumers' perception (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Videos containing negative reviews tend to also gain more views than the positive ones and become viral (Bergen & Milkman, 2011), therefore such videos can extend beyond the followers of a TikToker. This can cause damage to the brand's image, considering how competitive the beauty industry is, where positive brand image is crucial, such negative content can have a long-lasting influence (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

The impact of authenticity in the beauty industry cannot be underestimated. Brands that align themselves with authentic TikTokers can benefit from enhanced credibility. Brands that embrace authenticity as a core value can create deeper connections with their target audience, which can lead to a positive brand image and in long term shape loyalty, which is crucial for most companies (De Kerviler & Butori, 2022).

Another possible explanation for this outcome is that consumers nowadays are much more aware of the way influencer marketing works, thus they can be highly skeptical of it. Even when they perceive certain TikToker as authentic, they might still question the sincerity of sponsored content, perceiving it as more insincere than their usual content (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).Therefore, based on our findings, this can lead to negative impact on the brand image as viewers might feel manipulated in a way to buy a certain product or service (Kay et al., 2020) that have never appeared in Tiktokers non-sponsored videos and can seem not as genuine.

While brands that align themselves with authentic Tiktokers might hope to benefit from enhanced perceived credibility, our findings showcase that this strategy also has its potential risk, that can lead to a negative brand image. Brands must carefully evaluate their choice of Tiktokers, as well as other influencers, considering various factors that might affect their future brand image.

According to our results, there is no effect when it comes to the quality of TikToker's content (H2), since our findings are not significant. It does not mean that the quality of TikToker's content also has a negative nor positive impact on the brand image, but rather shows that there is no significant effect. While quality surely plays a role in shaping viewers perception, it might not be as influential as authenticity and personality of the creator. When Influencer seems authentic and has a positive reputation in the minds of their viewers, they might not think about the overall quality of their content and prioritize other aspects such as their unique personality (Abidin, 2016). Positive reputation of Tiktoker might overshadow any concerns that viewers have about content quality since they might be biased by their overall perception of the creator.

6.2 Effect of Sponsored Content on Brand Image

The analysis revealed a negative relationship between brand image and perceived TikToker authenticity, but only when users held a negative perception of sponsored content in general, which second part was revealed as not significant. This aligns partially with psychological reactance theory (Lee & Kim 2020), suggesting that consumers who dislike persuasive advertising become more critical of inauthentic TikToker portrayals. A less authentic TikToker presence can significantly damage brand image in this scenario. This finding highlights the potential risk for brands collaborating with inauthentic TikTokers, especially when targeting audiences wary of sponsored content. Interestingly, the relationship between brand image and authenticity became statistically insignificant at high levels of SC acceptance. This suggests that when users are more comfortable with sponsored content, TikToker authenticity has a negligible influence on brand image perception. This could be because viewers who are accustomed to sponsored

content may prioritize entertainment value or product information over influencer genuineness.

Similar to the findings with TikToker's authenticity, perceived attitude towards sponsored content did not moderate the relationship between brand image and content quality- as our hypotheses assumed that attitude towards sponsored content positively moderates such relationships (H3A, H3B). However, we observed a weak positive relationship between brand image and content quality, particularly when users held a negative perception of sponsored content. This suggests that high-quality content can potentially mitigate the negative effects of sponsored content for some viewers. However, the relationship between brand image and content quality became very weak and non-significant at high levels of SC acceptance. This implies that when viewers are accepting of sponsored content in general, content quality may not be a significant factor influencing brand image perception.

Previous studies highlighted the importance of disclosure and transparency in sponsored content (Boerman et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2017). Our findings further emphasize the role of consumer perception towards sponsored content.

For brands, understanding target audience sentiment towards sponsored content can be crucial for developing effective influencer marketing strategies. While past research explored the negative consequences of sponsorship disclosure on brand image (Evans et al., 2017; Kay et al., 2020), our work suggests a more nuanced picture. In our study, brand image was not universally affected by disclosure, rather, the impact depended on viewers' overall perception of sponsored content.

Considering this discussion, our research question: *„What is the impact of TikToker's authenticity and quality of TikToker's content on brand image in the beauty industry, and to what extent does the attitude towards sponsored content moderate these relationships"*- can be addressed as follows:

Contrary to initial expectations, our study revealed that TikToker's authenticity may unexpectedly have a negative effect on brand image within the beauty industry. Interestingly, the quality of content was not significant, therefore it cannot be considered The attitude towards sponsored content moderates such relationships, however it is not always positive impact as was assumed in our hypotheses.

Our findings suggest valuable insights for both brands and content creators in the beauty industry as well as researchers, providing theoretical and managerial implications, which will be concluded in the next chapter.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, our study provides valuable insights when it comes to influencer marketing within the beauty industry on TikTok platform. Through analysis of aspects such as TikToker's authenticity, quality of their content and attitude towards sponsored content, we have identified key factors when it comes to shaping brand image for beauty brands that are promoted on TikTok.

7.1 Implications

7.1.1 Theoretical Implications

Our study contributes significantly to the theoretical understanding of influencer marketing within the beauty industry on TikTok, as well as other social media platforms.

Firstly, our findings contradict and challenge the assumption that authenticity always enhances brand image, a perspective supported by prior research such as De Kerviler and Butori (2022). Our results indicate that authenticity in certain circumstances negatively impact brand image when influencers provide their honest view of products they do not like or recommend. This insight provides a new perspective of influencer marketing, suggesting that while authenticity builds trust, it can also lead to decreased positive brand image, when TikToker's honest opinions are negative towards the product or whole brand. This showcases the dual nature of widely discussed authenticity in the digital marketing context, where there is a chance to build trust in the brand but there is also a risk of lowering brand reputation.

Secondly, our study presents the complex relationship between influencer authenticity, quality of their content and perceived brand image. Results from our research indicate that content quality alone does not have a significant impact on the brand image, suggesting that consumers prioritize human aspects and perceived image of the influencer over technical aspects contributing to overall quality. This finding can be crucial for understanding consumer behavior in the digital context, emphasizing how important personal connection still is and that it may overshadow content aesthetics. It underscores that perceived authenticity plays a more critical role in shaping consumer attitudes rather than the perfectly polished content itself.

Moreover, our study contributes to the existing knowledge about sponsored content and its impact on brand image, specifically in the beauty industry. The findings indicate that consumers with a negative attitude towards sponsored content are more likely to react negatively to inauthentic influencers. It highlights the crucial role of consumer attitudes towards advertising when it comes to shaping brand perceptions. Our research examined the

understanding of how sponsorships may affect brand image, suggesting that it is based on consumer's attitudes towards sponsored content. This adds a new angle to existing theories, suggesting that influencer marketing strategies success is not only limited to its correct choice of target audience but also considers their attitudes towards such collaborations.

Lastly, our research adds depth to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the specific context of the beauty industry on TikTok. By focusing on this certain industry, our study provides a detailed overview of how influencer authenticity and content quality interact with consumer perception, showcasing a deeper understanding of dynamics within this sector. It can help to add more knowledge to existing theories, proposing a relevant theoretical framework that captures the interplay between TikToker's authenticity, quality of their content and its impact on brand image within the beauty industry.

7.1.2 Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, our findings provide actionable insights both for brands and content creators not only on TikTok but all social media. Brands in the beauty industry can develop more strategic and effective influencer marketing campaigns leveraging the knowledge of how impactful TikToker's authenticity is in the content of enhancing credibility and shaping the overall brand image by creating more meaningful connections with their target audience, while considering the risk of authenticity leading to a negative brand perception if unfavorable review is posted. Brands should prioritize long-term collaborations with influencers that genuinely like and use their products. This strategy can help to reduce the risk of negative feedback and can have a positive impact on brand image, since then influencers might give a favorable review. Our findings have showcased how important it is for brands to conduct a thorough background check to identify TikTokers whose values and communication aligns with their brand ethos.

Since our research showcases how some actions may have a negative impact on the brand, it can help them to prepare how to respond to such potential risk in the future. Instead of viewing such negative reviews as damage to their image, brands can turn them into opportunities to improve their products and therefore improve customer satisfaction. Transparency can turn potential negatives into positives, showcasing brand's dedication to growth and providing good quality. This approach can help maintain consumer trust even in the light of negative impact on brand image.

Our research showed that when quality of content and authenticity is both considered, authenticity is more impactful when it comes to shaping brand image. Therefore such brands might use our insight to reconsider the choice of TikTokers they will choose to collaborate in the future in order to seem more credible within their customers and therefore create better collaborations that will benefit both the company and their customers. Brands should focus on building genuine commotions between influencers and their target audience. Authenticity should be at the core of their influencer marketing strategies, even considering potential risk of negative feedback.

For viewers skeptical of sponsored content, our research showcases that brands should emphasize transparency and ensure that the sponsored collaboration aligns with the influencer's regular content to seamlessly showcase a product without it seeming inauthentic.

Understanding the audience's attitude towards sponsored content can help brands tailor their marketing strategies in a more effective way.

By elaborating on theoretical and managerial implications, we provided a new perspective on the influencer marketing both for academic discourse and practical marketing actions.

From a managerial standpoint, our findings provide valuable insights for brands and content creators across all social media platforms, not just TikTok. Beauty industry brands can develop more strategic and effective influencer marketing campaigns by leveraging the understanding of how a TikToker's authenticity enhances credibility and shapes overall brand image, fostering meaningful connections with their target audience. Our research indicates that while both content quality and authenticity are important, authenticity has a more significant impact on brand image, which can be also negative. Brands can use those insights to carefully select TikTokers for future collaborations, enhancing credibility with customers and creating mutually beneficial partnerships. By addressing both theoretical and managerial implications, our study offers a new perspective on influencer marketing for academic research and practical marketing strategies.

7.2 Limitations

While our research explored the relationship between sponsored content attitude, Tiktoker's qualities, and brand image in the beauty industry on TikTok, it is important to acknowledge limitations that could influence future studies. A common challenge in survey research is response bias, where participants may provide socially desirable answers rather than their genuine thoughts and opinions. This can happen if they believe their answers are being judged or anticipate what the researcher expects to hear. The authenticity and reliability of the data can be compromised by this bias. Techniques like indirect questioning, where the answer choices do not reveal the desired answer, can help to reduce the pressure to provide a socially desirable response. Our study did not collect data on participants' age, which limits our ability to fully assess the external validity of the findings to the broader population.

The beauty industry focus of our research may have attracted a higher proportion of female participants. Another limitation is the convenience method, which may affect the bias of answers. Given the fact that a portion of our respondents were either directly or indirectly connected to us as friends and family, there is a possibility that it has affected the answers and it might not have been representative viewpoints when it comes to other users of TikTok. Furthermore, the number of respondents was relatively small and the results may have varied with a larger sample size.

7.3 Future Research

Based on the identified limitations, there are several areas that can be considered for future research that could give valuable insights into the matter.

Firstly, future research could involve the inclusion of a more diverse sample, particularly regarding gender. While our study focused more on the female representation due to the nature of the beauty industry, examining the influence that gender has on perception with beauty content on TikTok could provide valuable insights. By including more gender diverse research, scholars could gain an understanding of how gender shapes consumer attitudes towards TikTokers and influencer marketing strategies in the beauty industry.

Secondly, a more diverse age range of participants could showcase different results and enhance the findings. Due to our non-probability method, most of the participants were our friends or classmates representing similar age groups. By segmenting participants by age, researchers could uncover the impact of age on the brand perception within the context of using influencer marketing to promote their products or services. This could help marketers to develop new strategies enabling them to effectively engage with their target group.

Additionally, future research could explore more specific questions about sponsored content to deepen the understanding of its effects on brand perception. Investigating further into how different types of sponsorships disclosures and transparency of influencer affect consumer trust and brand image could provide important insights. Furthermore, examining the frequency of exposure to sponsored content and its impact on consumer attitudes could give a new angle of the effectiveness of influencer marketing over time. It could give researchers a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay of TikToker's authenticity, content quality and brand image perception.

Lastly, by conducting other experiments researchers could discover other relationships between influencer characteristics and perceived brand image. Experimental methodologies would allow scholars to manipulate variables more freely and observe different effects and therefore provide other valuable insights into influencer marketing within the beauty industry on TikTok.

In conclusion, the future of influencer marketing research holds a potential for uncovering new insights that could advance our understanding of consumer behavior and brand management in a digital context. By addressing the limitations of this study and exploring suggested directions, researchers can provide deeper insights into the effective use of influencer marketing on social media platforms like TikTok.

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Appendix A

We need to avoid bots, so please do the math, 1+1=

1	○

2	○

0	○

→

Firstly, tell us a little bit about yourself.

With which gender do you identify?

Male	○

Female	○

Other	○

What is you level of education?

High school diploma	○

College Degree	○

Bachelor's Degree	○

Master's degree	○

Doctorate	○

What is your income?

< Euro 25,000	○

Euro 25,000-50,000	○

Euro 50,000-100,000	○

Euro 100,000-150,000	○

>Euro 150,000	○

Do you use TikTok?

Yes	○

No	○

Do you watch beauty videos on TikTok? (Beauty videos: videos that show skincare, makeup, fragrance etc.)

Yes	○

No	○

Please write down your three favorite Tiktokers in the beauty industry

Please indicate how you perceive beauty brands, promoted by Tiktokers and evaluate the following statements, on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The brand is well-known	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is trendy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is having reputation for good quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is prestigious	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Consider the beauty content creators you follow on TikTok. Please rate the following statements about them on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They actively communicate with consumers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They value the relationship with their followers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They are honest without lying	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They broadcast with sincerity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They have their own special content	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They have their own personality and characteristics	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They fulfill their promises with followers well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Again, consider the beauty content creators you follow on TikTok.
Please rate the following statements about them on a scale of 1
(Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They explain well the relationship between content, product, and brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They clearly communicate information about a product or brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They know and understand a product or brand well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They give accurate information about the product	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
They give all the information that I need about the beauty product	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Now, think more general, on Tiktok platform, sponsored content
(tutorials, unboxing videos etc.) related to beauty products and
evaluate the following statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree)
to 7 (Strongly Agree)

|	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sponsored content of beauty products on Tiktok is unbiased	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sponsored content of beauty products on Tiktok is credible	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sponsored content of beauty products on Tiktok is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sponsored content of beauty products on Tiktok is trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sponsored content of beauty products on TikTok is believable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix B

Construct reliability and validity - Overview

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Q10_Quality	0.889	1.049	0.906	0.661
Q11_Sponsored attitude	0.958	1.018	0.969	0.885
Q8_Brand Image	0.553	0.581	0.764	0.522
Q9_authenticity	0.953	0.975	0.961	0.806

Outer model

	Q10_Quality	Q11_Sponsored attitude	Q8_Brand Image	Q9_authenticity
Q10_1	-1.000			
Q10_2	-1.000			
Q10_3	-1.000			
Q10_4	-1.000			
Q10_5	-1.000			
Q11_1		-1.000		
Q11_2		-1.000		
Q11_3		-1.000		
Q11_4		-1.000		
Q8_1			-1.000	
Q8_3			-1.000	
Q8_4			-1.000	
Q9_2				-1.000
Q9_3				-1.000
Q9_4				-1.000
Q9_5				-1.000
Q9_6				-1.000
Q9_7				-1.000

Outer loadings - Matrix

	Q10_Quality	Q11_Sponsored attitude	Q8_Brand Image	Q9_authenticity
Q10_1	0.915			
Q10_2	0.736			
Q10_3	0.833			
Q10_4	0.848			
Q10_5	0.716			
Q11_1		0.903		
Q11_2		0.947		
Q11_3		0.972		
Q11_4		0.939		
Q8_1			0.720	
Q8_3			0.811	
Q8_4			0.623	
Q9_2				0.913
Q9_3				0.847
Q9_4				0.902
Q9_5				0.903
Q9_6				0.916
Q9_7				0.904
Q11_Sponsored attitude x Q10_Quality				
Q11_Sponsored attitude x Q9_authenticity				

Inner model

	Q10_Quality	Q11_Sponsored attitude	Q8_Brand Image	Q9_authenticity
Q10_Quality			1.000	
Q11_Sponsored attitude			1.000	
Q8_Brand Image				
Q9_authenticity			1.000	

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.087	0.087
d_ULS	1.296	1.287
d_G	1.000	1.000
Chi-square	491.886	491.273
NFI	0.718	0.719
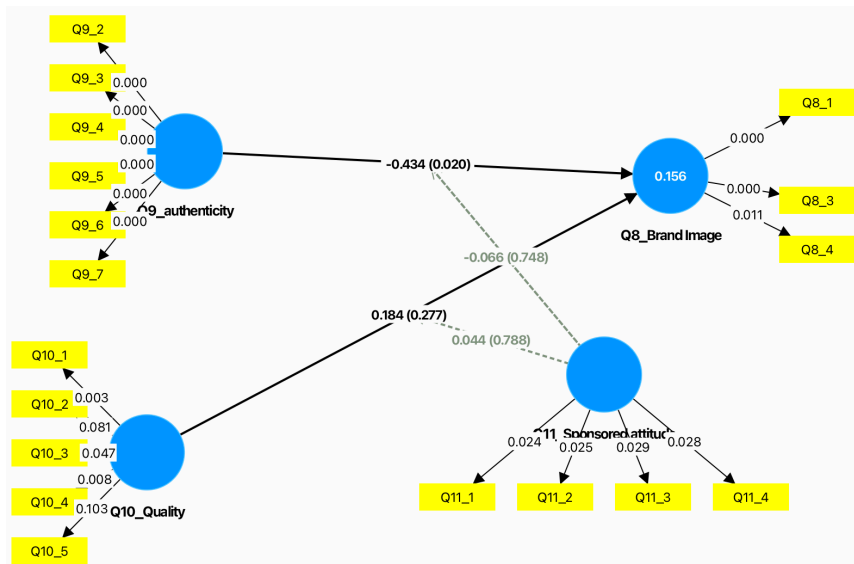
Appendix C

Moderation

Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Quality	0.1251	0.0946	1.323	0.186
Sponsored Attitude	−0.1023	0.0634	−1.614	0.107
Quality ✳ Sponsored Attitude	−0.0730	0.0733	−0.997	0.319

Moderation

Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Authenticity	−0.0998	0.0613	−1.630	0.103
Sponsored Attitude	−0.0565	0.0612	−0.924	0.356
Authenticity ✳ Sponsored Attitude	0.1010	0.0532	1.900	0.057

Linear Regression

Model Fit Measures

Model	R	R²	Overall Model Test			
			F	df1	df2	p
1	0.357	0.128	6.80	2	93	0.002

Model Coefficients - Brand Image

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	4.680	0.5800	8.07	<.001	
Quality	0.109	0.0895	1.22	0.226	0.120
Authenticity	−0.176	0.0551	−3.19	0.002	−0.315

Assumption Checks

Collinearity Statistics

	VIF	Tolerance
Quality	1.04	0.966
Authenticity	1.04	0.966

[5]

Q-Q Plot