

# Beauty Influencers on Social Media: How They Shape Consumer Emotions And Brand Loyalty in the Cosmetics Industry

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## Abstract

*Nowadays, beauty influencers are more than content creators; they influence how people feel, think, and choose products. This study looks at how consumers view the authenticity of beauty influencers, the emotions their content brings up, and how these experiences affect brand loyalty. It also looks at how people tell the difference between a genuine recommendation and a post that feels purely commercial.*

*To better understand these dynamics, we conducted in-depth interviews with 15 women aged between 20 and 40, all active on social media and engaged with beauty-related content. The findings show that authenticity is key to building trust.*

*The study brings fresh insights into the emotional side of influencer marketing in the beauty industry and highlights the importance of staying genuine, consistent, and emotionally in tune with the audience.*

**Key words:** beauty influencers, authenticity, emotional engagement, brand loyalty, social media marketing

**J.E.L. classification:** M31, M37, D91, L66

## 1. Introduction

In 2025, social networks will be part of most people's daily routines, influencing how we communicate, how we get information, or how we choose the products we use. According to data provided by Demandsage (2025), over 5.24 billion people worldwide are actively using social media, meaning approximately 64% of the global population. More than 94% of internet users are on at least one social network. On average, people spend 2 hours and 21 minutes daily on these networks. They interact with about seven different platforms every month. Despite all this, Facebook remains the global leader, with over 3.07 billion users, closely followed by YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp - all with over two billion users.

According to the (Datareportal, 2025), in Romania, at the beginning of 2025, 94% of Romanians had access to the internet. Of these, approximately 13 million were active on social networks. More than 75% of people over 18 use at least one social platform, making social media a primary channel for communication, promotion, and influence. Facebook is the most popular platform in Romania for sharing information and entertainment. It is also the top choice for marketing campaigns.

Influencers play an important role online. They can change how people think and what they buy. Their messages can influence opinions, stir emotions, and impact purchasing decisions. Recent research highlights that the perceived authenticity of influencers (Audrezet et al, 2020, p.560) and the emotional reactions of the audience (Casaló et al, 2020, p.511) are essential factors in the effectiveness of social media promotion campaigns.

This paper investigates how consumers view beauty influencers and their authenticity. It focuses on the emotions that their posts create and how these interactions affect loyalty to the brands they promote. The research will use in-depth interviews to gather insights. At the same time, the research aims to understand how people differentiate between a sincere recommendation and one that seems strictly commercial. This paper uses a simple approach to help us understand a complex digital trend that is constantly changing. This trend has a direct impact on modern marketing and how consumers behave.

## **2. Literature review**

The relationship between consumers and social media influencers has become a topic of significant interest in the digital marketing literature. Studies over the past decade have highlighted that influencers are no longer perceived as mere promoters but as "trusted individuals" who influence behaviors, attitudes, and choices (Freberg et al, 2011, p.91; Djafarova et al, 2017).

One of the central concepts in this direction is perceived authenticity, defined as the degree to which the audience feels that an influencer is sincere, transparent, and consistent in their messages (Audrezet et al, 2020, p.560). Authenticity contributes to the formation of a sense of closeness, which can generate trust and, ultimately, loyalty towards the promoted brands (Jin et al, 2019).

The emotions generated by influencer content also play an important role in shaping consumer behavior. Studies show that posts that trigger positive emotions (such as admiration, inspiration, or empathy) are more effective in attracting attention and determining concrete purchasing actions (Casaló et al, 2020, p.512). At the same time, content that provokes social comparisons or frustrations can lead to distancing and distrust (Chae, 2018, p.250).

The specialized literature also draws attention to the risk of superficial promotion, perceived as inauthentic, which can negatively affect both the image of the influencer and the associated brand (de Veirman et al, 2020, p.96). In this context, consumers are becoming increasingly attentive to details such as tone of voice, congruence between the influencer's style and the promoted product, or the frequency of brand changes.

These theoretical directions underlie the present research, which aims to investigate, in a qualitative manner, how authenticity is constructed in the public's perception, what role emotions play in the relationship with influencers, and how brand loyalty is formed or broken in this context.

### **2.1. Perceived authenticity in influencer marketing**

An influencer is a person who can influence the opinions, behaviors, or choices of others, primarily through social media. Influencers are now considered modern opinion leaders who combine their personal lives, stories from their experiences, and collaborations with brands to promote products in an authentic and relatable way (Wang et al, 2021, p.15).

Influencers can be classified in several ways depending on their field of operation and the number of followers they have. They are divided according to the niche they address - such as beauty, fashion, food, fitness, or tech. From a quantitative point of view, Moburst (2025) proposes the following division: nano-influencers (under 10,000 followers); micro-influencers (between 10,000 and 100,000); macro-influencers (between 100,000 and 1 million); mega-influencers/celebrities (over 1 million followers). A distinction is also made between content creators who generate original posts (photos, videos, reviews, etc.) and those who would rather have the role of ambassadors or models for the products of an already known brand.

Even though influencers with a large audience have increased visibility, studies show that those with smaller communities - such as nano or micro-influencers - enjoy more trust and a closer connection with their followers. Thus, in many cases, they can more effectively influence consumer choices, especially among niche audiences (De Veirman et al, 2017, p.800). Therefore, when we talk about influencers, it is not only the numbers or the visual appearance that matters, but mainly how they communicate, how sincere they seem, and what emotional relationship they build with their audience.

Perceived authenticity is one of the most discussed concepts in influencer marketing. It refers to the extent to which the audience feels that an influencer is honest, transparent, and consistent in communicating with their followers (Glucksman, 2017, p.78). In a digital space saturated with sponsored content, authenticity becomes essential in forming a trusting relationship between influencer and consumer. Consistency in communication, congruence between the influencer's style and the promoted products, but also assuming vulnerability or expressing personal opinions contribute to this perception of authenticity (Marwick et al, 2011, p.140).

Authenticity plays a key role in how consumers behave. Studies show that when people view a brand as authentic, they are more likely to buy from and stay loyal to it (Lou et al, 2019, p.60). On the other hand, if a brand lacks authenticity, it can raise doubts and lead consumers to distance themselves or even stop using the product or following the influencer. Especially in the cosmetics field, where trust plays a significant role, authenticity becomes a key differentiator.

## **2.2. Emotional engagement and consumer reactions to beauty content**

The content generated by beauty influencers is not only informative but also has a strong emotional impact. Emotions influence how the audience receives messages and how memorable or compelling a specific content is. Posts that trigger positive emotions such as admiration, empathy, or joy are more likely to attract attention and determine purchasing actions.

At the same time, idealized posts - in which perfectly edited images, expensive products, and "flawless" skincare routines appear - can generate negative emotional reactions. The feeling of comparison, frustration, or pressure to achieve a certain aesthetic standard can lead to distance from the influencer or a negative perception of the product (Kleemans et al, 2018, p.95). Such emotions often appear in content that does not seem realistic or accessible, especially if followers no longer find themselves in the lifestyle.

Another important aspect is related to storytelling - the ability of influencers to tell personal stories or share authentic experiences with products. Gretzel (2017, p.150) emphasizes that storytelling humanizes the content and creates a deeper emotional connection between the audience and the influencer. When people feel that the influencer is "living" the experience, not just promoting it, they are more willing to trust the recommendation.

In addition, recent studies show that emotional involvement is essential in forming loyalty to a brand. Strong emotions (positive or negative) influence immediate reactions and determine whether a consumer returns to that product. Authentic and emotional content thus becomes a key strategy in digital marketing, especially in industries such as beauty, where the visual and symbolic impact is powerful.

In conclusion, emotions are central to how consumers perceive and react to beauty content. It is not just about how a product looks, but how it makes the viewer feel.

## **2.3. Brand loyalty and consumer trust in influencer contexts**

In an increasingly crowded digital landscape, where consumers are exposed to hundreds of advertising messages daily, brand loyalty is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. That is why the relationship between the brand, the influencer, and their audience plays a key role in building trust and long-term attachment. An influencer perceived as authentic, consistent, and transparent can strengthen a brand's image and significantly contribute to forming a community of loyal consumers (Schouten et al, 2020, p.210).

Audiences react positively when there is a precise fit between the brand's values and the influencer's personal style. For example, an influencer known for promoting a healthy lifestyle will be perceived as more credible when recommending natural or sustainable cosmetic products. On the other hand, collaborations that seem "forced" or involve frequent brand changes can lead to a loss of trust (Boerman et al, 2017, p.85).

Today, consumers want clear communication about sponsorships. If influencers promote products without being honest or just for money, they risk facing negative comments, losing engagement, or even having followers leave. Trust comes not only from the message but also from how consistently influencers behave over time.

On the other hand, when consumers observe an authentic relationship between the influencer and the promoted product - that is, actual use of that product, mentioning personal experiences, and maintaining a sincere tone - brand loyalty is more likely to form and be maintained. This type of relationship is based on an emotional connection and the perception that the influencer is acting in the interest of his or her community, not just commercial collaborations.

In summary, online brand loyalty is built not just through seeing a brand repeatedly, but mainly through trust, transparency, and authenticity. Influencers who can mix these qualities become more than just promoters - they connect the brand with the consumer.

### **3. Research methodology**

The present research was conducted using in-depth interviews. The reason for choosing this method was the desire to find out and better understand how consumers perceive the way beauty influencers present or promote different products, as well as to identify the emotions that are triggered by their posts and how these interactions influence loyalty towards certain brands or even the decision to purchase certain products or not. Another reason for conducting such research was that this method is suitable for exploring topics related to emotions, perceptions, and personal experiences.

In-depth interviews (Boyce et al, 2006, p.3) are a qualitative method that helps researchers gather rich, personal insights. The research process followed several essential steps:

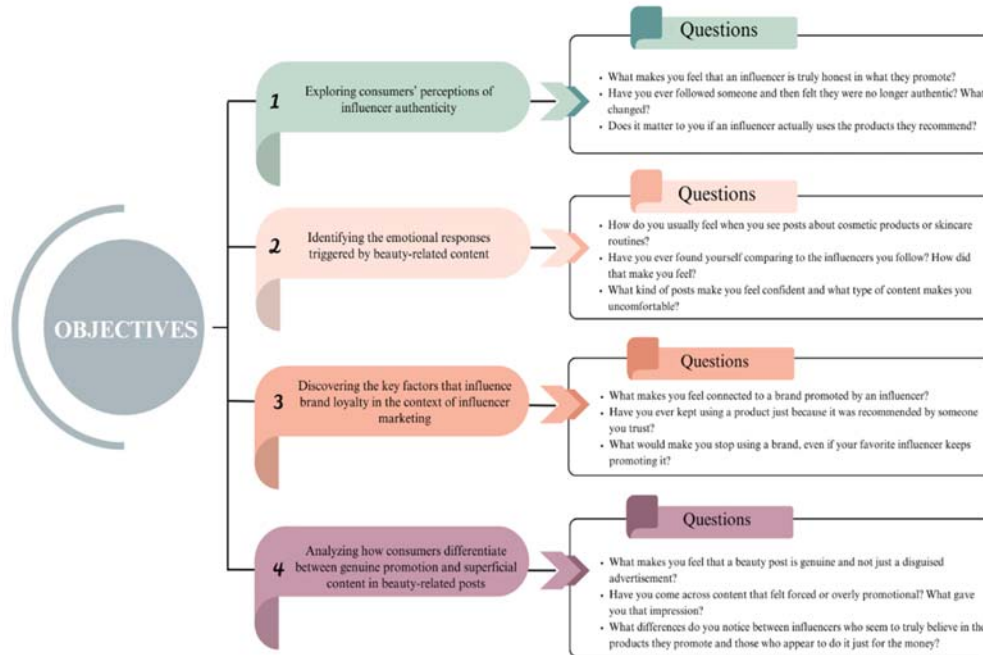
- Defining the research scope and objectives included understanding consumer perceptions of influencer authenticity, identifying emotional responses to beauty-related content, analyzing loyalty mechanisms toward promoted brands, and detecting how consumers distinguish genuine sustainability from superficial content;
- Developing a tailored interview guide structured around the four main research objectives and composed of open questions to elicit personal reflections, attitudes, and behavioral responses;
- Participant recruitment focuses on individuals who are active social media users and frequent followers of beauty influencers.

The study was conducted using the Zoom platform and took place in March 2025.

In this research, 15 women from Brasov, Romania, aged between 20 and 40, interested in the beauty field, women who usually use cosmetic products, who are active on social networks (especially on Instagram and TikTok), and who are familiar with online content, especially that posted by influencers, were interviewed. The participants were selected using the snowball method. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and the responses provided by the participants were transcribed and coded manually in order to preserve the accuracy of the information provided by the respondents. All ethical standards were rigorously upheld.

The research aimed to achieve the objectives shown in Figure 1.

Figure no. 1. Objectives of the research



Source: Authors' own research

#### *O1: Exploring consumers' perceptions of influencer authenticity*

This objective aims to understand how consumers form their opinions about beauty influencers' sincerity when presenting or promoting specific products. First of all, we want to find out what aspects convey to people that an influencer is honest and uses the promoted products, but also to identify those elements that give them the feeling that the content is made only with the aim of selling. Through the responses obtained from the participants, we can better understand how trust in such recommendations is built (or lost).

#### *O2: Identifying the emotional responses triggered by beauty-related content*

This objective aims to identify consumers' emotions when they watch posts about beauty products or care routines. While some posts may inspire trust, admiration, or curiosity, others may lead to comparisons, pressure, or frustration. We want to understand how these states influence relationships with influencers, self-image, and even purchasing decisions.

#### *O3: Discovering the key factors that influence brand loyalty in the context of influencer marketing*

The objective focuses on identifying the reasons why a consumer becomes loyal to a brand presented by an influencer. We try to find out how much trust in that influencer matters, how much it influences personal experience with the product, and what determines people to continue or stop buying that product. We also want to see if an influencer's support of a brand can maintain loyalty even when dissatisfaction arises.

#### *O4: Analyzing how consumers differentiate between genuine promotion and superficial content in beauty-related posts*

This objective aims to discover how people differentiate between a sincere post, in which the influencer believes in the promoted product and uses it regularly, and one that seems to be made only to honor a collaboration/contract with the company in question. We are interested in discovering what aspects inspire authenticity in them and what gives them the impression that a post is fake, forced, or lacking accurate content. Understanding these perceptions is important for assessing the credibility of beauty content.

As previously mentioned, to achieve these objectives, we considered several essential steps: research planning, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. In the preparation stage, we established the research questions and formulated the interview guide based on the proposed objectives. We also have stability in the selection criteria of participants,

choosing people active in the online environment who follow influencers and consume beauty content.

The interviews conducted in the online environment were guided by open-ended questions designed to encourage natural discussions based on each person's personal experiences. No predetermined answer options were offered, precisely to avoid influencing opinions and to surprise the answers. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. We aimed to identify recurring themes and response patterns that are related to the research objectives. This allowed us to extract relevant insights and better understand how consumers think about influencers and the brands they promote. Throughout the research, we respected ethical norms: we obtained informed consent from all participants, guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and treated all information responsibly. Finally, we interpreted the importance of the proposed objectives and formulated conclusions that reflect most of the ideas in this qualitative research.

#### 4. Results and discussion

To better understand how consumers relate to beauty influencers and the content they create, we analyzed the responses provided by the participants, based on the four objectives established in the research. As can be seen from Figure no. 1, each objective followed a specific direction and included three questions. The responses provided by the participants outlined an overview of consumer perception in the current context of the online promotion of beauty products through influencers.

The main ideas and themes of each objective are identified, along with the relevant interpretations extracted from the participants' responses.

These results give us a clearer perspective on how the young female audience, active in the digital environment, forms its opinions and choices related to cosmetic products and brands promoted through influencers.

##### *O1: Exploring consumers' perceptions of influencer authenticity*

Interview participants frequently mentioned that they can easily sense when an influencer is being sincere in what they are promoting. The most frequently cited criteria were using the product in everyday life (not just in campaigns), consistency in recommendations, and a natural style of talking about the product. For example, one respondent said that "you can tell when she is speaking from her own experience, she has a different tone, she is more relaxed."

On the other hand, the signs that made them believe that a post was just an advertisement were forced language, excessive use of superlatives, lack of personal details about the product, and the constant presence of the hashtag #ad without any other context. Participants were attentive to the connection between the influencer's image and the promoted product – when they felt that the two did not match, they lost trust.

These perceptions validate the conclusions of other studies that show that perceived authenticity is an essential factor in message acceptance and brand loyalty formation. In an online environment saturated with sponsored content, authenticity seems to be the main aspect that consumers look for when perusing an influencer's advertising and even trying to make a connection between that influencer and their audience.

##### *O2: Identifying the emotional responses triggered by beauty-related content*

Participants admitted that influencer posts frequently provoked a variety of emotions. The most common were admiration (for appearance, lifestyle, or skin "glow"), but also comparison and sometimes frustration ("I look at it and think that I will never look like that..."). Positive emotions were more common in the case of influencers who seemed real, natural, and who also talked about imperfections or failures.

Conversely, when the content was perceived as "too filtered", with too much perfection displayed, many respondents said they felt lied to. Some of the participants also mentioned that they avoided the content of some influencers because their self-confidence was affected.

This emotional tension is confirmed by the specialized literature, which shows that social media directly influences self-esteem and body perception, especially among young women. Emotions thus become an important filter through which consumers decide whether to stay connected or distance themselves from a particular influencer.

*O3: Discovering the key factors that influence brand loyalty in the context of influencer marketing*

During the interviews, it became clear that trust in the influencer is a significant factor in brand loyalty. Many respondents confessed that they started using certain products only because they saw them recommended by a person they trusted, and later, they remained loyal because the product confirmed their expectations.

At the same time, if the promoted product did not correspond to reality or if the influencer frequently changed the promoted brands, trust and loyalty quickly decreased. Some participants mentioned that their loyalty is maintained only as long as the influencer is consistent and sincere.

The observations correspond to theories about consumer loyalty in the digital context, where the emotional component (trust, identification with the influencer) is at least as important as the concrete experience with the product. Loyalty is, therefore, a mix between the content consumed and the relationship with the creator of that content.

*O4: Analyzing how consumers differentiate between genuine promotion and superficial content in beauty-related posts*

Participants were very attentive to the tone and style of the post to differentiate between a sincere and superficial recommendation. They said that sincere posts seem more relaxed, contain personal details ("I used it in the morning with X cream, I like that it does not leave a greasy film") and do not insist too much on "buy now."

In contrast, posts that seemed to be made "just for collaboration" had, according to the participants, advertising language, too perfect decoration, product promotions that did not fit with the rest of the influencer's content and a lack of any real experience with that product. One respondent said: "You can tell when it is forced. Especially when yesterday he had another favorite cream and today he says another is the best."

These insights align with research showing that the public is becoming increasingly sensitive to "ad fatigue" and the lack of coherence in influencer discourse. To be credible, promotional content must be aligned with the influencer's identity and convey an authentic experience.

The results of the qualitative research confirm that the relationship between consumers and beauty influencers is a complex one, built on perceptions of authenticity, personal emotions and trust in the recommendations made. The interviewed participants demonstrated a fine ability to distinguish between sincere promotions and those made strictly for commercial purposes, paying attention to details such as the tone of the post, the connection between the brand and the influencer, but also the presence of an authentic experience with the promoted product. Emotions played an essential role in this process, influencing both self-image and attitudes towards the product or brand.

Also, loyalty to a brand is not determined exclusively by the quality of the product, but also by trust in the person who recommends it. Trust and the perception of authenticity prove to be key factors in forming a lasting attachment to brands promoted through influencer marketing. Thus, this research highlights the importance of honest and coherent communication from influencers and makes a valuable contribution to understanding how beauty content is received and evaluated by the active female audience online.

## **5. Conclusions**

This research provides valuable insight into how online consumers perceive the authenticity of beauty influencers, as well as how they emotionally react to their content and develop (or not) loyalty to the brands promoted.

The results confirm that the relationship between the consumer and the influencer is deeply emotional, being influenced by factors such as tone of voice, naturalness of speech, coherence in communication and the connection between the influencer's style and the products presented. In addition, it has been observed that the public is increasingly aware of the difference between a sincere recommendation and a superficial promotion based exclusively on commercial collaborations.

This research complements other studies that highlight the fact that perceived authenticity is an essential element in influencer marketing, influencing not only trust in the person (influencer) but also the attitude toward the brand (Audrezet et al, 2020, p.560; Djafarova et al, 2017, p.2). Moreover, the emotions that online beauty content generates in consumers contribute significantly to the way they relate to their own image, as well as to the way they make purchasing decisions. Therefore, we

can conclude that the influence of influencers can no longer be viewed as strictly functional but rather affective and symbolic.

However, qualitative research based on in-depth interviews cannot generalize the results to the population level. The relatively small sample of 15 participants allows for a detailed, but not exhaustive, understanding of the phenomenon analyzed. Also, the answers can be influenced by factors such as the participant's context or even the desire to provide socially accepted answers.

Even so, the results provide solid starting points for future, larger-scale research that could validate these findings on larger samples or through mixed methods. In an increasingly competitive digital landscape, understanding how authenticity, emotions, and influencer marketing intersect with consumer choices is becoming essential for both brands and content creators.

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