

MSI Webinar: Designing Influencer Marketing Content for Enhanced Consumer Experiences and Brand Performance.

March 13, 2024 | Virtual | 12:00 pm – 12:30 pm ET

Speakers:

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Overview:

In this MSI Webinar, Jordan Moffett and Patrick Fennell discuss two studies with Daniel Sheehan (University of Kentucky), Colleen Harmeling (Florida State University) and Robert W. Palmatier (University of Washington) on how online influencers shape consumers' purchasing decisions. Study one ("parasocial") relationships consumers have with celebrities to explain how various cues in influencer posts generate self-relevant reactions, impacting brand performance. Building on the findings of Study 1, the second predicts how relatable and inspiring each influencer post is.

Parasocial experiences fulfill consumers' desires for relatable content and social connections. Immediate responses to influencer posts impact-perceptions of authenticity, affecting purchase behavior. Outcomes from the model suggest that the effectiveness of parasocial experiences depends on the alignment between the brand offering and consumers' self-concepts: products that let individuals express themselves make people more interested and inspired, while trendy brands help people feel more connected. This research aims to test the differential effects of product individuation and brand coolness on consumer responses to influencer marketing.

Takeaways:

The consumer-influencer touchpoint experience

- The **consumer-influencer touchpoint experience** is defined as **the consumers' immediate self-relevant reactions to influencer marketing content**.
 - Influencer content has become deeply ingrained in the daily routine of consumers. A study from [Traackr](#) indicated that **70% of social media users follow influencers**. Additionally, 50% of those who follow influencer content are looking to them for product recommendations.
- Influencer marketing is a 21-billion-dollar industry, having an ROI 11x higher than that of traditional digital marketing.

- **Caveat:** Only 36% of marketers are satisfied with their influencer marketing outcomes.

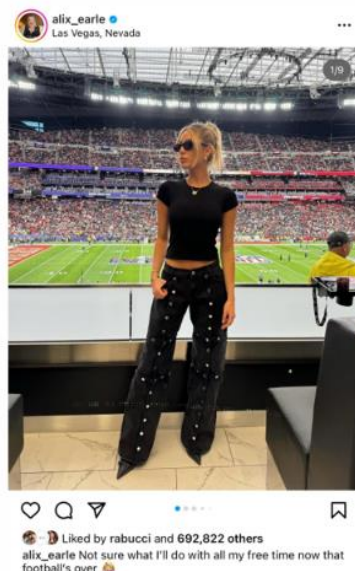
What makes influencer marketing effective?

- Most of the **previous research** on successful influencer marketing **places attention on the influencer’s characteristics** (e.g., follower size, following size, etc.), but these characteristics are largely fixed.
 - Marketers need to recognize that **each piece of influencer content evokes a touchpoint experience** and creates an opportunity for engagement or interaction with their target audience.
 - **Research in this area has a narrow scope**, examining one or a few content cues at a time (e.g., Is there an influencer in the image or not? Is emotional language used?).
 - **This method overlooks more universal mechanisms driving content effectiveness.**

About the research

- **Research from this study aims to provide evidence of:**
 - The underlying **consumer-influencer touchpoint experience** that drives consumers’ purchase decisions.
 - **Content-level insights** for designing this experience for consumers.
- Consumers follow influencers and look to their content because at certain moments "they might see who they are," but at other moments, the consumers "might see who they want to be."

Influencer content is a beacon of self-relevant information.



The Alix Earle Effect

The New York Times star built a brand on being your "best friend." So what happens when she becomes super famous?

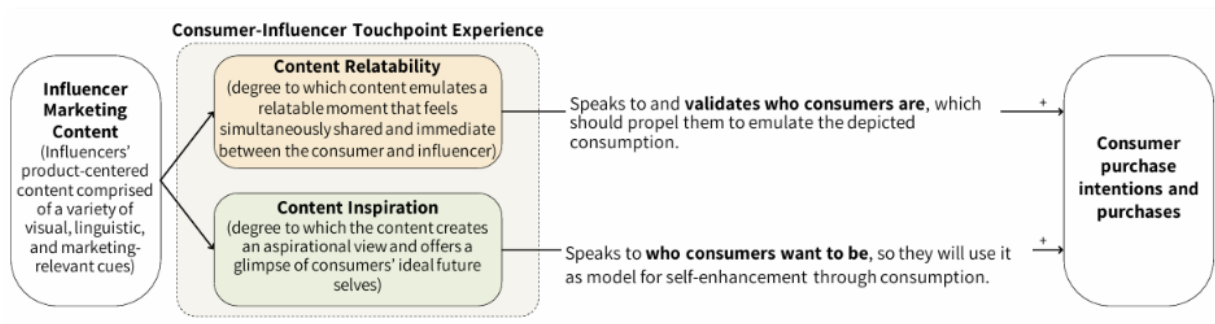
BY VERONIQUE HILLARD AND PHOTOGRAPHER BY TYLER JOEL STILES BY SARAH ZERBESAS PUBLISHED AUG 16, 2023 FOR ANEST

"[Alix Earle]’s mastered the **precise titration between aspirational and relatable**. When she’s doing something that falls into the first column (say, going to a club), you can bet she’ll also be doing, and posting, something that falls into the second (e.g., putting in her retainer in said club)."

Sources: Hyland 2023

The research

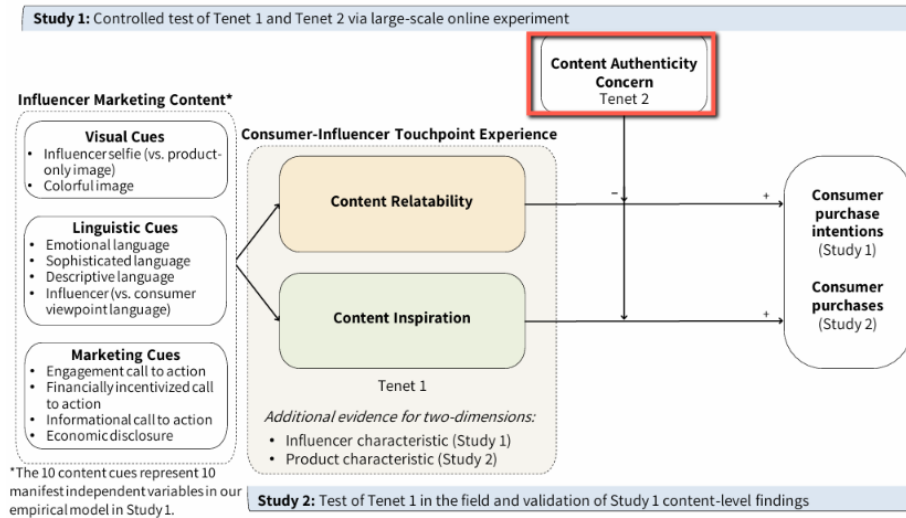
- Consumer-influencer touchpoint experience: The researchers propose a **two-dimensional model**.
 - Influencer marketing (product centered content) is going to evoke **content relatability** (the degree to which content emulates a relatable moment that feels simultaneously shared and immediate between the consumer and influencer).
 - The relatability of content speaks to consumers' identities, for example, encouraging self-verification and motivating them to emulate depicted consumption patterns.
 - **Content inspiration**: The degree to which the content creates an aspirational view and offers a glimpse of consumers' ideal future selves.
 - Inspirational content resonates with consumers' desired identities, often serving as a model for self-enhancement through consumption.



- **Study 1:** A large-scale online experiment (Taguchi Experimental Approach) with 3,409 consumers and 264 Instagram posts, the researchers manipulated 10 post cues to **examine how online influencer marketing impacts purchases through consumers' parasocial experiences** (e.g., visual cues—selfie vs. product, linguistic cues—emotional language and marketing cues—CTA).
 - Using the collected data, the researchers created a model to **determine how each post cue influences different parasocial experience** dimensions and how these dimensions affect purchases.

Tenet 1 (relatable-aspirational tenet):
Influencer marketing content evokes consumer-influencer touchpoint experiences that comprise both content relatability and content inspiration, which drive consumers' purchase decisions.

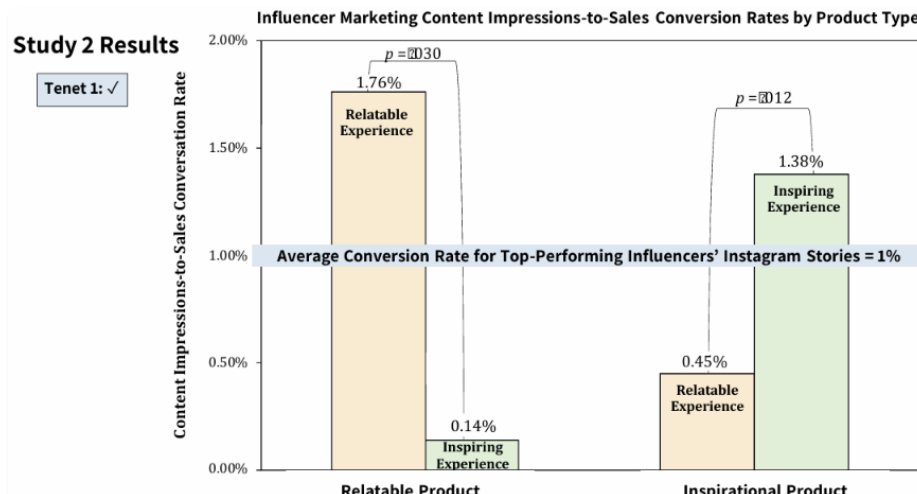
Tenet 2 (content authenticity concern tenet):
The effect of the content relatability dimension on consumers' purchase decisions is more susceptible to their content authenticity concerns, whereas the effect of the content inspiration dimension is more resilient to those concerns.



- **Study 2** analyzed real influencer marketing posts on Instagram to explore how various brand offerings impact consumers, ensuring practical relevance and theoretical exploration of parasocial dimensions, building on insights from Study 1.

Results

- Overall, study 1 supports that posting specific cues across various touchpoint experience dimensions (e.g., content reliability and content inspiration) drives purchase intention, though the results from each dimension may have differing effects.
- Study 2 found synergistic effects in terms of reliable and inspiring configurations (two-dimensional touchpoint experience).
 - A reliable experience combined with a reliable product can **amplify the content's self-validation** nature for consumers.
 - Additionally, an inspiring experience combined with an inspirational product can **amplify the content's self-enhancing** nature for consumers.



Selected sources:

Calibrating online influencer marketing posts for enhanced brand performance.

Source: Moffett, J. W., Sheehan, D. E., Harmeling, C. M., Fennell, P. B., & Plamatier, R. W. (2023). MSI Working Paper. [MSI](#).

2022 influencer marketing impact report.

Source: Traackr. (2022). [Traackr](#).

The Alix Earle effect.

Source: Hyland, V. (2023, August 30). [Elle](#).