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Influencing Beauty: The Impact of TikTok Influencers on Gen Z the Cosmetic Industry

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HONORS THESIS

Influencing Beauty: The Impact of TikTok Influencers on Gen Z the Cosmetic Industry

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Honors Thesis for Lauren Barry

<u>ABSTRACT</u>

This study analyzes the impact that influencers on TikTok have on the cosmetic industry through Generation Z. The study aims to find, through research on economic trends and purchasing behaviors of Generation Z, strategies companies can use towards marketing and production in the cosmetic industry to better understand their consumers. Data will be collected through surveys and analysis of economic trends for the popular cosmetic brand, Tarte Cosmetics. The findings and results of the data collected will offer recommendations for companies in the cosmetic industry to adjust their strategies to work along with Gen Z's engagement on social media, focusing on the traits consumers look for in the influencers they follow and the products that they buy.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, social media has had a large impact on the cosmetic industry. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and more have transformed the way consumers discover, purchase, and share information about products. The same idea is true for businesses, as social media platforms play a huge role in the marketing and strategic decisions they make when promoting specific beauty products. Through influencers, companies can use advertisements through posts, intentionally, or even inadvertently. Cosmetic brands are more and more likely to use influencers to advertise and review products to increase sales. Some brands, specifically Tarte cosmetics, send a group of influencers on a "brand trip" to overall promote their brand. Influencer marketing is very prevalent, with a study by Shen and Bissell finding that 86% of beauty brands in the United States use influencers in their marketing strategies (Shen & Bissell, 2013). This research aims to analyze the impact of TikTok influencers on the cosmetic industry's supply and demand among Gen Z consumers. This research and its findings will provide insights into the growing importance of social media influencers and their impact on the cosmetic industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Introduction</u>
TikTok is a social media app that allows users to create and share short 15-second – 3-minute-long videos. It has recently become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, with over 1 billion users. (Siqi & Yee, 2021). Sacchariason (2021) observes that "TikTok is an innovative platform for beauty brands to connect with consumers through creative and engaging content" (para. 1). TikTok influencers are users on the app with a significantly large following who make daily content to promote products and services. They are a major marketing strategy to many companies to reach younger audiences, such as Gen Z. While there is no specific number of followers that define an individual as an influencer, Jin et al., used experiments with Instagram influencers specifically, and found that even micro-influencers, individuals with less than 10,000 followers, can have a significant impact on their audiences. (Jin et al., 2019). Specifically for the cosmetic industry, influencers promote products by doing reviews, but also gain attraction when they are using makeup products during short "GRWM" (Get-Ready-With-Me) videos. Gen Z refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. They are the main generation to live through the "digital age" and are known for their comfortability and intelligence with technology and social media (Meliawati, Gerald, & Aruman, 2023).

<u>Importance of Studying the Impact of TikTok Influencers on Gen Z's Consumer Behavior and the Cosmetic Industry</u>
Understanding the impact of TikTok influencers on Gen Z's consumer behavior is important for companies in the cosmetic industry to learn about the trends TikTok marketing through influencers causes for their products, to allow for a more efficient management approach regarding inventory. It is also important from a marketing standpoint to understand Gen Z's TikTok usage to better follow along with trends and behaviors. As one of the largest generations throughout history, Gen Z's buying power is significant, and their preferences and behaviors will shape the future of the cosmetic industry (Bernard & Parker, 2021). Widyanto and Agusti (2020) conducted a study on the influence of beauty influencers in the digital age on the purchase intention of Generation Z and found that beauty influencers have a significant impact on their purchase decisions. In their study, they created a survey with 154 young

women from Generation Z from Greater Jakarta, a city in Indonesia, while also following beauty influencers who promoted a halal cosmetic brand, called Mustika Ratu, to come to this conclusion. (Widyanto & Agusti, 2020, pg. 1).

Theoretical Frameworks and Models
The theoretical framework being used to better understand the impact of TikTok influencers on Gen Z's consumer behavior is the supply and demand model. This model is used from a more economic standpoint to show how supply and demand can affect prices and market outcomes, specifically for the cosmetic industry. It can show how influencer marketing can affect consumer demand for specific products. The cosmetic industry operates on the principles of supply and demand, as manufacturers and companies produce products based on the demand of their consumers. This study aims to find the theory that if a cosmetic company hires a social media influencer, demand will increase, subsequently causing an increase in both sales (equilibrium quantity) and equilibrium price.

Impact of TikTok Influencers on Consumer Behavior
Recent studies have shown that TikTok influencers have a significant impact on consumer behavior. According to Siqi and Yee (2021), social media influencers are one of the most crucial factors that influence consumers' purchase intentions and behaviors. The study by Gerald & Aruman concluded that "TikTok's social media marketing and product quality positively influence customer buying interest" (Meliawati, Gerald & Aruman, 2023, p.87). This study used surveys through Google Forms to obtain information on the demographic of their respondents, while also questioning social media habits (Meliawati, Gerald & Aruman, 2023, p.83). Similarly, Darmatama et al (2021) concluded that "advertising on TikTok social media and the image of beauty products together have a significant effect on consumer purchasing decisions. From the research findings, it turns out that the most powerful and significant variable influencing consumer purchasing decisions is the image of beauty products." This study also used questionnaires as their research methodology.
Dhanesh and Duthler concluded that when followers are aware of an influencer's paid endorsements, it presents a negative effect on the relationship between consumer and influencer (Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019).

"TikTok has disrupted the beauty industry by allowing for direct-to-consumer advertising through social media influencers who create short videos to promote cosmetic brands" (Heidra & Rahmiati, 2022, p. 64). TikTok influencers have disrupted traditional advertising in the cosmetic industry by providing a more authentic and relatable way of promoting products to customers. "The rise of conscious consumerism has led to a growing trend of consumers seeking out environmentally friendly, sustainable, and cruelty-free beauty products" (Bernard & Parker, 2021, p.2). With many companies using this strategy, it could inform other similar industries that market towards Generation Z a more efficient and beneficial marketing strategy.

Gen Z's Consumer Behavior and the Cosmetic Industry: A Marketing Perspective
"TikTok has become an important platform for Gen Z to discover and learn about new products and trends in the beauty industry" (Ngangom, 2020, p.8). Ngangom (2020) analyzed brands Facebook pages to understand marketing strategies used through social media. This study found that often, brands use social media and its influencers to build a sense of community, to increase loyalty and sales. Heidra and Rahmiata (2021) conducted a study centererd on women in Indonesia to examine the impact of influencers on consumer behavior in the cosmetic industry. They used a combination of surveys and sales data to measure the influencer of influencers on consumer's purchase decisions. Their research concluded that social proof, defined as the idea that people are more likely to make a purchase if they see others doing the same, is a major factor in influencer marketing. They also found that influencers are effective at increasing brand awareness and building trust with customers to build retention within the brands. Gen Z consumers are more likely to trust and purchase products recommended by the influencer they follow, especially if the influencer is seen as trustworthy, relatable, and fully authentic. "Gen Z consumers have been found to value authenticity, transparency, relatability in social media influencers they follow" (Meliawati, Gerald & Aruman, 2023, p.83). "TikTok's unique algorithm and content creation tools make it an ideal platform for beauty brands to showcase their products and engage with consumer" (Kennedy, 2020, para. 4).

Shen and Bissell (2021) found that beauty influencers are effective at increasing purchasing intention among Generation Z. They conducted an analysis of popular makeup brands

Facebook pages (Estée Lauder, MAC Cosmetics, Clinique, L'Oreal, Maybelline, and CoverGirl) to find the interactions on posts by its consumers. In correlation, Widyanto and Agusti (2020) found that drugstore makeup reviews by beauty influencers on YouTube have a significant impact on purchase intention among undergraduate students in Indonesia. Santos et al. (2021) found in a study of Brazilian individuals, ages 18 and up, that social media use is a predictor of purchase intention among consumers of products in the cosmetic industry, specifically vegan products. This information supports the idea of customer loyalty and retention, as well as increases in demand and sales.

The Cosmetic Industry and Other Social Media Apps
Although this research is specifically focused on TikTok usage through Gen Z, it is evident that companies use other platforms to promote their products as well. This creates a parallel between TikTok and other social media platforms, as its target audience is similar. For example, YouTube and Instagram are major platforms used by businesses to promote their products. According to Ananda and Wandebori (2018), the impact of drugstore makeup product reviews by beauty vloggers on YouTube towards purchase intention by undergraduate students in Indonesia was found to be significant. Similarly, Apriliania et al. (2019) found that YouTube beauty vlogger reviews, self-congruity, and price perception influenced impulse buying and had an impact on repurchase intention among teenage users of Emina Cosmetics in Surbaya. And for Instagram, Lopez and Islam (2019) investigated the relationship between beauty influencers and Instagram usage and found that Instagram use had a significant effect on the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of beauty influencers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The basis of this research revolves around multiple research questions that will be answered.

1. How has the cosmetic industry incorporated influencers into their marketing strategies?

2. Do TikTok influencers impact cosmetic purchasing behavior in Gen Z consumers?

3. What values do Gen Z consumers look for in cosmetic products and social media influencer?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate the impact of social media influencers on the demand for cosmetic brands among Gen Z. The study will use a mixed-methods approach, using qualitative and quantitative data, involving both a survey and independent research to analyze economic trends for multiple different cosmetic companies. A case study will be performed on Tarte cosmetics, a leading marketing brand on TikTok, and overview of popular makeup brands/collaborations made by TikTok beauty influencers.

For the survey portion of the study, a sample of college students, as well as individuals included in Gen Z will be asked to complete a series of questions regarding use of social media, purchase intention, and their thoughts on the power of advertisements and promotions from their favorite creators, specifically through TikTok. The survey will also include questions on their purchasing habits, attitudes towards cosmetic brands, and the influence of social media on their purchasing decisions. The survey will also include demographic questions, such as age and gender. To analyze the survey data, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution will be used to better understand the results.

CASE STUDY: TARTE COSMETICS

Brand Overview
Tarte Cosmetics is a cosmetic brand formed in 2000 by Maureen Kelly. The focus of the brand is for its consumers who prioritize quality of cosmetics that they use, as well as the health of their skin. Tarte's products are made from natural ingredients, free from parabens and harmful substances, making the brand gain a loyal consumer base made up of those looking for a cleaner makeup product option (Goins, 2016). Tarte's presence on TikTok is significant, with 1.4 million followers, 1,747 uploads, and 18.8 million likes (As of April 4, 2024).

Tarte Influencer Brand Trip
Tarte has gained widespread attention for its influencer brand trips to destinations like Bora Bora, Costa Rica, Dubai, and Hawaii. These trips, fully sponsored by Tarte, offer influencers an all-expenses-paid luxury experience from start to finish. Tarte meticulously plans every

detail of the trip, ensuring that every moment is social media-worthy. Influencers share their experiences on social media, often using Tarte's hashtag #TrippinWithTarte. This collaboration between Tarte and influencers enhances the brand's visibility.

Most recently in March 2024, Tarte sent 24 influencers to the Four Seasons Resort in Bora Bora, in what looked like a very extravagant multiple day excursion. It gained quite a lot of attention, as their influencers posted multiple times a day, promoting the products and daily events that Tarte planned for them. Figure 1 shows the traction gained by this trip, as their following on TikTok increased to 200,000 more followers in the month of March (See Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Source: socialblade.com
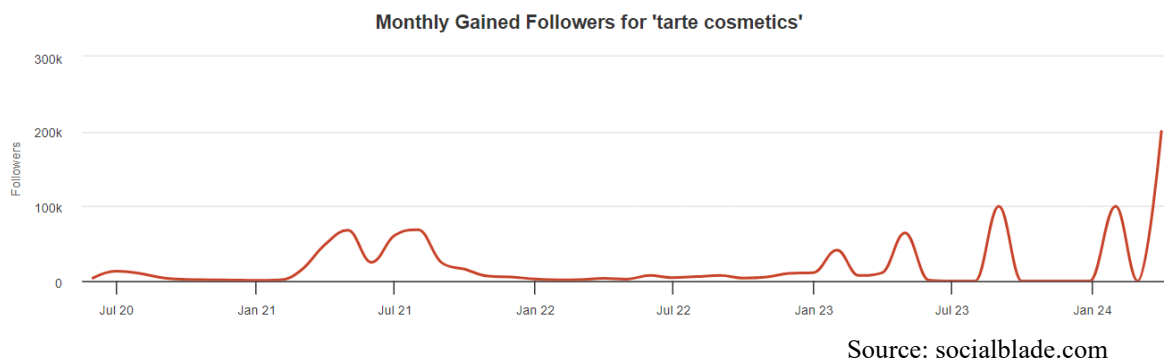
CONSUMER SURVEY

A total of 94 respondents participated in the survey. Participants were asked to provide demographic information, including their age, gender, highest level of education, employment status, and student status if applicable. The majority of respondents fell into the age range of 18-24 (42.6%), followed by 25-34 (33.0%), with smaller proportions in older age groups. In terms of gender, the respondents consisted of 68.8% females, 31.3% males, and a small percentage identified as non-binary/third gender or preferred not to specify. Regarding education, the majority held a Bachelor's degree (33.3%), followed by High School/GED (27.1%) and Associate's degree (23.9%). In terms of employment status, a significant portion identified as students (88.5%), with the remainder being employed full-time, part-time, unemployed, retired, or other. Among the students, the majority were currently enrolled full-

time (77.1%). The survey included aspects of multiple choice questions and importance scales.

The definition of a influencer was provided prior to engaging in the survey's questions regarding TikTok influencers to ensure understanding was included for each individual participating. The definition given is as follows: "An influencer is a social media personality. They have a significant following and aim to inspire, educate, and inform their followers about the latest trends and techniques."

TikTok Usage and Engagement
        Respondents were asked about their usage of TikTok and their engagement with influencers. The questions analyzed are as follows:

1. How often do you use TikTok?
    a. Multiple times a day
    b. Once a day
    c. A few times a week
    d. Rarely
    e. Never
2. Do you follow influencers who promote cosmetic products on TikTok?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Most respondents reported using TikTok multiple times a day (73.9%) indicating high engagement with the platform (See Figure 2). Regarding following influencers who promote cosmetic products on TikTok, 54.2% of respondents indicated that they do follow such influencers.

Figure 2.
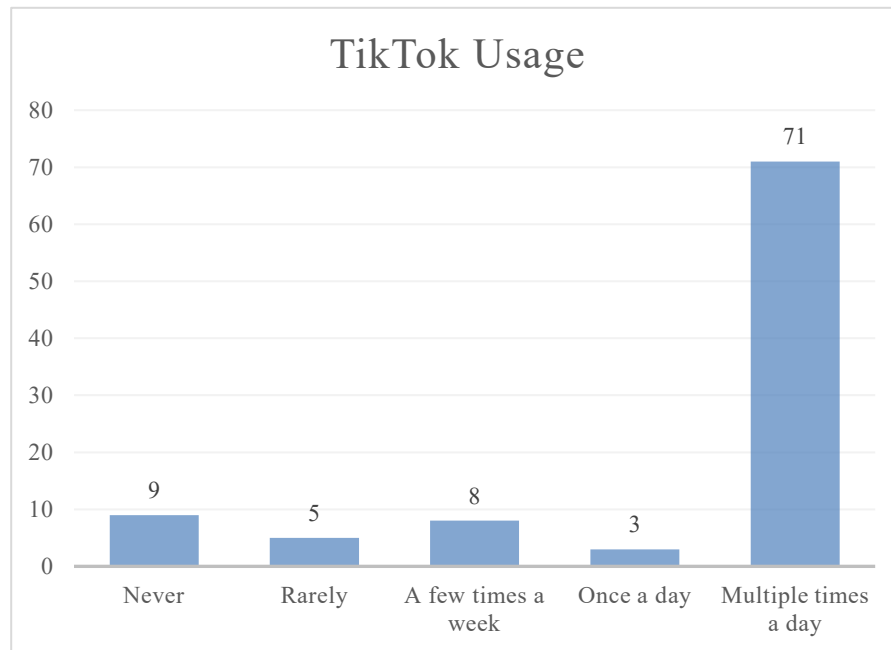
Purchasing Behavior Based on Influence
Questions provided:
1. Have you ever purchased a product based on a recommendation or a review from a

    TikTok influencer?

    a. Yes

    b. No

2. How often do TikTok influencers influence your purchasing decisions for cosmetic

    products?

    a. Daily

    b. Weekly

    c. Monthly

    d. Rarely

    e. Never

When asked about purchasing behavior influenced by TikTok influencers, 54.1% of

respondents reported having purchased a product based on a recommendation or review from

a TikTok influencer (See Figure 3). Additionally, 40.6% stated that TikTok influencers influence their purchasing decisions for cosmetic products either daily, weekly, or monthly. Regarding brand loyalty and purchase behavior, 65.6% of respondents expressed being more likely to purchase from a cosmetic brand promoted by TikTok influencers they follow. However, only 15.6% considered themselves loyal to any specific cosmetic brands promoted by TikTok influencers.

Figure 3.

Cosmetic Industry and Brand Loyalty

HAVE YOU EVER PURCHASED A PRODUCT BASED ON A RECOMMENDATION OR A REVIEW FROM A TIK TOK INFLUENCER?

45.90%

54.10%

▪ Yes ▪ No
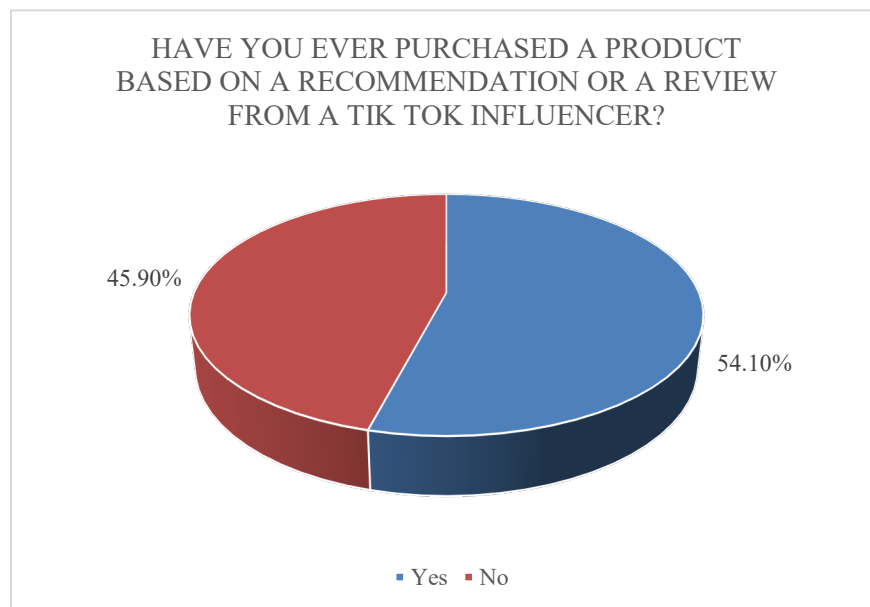
Questions provided:

1. Are you more likely to purchase from a cosmetic brand that is promoted by TikTok influencers you follow?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
2. Do you consider yourself loyal to any specific cosmetic brands promoted by TikTok influencers?
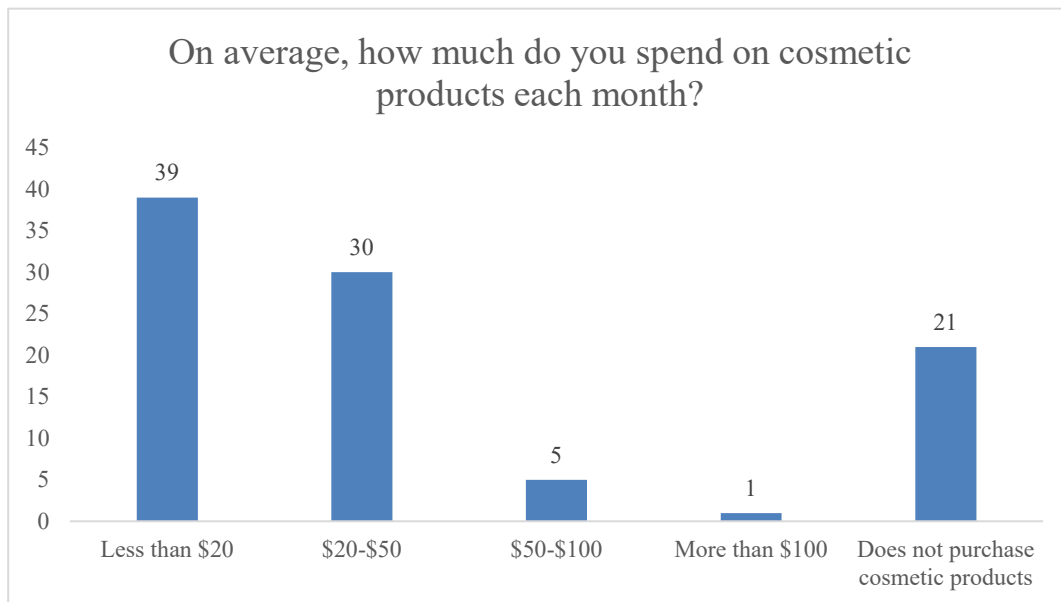   a. Yes

      b.   No

In terms of purchase behavior, 71.8% of respondents reported spending between $1 to $50 on cosmetic products each month (See Figure 4). When asked about changes in purchase behavior since following influencers on TikTok, 50.0% of respondents noted noticing such changes.

Figure 4.

On average, how much do you spend on cosmetic products each month?

Cosmetic Brand Qualities
Question provided:

In considering cosmetic qualities, respondents rated price and quality as the most important factors, followed by cruelty-free, ESG (environmental, social, and governance), ethics, and inclusivity (See Figure 5).

Figure 5.

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Deviation
Inclusivity	95	3.45	1.59
Ethics	95	3.81	1.43
Cruelty-free	95	3.78	1.49
Quality	49	4.31	1.31
Price	62	4.03	1.32

Influencer Qualities
1. What qualities do you value most in TikTok influencers when it comes to beauty

    product recommendations? (Select up to three)

    a. Authenticity

    b. Expertise

    c. Relatability

    d. Honesty

    e. Creativity

    f. Other(please specify): _____

    g. None of the above

Regarding qualities valued in TikTok influencers, respondents prioritized authenticity,

honesty, and relatability (See Figure 6). Additionally, 62.5% of respondents believed that

TikTok influencers have a positive impact on the cosmetic industry.

Figure 6.

Variable	Observations	Mean
Authenticity	94	0.659
Expertise	94	0.213
Honesty	94	0.628
Relatability	94	0.479
Creativity	94	0.149

Data Summary Table

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Authenticity	94	0.659	0.476	0	1
Expertise	94	0.213	0.411	0	1
Honesty	94	0.628	0.486	0	1
Relatability	94	0.479	0.502	0	1
Creativity	94	0.149	0.358	0	1
Female	96	0.687	0.466	0	1
College Degree	96	0.333	0.474	0	1
Student Status	96	0.885	0.32	0	1
Non-user of TikTok	96	0.094	0.293	0	1
Follows Influencer	96	0.427	0.497	0	1
Recommended purchases	96	0.542	0.501	0	1
Purchase Influence	96	1.479	1.528	0	4
Promoted Brand Purchasing	96	1.021	0.858	0	2
Brand Loyalty	96	0.156	0.365	0	1
Cosmetic Spending	96	0.854	0.542	0	3
Purchase Behavior	96	0.302	0.461	0	1

Price	62	4.032	1.318	0	5
Quality	49	4.306	1.31	0	5
Cruelty-Free	95	3.779	1.496	0	6
Ethics	95	3.811	1.431	0	6
Inclusivity	95	3.453	1.589	0	6
Trend Influence	96	0.406	0.494	0	1
Positive Impact	96	2.98	0.144	2	3

Correlation Matrices

The data was analyzed through Stata, a statistical software engine used to analyze, manage, and create data visualizations. Through the analysis, multiple correlations were found. Gender (Female) has positive correlations with following influencers (0.3612), spending (0.6277), and inclusivity (0.4742), indicating that females are more likely to follow influencers, spend more on cosmetic products, and value inclusivity in cosmetic brands. The same is noticed with spending, where the correlation between gender (0.6277), following influencers (0.4941), and seeing recommendations on TikTok (0.4629) is positive, suggesting that female individuals who spend more on cosmetic products are more likely to follow influencers on TikTok and engage in their recommendations. An individual who follows influencers has positive correlations being recommended products on TikTok through influencers, influencer qualities are important to them (0.6459), and likelihood of purchasing based on promotions on TikTok. This suggests that individuals who are recommended products by an influencer are more likely to perceive influencers as influential and engage with their promoted content. TikTok having a positive impact on the purchasing behavior on the cosmetic industry has a negative correlation with gender (-0.3178) and student status (-0.4273) indicating that males and non-students are less likely to perceive that TikTok has a positive impact on the cosmetic industry.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Gen Z exhibits significant engagement with the TikTok platform, as evidenced by a majority of respondents purchasing products based on recommendations from TikTok influencers, highlighting the substantial influence these influencers wield over consumer behavior.

However, despite this influence, Gen Z generally does not identify as loyal to specific brands promoted by these influencers. This suggests a need for brands to maintain engagement with influencers and offer compelling reasons for consumers to develop brand loyalty. Respondents prioritize factors such as price, quality, and ethics, seeking influencers who embody authenticity, honesty, and relatability. Therefore, brands and influencers should align their marketing strategies to foster trust and resonate with their audience. Furthermore, a majority of respondents perceive TikTok influencers to positively impact the cosmetic industry, indicating a favorable view of influencer marketing. Despite concerns about brand loyalty, the overall sentiment towards influencer marketing on TikTok remains positive, providing brands with an opportunity to strengthen partnerships with influencers and enhance marketing efforts on the platform.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research could delve into a more comprehensive analysis of sales data to directly measure the impact of TikTok influencer campaigns on consumer purchasing behavior. Utilizing regression analysis could further elucidate which demographic segments are most influenced by influencers on the platform

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size and composition of the study may be limited, particularly in terms of representing Gen Z, which forms only a subset of TikTok users. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, including social desirability bias and recall bias, which may affect the accuracy of the findings. Respondents may provide answers they perceive as socially desirable or may not accurately recall their past purchasing behavior. Additionally, the study's narrow focus on TikTok usage, influencer engagement, and purchasing behavior for cosmetic products may overlook other influential factors such as personal preferences, brand reputation, or peer recommendations, suggesting a need for broader exploration in future research endeavors.

<u>ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS</u>

There are several ethical considerations taken into account during this research. Participants in the survey are fully informed of the purpose of the study and what their involvement entails. It is not believed that there is any concern with the ethics of the survey sent out. The sample selected for the survey and interview is representative of the Gen Z population and the effort of minimization of sampling bias is at best interest. The research is conducted in an honest and transparent way, respecting privacy and autonomy of participants, and ensuring that the study causes no harm to its participants. The survey questions will be brought forth to the University Institutional Review Board in order to receive any and all necessary approval before survey is conducted.

PROJECT PLAN AND DELIVERABLES

Month	Task/Deliverable
May 2023	• Submit Thesis proposal
June 2023	• Receive feedback from Bryant Honors Council • Share Honors Council feedback with faculty advisor, Allison Kaminaga • Share Honors Council feedback with editorial reviewer, • Complete CITI certification
July 2023	• Brainstorm survey questions with Allison Kaminaga • Meet on Zoom with faculty advisor
August 2023	• Submit survey/interview questions to Bryant IRB before the beginning of the Fall Semester • Update Professor Kaminaga on literature review and methodology and discuss IRB feedback
September 2023	• Resume in-person meetings with Professor Kaminaga • Distribute survey questions to Bryant students and other target Gen Z's
October 2023 & November 2023	• Continue meetings with Professor Kaminaga with updates • Check in with editorial reviewer to discuss writing styles and approaching survey result documentation • Make plans for work to be done during winter break, specifically survey analysis and interview analysis
December 2023	• Meet with editorial reviewer to make adjustments before spring semester

January 2024	• Make necessary updates to literature review and methodology sections • Review and revise literature review and methodology sections
February 2024	• Submit intent to complete the final thesis to academic advisor, Brooke Yerger • Work on writing section of data analysis from survey and interview • Update Professor Kaminaga on work in progress and completed
March 2024	• Review project with Professor Kaminaga and editorial reviewer • Create presentation slides • Presentation preparation and practice by the end of the month
April 2024	• Mid-April Final Presentation • Submit Honors Thesis project to Honors Program at the end of the month

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