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**Selling “Real”: How Influencer Partnerships and Experiential Events Shape
Perceived Brand Authenticity in Cosmetics among Generation Z Users.**

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FOREWORD

Brand authenticity is a key challenge in today's cosmetics industry, as young consumers assess beauty brands based on product performance as well as associated values, people, and experiences. This study examines how influencer partnerships and experiential events shape perceived brand authenticity among Generation Z consumers. Specifically, it investigates how collaborations with beauty and lifestyle creators, together with immersive experiences, influence perceptions of authenticity, trust, engagement, and purchase intention.

A literature review established a theoretical framework on perceived brand authenticity, influencer credibility, brand–influencer congruence, consumer skepticism, and experiential marketing. This was followed by a quantitative survey of 104 Generation Z respondents to assess their perceptions of influencer collaborations and event-based beauty content. The survey used items inspired by Morhart et al.'s (2015) Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) scale to evaluate dimensions such as credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity.

The findings indicate that authenticity in cosmetics arises not only from brand communication, but also from the perceived alignment among the brand, the influencer, the experience, and the consumer's values. For beauty brands, especially emerging ones like Fei Paris, the results underscore the importance of selecting credible creators, designing authentic experiences, and maintaining consistency between digital storytelling and actual brand identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

The beauty industry has entered an era in which brand desirability is no longer built only on product efficacy. Performance, texture, and visible results remain essential, but cosmetic brands are increasingly judged through the quality of their relationship with consumers. This phenomenon has expanded with the rise of social media. For younger consumers, especially Generation Z, cosmetic branding is shaped by a combination of aspiration and proximity. A brand's product must be desirable, but it also needs to feel sincere, accessible, and culturally relevant. The traditional ideal of flawless beauty has been challenged by a stronger interest in transparency and emotional connection to a brand. Different formats such as Behind-the-scenes videos, realistic product use, creator routines, event content, and consumer posts all contribute to the way brands are perceived online.

In response to this key shift, a large number of cosmetic brands have developed partnerships with influencers, lifestyle creators, makeup artists, and other visible personalities. These collaborations are often intensified with experiential activations such as pop-up stores, product launch events, masterclasses, or brand trips. These initiatives are designed to circulate digitally through Instagram stories, TikTok videos, event recaps, unboxings, and user-generated content. As a result, the event becomes both a brand experience and a communication tool.

However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends strongly on how authentic they appear. A collaboration can reinforce a brand's image when the partner seems genuinely connected to the brand's universe, values, and products. In contrast, when a partnership appears too commercial, artificial, or disconnected from the creator's usual identity, it can create doubt among consumers. Gohil et al. (2025), in the *Advances in Consumer Research*, highlight the importance of perceived alignment between sponsored content, personal values, and consumer response.

This thesis therefore examines the following research question: How do influencer partnerships and experiential events shared on social media shape perceived brand authenticity and consumer responses among Generation Z cosmetics consumers? The study focuses on the way these practices affect perceived authenticity, trust, engagement, and purchase intention.

To answer this question, the thesis is based on a quantitative research approach supported by a literature review. The theoretical part examines key concepts and definitions such as brand authenticity, perceived brand authenticity, influencer credibility, social media engagement, community participation, and experiential marketing in the cosmetics industry. The empirical part relies on a

survey conducted among Generation Z respondents in order to understand how they perceive influencer collaborations and beauty events shared online.

The thesis is organized into four chapters. The first chapter reviews the existing literature on authenticity, influencer marketing, social media dynamics, and experiential branding. The second chapter explains the methodology, including the research design, questionnaire structure, sampling criteria, and data collection process. The third chapter presents and interprets the survey results and the main findings. The final chapter discusses the research question, formulates managerial recommendations for cosmetic brands and acknowledges the limits of the research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review establishes a foundation for the research question by examining the evolution of authenticity in branding and its impact on the cosmetics industry. To achieve this, the author conducted a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the question, drawing on a wide range of sources, including articles, books, journals, and social media content. The material was accessed through EDHEC Business School's digital Library, as well as through online resources such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Harvard Business Review, and Vogue Business. Additional insights were gathered from cosmetic brand websites and social media platforms such as Sephora, Rhode, Glossier, and Fei Paris. Lastly, some insights were extracted from internal documents from Fei Paris.

This literature review explores the concept of brand authenticity by defining the term in branding and explaining how consumers evaluate it. The review then focuses on the main dimensions of Perceived Brand authenticity by Morhart et al. (2015), a framework that serves as the basis for this question and the methodology. Secondly, the review deepens into the cosmetics industry and social media branding. The third part examines the growing importance of authenticity among Generation Z users, particularly in cosmetics. Lastly, the fourth part focuses on the usage of influencer partnerships and experiential events as authenticity-building tools for cosmetic brands. The author analyzes theoretical foundations to examine how cosmetic brands' strategies can influence perceived authenticity, trust, engagement, and purchase intentions.

This chapter highlights key gaps in the literature, regarding how influencers and events shape authenticity for Generation Z consumers. It establishes the relevance of the research and supports the quantitative methodology presented in the next chapter.

1. Authenticity in Branding: Concepts and Definitions

Authenticity has origins in philosophy, psychology, and sociology before its adoption in marketing. The term comes from the Greek *authentikos*, meaning "originality" and "genuineness". Authenticity was first explored through existentialist philosophy, notably in the works of Sartre and Heidegger, as the capacity of an individual to remain true to their inner self in the face of external pressure (Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 1943). The concept began to be applied to branding as consumer culture grew and became more complex. Nowadays, consumers search for brands that reflect what

they value in themselves. In branding and consumer research, authenticity is linked to credible performance, continuity, integrity, sincerity, and quality commitment. It is not solely defined by origin, craft, or tradition, but also by a brand's behavior, communication, and experience design. Authenticity refers to how real, genuine, and true a brand appears to be, and how faithfully it delivers on its claims. Beverland (2006), in "The 'Real Thing': Branding Authenticity in the Luxury Wine Trade," shows that brand authenticity can be constructed through cues such as heritage, stylistic consistency, quality, connection to place, production methods, and the minimization of overt commercial motives. This perspective shifts authenticity from a philosophical concept to a practical tool used in branding strategies. Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland and Farrelly (2014), in "Measuring Consumer-Based Brand Authenticity," further argue that authenticity is consumer-centered. Customers select specific authenticity cues to achieve outcomes like control, connection, and virtue. Thus, authenticity is meaningful and goal-dependent. This is especially relevant in the cosmetics industry, where purchases are closely tied to social identity, moral values, and daily routines. Another key perspective describes authenticity as a consumer assessment rather than an inherent property of an object. Nunes, Ordanini, and Giambastiani (The Concept of Authenticity: What It Means to Consumers, *Journal of Marketing*, 2021) argue that authenticity is a holistic consumer judgment, constructed by diverse dimensions. In cosmetics, this approach can be applicable as beauty brands are assessed based on claim accuracy, social values, efficacy, expertise, and relevance to consumer identity.

In summary, these studies show that brand authenticity is defined by consumers' perceptions of a brand's actions, claims, identity, and experiences. Coherence, sincerity, legitimacy, and genuineness are central values through which consumers evaluate perceived brand authenticity.

1.1. Authenticity as a Consumer Perception

Although authenticity originated as a philosophical and psychological concept, modern marketing and consumer research view it as a perception evaluated by consumers, not as an objective trait of products or brands (Beverland, 2014; Morhart et al., 2015; Nunes, Ordanini and Giambastiani, 2021). Accordingly, authenticity is a judgment people make in specific consumption contexts, based on their beliefs about whether an offering, person, or brand is "the real thing" rather than a simulation (Beverland, *Journal of Business Research*, 2014). Scholars therefore argue that authenticity is best understood as a socially constructed assessment rooted in consumers' interpretations,

expectations, and experiences, rather than as a fixed attribute of the market offering. Consumer behaviour research clarifies the different forms perceived authenticity can take. Drawing on semi-otic theory, Grayson and Martinec (Consumer Perceptions of Iconicity and Indexicality and Their Influence on Assessments of Authentic Market Offerings, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2004) distinguish between “indexical and iconic authenticity” in consumption. Indexical authenticity is the perception that an object or experience is directly connected to a genuine origin or history. Products made in their actual place of origin or brands with a traceable heritage are seen as examples of indexical authenticity. Fei Paris, where the author is completing their apprenticeship, is a French dermocosmetics company that develops and manufactures all its products in its place of origin. In contrast, iconic authenticity refers to offerings that visually or symbolically resemble what consumers believe an authentic object or brand should look like. This includes packaging, storytelling, or aesthetics that “feel” true, even if they are partly staged. Aesop, an Australian luxury cosmetics brand and subsidiary of L’Oréal, exemplifies iconic authenticity. Its products are packaged in amber glass bottles with simple, pharmacy-style labels, understated typography, and scientific language. Stores feature minimalist, laboratory-like interiors, and the branding emphasizes literature, craft, and thoughtful formulation. This approach creates a strong impression of authenticity, reflecting the aesthetic consumers associate with pure, carefully made skincare. Existential authenticity shifts the focus from the object to the individual, describing situations where consumers feel more connected to their “true self” through a consumption experience, regardless of historical genuineness. For example, at a Glossier¹ pop-up store in Los Angeles, customers can try products freely, use mirrors with natural lighting, and create routines that enhance their features rather than transform them. The brand message “skin first, makeup second” encourages shoppers to embrace their natural appearance.

Authenticity has further been reconceptualized as a holistic assessment made up of several underlying judgments, which can vary depending on the situation. Nunes, Ordanini and Giambastiani (2021) identify six core components shaping consumers’ authenticity evaluations: accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency. Accuracy measures if the brand is transparent and reliable in its self-representation. Connectedness refers to consumers’ feelings of familiarity. Integrity concerns whether the actor behaves according to stable values. Legitimacy

¹ Glossier is an American beauty brand founded in 2014 by Emily Weiss.

reflects acceptance by relevant communities and cultural norms. Originality relates to distinctiveness and a non-imitative personality. Lastly, proficiency denotes perceived competency and expertise. These components reinforce the idea of authenticity emerging from the interplay of multiple judgments consumers make when interpreting an offering as authentic or inauthentic. These judgments are closely tied to identity processes. Belk (Possessions and the Extended Self, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1988) shows that consumers increasingly use brands, places, and experiences to construct, maintain, and express their sense of self, with authenticity perceptions playing a central role. Authentic consumption experiences are associated with emotional resonance, while inauthentic ones are often described as fake, forced, or misaligned with personal values. This identity-based view is reflected in branding that adopts an existentialist approach, suggesting consumers perceive brands as authentic when they credibly affirm who they are or aspire to be. Within this consumer-perception perspective, brand authenticity is a specific case where the evaluation focuses on a branded offering. Beverland (*Journal of Business Research*, 2014) shows that consumers infer brand authenticity from cues such as heritage, stylistic consistency, commitment to quality, connection to place, and minimization of overt commercial motives, all interpreted through their own beliefs and expectations. This confirms that perceived brand authenticity is fundamentally a consumer-side construct, emerging from the interaction between brand actions on one side and individual interpretations on the other, shaped by identity and social context. Beverland (2014), Napoli (2014), and Morhart (2015) explain that authenticity rests on three key questions: Is the brand consistent with its claimed identity? Does it tell the truth and deliver on its promises? Does it mean something beyond the transaction? In cosmetics, these questions are crucial. Young, hyper-connected consumers assess authenticity by its entire universe diffused on digital and traditional platforms. Influencer content, behind-the-scenes footage, user-generated reviews, and event coverage all serve as cues for consumers to judge whether a brand is accurate, transparent, value-driven, and emotionally engaging, or instead overly scripted and commercially motivated. In this context, authenticity is not a static label but an ongoing, negotiated judgment shaped by each new collaboration, campaign, or experiential event.

Overall, this discussion suggests that authenticity is not an inherent brand characteristic, but a perception developed by consumers through social, symbolic, and experiential cues. Understanding how consumers interpret authenticity is therefore essential for understanding the cosmetics industry and the impact of social media collaborations and experiential events on this sector.

1.2. Dimensions of Perceived Brand Authenticity and key scales

While authenticity scales vary by context, several key dimensions consistently appear in the literature. He, Ma, and Zhang (2023), in the *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, identified perceived consistency, uniqueness, and integrity as central to authenticity in hallmark event brands. Their research shows that consumers assess authenticity based on coherence between brand identity and context, differentiation from competitors, and perceptions of honesty and trustworthiness. The consistency of these dimensions across industries suggests their stability in different experiential contexts. A central challenge in brand authenticity research is translating this abstract concept into measurable dimensions that reflect consumer perceptions in the marketplace. To limit this challenge, Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer, and Heinrich (*Advances in Consumer Research*, 2012) made a contribution by developing a scale that defines brand authenticity through four observable characteristics: continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. Morhart et al. (2015) expanded this concept by including the consumer's identity relationship with the brand. Their framework adds symbolism as a core dimension, highlighting how authentic brands support self-expression and personal identity. This consumer-focused perspective is especially relevant in cosmetics and social media, where brands often serve as symbolic lifestyle and identity markers.

1.2.1. The Four Dimensions of the Bruhn et al. (2012) Scale

In “Brand Authenticity: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Its Conceptualization and Measurement” by Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer, and Heinrich (*Advances in Consumer Research*, 2012) brand authenticity is defined as the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as genuine, real, and truthful. Through qualitative interviews and quantitative validation studies, the authors identified four core dimensions that collectively shape perceptions of brand authenticity: “continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness (see Figure 1).” Continuity refers to the perception that a brand remains stable, coherent, and faithful to its identity over time. According to the authors, brands are perceived as more authentic when they demonstrate consistency in values and communication style. This dimension is closely associated with tradition, long-term commitment, and the consistency of a brand's philosophy. In the cosmetics industry, continuity may be reflected in consistent formulations, a recognizable visual identity, enduring brand values, or sustained expertise. Originality, the second component of Bruhn's et al. scale, refers to the uniqueness and

distinctiveness of a brand. According to the article, brands are perceived as authentic when they appear innovative, non-imitative, and capable of expressing a clear and differentiated identity. Originality is often associated with distinctive storytelling, a unique and recognizable brand universe, or innovative products that set industry trends. The third core dimension identified in “Brand Authenticity: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Its Conceptualization and Measurement” is reliability, which reflects the extent to which a brand fulfills its promises. Reliability is closely linked to credibility, trustworthiness, and consistency. It can be assessed through a brand’s website, social media platforms, or in-store displays, mainly its owned content. The fourth core dimension is naturalness, which denotes an absence of artificiality and opportunism in a brand’s behavior. In the article, naturalness suggests that brand actions are driven by genuine convictions rather than solely commercial motives, and stands in opposition to, overstaging or manipulative ways of communicating.

The framework demonstrates that authenticity is a multidimensional approach built by several complementary evaluations, rather than a single characteristic. The article featured in *Advances in Consumer Research* further explains that continuity and reliability are the most influential dimensions in consumers authenticity judgments.

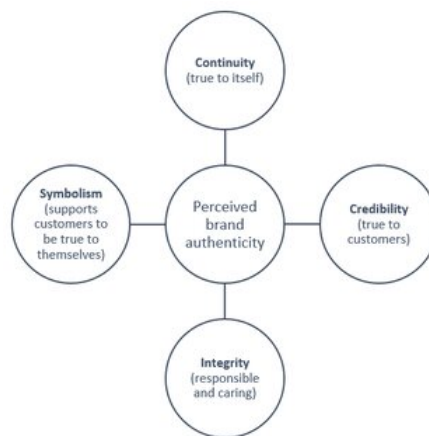


Figure 1: Perceived brand authenticity scale by Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer and Heinrich (2012)

1.2.2. Morhart et al. (2015) Perceived Brand Authenticity Scale

Building on this groundwork, Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, and Grohmann (2015) introduced the Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) scale in their article “Brand Authenticity: An

Integrative Framework and Measurement Scale,” published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (see Figure 2). This widely used framework integrates objectivist, constructivist, and existential perspectives by defining PBA as consumers’ overall assessment of a brand’s genuineness and transparency, based on observable brand cues, socially constructed meanings, and the brand’s role in self-expression. The scale includes four dimensions: continuity, integrity, credibility, and symbolism. According to the authors, credibility measures the brand’s honesty, reliability, and ability to fulfill promises. Integrity reflects the belief that the brand acts in accordance with genuine values and responsibility. Symbolism assesses whether the brand enables consumers to express their true selves and to align with it. Continuity, as in Bruhn et al. (2012), emphasizes the brand’s coherence and recognizability over time. The PBA framework demonstrates that higher PBA scores increase emotional brand attachment, word-of-mouth, and the likelihood of brand choice, particularly through self-congruence among consumers with high self-authenticity.

The PBA scale is part of a broader network that identifies both the antecedents and consequences of perceived authenticity, making it relevant to analyze consumer behavior in cosmetics. Morhart et al. (2015) distinguish three types of authenticity cues that shape consumers’ PBA judgments. Indexical cues are evidence-based signals demonstrated in the brand’s actual behavior, such as scandals. Secondly, iconic cues are defined as impression-based signals based on communication style, including storytelling. Third, existential cues are explained as self-referential stimuli, such as brand anthropomorphism, that invite consumers to project their identity onto the brand. Morhart et al. also show in their article (“Brand Authenticity: An Integrative Framework and Measurement Scale,” *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2015) that the effect of iconic cues on PBA perceptions is moderated by consumers’ marketing skepticism: those who distrust marketing messages are less responsive to impression-based authenticity signals, even when well-designed. This finding is important for brands aiming to communicate authenticity through influencer partnerships or branded content.

Compared to Bruhn et al.’s (2012) four-factor scale, the PBA scale by Morhart et al. (2015) provides a more psychologically nuanced approach to brand authenticity. Both models are multidimensional and include continuity, but Morhart et al. (2015) explicitly incorporate consumer identity through the symbolism dimension and position PBA within a testable causal model with defined antecedents and outcomes. As the research question explores how influencer partnerships and experiential events affect emotional brand attachment and word-of-mouth among young

consumers, the Morhart et al. (2015) PBA scale will be the primary measurement tool in the quantitative phase.

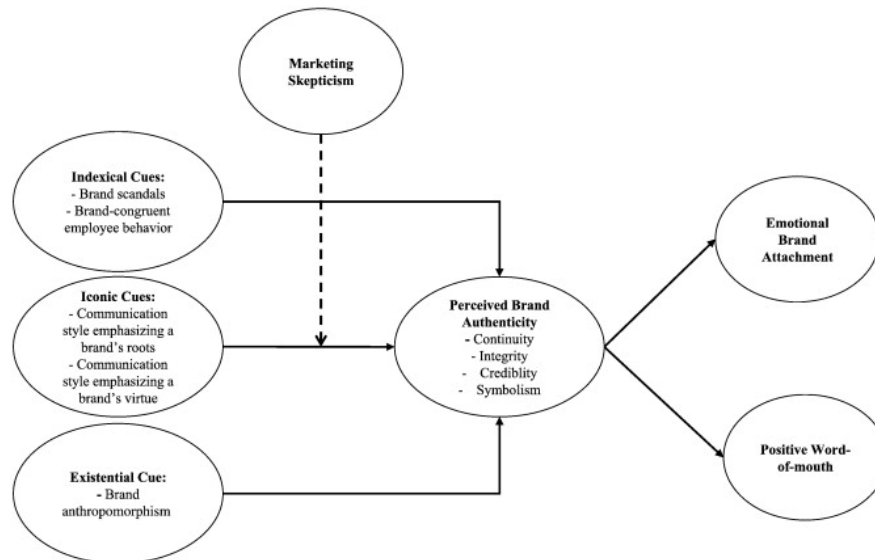


Figure 2: Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin and Grohmann Perceived Brand Authenticity Scale (2015)

1.2.3. Consumer- Based Brand Authenticity

Nunes, Ordanini, and Giambastiani (2021), in their article “The Concept of Authenticity: What It Means to Consumers” published in the *Journal of Marketing*, conceptualize authenticity as a multidimensional consumer judgment. Their article highlights how consumers assess a brand’s genuineness and its commitment to its values. Authenticity, in this context, is evaluated through perceived quality, sincerity, heritage, and credibility. This consumer-centric perspective is further developed in Doğrul and Kosar’s article “The Effect of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love in the Turkish Mobile Phone Market: The Moderating Role of Brand Image” published in *Eurasian Journal of Business and Economics* (2025). Doğrul and Kosar analyze brand authenticity using four sub-dimensions: quality commitment, brand heritage, originality, and sincerity. Their analysis indicates that each of these dimensions impacts brand love, which subsequently encourages repurchase intention. First, quality commitment denotes the perception that a brand is genuinely dedicated to maintaining high standards in its products. Doğrul and Kosar argue that quality commitment is associated with consumers’ trust in a brand’s quality assurances and their belief in the

brand's consistency, reliability, and excellence. Within the cosmetics industry, this dimension is crucial, as consumers assess not only a brand's visual identity or storytelling but also product efficacy, ingredient quality, safety, formulation transparency, and dermatological credibility. A cosmetics brand is thus perceived as authentic when its product claims are substantiated by actual performance and consistent consumer experiences. According to the authors, brand heritage is defined as the perception that a brand possesses a meaningful history, enduring values, and a recognizable identity over time. In the cosmetics sector, heritage may be linked to French dermo-cosmetic expertise, pharmacy traditions, botanical knowledge, a founder's narrative, or a sustained commitment to skincare science. Doğrul and Kosar characterize heritage as encompassing a brand's essence, history, traditions, and values, suggesting that consumers often interpret heritage as an indicator of authenticity and reliability. This dimension is particularly pertinent in beauty markets, where the rapid emergence of new brands driven by social media trends prompts consumers to seek evidence that a brand is not merely opportunistic or transient.

Originality pertains to the extent to which a brand is perceived as distinctive, innovative, and difficult to imitate. In "The Effect of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love in the Turkish Mobile Phone Market," originality is defined as a brand's capacity to differentiate itself through unique and hard-to-replicate value propositions. This dimension is especially significant in the cosmetics industry, which is characterized by similarity in packaging, influencer marketing, and aesthetic presentation. Brands that cultivate a unique identity, are more likely to be perceived as authentic, as they demonstrate a clear and independent identity rather than merely conforming to prevailing market trends. Sincerity is defined as the perception that a brand is honest, trustworthy, and morally consistent. Doğrul and Kosar describe sincere brands as those exhibiting authentic communication, alignment between stated values and actions, and genuine concern for consumers. In the cosmetics industry, sincerity is particularly critical, as consumers are increasingly skeptical of exaggerated product claims, greenwashing, superficial inclusivity, manipulated visuals, and influencer partnerships perceived as purely commercial. A sincere cosmetics brand is thus characterized by alignment between its messaging, product claims, partnerships, and social commitments. This framework is particularly relevant to the research question, as it links the measurement of authenticity to specific criteria used in evaluating beauty brands. Quality commitment corresponds to product efficacy and formulation credibility; heritage pertains to brand origin and enduring identity; originality addresses differentiation within a saturated beauty market; and sincerity concerns the perceived

honesty of communication, influencer partnerships, and experiential marketing. Collectively, these four dimensions serve as a bridge between the theoretical assessment of perceived brand authenticity and the practical indicators Generation Z consumers use to evaluate cosmetics brands on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

1.3. Drivers and Cues of Authenticity

After identifying the main dimension of perceived brand authenticity, it is important to analyze the cues that shape consumers' perceptions. These drivers and cues further explain how authenticity is communicated and interpreted by consumers. Individuals tend to infer authenticity from brand history, product quality, or communication style.

Differences are illustrated by distinguishing desired positioning and obtained positioning (see Figure 3). Desired positioning is what the company intends the brand to represent, while obtained positioning reflects consumer perceptions. The brand image, shaped by communication cues such as advertising, packaging, retail staff, social media, influencer partnerships, and experiential events, bridges these two. Brand claims are not only what define authenticity, what matters is how the consumer interprets it.

A primary driver of authenticity is consistency among brand identity, communication, and actions. In cosmetics, this requires all external and internal communication reflect the same values and behaviors. If a brand claims to be natural, inclusive, scientific, or expert-led but engages in activities that contradict these values, its perceived authenticity may diminish. Doğrul and Kosar (2025) explain that brand authenticity can be perceived as a perception of realness, encompassing transparency and adherence to values and morals.

Heritage and origin represent other cues. Consumers often research a brand's connection to a place, its history, or the story of how it was created. In cosmetics, this may include French origin, dermatological expertise, pharmacy heritage, founder-led formulation, family tradition, or manufacturing transparency. These factors increase traceability and legitimacy. However, heritage needs to be supported by actions that align with the brand's stated values.

Product and quality credibility are also key drivers. In cosmetics, authenticity is closely linked to the perceived reliability of the product. Consumers assess whether promised benefits match results. Ingredient claims and product experience support the brand narrative. Commitment to quality serves both as a dimension of authenticity and as a cue for brand reliability and credibility,

particularly in cosmetics where quality plays a big role, since the product is applied directly to the skin or body.

Naturalness and non-artificiality in communication are important cues. Gilmore and Pine (2007), in *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*, explain that authenticity is central in the experience economy because consumers increasingly judge offerings as “real” or “fake.” The authors note that consumers are always searching for memorable experiences that need to feel genuine and pleasant. The challenge lies in creating staged experiences that need to remain consistent with the brand’s values and true to the identity of the brand. Influencer partnerships are among the most significant authenticity cues in contemporary cosmetics marketing. Influencers act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, and their perceived sincerity affects brand interpretation. In *The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media*, Emily Hund (2023) shows that the development of the influencer economy was not accidental, but emerged from broader technological, cultural, economic, and marketing changes during the mid- to late 2000s. As influencers became part of a structured commercial system, their credibility increasingly depended on their ability to balance monetization with the impression of personal honesty. For cosmetic brands, this means that a partnership cannot rely only on visibility or follower numbers. It must also appear coherent with the influencer’s usual content, values, lifestyle, and relationship with their audience. When this coherence is present, the collaboration is more likely to be perceived as authentic rather than purely transactional. Conversely, partnerships may seem opportunistic if influencers promote products inconsistent with their personal identity or if the provided content appears very scripted. Hund describes the rise of “cultivated-but-authentic visibility” (Emily Hund, 2023), where influencers and marketers balance authenticity with metrics and monetization.

Transparency is another key cue. Sponsored content, gifted products, and brand trips can increase authenticity if the commercial nature is clearly disclosed and the influencer explains how the product fits their routine, values, or needs. The issue is not sponsorship itself, but the perception of hidden and forced endorsements.

User-generated content is another important authenticity cue. Reviews, comments, tutorials, unboxing videos, reposts, and consumer testimonials increase credibility because they are not produced by the brand itself. In beauty, consumers trust peers who provide practical evidence of product use. UGC enables co-creation of authenticity, as consumers help confirm, negotiate, or contest the brand narrative.

In summary, authenticity cues in cosmetics arise from both brand-controlled and consumer-controlled signals. Brands can manage identity, product claims, influencer selection, and event design, but consumers interpret authenticity based on their expectations, social media literacy, and community interactions. Therefore, authenticity should be viewed as an ongoing and fragile perception.

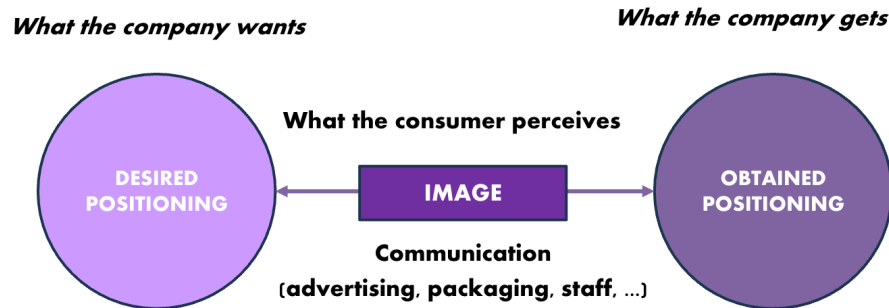


Figure 3: Desired positioning, perceived image and obtained positioning

Source: Adapted from EDHEC Business School, Customer-Centric Brand Management course, BBA3, internal course material.

1.4. Outcomes of authenticity

Authenticity is a critical factor influencing key consumer outcomes. Brands perceived as authentic are more likely to foster trust, emotional attachment, engagement, positive word-of-mouth, and purchase intention (Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn, 2017; Morhart et al., 2015). These outcomes are significant in the cosmetics industry, where consumers assess products not only based on functional benefits, but also on the values, image, and identity conveyed by the brand. For Generation Z consumers, authenticity holds heightened importance due to their frequent exposure to sponsored content and their ability to identify collaborations that appear opportunistic or misaligned with a brand's communicated positioning.

Within this context, influencer partnerships and experiential events serve as strategic tests of authenticity. When these initiatives align with the brand's values, identity, and positioning, they can reinforce perceptions of sincerity, credibility, and value consistency. Conversely, if these efforts appear artificial or inconsistent, they may diminish perceived authenticity and weaken consumer

trust. In practical terms, authenticity strengthens the consumer-brand relationship because it influences how consumers feel about the brand, how they interact with it, whether they recommend it, and whether they consider purchasing from it (Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn, 2017).

In summary, this means that authenticity should not be treated as something a brand simply owns. It is formed in the consumer's mind through repeated exposure to the brand's discourse, actions, visual identity, collaborations, and experiences (Morhart et al., 2015; Campagna, Donthu and Yoo, 2023). The literature indicates that authenticity has shifted from a philosophical notion of being "true to oneself" to a central concept in marketing, particularly in markets where consumers increasingly differentiate between what appears genuine and what appears artificial. The reviewed models show that consumers do not judge authenticity through one single criterion. Instead, they combine several impressions, including whether the brand appears consistent, credible, sincere, distinctive, responsible, and meaningful to their identity (Bruhn et al., 2012; Morhart et al., 2015; Campagna, Donthu and Yoo, 2023).

Furthermore, authenticity is built through several visible cues: whether the brand acts consistently with its claims, communicates transparently, delivers credible product performance, collaborates with coherent influencers, and allows consumers to validate the brand through events and user-generated content (Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn, 2017). These factors are especially important in the cosmetics industry, where brand image is shaped not only by products, but also by visual identity, social media storytelling, influencer collaborations, and experiential activations. Ultimately, the outcomes of authenticity underline its strategic significance. By enhancing trust, emotional attachment, engagement, word-of-mouth, and purchase intention, authenticity becomes a key determinant in the relationship between cosmetics brands and consumers. This analysis establishes the foundation for the following section, which explores how social media and cosmetics branding shape the environment in which authenticity is evaluated, negotiated, and contested.

2. Social Media and Cosmetic Branding Context

Brand authenticity has been established as a consumer-perceived, multidimensional construct. It is important to situate this concept within the context of cosmetics branding on social media. On social media platforms, cosmetic brands are evaluated through highly visible forms of communication, such as influencer partnerships, product tutorials, reviews, behind-the-scenes content, event

coverage, and user-generated content. Consequently, authenticity becomes a continually negotiated perception, shaped by interactions among brands, influencers, and social media users.

This section examines the social media logics that structure beauty branding, the role of digital communities and co-created content, and the tension between aspirational imagery and perceived authenticity. This context is crucial for understanding how influencer partnerships and experiential events may strengthen or weaken the perceived authenticity of cosmetics brands among Generation Z consumers.

2.1.Social media logics in beauty

The cosmetics industry is now closely tied to social media, as beauty products are highly visual, demonstrable, and identity-driven. Unlike other consumer goods, cosmetics can be showcased through transformation, such as testing foundation on skin, swatching lipstick, integrating skincare into routines, or conveying fragrance and rituals through storytelling and lifestyle imagery. Social media is no longer only an additional communication channel; it has transformed the way consumers interact with brands and the way marketers build relationships with audiences (The Future of Social Media in Marketing, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 2020). Social media marketing should therefore be seen as a strategic activity, not just a series of isolated posts. Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017) present social media marketing as a strategic activity that requires coordination across scope, culture, structure, and governance. For cosmetics brands, this is critical because brand image is shaped by many simultaneous touchpoints, including brand posts, influencer content, consumer reviews, event footage, customer comments, user-generated content, and community conversations. Brands can no longer fully separate their owned content from the image created by consumers and creators, which opens a more participatory branding environment where authenticity is constantly negotiated. The current beauty market reinforces the importance of this issue, as McKinsey and The Business of Fashion estimate that “the global beauty market could reach \$590 billion by 2030 across skincare, cosmetics, hair care, and fragrance” (McKinsey & Company and The Business of Fashion, 2025). The same report also highlights that “consumers are becoming more attentive to genuine product value and more skeptical toward excessive hype” (McKinsey & Company and The Business of Fashion, 2025). This is crucial for the research question, as visibility alone is no longer sufficient. In a saturated market, repeated exposure does not guarantee trust. Excessive visibility can even lead to fatigue or skepticism if consumers perceive

overpromising or commercial pressure. Beauty content on Instagram and TikTok follows specific platform logics. First, it is immediate: consumers expect quick demonstrations, visible results, short tutorials, and direct reactions. Second, it is relatable: users respond more positively to real routines, unfiltered skin, product empties, honest reviews, and conversational formats such as “get ready with me” videos than to traditional advertising. Third, it relies on social proof: consumers assess not only brand messaging but also user reactions through likes, comments, shares, and reviews. Fourth, it benefits from algorithmic amplification: content that is spontaneous, emotional, entertaining, useful, or controversial can reach audiences far beyond the brand’s followers. These dynamics are especially influential among Generation Z. Euromonitor describes “Gen Z beauty consumers as particularly focused on self-expression, value for money, holistic wellness, genderless beauty, and support for social causes” (The Gen Z Beauty Consumer *Euromonitor International*, 2022). As a result, brands targeting young consumers must create content that is both visually appealing and socially credible. A product video may be attractive, but if it appears scripted or disconnected from real concerns, it can undermine authenticity.

A cosmetics brand’s digital presence must balance three imperatives: it should be aspirational to create desire, useful to support decision-making, and authentic to reduce skepticism. This also explains the growing importance of user-generated communication. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) show that user-generated communication can have a strong effect on brand attitude and brand equity, which is particularly relevant in cosmetics because consumers often trust peer content more than brand-controlled messages. This distinction matters in cosmetics, as consumers often trust peer demonstrations, reviews, and tutorials more than brand claims. While a brand can claim that a serum improves skin or that a foundation has a natural finish, consumers often seek confirmation from ordinary users, micro-influencers, and beauty communities.

In a nutshell, social media has transformed beauty brands into cultural actors whose authenticity is judged by the coherence among their products, images and videos, values, influencers, communities, and experiences. This makes social media platforms essential for understanding how influencer partnerships and experiential events shape perceived brand authenticity.

2.2.Digital Communities, UGC, and Co-Creation Mechanisms

Digital communities play a significant role in beauty branding, as cosmetics consumers frequently rely on the experiences of others before forming their own opinions about brands or products. In the beauty and skincare sectors, purchasing decisions are shaped by recommendations, tutorials, shared routines, and online discussions. Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) conceptualize brand communities as groups of consumers who are connected through a shared attachment to a brand. (Brand Community, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2001). The authors further explain that such communities are built after believing that they share mutual rituals with the brand. This concept is pertinent to cosmetics, where consumers congregate not only around specific brands but also around shared skin concerns, beauty routines, aesthetics, values, and influencer personalities. Within the cosmetics industry, communities manifest in various forms, including TikTok skincare discussions in comment sections, Instagram Questions on stories, YouTube review channels, Reddit forums, and other online groups. Digital platforms enable consumers to exchange advice or compare product experiences. Consequently, brand meaning is co-created by both companies and consumers through ongoing conversations, interpretations, and shared practices. Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould (2009) show that brand communities create value through the repeated practices, interactions, and contributions of their members (How Brand Community Practices Create Value, *Journal of Marketing*, 2009). In cosmetics, this value emerges when consumers share routines, recommend shades, compare alternatives, display product results, or provide usage instructions. Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas further demonstrate that “engagement in online brand communities can be cognitive, emotional, and behavioral” (Consumer Engagement in Online Brand Communities: A Social Media Perspective, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 2015). To start with, cognitive engagement is clear when consumers look for information, analyze ingredients, or compare products. Emotional engagement arises when they experience trust and feel a sense of belonging. Second, behavioral engagement is reflected in comments, reviews, content creation or product recommendations. Reviews, tutorials, “get ready with me” videos, before-and-after posts, unboxings, event vlogs, and consumer photos provide potential buyers with insights into product performance across diverse looks, textures, ages and lifestyles. User-generated content is also crucial in that sense since it often appears more authentic than official brand campaigns. UGC also serves as social proof. When consumers voluntarily share their experiences without expecting anything in return, brands may be perceived as more credible and culturally relevant. However, UGC does not inherently confer authenticity. It

is a tool that supports authenticity when it appears spontaneous and honest, and mostly consistent with the brand's identity. This may be a challenge for many cosmetic brands since they need to encourage UGC without creating an impression of manipulating consumers. For small or emerging brands, it may seem difficult to increase credibility without extensive advertising that will push for visibility. For these brands, authenticity can be reinforced through coherent storytelling, credible partnerships, and genuine collaborations.

To conclude, digital communities and user-generated content are crucial for cosmetic brands since they shape perceptions of authenticity. Social media platforms enable consumers to confirm, question, or reinterpret a brand's universe. Through influencers, partnerships and experiential events, a brand may or may not be perceived as credible and genuine, according to its initiatives.

2.3.The Authenticity–Aspirational Tension in Cosmetics Branding

Cosmetics branding is defined by the tension between aspiration and authenticity. Before the rise of social media and digital communities, beauty brands have always focused on promoting confidence and perfect skin. Nowadays, consumers expect brands to be transparent and genuine. The challenge is to credibly combine aspiration with authenticity, especially since cosmetics are closely tied to personal identity. Escalas and Bettman (2005) show that “brands help consumers construct self-concepts” (Self-Construal, Reference Groups, and Brand Meaning, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2005). Cosmetics, applied directly to the body, become part of how individuals express themselves and shape how they are perceived. For Generation Z, this identity aspect is especially significant. According to Euromonitor’s, “Gen Z values personal expression, individualism, wellness, and comfort in their own skin, yet they remain influenced by social pressures and external opinions” (The Gen Z Beauty Consumer”, *Euromonitor International*, 2022). This finding creates a paradox since young consumers are seeking authenticity and self-expression through beauty but also face constant comparison and standards online. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok allow brands to create compelling visuals, but also expose them to criticism if their content appears unrealistic or exclusionary. Conversely, body positivity and realistic beauty content promote acceptance, diversity, and self-compassion. Aspirational content is effective when it inspires and differentiates, but it can backfire if seen as artificial. For example, flawless skin campaigns or

as we call them nowadays “glass skin”, may generate desire to look the same but also can create skepticism if consumers suspect excessive retouching and artificial content. Similarly, luxury events can elevate a brand's image to the public but may seem exclusionary if not genuinely connected to the brand's community. To limit this paradox, brands do not need to abandon aspiration but make it believable by showcasing real skin and honest opinions that reflect inclusivity. A new trend has emerged, and it is the rise of de-influencing. Young beauty consumers do not necessarily reject influencer marketing itself. What they tend to question is the repetition of sponsored recommendations, exaggerated product claims, and partnerships that appear mainly commercial rather than sincere (This Post Is Sponsored: Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure on Persuasion Knowledge and Electronic Word of Mouth in the Context of Facebook, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2017). An influencer can increase visibility and desirability, but only when the collaboration feels coherent with the brand's image, values, and target consumers.

The same logic applies to experiential events. Pop-ups, masterclasses, and brand trips can make the brand universe more desirable by creating “sensory, emotional, and social experiences around the brand” (Schmitt, Experiential Marketing, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 1999). However, these events also need to remain close enough to consumers' expectations and lifestyles to avoid appearing artificial. For beauty brands, the challenge is to create desire without losing credibility. A brand that relies only on aspiration may seem too staged, while a brand that focuses only on authenticity may struggle to generate excitement. Influencer partnerships and experiential events help manage this tension because they connect the brand to people, situations, and shared experiences. Their impact, however, depends on coherence: the influencer, the event concept, the content produced, and the brand's values must all support the same narrative. In this sense, brand authenticity is not created through isolated campaigns, but through a broader system of social media visibility, community interaction, user-generated content, influencer credibility, and experiential storytelling.

2.4.Generation Z Consumer Behavior and Authenticity Expectations

Generation Z, commonly referred to as Gen Z, represents individuals born between 1997 and 2012. This cohort has grown up in a digital environment where social media is integral to daily life. Consequently, Gen Z is often characterized as a digital-native generation, accustomed to

discovering, evaluating, and discussing brands through online content. In the context of this study, Gen Z is particularly relevant because beauty products are closely associated with identity, self-expression, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Members of this generation do not consume beauty products solely for functional benefits; rather, cosmetics serve as tools for expressing personality, lifestyle, and aesthetic preferences. As a result, Gen Z consumers are attentive to whether a brand appears inclusive, transparent, relatable, and consistent with authentic consumer experiences. This generational profile is central to the research question, which examines how influencer affiliations and experiential events influence perceived brand authenticity in the cosmetics sector. Generation Z plays a pivotal role in transforming cosmetic branding through social media. As digital-native consumers, Gen Z is influenced by a continuous stream of TikTok videos, Instagram Reels, influencer routines, product reviews, and viral beauty trends. In France, this context is particularly significant. According to DataReportal, “France had 50.4 million social media user identities in January 2025, representing 75.7% of the population, with internet penetration reaching 95.2%” (*DataReportal*, 2025). These figures show that social media is a primary environment where young consumers encounter, evaluate, compare, and discuss cosmetic products. This shift occurs as beauty consumers become more discerning and skeptical. The *State of Beauty 2025* report by McKinsey and The Business of Fashion observes that beauty consumers are increasingly “skeptical of hype and focused on whether products genuinely deliver value” (McKinsey and The Business of Fashion, *The state of Beauty 2025*). For cosmetics brands, this indicates that attractive visuals alone are insufficient.

In this context, reliability has become one of the strongest markers of authenticity and beauty communication. Highly scripted or overly perfect content can create skepticism, whereas formats such as “get ready with me” videos, reviews, unfiltered skin updates, and de-influencing content make the evaluation process feel more immediate and concrete. These formats are persuasive because they translate brand claims into everyday situations. For example, a foundation is not only described as long-wearing; it is shown being worn for eight hours. A serum is not only presented as hydrating; it is integrated into a morning or evening routine. A lipstick is not simply displayed in campaign imagery; it is tested during eating, drinking, or social activities. In this way, authenticity is established through visible proof.

TikTok and Instagram play complementary functions in consumer behavior. TikTok is associated with discovery, experimentation, humor, trend diffusion, peer-to-peer recommendation, and rapid

product evaluation. The platform's diverse formats foster the perception that beauty knowledge is shared by ordinary users rather than dictated by brands. The rise of de-influencing is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates that Gen Z consumers do not passively accept influencer recommendations. They expect creators to critique overhyped products, caution against unnecessary purchases, and protect audiences from purely commercial persuasion. In contrast, Instagram is more closely linked to aesthetic consistency, brand universe, visual identity, and aspirational storytelling. For cosmetics brands, Instagram facilitates the construction of a coherent image through campaign visuals, influencer events, product launches, founder content, tutorials, stories, and reposted user-generated content (UGC). While TikTok often conveys authenticity through spontaneity and trial, Instagram does so through continuity and coherence. A beauty brand can utilize Instagram to showcase its identity, values, community, and lifestyle, while TikTok can demonstrate product relevance in a more immediate, conversational manner. For Gen Z, the most persuasive brands are those that balance these two approaches: they are aspirational enough to be desirable, yet relatable enough to be trusted. For cosmetics brands, this suggests that authenticity on social media should be conceptualized as a combination of coherence, transparency, relatability, and demonstrable proof. A brand is perceived as authentic when product claims are substantiated by real demonstrations, influencers are selected for genuine alignment, paid partnerships are transparent, and the community participates in meaning-making through reviews, comments, tutorials, and UGC. In this context, Gen Z consumers are not merely recipients of brand messages; they act as evaluators, amplifiers, and, at times, correctors of brand discourse. Therefore, within this research, Generation Z should be regarded as a key interpretive audience for cosmetic brand authenticity. These consumers assess beauty brands through the interplay of brand-controlled content, influencer-generated content, and user-generated content. Their perception of authenticity is shaped by the interplay among brand messaging and how the broader social ecosystem confirms, challenges, or reinterprets that message.

This section thus establishes a connection between the social media context of beauty branding and the subsequent literature review on strategic collaborations. Influencer partnerships and experiential events can serve as powerful mechanisms for authenticity, but only when they generate content that is coherent, transparent, relatable, and credible within the everyday social media practices of Gen Z consumers.

3. Strategic Collaborations as Authenticity Devices

In today's cosmetics industry, collaborations have become an important way for brands to gain visibility, credibility, and cultural relevance. Beauty brands are no longer evaluated only through their own advertising or official product claims. They are judged within a wider social media environment made up of influencers, experts, micro-creators, consumers, reviews, tutorials, comment sections, user-generated content, and event-based posts. This means that brand image is increasingly shaped by several voices at the same time, not only by the brand itself.

Strategic collaborations should therefore be understood as more than promotional tools. They create a connection between the brand and the communities that follow the creator, expert, or public figure involved. When a cosmetic brand collaborates with someone outside the company, it benefits from part of that person's identity, credibility, and relationship with their audience. This is why influencer partnerships can strengthen perceived authenticity when there is "a clear congruence between the influencer, the product, and the target consumer" (Belanche et al., 2021). In this case, the collaboration feels consistent rather than forced, and the influencer appears as a legitimate voice for the brand.

However, this transfer of credibility remains fragile. If the partnership appears too scripted, overly commercial, or disconnected from the influencer's usual content and values, it can create distance instead of trust. Research on sponsored content shows that when consumers recognize the persuasive intention behind a message, this can "activate persuasion knowledge and increase skepticism toward the content" (Boerman et al., *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2017). For cosmetics brands, this means that collaboration choices must be carefully aligned with the brand's identity, the influencer's image, and the expectations of the audience. A partnership can support authenticity only when it appears coherent, transparent, and sincere.

3.1. Influencer marketing: credibility, fit, transparency, and perceived sincerity

Influencer marketing can be defined as the use of social media personalities to communicate brand messages, present products, and influence consumer perceptions through content that appears closer to everyday experience than traditional advertising. Campbell and Farrell explain that influencers create value through "three functional components: the audience, the endorser, and the social media manager" (Campbell and Farrell, *More Than Meets the Eye: The Functional*

Components Underlying Influencer Marketing, *Business Horizons*, 2020). This means that influencers do not only provide access to followers. They also give brands a human voice, adapt communication to platform codes, and transform commercial messages into content that audiences are more likely to watch, save, share, and discuss.

In the cosmetics sector, this role is particularly important because beauty products are often difficult to evaluate through a simple advertisement. A cleanser, serum, foundation, or lipstick is judged through texture, application, skin reaction, comfort, routine integration, visible results, and long-term use. Influencers make these elements more tangible by placing products in practical situations. A skincare creator may show how a powder becomes foam, how a cleanser feels on the skin, how a serum fits into a morning routine, or how makeup performs throughout the day. These demonstrations can make a product claim more credible because the audience does not only hear the promise; it sees the product being used.

The effectiveness of influencer marketing depends strongly on perceived credibility. Ohanian's source credibility model identifies "expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness" as central dimensions of an endorser's credibility (Ohanian, Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness, *Journal of Advertising*, 1990). In beauty, these dimensions take specific forms. Trustworthiness is linked to selective and honest recommendations. Expertise is associated with knowledge of skincare, ingredients, skin types, makeup techniques, or product application. Attractiveness does not only refer to physical appearance, but also to the ability to embody an aspirational lifestyle, aesthetic, or brand universe.

However, credibility does not function in the same way for all influencer profiles. Macro-influencers can generate broad visibility and social proof, but their large audience may also make partnerships feel more commercial. By contrast, micro-influencers, expert creators, estheticians, skincare educators, and niche beauty profiles may generate stronger proximity because their audiences often perceive them as more accessible and specialized. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders show that "a high number of followers can increase perceived popularity," but that "a larger audience does not automatically produce stronger brand outcomes" (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, Marketing through Instagram Influencers: The Impact of Number of Followers and Product

Divergence on Brand Attitude, *International Journal of Advertising*, 2017). For differentiated or expert-positioned beauty products, mid-sized or niche creators may therefore be more relevant than highly visible influencers, especially when the objective is to build trust rather than only awareness.

The case of Feï Paris illustrates this strategic issue. For a small French dermocosmetic brand, immediate collaboration with major lifestyle influencers may not be the most coherent approach. Authenticity can be built more effectively through a limited number of voices that are credible, aligned, and able to explain the product beyond its aesthetic appeal. These voices may include skincare experts, dermocosmetic consultants, estheticians, cosmetic science educators, sensitive-skin creators, acne-prone-skin creators, or lifestyle micro-influencers whose audiences are already interested in minimalist, science-informed, and sensorial skincare. This approach is consistent with Feï Paris's target segments, which include "informed women aged 25 to 45, consumers with sensitive or reactive skin, and acne-prone consumers" (Feï Paris, *Internal Strategic Document*, 2026). These consumers are likely to seek reassurance, education, and evidence rather than purely aspirational visibility. Influencer partnerships should therefore be selected according to credibility, expertise, audience alignment, and consistency with the brand's positioning around skin balance, microbiome health, simplicity, and "cosmétique du vivant" (Feï Paris, *Internal Strategic Document*, 2026).

Feï Paris's product positioning reinforces this need for educational collaboration. The brand presents its powder cleanser as a "4-in-1 product for the face, body, hands, and hair" and highlights its role in respecting the skin barrier and microbiome (Feï Paris website). Its communication also emphasizes a natural formula, Made in France production, and a scientific approach. This creates a specific communication challenge. The brand cannot rely only on beautiful visuals or lifestyle promotion, because its credibility depends on the capacity to explain why the product exists, how it works, and for whom it is relevant. For Feï Paris, the most relevant path appears to be a hybrid model combining scientific credibility with relatable skincare routines. Collaborators should not simply present the product as beautiful or innovative. They should be able to explain when to use it, who it is designed for, how the powder transforms into foam, why the format is different, and how it fits into a narrative of skin barrier protection, microbiome balance, sensitive skin, and minimalist routines. In this sense, the most valuable influencer partnerships for Feï Paris are not

necessarily the most visible ones, but those that can make the brand's scientific and sensorial positioning understandable, credible, and emotionally relatable.

3.2.Parasocial relationships and perceived intimacy

Beyond credibility, influencers also remain persuasive because they can create a feeling of closeness with their audience. On social media, this feeling can become stronger because creators regularly share personal routines, everyday moments, opinions, and behind-the-scenes content. In beauty, this connection is especially relevant because cosmetic content often touches on personal subjects such as skincare routines, acne, skin sensitivity, makeup transformations, confidence, and self-image. As a result, consumers may trust a creator not only because of their knowledge, but also because they feel familiar with them. The recommendation can then appear less like a commercial message and more like advice from someone they already know.

This dynamic is supported by Sokolova and Kefi, whose study on beauty and fashion influencers in France shows that “credibility and parasocial interaction are linked to purchase intention” (*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*,2020). This suggests that influencers need to build trust, perceived similarity, and emotional proximity with their audience to remain persuasive. However, this closeness can also make collaborations riskier. When followers feel attached to a creator, they may react more negatively if a partnership appears forced, overly commercial, or inconsistent with the creator's usual identity.

In the case of Feï Paris, Célia Bennouar² represents a specific type of collaborator. She is not positioned as a general lifestyle influencer, but rather as a dermocosmetic specialist and skin consultant. Between January and April 2026, the collaboration between Célia Bennouar and Feï Paris became the brand's strongest sales channel, representing 35% of total revenue over the period (see Figure 4). This result highlights the commercial importance of a well-aligned influencer

² In the case of Feï Paris, Célia Bennouar acts as the brand's main ambassador and dermocosmetics expert. She recommends Feï products to her own clients and redirects them to the brand's website through a dedicated promotional code. Orders placed with this code are attributed to her, and she receives a 10% commission on each sale.

partnership, as Célia’s contribution exceeded other channels such as e-commerce, the physical shop, B2B, and practitioners.

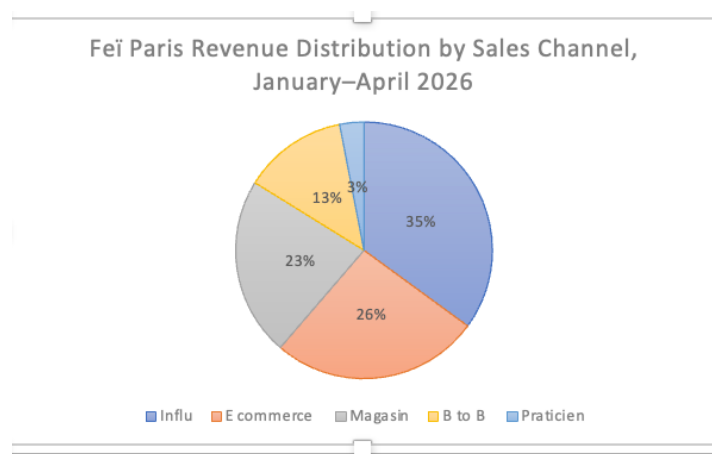


Figure 4: Fei Paris Revenue Breakdown by Sales Channel, January–April 2026

3.3.Sponsored content disclosures and consumer skepticism

Authenticity in influencer marketing is strongly connected to transparency. Consumers are increasingly aware that influencers may have commercial relationships with brands, whether through payment, gifted products, invitations, affiliate links, or other forms of compensation. This awareness can lead audiences to identify the promotional intention behind a post and to evaluate the message more critically. Boerman, Willemsen and Van Der Aa show that “when consumers recognize the advertising intent of sponsored content, this can activate persuasion knowledge, create more distrustful attitudes toward the post, and reduce electronic word-of-mouth intention in some cases” (*Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2017). Transparency therefore has a double effect. On the one hand, it makes the commercial nature of the content clear. On the other hand, it also reminds consumers that the recommendation may be influenced by a paid or contractual relationship. However, hiding a partnership is even more problematic, because the discovery of an undisclosed collaboration can damage trust and weaken the perceived sincerity of both the influencer and the brand. In the beauty sector, where credibility is closely linked to skin health, product claims, and consumer confidence, transparency should be treated as a condition of authenticity rather than a simple legal requirement. Disclosures such as “commercial collaboration,” “paid partnership,” “product gifted,” or “invited by the brand” can be accepted by audiences when the collaboration

feels coherent with the influencer’s identity and when the content provides real value. This is particularly relevant in France, where influencer marketing is increasingly regulated. French Law No. 2023-451 of 9 June 2023 defines commercial influence as “the activity of individuals or entities who use their reputation with an audience to communicate online content promoting goods, services, or causes in exchange for an economic benefit or a benefit in kind” (French Law No. 2023-451, *Légifrance*, 2023). The law also connects influencer activity to existing advertising and consumer protection rules and restricts certain types of promotion, including content that presents products or methods as comparable, preferable, or substitutable to therapeutic acts or medical prescriptions. For cosmetics brands, this regulatory context reinforces the need for clear disclosure, substantiated claims, and careful wording. The ARPP³ recommends responsible practices through its influence framework and certification, which aim to help creators understand “the legal and ethical rules that apply to advertising communication on social media” (*Responsible Influence Certificate*, ARPP, 2025).

For example, if a cosmetic claim states that a product “helps maintain skin comfort,” an influencer should not reformulate it as “cures eczema” or “replaces a dermatologist treatment.” This type of exaggeration could mislead consumers and move the message away from cosmetic communication into a medical or therapeutic claim. As a result, brands should provide creators with clear claim guidelines, approved wording, and a list of expressions that must be avoided. This allows the influencer to remain authentic in tone while ensuring that the content stays transparent, accurate, and compliant.

Therefore, transparency should be regarded as encompassing more than legal disclosure. It involves openness regarding the commercial relationship, the nature of the collaboration, the specific product claims, the creator’s genuine experience, and the boundaries of the recommendation. Transparent collaborations can remain persuasive when they are informative, consistent, and

³ ARPP refers to the Autorité de Régulation Professionnelle de la Publicité, the French professional advertising self-regulatory authority. ARPP provides ethical guidelines for advertising and influencer marketing regarding transparency, honesty, and the clear identification of commercial partnerships.

truthful. For Generation Z consumers in particular, transparency may enhance perceptions of authenticity by demonstrating that both the brand and the creator respect the audience's discernment.

3.4. Influencer–brand congruence and value alignment as authenticity signals

The final element that determines whether a collaboration strengthens or weakens authenticity is congruence. Influencer–brand congruence refers to the fit between the influencer, the product, the brand identity, and the expectations of the audience. A collaboration appears authentic when consumers can easily understand why a specific creator is associated with a specific brand.

In cosmetics, this fit should not be evaluated only through follower count or visual appeal. Product fit matters because the influencer must have a credible reason to use the product. For example, a creator focused on sensitive skin is more relevant for a gentle dermocosmetic cleanser than a creator mainly known for heavy makeup looks. Expertise fit is also important for science-led skincare brands, as collaborators should be able to explain ingredients, skin barrier concerns, product use, and routine logic. Audience fit ensures that the influencer's followers correspond to the brand's target consumers, while value fit means that the creator's image does not contradict the brand's principles, such as transparency, minimalism, skin respect, or scientific rigor. Finally, repeated collaborations over time can appear more authentic than isolated paid posts, because they suggest a more stable relationship between the creator and the brand.

For Fei Paris, the strongest form of congruence is located at the intersection of science, skin respect, minimalist routines, and sensory innovation. This is consistent with the brand's repositioning around "cosmétique du vivant," which presents the skin as a living ecosystem and places microbiome balance, skin barrier protection, and essential routines at the center of the brand narrative (Fei Paris, *Internal Strategic Document*, 2026). Its powder-to-foam cleanser also creates both an opportunity and a challenge. The format is distinctive, memorable, and easy to demonstrate on social media, but it also requires explanation because consumers may not immediately understand how a powder cleanser works or why it is different from a standard liquid cleanser.

For this reason, the most relevant collaborators for Fei Paris are those who can turn product novelty into clear consumer value. A dermocosmetic specialist can explain the product's role in a skincare routine. A sensitive-skin or acne-prone-skin creator can show daily use and tolerance. A sustainable beauty creator can highlight the waterless format, refillable packaging, and reduced consumption. A lifestyle creator can present the product as a practical, minimalist, and travel-friendly object. Founder-led content can also support authenticity by explaining the origin of the product and the logic behind the brand's repositioning.

Since its creation in 2022, Fei Paris has faced the challenge of building legitimacy in a saturated French cosmetics market where many brands already claim to be natural, scientific, clean, expert, and authentic. In this context, collaborations are not only visibility tools. They help answer key questions: who validates the brand, who uses the product, who explains it, and who makes it culturally relevant?

This discussion leads to the next section on experiential events. While influencer collaborations help generate content and trust, events make the brand experience more tangible. Events are physical proof and storytelling material that can later be translated into digital content. Collaborations and events should therefore be understood as connected parts of the same authenticity system: influencers bring intimacy and audience trust, while events provide experience, education, proof, and narrative substance.

4. Experiential Events as Authenticity Amplifiers

While influencer partnerships enable cosmetic brands to leverage credibility, intimacy, and social relevance from selected creators, experiential events render authenticity more tangible. Within the beauty industry, brand promises are seldom assessed solely through verbal communication. Consumers seek to engage with products by touching textures, smelling formulas, observing finishes on skin, asking questions, comparing with other offerings, and witnessing the reactions of fellow consumers. Consequently, experiential events have gained particular significance in cosmetics, as they convert abstract claims such as “effective,” “clean,” “expert,” or “sensory” into concrete, lived experiences. For the purposes of this research, experiential events are defined as temporary or permanent brand experiences, including pop-ups, masterclasses, product launch events, skincare

consultations, brand trips, workshops, in-store activations, and creator-led community engagements. The role of experiential marketing has evolved alongside the development of social media. In *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*, Gilmore and Pine (2007) introduced the concept of the “experience economy,” asserting that companies increasingly compete by staging memorable experiences rather than solely selling products or services. For cosmetic brands, such events can function as authenticity amplifiers. While they do not independently generate authenticity, they can reinforce it when the event provides consumers with evidence that the brand’s claims align with its products, values, personnel, and community. A successful beauty event extends beyond visual appeal on social media platforms; it enables consumers to engage with the brand’s identity in a tangible manner.

4.1. Experiential marketing in beauty

Experiential marketing within the cosmetics industry encompasses a range of formats, from highly public pop-up events to personalized skincare consultations. Pop-ups have emerged as prominent platforms in beauty marketing, integrating product testing, scenography, content creation, and social media engagement. Their temporary nature generates urgency and Fear of Missing Out⁴(FOMO), while enabling consumers to immerse themselves in the brand environment. Sephora’s SEPHORiA event exemplifies the rise of experiential communication in the beauty sector. The 2024 Paris edition, hosted at Maison de la Mutualité, offered an immersive experience into the world of Sephora with brand activations. According to FashionNetwork, the previous Paris edition attracted 3,600 visitors, indicating that such events serve as significant public-facing marketing tools capable of increasing brand engagement. Sephora thus functions as an experiential platform, allowing brands to materialize their identity, facilitate product testing, connect consumers with professionals, and foster social media content. The event bridges physical experience and digital visibility, as on-site activities are designed for photos, videos and user-generated content. SEPHORiA demonstrates how experiential marketing develops perceived authenticity, as consumers engage with the brands and discuss their experiences afterwards.

⁴ FOMO refers to the feeling of “Fear of Missing Out,” meaning the feeling that others are experiencing something desirable, exclusive, or socially rewarding without the individual being part of it.

Rhode Skin offers another illustration, utilizing pop-up activations that integrate beauty with food and lifestyle elements. The brand's official events page details the "rhode bakery" activation in Sydney, organized to mark its launch at MECCA. The event featured pastries, coffee, branded food items, and a stamp card connected to product samples at selected MECCA stores. Such activations demonstrate that beauty events are evolving beyond traditional product demonstrations, creating lifestyle experiences that attendees are motivated to photograph, share, and remember. Collectively, these examples indicate that experiential marketing in cosmetics manifests in diverse formats. However, the most authentic events consistently exhibit three key characteristics: they facilitate direct product engagement for consumers, visibly communicate brand values through environment, personnel, discourse, and service, and generate content that persists and circulates beyond the conclusion of the event.

4.2.Events as proof and storytelling material for social platforms

In a crowded cosmetics market, many brands make similar claims such as clean, effective, natural, scientific, inclusive, sensory, expert, or innovative. The challenge is not just making these claims, but making them credible. Events address this by providing opportunities for promises to be tested, observed, and shared. In skincare, demonstrating proof is essential. Product claims gain credibility when consumers can see the texture, ask questions, receive advice, and understand how the product fits into their routine.

Events provide brands with storytelling opportunities. A well-designed event generates content for social media, extending its impact beyond the physical space. This is why beauty events are often created with digital platforms in mind. A pop-up serves as both a physical venue and a visual script, where every element can trigger content creation. Consumers are encouraged to experience and document the brand, bridging experiential marketing and user-generated content.

Sephora's SEPHORiA exemplifies this hybrid approach. The event combined product testing, brand booths, masterclasses, and immersive experiences, while generating significant social content from visitors, influencers, brands, and media. This transformed product discovery into a collective experience, placing consumers in a beauty "playground" within a vibrant community.

4.3.UGC generated by events: social validation and co-created meaning

User-generated content is a key outcome of experiential beauty events. When attendees share posts about an event, they extend the brand experience to those who could not attend. This content includes TikTok vlogs, “come with me” videos, product testing, event recaps, and unboxing of goodie bags.

UGC matters because it provides social validation. A brand message produced by the brand is expected to be positive. A post produced by a consumer or creator can feel more spontaneous, especially when it includes personal impressions, small imperfections, honest comments, or practical details. In cosmetics, this is particularly powerful because consumers often trust visible use, peer recommendation, and routine-based content more than abstract claims. *Vogue Business* highlights that in-person beauty activations have regained importance because they create shareable cultural moments and digital momentum (“Inside Beauty’s Digital Hype Chase”, *Vogue Business*, 2025). It also highlights that beauty consumers value authentic, community-driven content rather than relying only on traditional influencer marketing. However, UGC is valuable since it allows consumers to participate in meaning-making. When a consumer films a product demonstration, comments on the texture, explains who the product is for, or compares the experience to another brand, they are not simply repeating the brand message. They are interpreting it. This process is central to perceived authenticity because it shows that the brand is not fully in control of the conversation. Thus, events are co-creation mechanisms. The brand creates the setting, but consumers and influencers create the social meaning. For example, a Sephora event may be designed by the retailer, but the final perception of the event is shaped by visitor videos, creator rankings, product hauls, live reactions, comments, and post-event reviews. This also means that events carry risk. If the experience feels superficial, overly exclusive, poorly organized, or disconnected from the product, UGC can expose that weakness. A luxurious event may create beautiful content, but it can damage authenticity if consumers perceive it as a waste of budget or as a way to impress influencers rather than serve real customers. Authentic UGC depends on the event's design. If the event gives attendees something meaningful to learn, test, feel, or discuss, the content is more likely to appear sincere. If the event only provides a decorative background and a gift bag, the resulting content may look attractive but weak in credibility.

Overall, UGC demonstrates that experiential events enhance authenticity only when they provide consumers with genuine opportunities to test, interpret, and share, rather than offering merely a visually appealing but superficial brand moment.

4.4.Integrating influencer collaborations and events

The most effective authenticity strategy is to connect influencer collaborations and experiential events within the same system. Influencers bring audience access, trust, and a sense of proximity, while events create direct experience, proof, and content opportunities. Together, they help transform brand claims into stories that can be seen, tested, shared, and socially validated. This is consistent with the idea that influencers create value through their role as “audience holders, endorsers, and social media content managers” (Campbell and Farrell, *More Than Meets the Eye: The Functional Components Underlying Influencer Marketing*, *Business Horizons*, 2020). It also reflects experiential marketing theory, which considers consumers not only as rational decision-makers, but also as people looking for “sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational experiences” (Schmitt, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 1999).

This integration can be understood in four stages. The first stage is pre-event credibility building. Before the event, the brand selects creators whose identity, audience, and values are aligned with the product. These creators can introduce the brand, explain why the collaboration makes sense, and prepare their audience for the product story. For skincare brands, this stage is particularly useful when the product is technical or innovative, because it allows creators to explain the problem the product addresses before showing the experience itself.

The second stage is the event experience. At this point, creators and selected consumers interact directly with the brand through product testing, expert explanations, sensory discovery, and moments of exchange. The purpose of the event should not only be to entertain attendees, but to give them credible material to understand and share.

The third stage is content creation and UGC. The event should make content production easy without making it feel forced. Good lighting, clear product stations, simple demonstrations, and freedom of expression help creators and attendees share the experience in their own way. This is

important because online brand engagement includes “cognitive, emotional, and behavioural participation” (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, Consumer Engagement in Online Brand Communities: A Social Media Perspective, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 2015). Authenticity is weakened when every creator repeats the same scripted message, but it is strengthened when each person interprets the event through their own voice and experience.

The fourth stage is post-event amplification. After the event, the brand can extend the value of the experience by reposting UGC, answering questions, sharing short educational clips, publishing testimonials, and turning the event into a longer content series. This stage is essential because the event does not only matter for the people who attended it. Its broader impact comes from the audiences who later discover it through influencer posts, reviews, comments, stories, and shared content.

In cosmetics, where trust depends on texture, product use, expertise, visible results, and social proof, events help make the brand promise more concrete. When they are combined with well-chosen influencer collaborations, they become a way to turn product claims into credible and shareable stories. The most authentic event strategy is therefore not necessarily the most expensive one, but the one that best connects the product, the brand narrative, expert knowledge, and the consumer experience.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

This study explores the significance of influencers and experiential events in shaping perceived brand authenticity within the cosmetics industry. Specifically, it investigates whether partnerships and events influence key dimensions, including credibility, integrity, continuity, and symbolism, as defined by the Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) scale (Morhart et al., 2015). This research extends prior work by examining perceived brand authenticity as a multidimensional consumer judgment influenced by factors such as influencer fit, transparency, and experiential proof. Drawing upon the literature reviewed in Part II, this research pursues four primary objectives.

- 1) Measure perceived brand authenticity: Quantify how Generation Z consumers evaluate perceived brand authenticity of cosmetics brands using items inspired by the PBA scale (Morhart et al., 2015) across its four dimensions: credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity.
- 2) Assess the impact of influencer partnerships: Examining whether specific influencer-related factors such as credibility, influencer brand congruence, parasocial relationship, and brand-sponsored content transparency positively affect Gen Z consumers in the cosmetics industry.
- 3) Evaluate the impact of experiential events: Examine whether exposure to or awareness of experiential events, such as pop-ups, masterclasses, or brand trips, contributes to higher perceived brand authenticity through mechanisms including experiential proof, user-generated content co-creation, and social validation.
- 4) Explore downstream consumer outcomes: Determine whether perceived brand authenticity positively predicts downstream consumer outcomes, specifically brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention.

Guided by these four objectives, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Influencer credibility and brand fit are positively associated with perceived brand authenticity.
- H2: Experiential event value is positively associated with perceived brand authenticity.
- H3: UGC and social proof are positively associated with perceived brand authenticity.
- H4: Perceived brand authenticity is positively associated with brand trust.

H5: Perceived brand authenticity is positively associated with engagement intention.

H6: Perceived brand authenticity is positively associated with purchase intention.

2. Research Methodology and Survey

This study employs a quantitative primary data collection method using an online survey developed on Qualtrics. A survey was deemed appropriate as the objective is to collect measurable data from a sample of young consumers and to analyze the influence of influencer partnerships and experiential events on perceived brand authenticity within the cosmetics sector. Given the research focus on social media, influencer content, beauty communities, and digital brand experiences, an online questionnaire was the most suitable format to reach respondents active on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was administered anonymously, and participation was voluntary, enabling respondents to express their opinions freely regarding influencers, sponsored content, cosmetics events, trust, engagement, and purchase intentions.

For the purposes of this study, the target population was operationalized as young adult consumers aged 18 to 30, with a focus on Generation Z and adjacent young consumers highly exposed to social media beauty content. This group was selected because young consumers in this age range are digitally active and frequently exposed to beauty content, influencer marketing, paid partnerships, brand events, and user-generated content on social media. This focus aligns with the research question, which seeks to understand how young consumers interpret the authenticity of cosmetics brands employing influencer collaborations and experiential events as communication tools. The sampling strategy utilized non-probability methods, specifically convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The survey was initially distributed to individuals directly accessible to the researcher, including EDHEC classmates, friends, colleagues, and personal contacts. Initial respondents were encouraged to share the survey with others in their networks who matched the target audience. Distribution occurred through digital channels such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. A total of 146 responses were collected via Qualtrics before data export and cleaning.

Regarding survey structure and content, the questionnaire was organized progressively (see Appendix 1) and divided into nine sections. The first section introduced the research question and focus, and obtained respondents' consent to participate. The second section collected screening

and demographic information, particularly age, to ensure alignment with the target population of young adult consumers aged 18 to 30. Respondents under 18 or over 30 were automatically redirected to a stop block, which informed them of ineligibility and terminated the survey; their responses were excluded from the final dataset. This filtering process ensured that the data collected was relevant and focused solely on the intended sample. The third section examined respondents' social media and beauty content habits, including frequency of social media use, exposure to beauty content, preferred platforms, and whether they follow beauty creators. The fourth section presented a scenario forming the basis for the remainder of the survey. Respondents were asked to imagine a young cosmetic brand introduced through a beauty creator's social media account. The creator was described as testing a powder-to-foam cleanser, observing the product transformation, listening to a skincare expert, and sharing honest impressions with the audience. The content was explicitly presented as a paid partnership, and the creator shared sponsored content while attending the brand's event. This scenario was included to reflect the core focus of the thesis: the combination of influencer partnerships and experiential events as potential drivers of perceived brand authenticity in cosmetics. The remaining five sections measured the main variables of the study. The final sections utilized a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," allowing respondents to express varying degrees of agreement and facilitating analysis. Section five assessed perceptions of the influencer partnership, such as trustworthiness, expertise, and the fit between the creator and the brand. Section six measured perceptions of the experiential event, specifically whether the event enhanced the brand's realism, whether the product demonstration substantiated the brand's claims, and whether the presence of an expert increased credibility. Section seven examined user-generated content and social proof by assessing whether content shared by event attendees and other users made the brand appear more authentic and convincing. Section eight measured perceived brand authenticity, the central focus of the study, including items related to credibility, integrity, symbolism, continuity, and overall perceived authenticity.

3. Data analysis

A total of 146 responses were collected using the Qualtrics questionnaire. After data collection, responses were exported to a CSV file and transferred to Microsoft Excel. The initial step involved data cleaning, which included removing incomplete responses, participants who terminated the survey early, and those who did not meet the age requirement, as the study targets Generation Z

consumers. The cleaned CSV file was uploaded to IBM SPSS Software, where necessary modifications were made, such as adjusting variable types. Nominal variables were converted to scale variables for Likert-scale questions. Likert-scale items were coded from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to facilitate quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to present respondent profiles, including age, social media usage, and interest in cosmetics. Additionally, descriptive statistics summarize the average scores for key variables measured in the survey: influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, user-generated content (UGC) and social proof, perceived brand authenticity, brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention.

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether the main variables were positively related. Specifically, the analysis assessed whether influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, and user-generated content/social proof were associated with higher perceived brand authenticity. Regression analyses were then performed to test the research hypotheses. The first regression evaluated whether influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, and UGC/social proof positively influenced perceived brand authenticity. Additional regression analyses examined whether perceived brand authenticity positively affected brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention. The data analysis followed the research model by first identifying the factors contributing to perceived brand authenticity, then examining whether this authenticity enhanced consumer trust, engagement, and purchase intention.

IV. RESULTS: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

As outlined in Chapter III, the data collected for this study is quantitative. The dataset is diverse and facilitates insights into the key aspects of the research topic. In total, 146 responses were collected, of which 104 were deemed valid.

The initial stage of the analysis involves descriptive statistics. This step offers an overview of respondents' profiles, social media behaviors, exposure to beauty and skincare content, and familiarity with beauty creators.

The age distribution shows that most respondents are aged 21-24, representing 49.0% of valid responses (see Appendix 2). Respondents aged 25-27 and 28-30 each account for 21.2% of the sample, while those aged 18-20 account for 8.7%. Overall, the sample is primarily composed of young adults aged 21 to 24. In terms of social media usage, the results show a very high level of digital activity (see Appendix 3). A large majority of respondents use social media several times a day, representing 87.5% of valid responses. Only 8.7% use social media once a day, 2.9% several times a week, and 1.0% once a week. This confirms that the population sample is highly relevant to the research question focusing on influencer partnerships and social media-based cosmetics communication. Furthermore, in descriptive statistics, Figure 5 presents respondents' relationship with beauty creators. The results show that more than half of the respondents actively follow beauty-related creators: 35.6% follow a few, while 17.3% follow many. Combined, 52.9% of the sample therefore follows beauty influencers, skincare creators, makeup artists, dermatology-related creators, or lifestyle creators who talk about cosmetics. In addition, 33.7% of respondents stated that they sometimes see this type of content but do not follow specific creators. This result is important because it shows that exposure to beauty creator content is not limited to active followers. Respondents may also encounter cosmetics-related content passively through algorithmic recommendations, sponsored posts, reposts, or discovery feeds on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Only 13.5% of respondents reported not following beauty creators. Overall, these findings confirm the sample's relevance to this research. Most respondents are either active followers of beauty creators or are at least passively exposed to this type of content, making them suitable for analyzing the impact of influencer partnerships and experiential event content on perceived brand authenticity.

Follow Beauty Creators		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Does not follow beauty creators	14	13.3	13.5	13.5
	Sees content but does not follow specific creators	35	33.3	33.7	47.1
	Follows a few beauty creators(1-5)	37	35.2	35.6	82.7
	Follows many beauty creators(10-15)	18	17.1	17.3	100.0
	Total	104	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		105	100.0		

Figure 5: Frequency distribution of respondents' level of following beauty creators

The second step of the descriptive analysis focuses on the average scores of the main variables measured in the survey. These variables include influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, UGC and social proof, perceived brand authenticity, brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention. Each variable was calculated in SPSS by creating mean scores from the corresponding questionnaire items. Since the perception items were measured on a seven-point agreement scale, the midpoint is 4, corresponding to a neutral position. Therefore, mean scores above 4 indicate a generally positive perception (see Figure 6). All variables obtained mean scores above the neutral midpoint, suggesting that respondents reacted positively to the cosmetics-brand scenario. The highest mean score is observed for experiential event value ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.17$), indicating that the event dimension was the strongest element in the scenario. This suggests that the product demonstration, the presence of a skincare expert, and the event setting contributed to making the brand appear more concrete and credible. UGC and social proof also received a high mean score ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.16$), showing that respondents were positively influenced by the idea of seeing real attendees share content and test the product. This reinforces the idea that authenticity in cosmetics is built not only through brand communication but also through visible consumer participation and social validation. Purchase intention also appears relatively strong ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.37$), followed by engagement intention ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.46$), perceived brand authenticity ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.12$), and brand trust ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.29$). These results suggest that the scenario elicited a generally positive response, not only in brand image but also in potential consumer behavior. Influencer credibility and fit received the lowest mean score among the constructs ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.26$). Although this score remains above the neutral midpoint, it suggests that respondents were slightly more convinced by the event, product demonstration, and UGC dimensions than by the influencer partnership alone. This finding is particularly interesting for the

thesis, as it suggests that influencer credibility alone may not be sufficient to shape perceived authenticity. Instead, it appears to gain strength when combined with experiential and social proof elements.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
INF_MEAN	104	1.00	7.00	4.5545	1.26236
EVT_MEAN	104	1.00	7.00	5.4583	1.16603
UGC_MEAN	104	2.00	7.00	5.3365	1.16052
PBA_MEAN	104	2.00	7.00	5.1046	1.12117
TRUST_MEAN	104	1.00	7.00	5.0769	1.29181
ENG_MEAN	104	1.00	7.00	5.1106	1.45808
PURCHASE_MEAN	104	1.00	7.00	5.2548	1.36530
Valid N (listwise)	104				

Figure 6: Descriptive Statistics of the Main Constructs Measuring Respondents' Perceptions of the Cosmetics Brand Scenario

The third step of the analysis consists of a correlation analysis. After presenting the descriptive statistics, the objective is to examine whether the study's main variables are positively related. More specifically, this step tests whether influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, and UGC/social proof are associated with higher perceived brand authenticity. This analysis is crucial because perceived brand authenticity represents the central variable of the research. The aim is not only to determine whether respondents reacted positively to the cosmetics-brand scenario, but also to understand which elements of the scenario are most strongly associated with perceptions of authenticity. In this context, Pearson correlation analysis enables identification of whether respondents who rated the influencer partnership, event experience, and UGC/social proof more positively also tended to perceive the brand as more authentic (see Figure 7). As shown in Figure 7, all correlations are positive and statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level. The strongest correlation is observed between influencer credibility and fit and perceived brand authenticity ($r = .740, p < .001$). This suggests that when the beauty creator appears trustworthy, knowledgeable, and naturally aligned with the brand, respondents are more likely to perceive the cosmetics brand as authentic. UGC and social proof are also strongly correlated with perceived brand authenticity ($r = .641, p < .001$), indicating that seeing real attendees share content from the event and test the product contributes to making the brand appear more genuine and convincing. Experiential event value is also positively and significantly correlated with perceived brand authenticity ($r = .615, p$

< .001), indicating that the event setting, product demonstration, and expert presence are associated with stronger perceptions of authenticity. Overall, the correlation analysis suggests that perceived brand authenticity is not shaped by one isolated factor. Instead, it appears to be the result of a credible influencer partnership, a convincing experiential event, and visible social proof through UGC.

		Correlations			
		INF_MEAN	EVT_MEA	UGC_MEAN	PBA_MEAN
INF_MEAN	Pearson Correlation	1	.575**	.518**	.740**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	104	104	104	104
EVT_MEA	Pearson Correlation	.575**	1	.458**	.615**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	104	104	104	104
UGC_MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.518**	.458**	1	.641**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	104	104	104	104
PBA_MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.740**	.615**	.641**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	104	104	104	104

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 7: Pearson Correlations between Influencer Credibility, Event Value, User Generated Content, and Perceived Brand Authenticity

The fourth stage of the analysis involves conducting a multiple linear regression to test whether influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, and UGC/social proof positively predict perceived brand authenticity. In this model, perceived brand authenticity serves as the dependent variable, while influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, and UGC/social proof are the independent variables.

Figure 8 demonstrates the overall regression model, which is statistically significant ($F(3,100) = 66.590, p < .001$). The model explains 66.6% of the variance in perceived brand authenticity, with an adjusted R^2 of .656. This indicates that the three predictors together explain a substantial proportion of the variance in respondents' perceptions of brand authenticity.

The regression coefficients indicate that all three predictors have a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived brand authenticity. Influencer credibility and fit emerge as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .462, p < .001$), suggesting that when the beauty creator is perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and well-aligned with the brand, perceived brand authenticity increases. UGC and social proof are the second strongest predictor ($\beta = .306, p < .001$), indicating that observing real

attendees share content and test the product further enhances perceptions of authenticity. Experiential event value also exerts a positive and significant effect ($\beta = .209$, $p = .005$), demonstrating that the event, product demonstration, and expert presence contribute to the brand's perceived authenticity.

Variance inflation factor (VIF) values are all below 2, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in this model. Overall, these results support the hypotheses that influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, and UGC/social proof positively influence perceived brand authenticity.

Regression ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.562	.358		1.569	.120		
	Influencer credibility and fit	.410	.067	.462	6.131	<.001	.588	1.701
	Experiential event value	.201	.070	.209	2.887	.005	.635	1.576
	UGC and social proof	.295	.067	.306	4.408	<.001	.694	1.441

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Brand Authenticity

Figure 8: Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Perceived Brand Authenticity

The final step of the quantitative analysis consists of three separate linear regressions to examine whether perceived brand authenticity positively influences the study's main consumer outcomes. While the previous regression tested the drivers of perceived brand authenticity, this final stage focuses on its consequences. More specifically, the analysis examines whether higher perceived brand authenticity predicts stronger brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention. To complete the analysis, three separate linear regressions were conducted to test whether perceived brand authenticity positively influences the study's main consumer outcomes: brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention. In each regression, perceived brand authenticity was entered as the independent variable, while one consumer outcome was entered as the dependent variable. The results of the three regressions were then combined into a single summary table to make the comparison clearer (Figure 9). Perceived brand authenticity was entered as the independent variable in each regression. Brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention were each entered separately as dependent variables. This approach enables assessment of whether authenticity serves as a meaningful driver of consumer response in the cosmetics-brand scenario.

As illustrated in Figure 9, perceived brand authenticity exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on all three consumer outcomes. The strongest effect is observed for brand trust, with

perceived brand authenticity accounting for 80.7% of the variance in brand trust ($R^2 = .807$, adjusted $R^2 = .805$). The effect is both positive and highly significant ($B = 1.035$, $\beta = .899$, $t = 20.673$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that respondents who perceived the cosmetics brand as more authentic were substantially more likely to trust the brand and believe in its product claims. Consequently, the hypothesis that perceived brand authenticity positively influences brand trust is supported.

Perceived brand authenticity also demonstrates a positive and significant effect on engagement intention. The model explains 61.5% of the variance in engagement intention ($R^2 = .615$, adjusted $R^2 = .611$), with a positive and significant coefficient ($B = 1.020$, $\beta = .784$, $t = 12.765$, $p < .001$). This result suggests that respondents who perceived the brand as more authentic were more likely to express intentions to visit the brand's Instagram or TikTok page and interact with its content. Thus, the hypothesis that perceived brand authenticity positively influences engagement intention is supported.

Finally, perceived brand authenticity positively and significantly predicts purchase intention. The model accounts for 63.5% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .635$, adjusted $R^2 = .631$), with a positive and significant coefficient ($B = .970$, $\beta = .797$, $t = 13.311$, $p < .001$). This indicates that respondents who perceived the brand as more authentic were more likely to consider trying the product or purchasing from the brand. Therefore, the hypothesis that perceived brand authenticity positively influences purchase intention is supported.

Overall, these results show that perceived brand authenticity is a strong predictor of consumer response. In particular, authenticity appears to have the strongest effect on brand trust, followed by purchase intention and engagement intention. This confirms the importance of authenticity in the cosmetics industry, where consumers must believe that the brand is honest, credible, coherent, and close to real consumer needs before developing trust, engagement, or purchase consideration.

Regression	Dependent variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	PBA_MEAN B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p	Model p
Engagement intention	ENG_MEAN	0.784	0.615	0.611	162.942	1.02	0.08	0.784	12.765	<.001	<.001
Purchase intention	PURCHASE_MEAN	0.797	0.635	0.631	177.184	0.97	0.073	0.797	13.311	<.001	<.001
Brand trust	TRUST_MEAN	0.899	0.807	0.805	427.373	1.035	0.05	0.899	20.673	<.001	<.001

Figure 9: Linear Regressions Predicting Consumer Outcomes from Perceived Brand Authenticity

In conclusion, the quantitative results provide strong support for the research model. Descriptive statistics indicate that respondents reacted positively to the cosmetics-brand scenario overall. All main constructs achieved mean scores above the neutral midpoint of the seven-point scale, reflecting favorable perceptions of the influencer partnership, event experience, UGC/social proof,

perceived brand authenticity, trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention. Among these dimensions, experiential event value received the highest mean score, suggesting that the event setting, product demonstration, and expert presence were particularly effective in enhancing the brand's perceived concreteness and credibility. UGC and social proof also received high scores, confirming the significance of visible consumer participation and social validation in the cosmetics context.

Second, the correlation analysis confirms that influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, and UGC/social proof are all positively and significantly associated with perceived brand authenticity. Respondents who evaluated the influencer, event, and UGC dimensions more positively also tended to perceive the cosmetics brand as more authentic. The strongest correlation was observed between influencer credibility and fit and perceived brand authenticity, highlighting the centrality of the creator's trustworthiness, expertise, and alignment in constructing authenticity. Multiple regression analysis shows that the three explanatory variables together account for a substantial share of the variance in perceived brand authenticity. Influencer credibility and fit emerged as the strongest predictors, followed by UGC/social proof and experiential event value. This result suggests that authenticity is not created by a single communication tool, but rather by the combination of a credible creator, an experiential brand context, and social proof from real attendees or users.

Finally, the three separate regressions indicate that perceived brand authenticity is a strong predictor of the main consumer outcomes examined in the study. Authenticity exerts a positive and significant effect on brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention, with the strongest effect observed for brand trust. This finding is particularly significant, as it demonstrates that authenticity not only enhances brand image but also leads to stronger consumer responses. Respondents who perceived the brand as more authentic were more likely to trust the brand, engage with its social media content, and consider trying or purchasing the product.

Overall, the findings support the central argument of this thesis: in the cosmetics industry, strategic influencer partnerships and experiential event-based content can enhance perceived brand authenticity when they are regarded as credible, coherent, demonstrative, and socially validated. The results further demonstrate that perceived brand authenticity is instrumental in transforming positive brand perceptions into trust, engagement, and purchase intention. Consequently, for emerging cosmetics brands, authenticity should be regarded not as a mere communication claim, but as the

outcome of consistent and credible experiences involving creators, events, product demonstrations, and consumer participation.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented the quantitative findings of the study and tested the relationships between influencer credibility and fit, experiential event value, social proof, perceived brand authenticity, and consumer outcomes. The results confirmed the central role of perceived brand authenticity in the cosmetics-brand scenario. More specifically, all variables were found to positively influence perceived brand authenticity. In turn, perceived brand authenticity was shown to positively predict brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention.

This chapter discusses the meaning of these findings in relation to the research question and the literature reviewed earlier in the research. The objective is to move beyond the statistical results and interpret what they reveal about the construction of authenticity in the cosmetics industry, particularly among young consumers exposed to influencer partnerships and experiential content on social media. The findings suggest that authenticity is not created by a single communication device, but rather by the coherence between the creator, the brand, the event experience, the product demonstration, and the social proof generated around the experience.

The chapter then translates these findings into managerial recommendations for cosmetics brands. The recommendations focus on how brands should select influencers, design experiential events, encourage authentic UGC, and communicate product claims in a way that strengthens trust and consumer engagement. Finally, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and proposes directions for future research.

1. Discussion of the Main Findings

This study aimed to examine how influencer partnerships and experiential events influence perceived brand authenticity within the cosmetics industry. The results demonstrated several notable insights. Descriptive statistics indicated that respondents generally reacted positively to the scenario. All primary constructs received mean scores above the neutral midpoint, suggesting that the cosmetics-brand scenario elicited favorable perceptions.

The descriptive results further revealed that experiential event value received the highest mean score among the constructs. This indicates that respondents found the event aspect of the scenario particularly persuasive. The event contributed to perceptions of the brand as concrete, credible,

and authentic. For cosmetics brands, it is crucial, as consumers often require tangible evidence before accepting product claims. Product demonstrations, such as illustrating a texture transformation from powder to foam, make brand promises more observable and assessable. Additionally, the presence of a skincare expert enhances credibility by demonstrating that the brand offers both aesthetic appeal and substantive expertise. Proof also received a high mean score, which indicates that respondents reacted positively to the idea of seeing real attendees share content and test the product. Hence, authenticity is not only produced by the brand itself. It can also be reinforced by other consumers' participation. When people see real attendees interacting with a product, the brand may appear less staged and more socially validated. In the cosmetics industry, where consumers often rely on reviews, tutorials, and visible product experiences, UGC can therefore play an important role in reducing skepticism.

Influencer credibility and fit received the lowest mean score among the primary constructs, though it remained above the neutral midpoint. This outcome does not imply that influencers are ineffective. Instead, it suggests that respondents may exercise greater caution when assessing influencer partnerships. Younger consumers, who are often accustomed to sponsored content, may exhibit skepticism when collaborations appear overly commercial or scripted. Consequently, the influencer alone may not suffice to establish authenticity. The creator's credibility is enhanced when supported by a compelling event, authentic product demonstration, expert presence, and UGC.

Correlation analysis demonstrated that influencer credibility and fit, event value, and UGC/social proof are all positively and significantly associated with perceived brand authenticity. Respondents who rated these elements more favorably were also more likely to perceive the brand as authentic. The strongest correlation emerged between influencer credibility and fit and perceived brand authenticity, confirming that the creator serves as a central signal of authenticity. When the creator is perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and well-aligned with the brand, the partnership is more likely to enhance rather than undermine brand authenticity.

Multiple regression analysis further substantiated these findings. Influencer credibility and fit, event value, and UGC/social proof each exerted a positive and significant influence on perceived brand authenticity. Among these variables, influencer credibility and fit emerged as the strongest predictors, followed by UGC/social proof and experiential event value. These results indicate that the most effective authenticity strategy involves integrating multiple authenticity cues rather than relying on a single communication tool. A credible creator introduces the brand and the event,

provides a tangible and experiential dimension, and UGC offers social proof from other consumers.

The final regression analyses indicated that perceived brand authenticity is a strong predictor of brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention, with the most pronounced effect observed for brand trust. This outcome is consistent with the close association between authenticity and attributes such as sincerity, credibility, coherence, and honesty. When respondents perceive a brand as authentic, they are more inclined to accept its claims and believe it can fulfill its promises. Authenticity also positively influenced engagement and purchase intentions, demonstrating that authenticity extends beyond symbolic or emotional dimensions to produce tangible behavioral outcomes. In this study, respondents who perceived the brand as more authentic were more likely to engage with its social media content and consider purchasing the product.

In summary, the results confirm that perceived brand authenticity serves as a central mechanism in cosmetics marketing. It functions as a bridge between communication strategies and consumer responses. Influencer partnerships, events, and UGC contribute to shaping perceptions of authenticity, which in turn influence trust, engagement, and purchase intention.

2. Managerial recommendations

Based on the empirical approach, several managerial recommendations are proposed for cosmetics brands, especially emerging brands like Feï Paris seeking to build consumer authenticity.

First, cosmetics brands should prioritize influencer credibility and brand fit over follower count. The results indicate that credibility and fit are the strongest predictors of perceived brand authenticity. Brands should select creators who align with their values, product category, and audience expectations. For skincare and cosmetics, this means choosing creators who are knowledgeable, trustworthy, and relevant to beauty topics. Collaborations with creators lacking a clear connection to skincare may appear opportunistic and reduce authenticity. Managers should assess influencers based on content consistency, expertise, tone, audience relationship, previous partnerships, and alignment with brand identity. The goal is to avoid partnerships that seem forced or purely commercial, and instead foster collaborations that feel sincere and credible.

Second, cosmetic brands should design influencer partnerships around real product experiences rather than simple product placement. The findings showed that experiential event value and

UGC/social proof also significantly influence perceived brand authenticity. This means that audiences are more likely to believe a collaboration when the influencer is shown interacting with the product in a meaningful context. For cosmetics brands, this could involve inviting creators to masterclasses, formulation workshops, skincare diagnosis sessions, pop-up events, or product testing experiences. The creator should not only show the product but also explain how it works, why it is relevant, and how it fits into a real routine. In the scenario used in this study, the product demonstration was important because it made the brand's claims more visible and believable. This recommendation is particularly relevant for brands with innovative or unfamiliar products. For example, if a brand sells a powder-to-foam cleanser, the texture transformation should be clearly shown. Demonstrating the product reduces uncertainty and gives the audience concrete proof. This can make the brand feel more transparent and credible.

Third, cosmetics brands should view events as opportunities to amplify authenticity, not just increase visibility. Events received the highest positive impact on perceived brand authenticity. They should provide proof, education, and hands-on experience, helping consumers understand the product, brand values, and expertise. Effective events include live demonstrations, expert talks, consultations, and opportunities for attendees to test products. The event should align with the brand identity; for example, a minimalist brand should avoid extravagant events. Authenticity relies on coherence, so events must feel like a natural extension of the brand's values.

Fourth, brands should encourage user-generated content (UGC) without over-controlling it. UGC and social proof strongly enhance perceived brand authenticity. Brands should create environments that inspire attendees to share content naturally, such as by designing meaningful, photogenic moments and providing educational materials. Content should not appear scripted; identical posts may seem like controlled advertising rather than authentic social proof. A balanced UGC strategy offers guidance, such as suggested hashtags and visual settings, while allowing attendees to express their own perspectives. This approach helps maintain authenticity.

Fifth, brands should maintain transparency in influencer collaborations. Clearly marking content as a paid partnership reduces skepticism when the collaboration is coherent and credible. Young consumers recognize the commercial nature of influencer marketing, so it is important to ensure sponsored content is disclosed and creators can explain their partnership with the brand. Transparency, combined with alignment of values and expertise, supports authenticity, while lack of disclosure can damage trust.

Finally, cosmetics brands should measure perceived authenticity as part of campaign performance. Traditional metrics like reach and sales do not fully capture whether a campaign strengthens brand authenticity. Since authenticity predicts trust, engagement, and purchase intention, brands should include authenticity-related questions in post-campaign surveys, such as whether the brand appears honest, credible, and aligned with consumer needs. Tracking these perceptions helps managers assess if their strategy builds long-term brand equity or only short-term visibility.

3. Limits of the research

The first limitation is the sample size. The study includes 104 valid responses, which is sufficient for exploratory research but restricts generalizability to all Generation Z or cosmetics consumers. A larger sample would increase statistical confidence and enable comparisons across age groups, countries, and consumer profiles.

Another limitation concerns the age categorization. Although the study focuses on Generation Z, the survey included a final age category of 28 to 30 years old. This may include a small number of respondents slightly outside the strict definition of Generation Z. However, these respondents remain relevant to the study because they belong to a digitally active young consumer group and are exposed to similar social media beauty content, influencer marketing, and experiential brand communication.

The third limitation is the use of a scenario instead of an actual purchasing situation. Respondents imagined discovering a young cosmetics brand via Instagram or TikTok. Although this approach allowed control over presented elements, it may not accurately reflect real consumer behavior, which can vary based on brand, influencer, price, product need, skin type, or prior experience.

The fourth limitation is the focus on intention rather than actual behavior. While purchase and engagement intentions are informative, they do not ensure consumers will buy or interact with the brand. Future research could supplement survey data with behavioral metrics such as clicks, likes, comments, conversions, or purchases.

The fifth limitation is the focus on a single cosmetics-brand scenario. The results apply to a young skincare brand, product demonstration, creator, and event, but may not extend to other categories such as makeup, fragrance, luxury beauty, or dermatological skincare. Different products may require distinct authenticity cues.

The last limitation is the emphasis on quantitative analysis. While the results reveal significant relationships between variables, they do not explain the underlying reasons for respondents' perceptions. Qualitative interviews or open-ended responses could offer deeper insights into why certain collaborations are perceived as authentic or inauthentic.

This thesis examined how influencer partnerships and experiential events shared on social media shape perceived brand authenticity and consumer responses among young cosmetics consumers. The findings show that authenticity is not created by one isolated communication tool, but by the coherence between the creator, the brand, the event experience, the product demonstration, and the social proof generated around the brand. Influencer credibility and brand fit emerged as the strongest predictors of perceived brand authenticity, followed by UGC/social proof and experiential event value. The results also confirm that perceived brand authenticity positively predicts brand trust, engagement intention, and purchase intention. This demonstrates that authenticity is not only an image-related concept, but also a strategic driver of consumer response. For emerging cosmetics brands such as Fei Paris, the main implication is that authenticity must be built through credible partnerships, transparent communication, meaningful experiences, and consumer participation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Full Survey Questions

Section 1: Introduction and consent

Thank you for taking part in this survey. This study is conducted as part of a Bachelor's thesis at EDHEC Business School and explores how influencer partnerships and experiential events affect perceived brand authenticity in the cosmetics industry. The survey should take approximately 5 minutes. Your answers are anonymous and will only be used for academic purposes. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to your personal opinion. By continuing, you confirm that you are at least 18 years old and agree to participate in this study. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

Yes Please continue

No I want to terminate

Section 2: Screening and demographic profile

1)What is your age?

Under 18

18 - 20

21-24

25-27

28-30

30+

Section 3: Social media and beauty-content habits

1)How often do you use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Snapchat?

Never

Less than once a week

Once a week

Several times a week

Once a day

Several times a day

2)How often do you see beauty or skincare content on social media?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Everyday

3) Which platforms do you use to discover or follow beauty/cosmetics content? Select all that apply.

Instagram

TikTok

Youtube

Snapchat

Pinterest

Beauty blogs or online magazines

I do not watch beauty content

Other _____

4) Do you follow beauty influencers, skincare creators, makeup artists, dermatology-related creators, or lifestyle creators who talk about cosmetics?

Yes, many (10-15 creators)

Yes, a few (1-5 creators)

I sometimes see this content but do not follow specific creators

No

Section 4: Scenario presentation

Imagine that you are scrolling on Instagram or TikTok and you discover a young cosmetics brand. The brand presents a powder-to-foam cleanser designed for a simple skincare routine. You see a beauty creator attending a small skincare event organized by the brand. During the event, the creator tests the product, shows the texture transforming from powder to foam, listens to a skincare expert, and shares honest impressions with their audience. The content is clearly marked as a paid partnership.

Section 5: Influencer partnership perception

Please answer the following questions based on the cosmetics brand presented in the previous situation. For each statement, select the answer that best reflects your opinion.

1)The beauty creator seems trustworthy.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

2)The beauty creator seems knowledgeable about skincare or cosmetics.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

3)The collaboration between the creator and the brand feels natural.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Section 6: Experiential event perception

Please answer the following questions based on the cosmetics brand presented in the previous situation. For each statement, select the answer that best reflects your opinion.

1)The event makes the brand feel more real.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

2)The product demonstration makes the brand's claims more believable.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

3)The presence of a skincare expert makes the brand feel more credible.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Section 7: User-generated content and social proof

Please answer the following questions based on the cosmetics brand presented in the previous situation. For each statement, select the answer that best reflects your opinion.

1)Seeing people share content from the event makes the brand feel more authentic.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

2) Seeing real attendees test the product makes the brand more convincing.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Section 8: Perceived brand authenticity

Please answer the following questions based on the cosmetics brand presented in the previous situation. For each statement, select the answer that best reflects your opinion.

1) This brand seems honest.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

2) This brand seems able to deliver what it promises.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

3) This brand seems to have real values.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

4) This brand seems sincere rather than purely commercial.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

5) This brand could fit with my lifestyle or values.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

6) This brand feels close to real consumer needs.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

7) This brand seems coherent in its communication.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

8) Overall, I perceive this brand as authentic.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Section 9: Consumer outcomes

Please answer the following questions based on the cosmetics brand presented in the previous situation. For each statement, select the answer that best reflects your opinion.

1) I would trust this brand.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

2) I would believe this brand's product claims.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

3)I would visit this brand's Instagram or TikTok page.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

4)I would like, save, comment on, or share this type of content.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

5)I would consider trying this product.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

6)I would consider buying from this brand.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age_Clean2					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-20	9	8.6	8.7	8.7
	21-24	51	48.6	49.0	57.7
	25-27	22	21.0	21.2	78.8
	28-30	22	21.0	21.2	100.0
	Total	104	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		105	100.0		

Appendix 3: Distribution of Social Media Usage

Frequency of SM Usage					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Once a week	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Several times a week	3	2.9	2.9	3.8
	Once a day	9	8.6	8.7	12.5
	Several times a day	91	86.7	87.5	100.0
	Total	104	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		105	100.0		

THANK YOU FOR READING.