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Can a Vlogger Help to Build Brand Awareness? The Impact of Vloggers on Customers' Attitude towards Brand Advertisement and Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study derives from the postulates of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) to explore the impact of vloggers on customers interested in beauty products. Particularly, this study examines whether the attitude toward vlogger's recommendations impacts the attitude toward the brand advertisement, and what their influence on consumers' purchase intention is.

Methodology: This study applies a cross-sectional mono method of quantitative analysis. The data collection was assisted with the use of survey by questionnaire built on Qualtrics and distributed in China. We use partial least squares structural equation modelling to analyse the data and test the proposed hypothesis.

Findings: Vloggers have a considerable impact on customer perceptions due to their proximity to customers who often portray vloggers as 'friends' and value their opinions. This study shows that it is not the perceived usefulness of shared information or vloggers trustworthiness that matter when forming the followers' attitude towards vloggers, but more attention should be given to information quality and the perceived benefits of information derived from vlogs. The strongest relationship in this study showed to be the one between the attitude towards a vlogger and the attitude towards a brand, which emphasizes the importance that content creators can have in building brand awareness.

Value added: This article provides a clear picture on exploring the impact of vloggers on customer perceptions. The results of the research can be used to guide companies on how to use vloggers in their marketing campaigns.



Recommendations: Considering the growth of social media and the various forms of content available, the companies should know how to apply those new media in their marketing strategies. As the importance of traditional media seems to decline, mostly among younger generations, those new medias are growing, and their application brings new opportunities and challenges.

Key words: vloggers, attitude towards vlogger, attitude towards brand, purchase intention

JEL codes: M30, M31

Introduction

Brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers are familiar with a particular brand and can recognize it when they encounter it. Social media platforms have become an important tool for companies to increase brand awareness among their target audience. In addition to creating content and running ads, companies can also use social media to leverage user-generated content (UGC) to increase brand awareness which is deeply connected with communication (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Customer builds brand awareness via effective communication which can impact his/her decisions while evaluating and selecting a product. The communication between brand and customers is crucial to build consumer's brand preference and brand loyalty (Bilgin, 2018) and the new media greatly facilitate this communication. As the UGC is constantly developing, bloggers have become a powerful tool for companies to increase brand awareness among their target audience.

The studies of consumer buying behaviour are very common in marketing, but still little is known about how content created by vloggers affects consumers' purchasing behaviour, mostly in the cosmetics category. Also, the link between the attitude towards a vlogger and the attitude towards a brand reminds to be investigated. Beauty bloggers produce content that creates a

promotional environment that is targeted to consumers' needs and emotions (Yu, 2021). Therefore, beauty bloggers can attract more people to view their posts, and on this basis, they can retain many viewers and to some extent harness consumers' emotions and influence their purchasing behaviour (Yu, 2021). Thus the main objective of this study is to explore how bloggers influence consumers' behaviour when making cosmetic purchases. To present the main objective, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. Which antecedents influence the attitude towards a vlogger?
2. Is there a relationship between attitude towards a vlogger and the attitude towards a recommended brand?
3. How the attitude towards a vlogger and the attitude towards a brand advertisement impact the purchase intention?

This study focuses on the beauty market in China which is one of biggest markets in the world. The cosmetics market in China has become immense as the economy grows (Li et al., 2022). With countless domestic and international brands to choose from, consumers are left in a position of indecision when faced with a multitude of cosmetic brands, or perhaps seeking more detailed and personalized products (Yu, 2021). The competition between cosmetic brands comprises not only the quality uniqueness and innovation of the products but also the brand awareness and the efforts of brand promotion (Li et al., 2022). Faced with a crowded and competitive environment, many cosmetic brands are exploring new ways of communicating their brand message and they are expanding new marketing models that guarantee both product quality and personalized emotional marketing to ensure success in the marketplace.

Aiming to achieve the objective of this study and to answer the questions posed, first the theoretical background of this study is reviewed. A conceptual model is proposed, linking the customers' attitudes towards vloggers, attitudes towards brands and purchase intention. Next, the research method is presented, the sample is defined, and data collection procedure and instrument are explained. After applying the partial least squares structural equation modelling, the results that lead to final conclusions are analysed and discussed.



Conceptual background

With the rise of social media, brands are more inclined to opt for in-stream advertising and video-sharing when choosing their communication methods (Man & Rahman, 2019). In this paper the focus is on vlogs, which tend to grow brands' popularity, and on the social networks which develop their streaming capabilities.

Blogs and vlogs

A blog is a way of communication in which ordinary people publish their opinions and information to the outside world through the Internet (PLA Publishing, 2013). Bloggers are private, and sometimes autonomous communicators. With modern electronic tools, bloggers deliver a variety of information to an unspecified audience through their blogs (PLA Publishing, 2013).

Bloggers are opinion leaders among their followers, sharing information they have, their experience, opinions and values with others. Consequently, they influence concepts, attitudes and behaviours. Bloggers spend a lot of time in their videos discussing the products and services they are enthusiastic about, and their opinions are considered persuasive because, like other consumers, bloggers are buyers and users of products, so viewers generally find the bloggers' opinions to be an objective assessment (Lee & Ma, 2012). Like a blog, vlog is a short video that is shot, edited and shared with mobile terminals, and it is mainly spread on social media channels. In China, Tencent's WeTV app is driving the explosive growth of vlogging in China, and it seems to be the new media format that differentiates and has advantages over traditional TV advertising (Kang, 2021).

Vlogs in China

Blogs in China were introduced in 2009 when Sina Weibo combined the advertising, e-commerce, and publishing with unique sociability and convenience. Currently, the platforms with the most active bloggers in China include: Bilibili, Kuaishou, TikTok, Sina Weibo and WeChat, and according to statistics, the

total number of registered blogs oscillates around 31.55 million (Liu, 2019). The growth of online streaming has brought some bloggers to the forefront, and those who run their own successful short video pages are getting more and more visitors and views, thus attracting new audiences (Yu, 2021). As China entered the internet era, vlogs developed on social media became an important tool for brand promotion due to their low cost, ease of production, high interactivity and ease of sharing (Kang, 2021). Unlike previous advertising formats, short video ads can visualize their effectiveness through data such as the number of views and clicks they receive (Yu, 2021). The emergence of the internet has made the opinions of internet users widespread; new ideas are being generated, and new theories that exist on the internet are more easily accepted. The more receptive internet users were the first to try their hand at expressing their views on social media platforms, and they were widely accepted in the online community (Yu, 2021).

Over time, a phenomenon has emerged in China's internet environment, where videos with a huge number of hits and views have led to heated discussions across the internet and even more offline discussions and secondary creations, resulting in an exponential interaction effect (Xin, 2020). In the online communication environment, the efficiency of vloggers' information dissemination can be reflected only in the number of shares and comments. These quantitative targets are conducive to vloggers' better understanding of their audience's preferences, thus enhancing more professional and targeted information for them (Yu, 2021). Vloggers who actively share their experience can reduce the spread of false advertising to a certain extent, as vloggers have purchased and used the product as much as other consumers, and, to some degree, vloggers are on the same side as consumers, which is different from advertising agencies (Lee & Ma, 2012). Beauty bloggers focus on experience portrayed by beauty products and accordingly, they share their feedback on product use and share they experience in short videos, which is particularly important in the process of promoting cosmetics (Kang, 2021). Vloggers have become popular in cosmetics advertising because, in addition to the convenience and social nature of social media itself, the messages conveyed in vlogs can change consumers' attitudes towards video advertising and brands to a certain extent (Xin, 2020).



Social media vloggers and their impact on followers

Theories of communication and persuasion suggest that the dissemination of information can persuade and change people's attitudes and behaviours (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). The communicator of the message, the message itself, and contextual factors are the three factors that influence human attitudes (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Vloggers can have an influence and reach extended networks (Yu, 2021). For example, vloggers like Li Jiaqi (Austin) and Wang Wei (Vivian) are undoubtedly the best known in the beauty sector in China. The influence they have makes them perceived not only as vloggers but they also become popular opinion leaders (Wang et al., 2020).

It is worth pointing out that most of beauty vloggers start as brand users (Zhou et al., 2021). The consumers of beauty products want to see the effects of a chosen product. By recording the effects of products through short videos (Zhou et al., 2021), beauty vlog creators first become the consumers, and then share their experience and insights from the customer's perspective. What is more, vloggers are also keen to interact with viewers in the comments section, agreeing or explaining their opinions, or answering questions. In such an environment of almost personal information exchange, beauty vlogger recommendations can be even more convincing than celebrity endorsement (Xin, 2020).

To make their videos more realistic and vivid, video production teams and agencies often suggest vloggers portraying their own 'personas', such as a sophisticated and independent career woman or a youthful and energetic college girl, to make the vlogger's image more specific (Yu, 2021; Qi, 2021). In this way the vlogger's image becomes more credible and easier for viewers to relate to. Viewers are always able to point out the vlogger they like the most, the one that will seem closer to their own perceptions and values, and normally showing a distinctive and unique personality which makes the content viewers keep following the vlogger's subsequent videos and updates (Kang, 2021; Qi, 2021). In beauty vlogs, vloggers often present their views in a friendly and easy-going tone, acting like a good friend to the viewer, always willing to give fair advice on skincare, and increasing trust with their fans as much as possible (Wang et al., 2020). The more trust there is between fans and beauty key opinion leaders,

the more the viewers will continue to build on their existing trust in the brands recommended by the vlogger until they eventually turn into loyal consumers of the brand, willingly promoting and advertising the brand spontaneously (Yu, 2021).

Certainly, vloggers alone do not determine consumers' attitudes and behaviours – the quality of short video content is an even more important measure for consumers to examine beauty in vlog ads (Xin, 2020). With the popularity of videos, access to information has become easier and more convenient, which brings with it the problem that viewers' patience is decreasing. A short video that is cluttered, illogical, and full of ineffective information will be ruthlessly ignored by the audience, so the quality of the information in a video is also an important factor in determining the quality of a vlog (Kang, 2021).

Beauty vlogs can be divided into several categories based on the video content. This paper investigates the following categories: product recommendations, make-up tips, skin care knowledge sharing, creative projects and other creative videos (Wang et al., 2020). The creative content of a good video can accurately capture the attention of the audience and achieve satisfactory communication results. It not only delivers an effective product message but can also generate a desire to buy and share, thus enhancing the consumer experience. It is also important to explore whether vlog-recommended advertisements have an impact on consumers' attitudes towards brands while changing their purchasing behaviour (Xin, 2020).

Customer attitudes

Attitudes are the negative or positive emotions that an individual feels towards a particular thing and ongoing preconceptions (Sparks et al., 2009). Consumer attitudes are an important factor in influencing consumer behaviour and, in general, they can be divided into attitudes towards behaviour and things. A positive attitude positively influences consumer's willingness to buy (Casaló et al., 2011). Herd behaviour is one of the factors influencing attitudes and, in some cases (Kang, 2021), the influence of strong social pressure on individual behaviour. For most people, the use of social software has become part of their



lives, and an important aspect of the initial motivation for using a particular social platform is friends' recommendation (Kang, 2021). It can be argued that today's young people are keen on social media not only for its inherent convenience and social aspect but also because it allows them to catch up with current trends, enabling them to keep up with social trends and build common topics with friends. If one does not grasp the current buzzwords, s/he will face difficulties in gaining acceptance in the social environment (Kang, 2021). Therefore, social platforms with high-quality content can meet this psychological need of users (Yu, 2021). In the context of short-form video marketing, the consumer's willingness to buy is a social act and allows the consumer to perceive the benefits of short-form video marketing.

Theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behaviour

To discuss the vloggers' influence on consumers' cosmetic purchase behaviour, this article anchors on the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is a social psychology model that explains how people make decisions and how their attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their beliefs, intentions and social pressures. TRA was proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975. According to the theory, people's behaviour is determined by their intentions, which in turn are influenced by their attitudes toward the behaviour and subjective norms. Attitudes refer to a person's positive or negative evaluations of behaviour, while subjective norms are the perceived social pressures to engage in or avoid specific behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a social psychology model that is an extension of TRA and proposes that behaviour is determined by three factors: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Attitudes toward the behaviour refer to the individual's positive or negative evaluations of the behaviour. Subjective norms are the perceived social pressures from significant others to engage in or avoid the behaviour. The TPB differs from the TRA in that it includes the construct of perceived behavioural control, which is the degree to which the individual believes they have control over the behaviour. This construct reflects the

individual's perception of their ability to overcome obstacles that may prevent them from engaging in the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Both TRA and TPB have been widely applied in various domains, including health, consumer behaviour and environmental behaviour, and have been used to develop interventions aimed at promoting behaviour change.

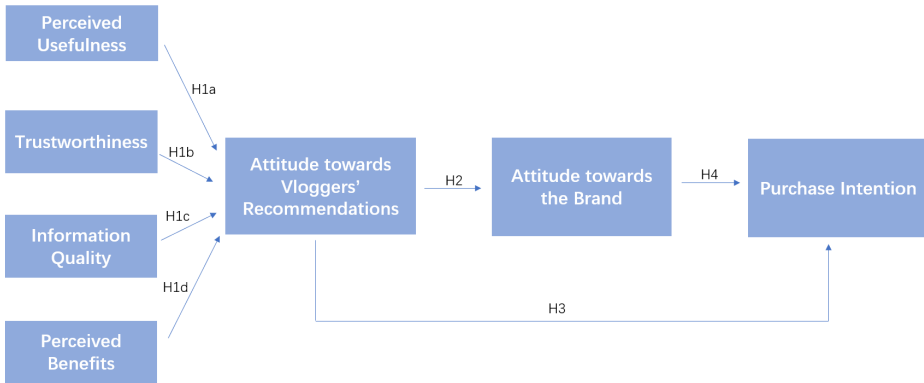
Recommendations from groups play an important role in consumer decisions, especially when purchasing expensive and/or new products and services (Brown & Reingen, 1987). In addition, the Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that individuals can develop beliefs by referring to the information or normative practices of groups and peers. Then those beliefs can influence individuals' behavioural intentions (Hsu et al., 2013). To reduce the risk and uncertainty in a purchase, consumers often rely on the opinions or recommendations of others (Hsiao et al., 2010). These factors create a predisposition to behave in certain way, which ultimately leads to behaviour change (Ing & Ming, 2018).

Conceptual model

Basing upon the Theory of Reasoned Action, the proposed conceptual model links the customer's perceptions concerning the vlogger and the message shared, customers' attitude towards the vlogger and towards the recommended brand, and finally it relates those dimensions to purchase intention. This setting is based on the model presented by Ing and Ming (2018) and Lee et al. (2017). First, the model proposed by Ing and Ming (2018) that explored the attitudes of customers towards blogger recommendations and their impact on purchase intention. According to Ing and Ming (2018), several dimensions determine the different degrees of influence on consumer attitudes and cause them to change their shopping attitude. Secondly, the proposed conceptual model also considers the impact of vlog ads on the brand itself, as in the study conducted by Lee et al. (2017) where the authors suggested that the information delivered by the ads would have an impact on the cognitive changes of consumers, making them feel pleasure and inducing them to make emotional changes. These cognitive changes not only change advertising attitudes but also brand attitudes. Based on that, the model proposed in this investigation includes consumer vlog ad recommendation

attitude as a variable that affects consumer attitude toward the brand and purchase propensity. Figure 1 exhibits the proposed conceptual model.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



Source: Own elaboration based on Lee et al. (2017) and Grace et al. (2018)

Purchase intention

The Theory of Reasoned Action implies that the stronger the intention of an individual to perform a certain behaviour, the higher the tendency to perform that behaviour (Grace & Ming, 2018). Purchase intention is associated with it, being an important concept in marketing and the main input for predicting future sales as well as marketing actions (Morrison, 1979). Purchase intention is a consumer's intent toward buying a product (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Spears and Singh (2004) define purchase intention as a consumer's conscious plan or intention to try to purchase a product. Lu et al. (2014) examined and defined purchase intention as the willingness of consumers to buy a certain product or service at a particular time and within a particular circumstance. Interestingly, it is noted in the literature that services are more vulnerable to purchase intention than tangible goods. This may be due to the fact that services are more difficult to assess before purchasing than tangible goods, and consumers rely on information provided by various sources to make their judgments (Lohtia et al., 2013).

Perceived usefulness

Perceived usefulness is positively influenced by perceived ease of use because holding other conditions equal, the easier a technology is to use, the more useful it can be (Lee et al., 2012). Compared to formal commercial marketing channels such as traditional paper media or TV and radio media advertising, recommendations from vloggers are considered an informal promotion channel. The length of short videos on vlogger platforms is measured in seconds, and this efficient form of information delivery and dynamic picture-based content has a strong visual impact on the audience. Consumers can visualize the product information and the sense of use in the video, which is certainly an effective way of marketing. Consumers usually positively impact blog recommendations because their opinions are non-commercial. Furthermore, the endorsement of satisfied consumers significantly influences other consumers' purchases. Many direct interactions happen between vloggers and their readers, as most vlogs are two-way communication channels, not just one-way commercial advertising. Therefore, vlogger recommendations are more reliable and valuable than commercials. Thus, in this study we understand usefulness as the degree to which blog readers perceive that adopting blogger recommendations will increase the efficiency of online shopping. Indeed, previous research has confirmed that perceived usefulness significantly affects attitudes and purchase intentions (Hsu et al., 2013). Accordingly, the following hypotheses is proposed: *Perceived usefulness will positively affect audiences' attitudes toward vloggers' recommendations (H1a)*.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as the perception of the trustworthiness and goodwill of the person to whom the trust is directed (Wu & Lee, 2016). This definition of trust is relevant in the context of online purchases. A consumer, when faced with a known transaction risk, turns to the other side which he considers trustworthy and well-meaning. Previous research has confirmed that trust is closely related to attitudes toward products and services and purchase behaviour in online transactions (Casaló et al., 2011). Trust is an important factor in



successful online transactions and a key to attracting and retaining customers and gaining a competitive advantage on the internet (Hsu et al., 2013). It can be built during repeated interactions between the vlogger and the audience. Specifically, the target of trust is the vlogger.

Through watching videos and frequent interactions on the vlog platform, viewers become familiar with vloggers and the content they provide, and when doing so, the trust appears. Moreover, this trust might be developed in large part from the record of interactions between vloggers and viewers; a viewer might trust a vlogger's positive recommendation and then shop for a specific product or service on the vlogger's recommended website (Hsu et al., 2013). Other audiences or readers can also rely on the interaction between vloggers and consumers to determine their purchase by confirming their peers' endorsement of the product (Lee & Ma, 2012). The trust that online shoppers have in certain shopping sites may influence their adoption of the sites' systems. By increasing communication with other online shoppers, the site can promote consumer trust and their assessment of the shopping site in terms of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, increasing consumers' willingness to use the site (Wu et al., 2012). When consumers are confident that information is accurate because their confidence in with the source is high, they may quit the effort needed to scrutinize the information and simply accept the conclusion as valid without thinking. Therefore, when the vlogger is trustworthy, consumers do not scrutinize the information as closely as they would do when the trust was low. When it comes to the relationship between vloggers and their audience, the most important factor seems to be the focus on the quality rather than the quantity of the response. Vloggers should cultivate consistent, close, and engaging relationships with their audience, and viewers can cultivate greater trust in their recommendations and suggestions (Lohtia et al., 2013). Moreover, the Theory of Reasoned Action demonstrates that an individual's behavioural intentions are influenced by his/her attitudes toward the behaviour in question. Empirical studies based on this theory have found that attitudes positively impact individuals' behavioural intentions. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis: *Trustworthiness will positively affect audiences' attitudes toward vloggers' recommendations* (H1b).

Information quality

Further persuading consumers to display higher purchase intention, apart from using the trustworthiness of the vlogger and the perceived usefulness of the product, can be also done through sharing relevant information. In the case of vlogs, information quality is associated with the general perception of the quality of the overall content of the vlog (Wang & Lin, 2011). The better and more extensive the quality of information, the higher the level of consumer satisfaction (Park et al., 2007). In addition, as consumer satisfaction increases, so does consumer purchase intention (Park et al., 2007).

The quality of a persuasive argument is represented by two dimensions: argumentative value and argumentative strength (Zhang, 2020a). High-quality commentary involves perceptions of strong and persuasive arguments rather than perceptions of weak and untrue arguments. There has been marketing-related research in the past that showed the manipulation of argument quality by emphasizing the persuasiveness of arguments, using argument strength to emphasize whether the information received would persuade a person to believe something or perform a behaviour (Zhang, 2020a). The perceived value of communication can influence viewers' attitudes toward vloggers' content and recommendations. Similarly, this study considers information quality as a variable that influences viewers' attitudes. Hsu et al. (2013) demonstrated that customer information quality has a positive effect on users' perceived value, which in turn leads to an increase in users' intention to repeat the use of the e-commerce system. This suggests that information quality positively impacts users' intention to use it (Grace & Ming, 2018).

A vlog platform system can be viewed as an information system. When viewers perceive the quality of information within a vlog to be superior to that of other vloggers, they are more likely to form a stronger intention to use the product recommended by that vlogger (Wang & Lin, 2011). Informative reviews will serve as additional information that will increase consumer understanding of the product during the browsing process, reduce perceived risk, and thus increase purchase intent. Therefore, information quality is defined as the viewer's overall perception of the quality of a particular blog's video content (Wang

& Lin, 2011). Consumer perception of video information characteristics such as relevance, comprehension, adequacy, objectivity and sufficient persuasiveness are important criteria for assessing the quality of short-form video content. Advances in online technology have enabled consumers to use and rely heavily on media messages generated by other consumers to obtain valuable commentary. Consequently, the quality of information, especially from more specialized bloggers, is crucial for buyers to form favourable attitudes toward the product. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed: *Information quality will positively affect audiences' attitudes toward vloggers' recommendations* (H1c).

Perceived benefits

In the context of vlogging, perceived benefits are the consumers' beliefs that there is a relative advantage in using the information included in a post/vlog (Lee & Ma, 2012). Consumers gather positive and negative information from vlogs (i.e., benefits versus costs). Normally, they try to use those recommendations to make their benefits outweigh their costs. Consumers can develop favourable attitudes when, on the basis of online reviews, they observe that they will enjoy more benefits than costs. The perception of a positive outcome from a particular option or perceived benefit enhances the consumer's propensity to buy a product. In the case of vlogger recommendations, the relative advantage of using testimonial posts refers to the perceived usefulness of the reviews in helping the consumers gather information about the product's features, functionality, price range, quality and popularity (Grace & Ming, 2018). Consumers form more favourable attitudes toward vlogger recommendations when the perceived benefits are high. According to the available research findings, online consumer reviews have both positive and negative impact on consumer purchase attitudes. The number of reviews is also considered to influence consumer purchase preferences, as many reviews may positively affect product popularity, but too much information hurts readers. Many information-intensive reviews may cause information overload and discourage decision-making by increasing uncertainty (Lee & Ma, 2012). Occasionally, consumers are suspicious of the effectiveness of online consumer reviews because the quality of the

review publisher's credentials is unknown. Conflicting reviews about a product, service or company can also hinder consumer information processing and make it more difficult for them to assess the quality of information (Lee & Ma, 2012). Such a situation can confuse readers provided with an uncertain description of product's quality, thus reducing the usefulness of the review itself.

There is no standard information format for consumers to post reviews. Therefore, each online consumer review is different from other reviews (Park et al., 2007). Typically, two types of reviews can be distinguished: 1) some reviews, such as "this is so good, I'm going to buy another one", or "I can't believe I got this; I'm proud of it", are subjective, emotional and not reasonably argued; 2) other reviews, such as "this product is twice as fast or even cheaper than other similar items", are more specific and explicit, and there is reasoning supporting the claims included. The first type of review is subjective and emotional, and there is no basis to confirm the authenticity of such a review, so it is difficult for consumers to get a definite benefit from such reviews (Park et al., 2007). The latter type of review is logical and rational, and consumers will build trust in the product when faced with it. In the case of vlogs that include recommended ads, the relative advantage of using vlogger's recommendations refers to the perceived usefulness of the reviews in helping the customers gather information about the product's features, functionality, price range, quality, and popularity. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed: *Perceived benefits will positively affect audiences' attitudes toward vloggers' recommendations* (H1d).

The relationship between attitude towards vlogger and purchase intention

The opinions of beauty vloggers have a leading role in their audience, and they can control consumer sentiment to a certain extent (Yu, 2021). Following the growth of the beauty sector, China has experienced a frenzy of anxiety about body image. Body image, appearance and grooming are typically the subjects of beauty vlogs. In some extreme cases, one can find vloggers trying to show in their short videos the direct consequences of their own lack of beauty, making the consumers feel like they are able to empathize with the creators (Yu, 2021).

The vlogger can make the followers believe that the cosmetics recommended in a short video can make their overall appearance improve, meaning that the purchase of products will make them more beautiful (Wang et al., 2020).

Under the influence of national beauty vloggers, the population's attention to Chinese brands has grown significantly, even more than that to international brands (Zhou et al., 2021). It is not surprising, as we observe the rise in popularity of short videos which has resulted in the growth in brand communication of makeup products. Brands that seek cooperation with beauty vloggers can have substantial autonomy. A lot of beauty vloggers set up shopping links of their partner brands on their homepage, which facilitates the shopping process for the audience and, to a certain extent, enables the audience to build up a good attitude towards the brand, while the brand also achieves the objective of its brand promotion (Kang, 2021). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed: *Attitude towards vloggers' recommendations will positively affect audiences' purchase intention (H2)*; and: *Attitude towards vloggers' recommendations will positively affect audiences' attitudes towards the brand (H3)*.

Attitude towards brand advertisement

Many studies have examined attitude towards advertisement in terms of recognition and emotional aspects of a particular brand product/service in advertising, emphasizing the influence of advertising attitudes on brand attitudes and the influence of advertising attitudes on the brand attitude formation process (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Grace & Ming, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). While brand attitude is defined as consumers' positive or negative attitudes toward a brand and represents the recognition of the emotional aspects of an individual brand, advertising attitudes are generally defined as consumers' favourable or unfavourable reactions to a particular advertisement based on various advertising factors and the emotional changes that occur after viewing an advertisement (Lee et al., 2017). Sales and brand promotion are the purpose of advertising, and today mobile advertising is leading the advertising market because of the popularity of smartphones. Mobile advertising often has a different purpose than other ad types, and its high advertising value and context-aware value bring important contributions

to brands. After being exposed to mobile advertising, consumers form purchase intentions toward the brand, which is one of the main advantages that the mobile advertising brings. The influence of advertising attitudes on brand attitudes is not limited to products/services of influential brands, but also those of brands with low brand awareness (Lee et al., 2017).

For many years, brand attitudes have been used to explore brand-specific issues alongside brand quality and perceived quality, which allowed marketers to recognize the complex character of consumer-based brand perceptions. Research in consumer psychology suggests that consumers who have more experience with a brand develop more dimensions and categories in their deep knowledge structure. As a result, consumers have more associations with familiar brands than with less known ones, which is very conducive to establishing a good propensity to buy from the brand (Low & Lamb, 2000). Thus the following hypothesis is proposed: *Attitude towards the brand will positively affect audiences' purchase intention (H4).*

Methods

This study applies a cross-sectional mono method of quantitative analysis. The data collection was assisted with the use of survey by questionnaire built on Qualtrics and targeted at consumers who met the following requirements: 1) they buy/use cosmetics and skin care products, 2) they originate from China, 3) they have experience in purchasing cosmetics online, and 4) they have the habit of watching beauty vlogs. The questionnaire was distributed through the most popular social media platforms and applications in China, such as Taobao shopping group chat, WeChat and QQ. The questionnaire begins with two filter questions: "Have you ever watched a beauty vlog?" and "Do you follow any beauty vloggers?". The questions were used to ensure the appropriate target sample for the analysis.

Justification of the choice of the country

With 986 million internet users in mainland China and 99.7% of citizens using cell phones to access the internet (CNNIC, 2021), China has the largest virtual



digital society in the world. Driven by the coronavirus pandemic, the nation has become significantly more digitalized, and it has become a habit for people to use social media and streaming platforms to access information. As streaming media continues to grow, traditional forms of information delivery are getting turned apart (CNNIC, 2021). Online streaming significantly changes the way of how information is delivered in people's daily lives. In China, streaming media platforms such as Sina Weibo, WeChat and TikTok have become important tools for users to obtain information and communicate with each other (Liu, 2019). Due to their advantages (such as low entry barriers and strong interaction), these streaming media platforms are also gaining popularity among industries (Kang, 2021). Many brands have found that advertising on streaming media platforms may be more efficient than the use of traditional media as ads streamed at social media are considered more credible than those delivered using the traditional media (Kang, 2021). Additionally, the entertainment benefits of social media are unique as compared to traditional media, which creates a positive atmosphere for viewers and impacts their attitudes (Kang, 2021). Therefore, the information posted by internet users on social media platforms is prompt to provide more emotional value to the audience and create trust (Shareef et. al., 2019).

As China's economy grows and national income rises, beauty sector is gaining attention and cosmetics are becoming a 'daily necessity'. In 2020, the total retail sales of cosmetics in China were 340 billion yuan, which makes China the second-largest cosmetics consuming market in the world after the U.S. (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). With such a large cosmetic consumer market, competition from major beauty brands has become fierce. International brands, with their brand reputation and excellent product quality, already have a large share of the market of high-end products in China. To date, international beauty brands still have a large and stable user base in the Chinese market (Zhang, 2020b). In the face of the growing competition, Chinese beauty brands are focusing on R&D and marketing, in a way to be able to take their place in the increasingly segmented market. The development of the internet and social media has become an efficient medium for information dissemination, which is changing marketing practices (Zhang et al., 2014;

Zhang, 2020a). With the development of blog platforms, more and more industries are seeking to collaborate with bloggers. The advantage which is bloggers' highly interactive and social nature can assist the organizations to increase their products' market appeal. Indeed, empowered by social media, the cosmetic industry is one of the fastest-growing markets (Qiu, 2019). At the same time, the growth of the blogosphere provides an opportunity for marketers to learn through contact with bloggers, and to use bloggers efficacy in communicating product information: Therefore, selecting the most effective blogs becomes an important part of a successful marketing plan (Lohtia et al., 2013).

Data collection instrument

To test the proposed hypotheses and answer the research questions, the questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part consisted of two filter questions, which were supposed to identify whether the respondents had experience in buying cosmetics online and had a habit of watching beauty vlogs. If the respondent answered 'yes' to both questions, the questionnaire continued; if the respondent answered 'no' to one of the two questions, or to both questions, the questionnaire skipped to the end. The second part was based on scales measuring all the study dimensions. To avoid missing data, all questions in the questionnaire were mandatory. The last part of the questionnaire included socio-demographic data, geographic location and residential environment, demand for beauty and skincare products, personal reliance on beauty vloggers, brand choices for beauty and skincare products, purchase intentions as well as other behavioural data.

To measure the variables under investigation, the seven-point Likert-type scales was used in the study. All the scales were based on previous studies (see Table 1), adapted to the context of the study and back-translated from English to Chinese and then back to English. The questionnaire was pre-tested within a group of 10 respondents.



Table 1. Measurement scales

Variable	Item	Scale	Reference
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	Vloggers' recommendations improve my shopping performance.	Grace & Ming (2018)
	PU2	Vloggers' recommendations enhance my shopping effectiveness.	
	PU3	Vloggers' recommendations increase my productivity when shopping.	
	PU4	Vloggers' recommendations provide useful information about the product.	
	PU5	Vloggers' recommendations are helpful in understanding the product.	
Trustworthiness	TR1	I believe vloggers' recommendations to be true.	Grace & Ming (2018)
	TR2	I trust information on vlogs to be true.	
	TR3	Vloggers are trustworthy.	
	TR4	Vloggers' recommendations are reliable.	
	TR5	Recommendations posted by trustworthy vloggers are to be considered true.	
	TR6	I think vloggers' recommendations are convincing.	
	TR7	I think vloggers' recommendations are credible.	
	TR8	I think vloggers' recommendations are accurate.	
	TR9	Vloggers' recommendations are more trustworthy than company advertising because they are posted by peers.	
Information Quality	IQ1	In each product video there are sufficient reasons supporting the opinions presented.	Grace & Ming (2018)
	IQ2	Each product video is objective.	
	IQ3	Each product video is understandable.	
	IQ4	Each product video is credible.	
	IQ5	Each product video is clear.	
	IQ6	In general, the quality of each product video is high.	

Variable	Item	Scale	Reference
Perceived Benefits	PB1	Vloggers' recommendations help me reduce the risk of making a decision.	Grace & Ming (2018)
	PB2	Vloggers' recommendations can help me gain knowledge about how the product works.	
	PB3	Vloggers' recommendations can help me obtain general product information.	
	PB4	Vloggers' recommendations can help me assess product quality.	
	PB5	Vloggers' recommendations can help me check product features and functions.	
	PB6	Vloggers' recommendations help me learn about products.	
	PB7	Vloggers' recommendations may provide various opinions about the product that I have never considered.	
Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations	ATR1	I think following vloggers' recommendations would be good for me.	Grace & Ming (2018)
	ATR2	I have a positive opinion about vloggers' recommendations.	
	ATR3	I like vloggers' recommendations.	
	ATR4	Overall, my attitude toward vloggers' recommendations is favourable.	
Attitude towards Brand	ATB1	Product branding in beauty vlog advertisements is good.	Lee et al. (2017)
	ATB2	Product branding in beauty vlog advertisements is pleasant.	
	ATB3	Product branding in beauty vlog advertisements is favourable.	
Purchase Intention	PI1	It is highly probable that I will choose the product recommended by a vlogger.	Grace & Ming (2018)
	PI2	It is very likely that I will seriously consider the product recommended by a vlogger.	
	PI3	If I were to make a decision, I would certainly purchase the product recommended by a vlogger.	
	PI4	It is highly probable that I would suggest buying the product recommended by a vlogger.	

Source: Own elaboration



Sample characterization

This study comprised the responses provided by 251 respondents in total, but only 243 of the questionnaires were considered for the analysis as we have excluded all the questionnaires that were not complete. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 243 respondents originating from China, out of whom 63.7% were female and 36.3% were male. Most respondents were adults (only two were under the age of 18). Out of these, the majority (54.2%) were between 26 and 35 years old. As far as their level of education is concerned, most respondents (55.8%) had a bachelor's degree, followed by those who attended senior high school or vocational high school (21.5%). In terms of occupational status, 46.6% of the respondents are currently employed. When asked about their residence, 52.0% of respondents claimed they live in an urban area, while 24.3% stated that their place of residence is a village. In addition, 24.3% said they live in the suburbs. In terms of income, more than half of the respondents (51.8%) claimed they income is just enough to support their living. When it comes to monthly spending on cosmetics, 33.7% said they spend 200–400 CNY (100 CNY=14.39 EUR) per month on cosmetics, while 30.9% said they spend 400–600 CNY. When it comes to how much attention they pay to beauty vlogs and vloggers, 75.8% of the respondents stated they regularly follow vloggers' updates, and 46.6% declared they sometimes buy beauty products recommended in beauty vlogs. While watching beauty vlogs, 85.6% of the respondents thought they would feel the urge to shop. Finally, 80.9% of the respondents said they would recommend their favourite beauty vloggers to their friends, while 85.6% of them admitted that the communications conveyed in beauty vlogs affect their interest.

Measurement model assessment

To understand how beauty vlog recommendation advertising impacts consumer purchase intention, we used SmartPLS 4 software that applies partial least squares (PLS-SEM) of structural equation modelling. One advantage of using the PLS approach is that it works well in small samples and does not

require data normality (Davari & Rezazadeh, 2013). Additionally, in PLS the constructs can be measured by fewer than four items. PLS is a robust method using latent variables and causal relationships. The objective of PLS-SEM is to maximize the explained variance of causal constructs by connecting multi-item scales into constructs and defining relationships between the constructs. It can handle complex relationships and can capture several causal structures in a single model (unlike linear regression, which can capture only one causal structure). In the past few years, PLS-SEM has become a popular technique among researchers (Amaro & Duarte, 2016).

Reliability and validity

The measurement model was evaluated in terms of indicator reliability (reflecting indicator loadings >0.5), item reliability (Cronbach's alpha >0.7), convergent reliability (assessed with average variance extraction, AVE >0.5), internal consistency (assessed with composite reliability, CR >0.7) and discriminant validity (cross-loading criterion, Chin, 2010). Table 2 describes the indicator loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), consistency reliability (Rho_A) and Cronbach's alpha for each latent variable.



Table 2. Reliability and validity

Variable	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude towards the Brand	ATB1	0.853	0.833	0.837	0.9	0.749
	ATB2	0.868				
	ATB3	0.875				
Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations	ATR1	0.839	0.862	0.863	0.907	0.709
	ATR2	0.855				
	ATR3	0.887				
	ATR4	0.783				
Information Quality	IQ1	0.849	0.915	0.915	0.934	0.702
	IQ2	0.873				
	IQ3	0.819				
	IQ4	0.844				
	IQ5	0.805				
	IQ6	0.835				
Perceived Benefits	PB1	0.835	0.92	0.921	0.936	0.677
	PB2	0.842				
	PB3	0.797				
	PB4	0.833				
	PB5	0.846				
	PB6	0.803				
	PB7	0.801				
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	0.793	0.875	0.878	0.909	0.667
	PU2	0.82				
	PU3	0.837				
	PU4	0.822				
	PU5	0.809				
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.832	0.87	0.87	0.911	0.72
	PI2	0.864				
	PI3	0.851				
	PI4	0.846				

Variable	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Trustworthiness	TR1	0.802	0.935	0.937	0.946	0.66
	TR2	0.833				
	TR3	0.797				
	TR4	0.835				
	TR5	0.783				
	TR6	0.801				
	TR7	0.834				
	TR8	0.832				
	TR9	0.789				

Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS

The results prove the reliability of the measured indicators. Since all item loadings exceeded the critical point of 0.5, we can assume that all indicators are acceptable. The average variance extracted (AVE) of the indicators was greater than the expected minimum consistency, ensuring convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The composite reliability (CR) value was also higher than the recommended minimum value of 0.7 (Gefen et al., 2000), indicating sufficient internal consistency across all constructs. The consistency reliability coefficient also represents the expected value (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015).

Discriminant validity

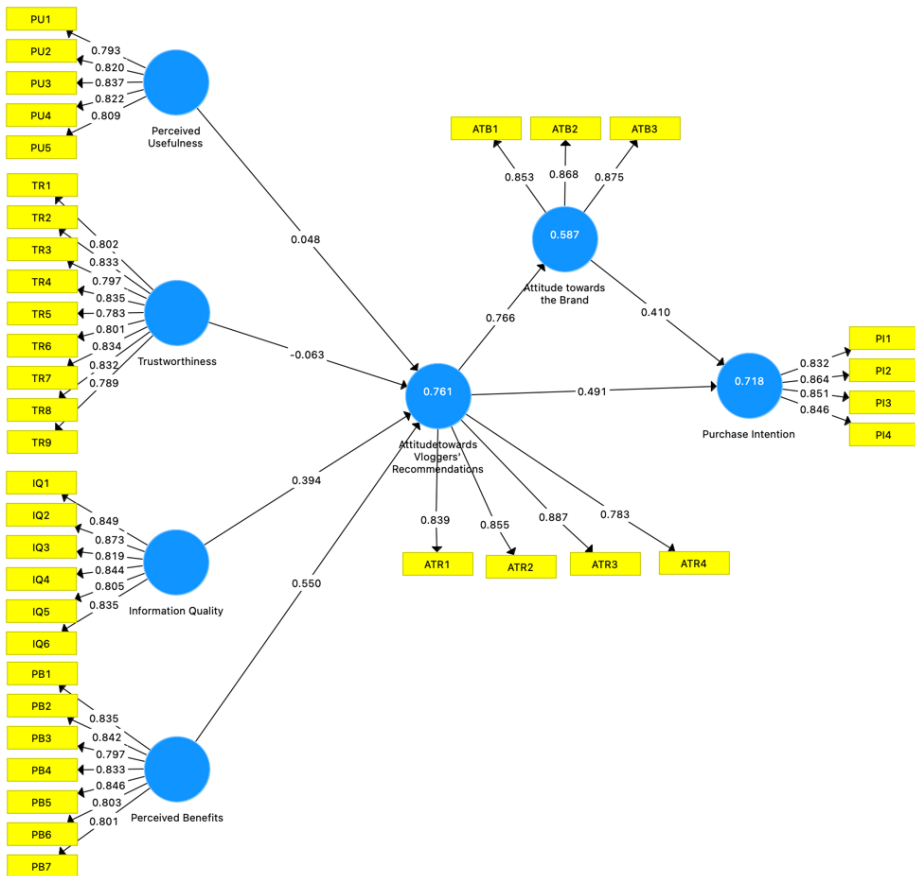
In terms of discriminant validity, the cross-loadings of the indicator items and the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) discriminant validity criteria were applied. The cross-loadings of all indicators are lower than the external loadings, and the square root of AVE is greater than the absolute value of all correlations with other constructs. This confirms the discriminant validity of our scale. All loadings are acceptable, which ensures the strength and reliability of the measured model (Hair et al., 2014). The external model loadings indicate the reliability of the latent variables as they are higher than 0.70 (Henseler et al., 2012). In a

well-fitting model, the structural VIF coefficient should not be higher than 4.0 (Garson, 2016). The highest outer VIF value was observed for item IQ2 (3,266).

Structural model

Figure 2 illustrates the structural model, showing the beta values of all coefficients, the external model loadings and the R2 adjusted for the dependent variable. Table 3 indicates the estimated model fit.

Figure 2. PLS algorithm model



Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS

The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is a measure of the approximate fit of the model and reflects the average size of the difference between the observed correlation matrix and the correlation matrix implied by the model. If the SRMR is below 0.10, we can consider the model to have a good fit (Henseler et al., 2012) (here SRMR =0.07, ensuring a good fit of the model).

Table 3. The algorithm model fit

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Attitude towards the Brand	0.587	0.585
Attitudetowards Vloggers' Recommendations	0.761	0.757
Purchase Intention	0.718	0.715
	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.05	0.07
d_ULS	1.839	3.659
d_G	1.078	1.168
Chi-Square	1467.767	1538.171
NFI	0.822	0.813

Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS

Hypotheses testing: Bootstrapping direct effect results

PLS-SEM uses a nonparametric bootstrap procedure to test the significance of estimated path coefficients with two-tails significant level of 5 per cent (Davison & Hinkley, 1997; Hair et al., 2017). Bootstrap estimates the spread, shape and bias of the sampling distribution of the population which the sample under research is drawn from, creating a large, pre-specified number of samples (Chin, 1998). Bootstrap analysis with 5000 iterations of resampling was used to calculate t-values to assess the impact of all hypothesized relationships as shown in Table 4. The hypotheses were accepted as statistically significant if the t-value was greater than the critical value (t-value >1.96) and the p-value was less than 0.05. The path coefficients, t-values and p-values allow us to accept five of the seven hypotheses

presented. For the models tested, almost all the external model loadings were highly significant, except for 'perceived usefulness' and 'plausibility'. The decision column indicates whether the hypothesis is 'supported' or 'not supported'.

Table 4. Summary of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
H1a	Perceived Usefulness -> Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations	0.048	0.047	0.050	0.958	0.338	not supported
H1b	Trustworthiness -> Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations	-0.063	-0.056	0.078	0.799	0.424	not supported
H1c	Information Quality -> Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations	0.394	0.388	0.074	5.303	0.000	supported
H1d	Perceived Benefits -> Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations	0.550	0.550	0.061	9.046	0.000	supported
H2	Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations -> Attitude towards the Brand	0.766	0.766	0.034	22.476	0.000	supported
H3	Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations -> Purchase Intention	0.491	0.492	0.073	6.737	0.000	supported
H4	Attitude towards the Brand -> Purchase Intention	0.410	0.410	0.066	6.240	0.000	supported

Source: Own elaboration based on SmartPLS

As can be observed, the 'Perceived Usefulness' had a low positive effect on 'Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations' (beta=0.048, t-value>1.96, p-value<0.05). Therefore, the relationship between 'Perceived Usefulness' and 'Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations' was not supported, which goes against the postulates of Grace and Ming (2018) in the study of whom perceived usefulness was positively affecting audiences' attitudes toward vloggers' recommendations. Moreover, there was a negative effect of 'Trustworthiness' and 'Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations' (beta=-0.063, t-value>1.96, p-value<0.05) noted. Therefore, the relationship between 'Trustworthiness' and 'Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations' was not supported.

The 'Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations' showed to have a strong positive effect on the 'Attitude towards the Brand' (beta=0.766, t-value>1.96, p-value<0.05), and it also has a positive effect on the 'Purchase Intention' (beta=0.491, t-value>1.96, p-value<0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis according to which the attitude towards vloggers' recommendations will positively affect audiences' attitudes towards the brand is justified. Compared to the 'Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations', the 'Attitude towards the Brand' has a relatively smaller effect on the 'Purchase Intention', but it is still a positive effect (beta=0.410, t-value>1.96, p-value<0.05). Consequently, it can be assumed that the attitude towards the brand positively affects audiences' purchase intention.

Finally, both 'Information Quality' (beta=0.394, t-value>1.96, p-value<0.05) and 'Perceived Benefits' (beta=0.550, t-value>1.96, p-value<0.05) have different levels of impact on the 'Attitude towards Vloggers' Recommendations'. Therefore, the hypothesis according to which perceived usefulness positively affects the audiences' attitude toward vloggers' recommendations was also verified. The findings confirm that Grace and Ming's (2018) recommendations can be also applied in China.

Conclusions

This study was conducted in the context of a Chinese society where online shopping and online social interaction are highly prevalent. Although the research on vlogger video recommendation advertising is narrow, little has been known



on its application in beauty sector. Moreover, the links between the attitude towards vloggers and the attitude toward brand advertisement remain to be explored. This study fills this research gap and applies the empirical test to the Chinese market, thus making an important contribution to enriching the existing knowledge on the topic that has been little explored. More specifically, this research contributes to a better understanding of the impact of vlog recommendations and provides an opportunity to understand the relationship between beauty vlogs and the intention to purchase beauty products. It also shows a strong connection between the vlogger and the brand advertisement attitude. In this way, this study provides useful information for practitioners as well.

To answer the first research question: "Which antecedents influence the attitude towards a vlogger?", it must be acknowledged that consumer attitudes are defined as consumers' favourable or unfavourable evaluations of specific behaviour (Casaló et al., 2011), and previous studies indicated that perceived usefulness of shared information significantly affects attitudes (Hsu et al., 2013). Indeed, in the light of the previous studies, perceived usefulness is one of the factors influencing the attitude towards vloggers, which could not be supported in this study. Secondly, since trust is considered the key to the success of online business and attracting customers (Hsu et al., 2013) and it can be established between the vlogger and the audience, trustworthiness was expected to be one of the factors that impact the attitude towards vlogger; again, this relationship was not supported in this study. In addition, previous studies showed that the better and more extensive the quality of information, the higher the satisfaction with the content creator (Park et al., 2007). Those postulates were verified in this study, confirming a positive relationship between information quality and attitude towards a vlogger. Previous research also indicated that followers develop more favourable attitudes toward vlog recommendations when the perceived benefits are high (Ing & Ming, 2018), which was supported in this study as well.

Moreover, this research also investigated whether there is a relationship between attitudes toward vlogger recommendations and attitudes toward brand advertisement, and how the attitude towards a vlogger and the attitude towards a brand impact the cosmetics purchase intention in China. The results of this study confirm a strong positive relationship between the attitude

towards vlogger recommendations and the attitude towards branded ads. Finally, we also verified the positive relationship between the attitude toward vlogger recommendation and the attitude toward the brand advertisement, and their impact on purchase intention. The results of this study confirm a positive impact of those two dimensions.

Considering the managerial contributions of this paper, vlogger promotion has become one of the options for beauty brands to create their brand awareness, and this research brings more knowledge on what companies should consider while planning their marketing activities and, particularly, while making a choice of content to be used. This research helps beauty products marketing managers understand how vlog advertising impacts consumer attitudes and realize that consumer attitudes towards the content creator may have an impact on brand attitudes. Regarding the level of interest in beauty vlogs and vloggers, most respondents admitted to regularly search for updates and information. They also admitted an urge to shop while watching beauty vlogs, which proves the efficiency of these new media. This study also recommends companies and marketers to pay attention to the perceived benefits and information quality in vloggers' recommendations as advertisements in vlogs can impact the audience's attitude to the greatest extent. Finally, more focus should be placed on the impact of vlog communication effects on brand awareness because both consumers' attitudes toward vlogger recommendations and their attitudes toward the brand after watching vlogs will affect their final purchase intentions. Therefore, companies should take these dimensions into account to gain more customers and to retain the existing ones.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The limitations of this study should be considered in future research. The primary limitation of this study is the use of non-probability sampling technique, which means that the sample does not represent the whole population and does not allow for the generalization of the results. In addition, the sample consisted mainly of women and young people, which could bias the subsequent results. Moreover, vlog promotion is a method that has only become popular in recent years, which results in very little research in this area. It limits the comparative



studies and leads to the existence of few scales that could serve as a reference for an empirical test. Furthermore, in future research it would be recommended to consider that consumers' attitudes towards vlogger's recommendations change along with their attitudes toward brands. Therefore, conducting a longitudinal study would be recommended. Future research should also consider other factors concerning the respondents, such as age, gender or their habits of using social media.

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