

**DIGITAL INFLUENCERS - FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR INFLUENCE ON FOLLOWERS**

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Agradecimento à órgão de fomento:  
não houve

# DIGITAL INFLUENCERS - FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR INFLUENCE ON FOLLOWERS

## Abstract

Ten hypotheses were proposed. The five variables of the traditional TEARS Model were evaluated. Only Trustworthiness and Similarity resulted correlated to positive attitudes and intention of purchase, indicating that the model does not necessarily represent the most important factors related to digital influencers and that therefore new models need to be studied and proposed in order to better understand which attributes are important or not for digital influencers. Other attributes also proved relevant, indicating a complex phenomenon and the need for the influencer to master many different skills to exert influence over her followers.

Followers expect utilitarian (necessary, informative and relevant) and hedonic (entertaining and cool) contents, focused on the expertise of the influencer, and endorsements should have a fit with the influencer expertise and with restricted frequency, or her influence could be reduced. Results also indicated that influencers who produce more utilitarian content generate a higher probability of purchase for the products they promote.

Influencers were evaluated positively, with power to influence consumer decisions, and are perceived as more trusted and closer than celebrities, in particular these influencers associated with creating more useful (functional, practical, and similar adjectives), when compared to those with hedonic content.

**Keywords:** Consumer Behavior, Social media, Digital Influencers, Endorsement, Influence.

## 1. Introduction

An important set of marketing managerial decisions are those related to communication, as it is through information, education and persuasion that companies build positioning, brand identity and brand equity (WIRTZ; HEMZO; LOVELOCK, 2020). There are many communication tools available to this end (Kotler and Keller, 2016). One that has been increasingly used is the endorsement of celebrities to make brands more desirable (CAMARGO, ESTEVANIM; SILVEIRA, 2017). The brand selects celebrities who present to the public attributes such as credibility, trust and attraction, positively influencing the perceptions, attitudes and intention to purchase the target audience and as a consequence increasing the impact of the message (BELCH; BELCH, 2014).

With the emergence of social networks, using endorsers as a marketing strategy became popular. Not only celebrities (CAMARGO, ESTEVANIM; SILVEIRA, 2017), but now one sees the emergence of opinion markers that have great groups of followers and whose opinions are very respected. They were first called Bloggers, as they communicated with their public mainly through blogs, later became Vloggers (from the combination of video+loggers) or Youtubers, as most migrated to videos in Youtube, Vimeo and others, and more recently, they are being called Digital Influencers, as they can be found in different social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. (CAMARGO, ESTEVANIM; SILVEIRA, 2017). They became an interesting alternative to celebrities, as they also have strong influence on their followers, although with a few different characteristics.

In view of this scenario, the present work aims to analyze the perceptions of the followers of digital influencers, in order to answer the following research problem:

*What factors affect the influence of digital influencers, and how the contents of her messages moderate this influence.*

The results of this study are of great interest for managers when selecting the right influencers for promotion of their brands, improving on the TEARS Model (SHIMP, 2003), better understand how the influence process works, and to help consumers to get better information in their selection of the most appropriate brand for their consumption. It also contributes to companies becoming more effective and competitive in the market, thus being able to invest in better working conditions, better salaries, better pay investors, more investment in Research & Development (and better products for consumers) and more employment for the community.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Brand image and endorsement**

In order to build a strong brand, managers can resource to endorsements from influent people. Endorsement of celebrities can be defined as (SENO; LUKAS, 2007) a partnership between brand and celebrity, in which both benefit from the transfer of image and attributes reciprocally. In that sense, the brand can profit from some traits that personalities have that in which their brands are weak, while the celebrity gains exposition and revenues (SHIMP, 2009). It is a powerful tool to develop the reputation of the brand, and influence people (BALMER; GREYSER, 2007). Endorsements can add credibility to a particular product and brand, generating a feeling and confidence of the consumer.

Celebrities attract the attention of the public, because the consumer identifies themselves with this celebrity and begins to want to be like her. The fan (KAPFERER, 1987) wants to fuse himself with the celebrity, possess her, incorporate her physically and mentally. This “*starphagy*” – a neologism combining *Star* (English) and *Phágein* (Greek, meaning “to eat”) means the wish to metaphorically absorb the star. This can be done by collecting physical traits and objects of the star (memorabilia), or by gathering information that makes the fan feel intimate with the star. In this second strategy, information on the star about his preferences, habits, consumption, routines, etc., can attract people to pay attention to any public manifestation of the star, that strengthen this intimacy, what can be useful for a brand that, when endorsed by the star, becomes more valuable for the fan.

The selection of the appropriate celebrity, however, depends on the strength of her image, and the fit between the brand image and the celebrity image (BELCH; BELCH, 2014). If the chosen celebrity is not viewed positively by the public, it can cause a negative impact on the brand image, with undesirable results (ZIPPORAH; MBERIA, 2014).

With the evolution of social networks and social media, digital influencers emerged as an interesting alternative to celebrities as endorsers, as they can have significant impact on attitudes, preferences, sales and loyalty (CRESCITELLI; TAGAWA, 2015). Today, on Instagram, the partnership between influencers and brands is common, with direct impact on their followers (HINERASKY, 2014). Digital influencers (SILVA, CAVALCANTI, 2019), have characteristics that differ from traditional celebrities, as they allow greater interaction, approximation and engagement with the public, are more open and spontaneous, while celebrities tend to be more discreet and protective of their privacy, resulting in an image more idealized and unreachable to the public, what may make more difficult for them to establish a connection with the public.

### **2.2. How influence works**

There are there are thousands, if not millions of influencers all over the world. Only on Instagram (InfluencerDB, 2018), there are more than half million active influencers operating. Out of this volume, managers have to weed out those not fitting, due to differences in personality, expertise, penetration or credibility with his specific target.

The TEARS Model (SHIMP 2003) proposes that the influence results mainly from two factors, that total five dimensions: **Credibility**, that consists of Trustworthiness and Expertise, and **Attractiveness**, composed by Physical Attractiveness, Respect and Similarity.

Credibility is associated to believing in someone, and can be explained by Trustworthiness, the perception that the person is honest and whole (ALI, 2011), and Expertise, the perception that the person fully understands the subject she is communicating (ERDOGAN, 1999). An influencer can easily lose her credibility if she is perceived as giving opinions or endorsements just for increasing visibility or for payment by contract with a particular brand (GILES, 2018). On the other hand, some cases may be perceived as a way to sustain the costs of the influencer and be acceptable under specific circumstances (DHANESH, DUTHLER 2019)

Attractiveness is the ability of a person to draw positive attention to her presence, behavior and ideas, and can be explained by Physical Attractiveness, the perception of esthetical factors valued by the target (PATEL, 2009; FELIX, BORGES, 2014), Respect, expressing admiration and esteem for a person, and Similarity, expressing identification and affinity for a person (SHIMP, 2003, 2009; PRINGLE, BINET, 2005).

A recent study (GANDRA et al. (2018) proposed that these variables may not always be of influence, and also that some other variables may be relevant depending on the profile of the influencer and her followers. A previous study (CLARKE, JOHNSTONE, 2012) suggested that the ability of the influencer in promoting information and ideas would also be relevant. Charisma (GOMÉZ, 2019), an attractiveness that can inspire devotion, could be pointed as another relevant variable, as well as sympathy (MOON, HAN 2011), usually expressed in social media by an emoticon, for instance, the “LIKE” on Facebook.

The use of humor (BARRY, GRAÇA, 2018) can be of influence, in particular for endorsement of low-involvement and emotionally motivated goods, but may reduce comments and feedback.

### 2.3. Theoretical Model

From the review above, a list of possible relevant variables that could be used to propose a theoretical model of the process of influence of Digital Influencers was built (Table 1):

*Table 1- Proposed Influencing Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Source</b>
Trustworthiness	TEARS, SHIMP, 2003, 2009
Expertise in the subject matter	TEARS, SHIMP, 2003, 2009
Physical Attractiveness	TEARS, SHIMP, 2003, 2009
Respect	TEARS, SHIMP, 2003, 2009
Similarity	TEARS, SHIMP, 2003, 2009
Spontaneity	SILVA, CAVALCANTI, 2019
Authenticity	GILES, 2018
Ability to communicate	SILVA, CAVALCANTI, 2019
Number of followers	HINERASKY, 2014
Charisma	GOMÉZ, 2019
Sympathy	MOON, HAN 2011
Proximity with the public	SILVA, CAVALCANTI, 2019
Transparency	ALI, 2001; DHANESH, DUTHLER 2019
Subject or segment	SHIMP, 2003
Good humor	BARRY, GRAÇA, 2018
Sincerity	SILVA, CAVALCANTI, 2019

*Source: bibliographical research*

## **2.4. Hypotheses**

Based on the analysis of the references and the variables identified in the bibliographical review, ten hypotheses were proposed:

H1: The TEARS model attributes influence attitude towards produced content and probability of purchase

H2: Followers don't like it when a digital influencer leaves aside the main subject on their social networks, either by the large number of ads and advertisements or by the change of focus or segment.

H3: Transparency is the most important attribute for a digital influencer

H4: Digital influencers are important for disseminating, popularizing and increasing the number of sales of products and services of a brand

H5: A partnership between the digital influencer and a brand must have a good match and conformity so that the brand is seen in a positive way by the target.

H6: People trust the digital influencer more than celebrities

H7: The contents of digital influencers are viewed positively by users of social networks

H8: The type of subject or segment addressed by digital influencers is a factor that influences the attraction and identification of followers.

H9: Content produced by digital influencers has different dimensions (utilitarian and hedonic) and distinct impacts on consumer behavior

H10: Utilitarian or hedonic content do not influence confidence between digital influencers and celebrities

## **3. Methodology**

With the help of the theoretical review, the methodology used in this work was carried out in two processes. The first was qualitative research, in which individual in-depth interviews were conducted. The second was the quantitative method through survey with the elaboration of a questionnaire. According to Malhotra (2012, p.111): "it is a fundamental principle of marketing research to consider qualitative and quantitative research as complementary and non-excluding".

### **3.1. Qualitative research**

The qualitative method (MALHOTRA, 2012) is important to establish the problem and develop the approach in research, thus assisting in the future construction of hypotheses and discover variables that should be inserted in the research. In order to assist in the future testing of hypotheses regarding attributes that influencers should possess and attributes of his communication, and how her target is impacted by them, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with eight individuals, aged over 18 years, of both sexes.

The in-depth interview (MALHOTRA, 2012), is an unstructured and direct model, to achieve content and performed individually. The interviewer works with one person at a time, in order to obtain information, motivations, feelings and beliefs of the respondent in relation to a given topic. In this way, qualitative research (MCDANIEL, GATES, 2003) can understand in a deep and exploratory way the motivations of consumers, thus obtaining information in subjective and comprehensive ways.

For the number of participants, it was adopted the criteria of theoretical saturation of qualitative research (GUEST, BUNCE, JOHNSON, 2006), that was reached after the seventh interview.

Out of the eight participants, three were men and five women. The choice of the interviewees occurred intentionally, with preference for those knowledgeable about digital media and frequent followers of digital influencers.

The interviews were conducted with the help of a script, based on the variables identified in Table 1, with open questions that stimulated the respondent to answer freely, with the objective of discussing attributes that influencers should possess and attributes of his communication, and how her target is impacted by them. All interviews were conducted personally, and were recorded, with an average length of one hour.

### **3.2. Quantitative research**

Survey was conducted with the help of an online questionnaire, elaborated and made available on the "Online Pesquisa" platform (<https://www.onlinepesquisa.com>), that took on average ten minutes to respond, and the field work was conducted between July and August 2020. Filter questions were used at the beginning of the questionnaire, in order to guarantee that only participants above eighteen years of age, and frequent followers of digital influencers completed the questionnaire. This resulted in a sampling by convenience. Out of 835 respondents, only 418 were considered valid and responded to all questions.

The questionnaire was published in several groups on social networks that had digital influencers as a theme. Univariate, bivariate and multivariate techniques were used in the analyses. The answers were obtained by the use of Likert scales and semantic differential scales.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Qualitative research**

From the analysis of the transcripts of the interviews, some points have been suggested.

Digital influencers have different roles and importance in the interviewees' lives due to the lifestyle of each person, however, for the interviewees it was clear that in general the influencers are sources of entertainment, information, guidance and inspiration. Thus, the individual identifies with the influencer or the type of content addressed. This identification can be more intense and make the influencer as a model to be followed, a situation observed on several occasions during the interviews. In addition, the interviewees also mentioned that influencers are important to promote products or services, and as a consequence, they leverage sale of a particular brand, due to people trusting them.

Many interviewees seem to lose interest in digital influencers, when they change their focus, that is, they divert from the subject that the channel or video proposes.

Apparently, they don't react well to influencers that makes a lot of messages with content clearly perceived as motivated by commercial interests, and they usually search for the influencer and the subject they like, through the recommendation by peers and search algorithms.

There was a general acceptance of the contents related to products and services made by digital influencers, because the influencer is perceived as being informative, when presenting product tests, giving valuable information and also reinforcing the feeling of intimacy with the influencer.

They value influencers that offer content with a combination of different information, as price and quality, and that is, all in all, more relevant for a final decision of consumption, than the strength of the power of the influencer.

Respondents stated that they perceived influencers more accessible and closer to the reality of the follower, unlike the celebrities who the participants perceive as unreachable people and who have a totally different and unusual lifestyle.

The results confirmed that all variables presented in Table 1 could be relevant, affecting the power of influence of the digital influencer, so they could be used to base the construction of the quantitative questionnaire.

## 4.2. Quantitative research

The questionnaire was published in several groups on social networks that had digital influencers as a theme. Univariate, bivariate and multivariate techniques were used in the analyses.

The use of univariate analyses refers to the analysis of a single variable at a time, with of statistical parameters as average, percentages and standard deviation. Regarding bivariate techniques, that is, the use of crosstables for two variables at the same time, it was used to interpret whether there were different perceptions for the different age or gender groups, for a given variable.

T-tests were used to compare means and assess the significance of statements and preferences for attributes of digital influencers. Multiple linear regressions were also performed to identify relationships with variables of perceptions about the contents of digital influencers and probability of purchase of a product or service disclosed by the influencer. The use of factor analysis was responsible for identifying which perceptions regarding the content of digital influencers were related to utilitarian and hedonic aspects.

### 4.2.1. Demographic profile

Out of 418 valid respondents, one has 132 (32%) males and 285 (68%) females, suggesting that women might be more interested in influencers.

The age distribution is presented in Table 2:

*Table 2- Age distribution of the sample*

Age group	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
From 18 to 24 years old	212	50.7
From 25 to 34 years old	75	17.9
From 35 to 44 years old	49	11.7
From 45 to 54 years old	57	13.6
Over 55 years old	25	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>418</b>	

*Source: primary data from questionnaire*

Due to the sampling technique of convenience, participants were in general those closer to the age range of the young interviewer that contacted and interacted with them, resulting in half of the sample being between 18 and 24 years old, with decreasing percentage in older age ranges. The family income distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 3:

*Table 3 - Family income distribution of the sample*

Family income	%
Up to 1.5 minimum wage (Up to R\$1,567.50)	10.0
Above 1.5 to 3 minimum wages (Between R\$ 1,567.51 and R\$ 3,135.00)	19.1
Over 3 to 4.5 minimum wages (Between R\$ 3,135.01 and R\$ 4,702.50)	16.7
Over 4.5 to 6 minimum wages (Between R\$ 4,702.51 and R\$ 6,270.00)	14.3
Over 6 to 10 minimum wages (Between R\$ 6270.01 and R\$10,450.00)	19.1

Above 10 minimum wages (more than R\$10,450.01)	18.2
We don't have a wage income	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>418</b>

Source: primary data from questionnaire

One can identify two groups of respondents, one with lower income (1.5MW – 3MW) and another (6MW – 10MW) higher one, both corresponding to with 19.1% of the sample. The respondents' education distribution is presented in Table 4:

Table 4 - Respondent education distribution of the sample

<b>Education</b>	<b>%</b>
Incomplete Elementary School	0.5
Complete Elementary School	0.5
Incomplete High School	1.9
Complete High School	11.0
Incomplete Higher Education	40.9
Complete Higher Education	22.0
Incomplete graduate school	4.1
Full graduate	15.1
Master's, doctorate, post-doctorate	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>418</b>

Source: primary data from questionnaire

The majority of the respondents are either attending higher education (40.9%) or have completed it (22.0%), representing a higher level of education than the general population. Based on the results of bibliographical and the qualitative research, ten hypotheses were created and analyzed in this quantitative phase.

#### 4.2.2. H1: The TEARS model attributes influence attitude towards produced content and probability of purchase

To evaluate the impact of each of the attributes of the TEARS model on the attitude towards the content produced and the probability of purchase, multiple linear regression analyses were used with the TEARS model as the independent variable and attitude and probability of purchase as dependent variables.

The model was significant when the response variable was attitude towards content ( $F(5, 412) = 5.14, p < .001$ ).

The results indicated that **Truthworthiness** ( $b = -.126, t(412) = -2.00, p = .046$ ) and **Similarity** ( $b = -.108, t(412) = -2.96, p = .003$ ) were associated with **Positive attitude** so that the more the consumer considers Trustworthiness and Similarity relevant, the greater the positive attitude towards the content.

There was no significant association between physical attractiveness, expertise, and respect in the attitude towards content (p-values above 20%). The results were similar when the response variable was probability of purchase ( $F(5, 412) = 7.06, p < .001$ ).

The results also indicated that **Trustworthiness** ( $b = -.273, t(412) = -2.98, p < .001$ ) and **Similarity** ( $b = -.214, t(412) = -4.04, p < .001$ ) were strongly associated with the **Probability of purchase**.

There was no significant association between Physical attractiveness, Expertise, and Respect with the probability of purchase (p-values above 20%).



These results indicate that the TEARS model does not necessarily represent the most important factors related to digital influencers and that therefore new models need to be studied and proposed in order to generate a greater understanding of which attributes are important or not for digital influencers. The hypothesis is refused.

**4.2.3. H2: Followers don't like it when a digital influencer leaves aside the main subject on their social networks, either by the large number of ads and advertisements or by the change of focus or segment.**

Initially, four sentences of the questionnaire, with 5-point (agree/disagree) Likert scales, were used to assess agreement with this hypothesis. The t-test was conducted with the hypothesis that the mean was equal to 3 (the midpoint of the scale). In all four phrases the mean was statistically lower than 3, indicating **agreement** with the affirmations. Table 5 presents the results:

*Table 5- T-tests results*

<b>Phrases</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p-value</b>
I don't like it when an influencer makes too many brand ads on their content and social networks	2.19	-17.89	<.001
The digital influencer loses my trust and credibility when he advertises many ads and advertisements.	2.55	-8.30	<.001
I lose interest in a digital influencer when she changes the subject or segment that is addressed on her social networks	2.78	-4.63	<.001
I stop following a digital influencer when he diverts from the main subject of his profile on social networks	2.86	-2.64	<.001

*Source: SPSS processing of primary data from questionnaire*

Next, two multiple linear regression were performed.

The first used the questions about attitude towards content and the one that measured the probability of buying a product or service disclosed by a digital influencer as dependent variables, and the different aversions and priorities of consumers as independent variables.

In the regression using **attitude to content**, the only significant relationship occurred with the **second phrase** "*The digital influencer loses my trust and credibility when he advertises many ads and advertisements*" (b = .088, t (413) = 2.41, p = .017).

This relationship indicates that **excess ads generally decrease the perception of how good the content is**. There was no relationship with variables related to subject deviation.

In the second regression, **probability of purchase** with the four phrases, the only significant relationship occurred with the **first phrase** "*I don't like it when an influencer performs many advertisements on their content and social networks.*" (b = .230, t (413) = 3.84, p < .001), again showing that excessive advertisements drive away consumers. However, there was no association between probability of purchase and change of subject.

These results indicate that although consumers do not like many advertisements in the content, the fact of leaving aside the main subject is less important.

The results of the regression indicate no relationship between "leaving aside the main subject" and decreased positive perception of content or probability of purchase. Therefore, digital

influencers need not be afraid to change subjects or segments, but should be careful when performing an excess of advertisements in a short time. The hypothesis is refused.

#### 4.2.4. H3: Transparency is the most important attribute for a digital influencer

A list of attributes of the digital influencer, compiled from Table 1, along with additional attributes identified in the qualitative phase, were evaluated with the use of a five-point Likert scale (highly relevant/ highly irrelevant).

The t-test was conducted with the hypothesis that the mean was equal to 3 (the midpoint of the scale).

Table 6 presents the results, ordered by order of importance (lower average).

Table 6 - Digital Influencer attributes evaluation in order of relevance

Attribute	Average	p-value
Respect	1.31	p< .001
Trustworthiness	1.39	p< .001
Charisma	1.41	p< .001
Ability to communicate	1.44	p< .001
Transparency	1.49	p< .001
Humility	1.59	p< .001
Good humor	1.60	p< .001
Proximity with the public	1.64	p< .001
Spontaneity	1.66	p< .001
Expertise in the subject matter	1.68	p< .001
Technical quality of the video	1.73	p< .001
Defined opinions	1.95	p< .001
Altruist	1.98	p< .001
Organization	1.99	p< .001
Talent	2.15	p< .001
Be funny	2.15	p< .001
Seriousness	2.16	p< .001
Similarity	2.26	p< .001
Talking about private life	2.90	p = .032
Physical attractiveness	2.96	p = .373

Source: SPSS processing of primary data from questionnaire

All attributes proved relevant (p< .050), except Physical attractiveness.

The most important attributes (average below 1.50) for those interviewed were Respect, Trustworthiness, Charisma, Ability to communicate and Transparency, but the number of relevant attributes suggests that a digital influencer needs to master several skills and attributes to be considered an effective influencer of her followers.

The initial hypothesis was that transparency would be the main attribute was refused, but the attribute is still among the main ones.

#### 4.2.5. H4: Digital influencers are important for disseminating, popularizing and increasing the number of sales of products and services of a brand

The phrase “*digital influencers have a good ability to popularize a product or service*” was evaluated with the help of a 5-point (agree/disagree) Likert scale, used to assess agreement with this hypothesis, resulting in agreement of more than half of the participants (55%). A significant number of respondents (38%) fully agree, adding to 93% of some degree of agreement.

A bivariate analysis of agreement by age range showed that the younger age group (18-24 years), was the one that most agreed with the ability of the influencers to popularize products and services, being that more than half of them (51%) have chosen the "fully agree" option. The hypothesis was accepted.

#### **4.2.6. H5: A partnership between the digital influencer and a brand must have a good match and conformity so that the brand is seen in a positive way by the target.**

To test this hypothesis, two phases of the questionnaire were analyzed.

The results of the evaluation of the phrase “*the brand should only partner with influencers who belong to the same segment of it*” of a 5-point (agree/disagree) Likert scale showed general agreement, with 33% with the option "I agree", and 19% with the "I totally agree" option, adding 52%. It was also significant that 26% of respondents chose the option "Neither agree nor disagree", indicating that for a particular parcel of the respondents are neutral to this option. Disagreement was identified in a smaller 22% group.

In relation to the phrase "*I believe more in the brand's message when it uses influencers from the same segment of it*", 55% of the respondents agree, with 24% positioning themselves as indifferent, and only 22% disagree.

These two results allow to accept this hypothesis.

#### **4.2.7. H6: People trust the digital influencer more than celebrities**

To test this hypothesis, were analyzed the results related to the phrase: "*I trust and believe more in digital influencers than in celebrities*".

The t-test was conducted with the hypothesis that the mean was equal to 3 (the midpoint of the scale), with results confirming that the average is significantly different from the midpoint of the scale ( $t(417) = -4.69, p < .001$ ), indicating that the respondents trust digital influencers more than celebrities, and confirming this hypothesis.

#### **4.2.8. H7: The contents of digital influencers are viewed positively by users of social networks.**

To test this hypothesis, respondents were asked to evaluate the quality of the content offered by digital influencers, using a 5-point (very good/very bad) Likert scale, with 59% selecting the option "Good" and 19% choosing “Very good”, in a total of 78% of positive evaluation. A smaller portion (21%) presented a more neutral position, choosing “Regular” and only 0.5% opted for “Bad” and “Very bad”, indicating a positive evaluation of the contents that helps accept this hypothesis.

To better understand the characteristics of this positive evaluation, a bivariate analysis was also performed between the public's perception of the content produced by digital influencers by age group. The results showed that the two age groups that more positively evaluate the content produced by digital influencers are the two youngest (18 to 24 years and 25 to 34 years).

In these two younger tracks, adding the respondents that evaluated as "Very good" and "Good", resulted in a majority of approximately 54%.

Semantic differential with a 5-point scale with opposed positive-negative adjectives evaluating the content provided by digital influencers was used, resulting in positive averages for all of them. “Cool” was the adjective best evaluated, as seen in Table 7:

Table 7- Averages of the semantic differential adjectives

Pair of adjectives	Average
Cool - Boring	1,789
Necessary - Unnecessary	2,404
Relevant - Irrelevant	2,282
Entertaining - Not entertaining	1,852
Informative - Non-informative	2,280

Source: SPSS processing of primary data from questionnaire

These results allow to accept this hypothesis.

**4.2.9. H8: The type of subject or segment addressed by digital influencers is a factor that influences the attraction and identification of followers.**

Analyzing the results of the evaluation in a 5-point (agree/disagree) Likert scale of the phrase “the segment or segment of the digital influencer, is important in the approximation between influencer and public”, the majority of respondents (45%) agreed, but part of the sample disagreed, what suggests that other factors might being taken into account by the respondents, like as the personality characteristics of an influencer, a factor addressed in another hypothesis. This hypothesis can be partially accepted.

**4.2.10. H9: Content produced by digital influencers has different dimensions (utilitarian and hedonic) and distinct impacts on consumer behavior**

The pairs of adjectives of the semantic scale from Table 7 were used for a factor analysis, in order to obtain possible latent factors related to the types of content produced by digital influencers. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation resulted in the extraction of two factors (each with eigenvalue > 1), accounting for 79.54% of the explained variance.

The first component is composed by three pairs of adjectives (Necessary - Unnecessary, Informative - Non-informative, Relevant - Irrelevant) and can be understood as the utilitarian component of the content produced by digital influencers. The degree to which the content of a given influencer is necessary, informative and relevant is related to functionality, practicality, and needs related to rational aspects.

The second component, composed by two pairs of adjectives (Entertaining- Not entertaining, Cool - Boring), can be understood as the hedonic component of the content produced by digital influencers. These two components suggest that consumers consider different - utilitarian and hedonic – aspects of the information produced by influencers.

Next, we analyzed which type of content – utilitarian or hedonic – have a more positive relationship with marketing response variables. The bivariate results of the question on content evaluation: “In general, how do you evaluate the content produced by digital influencers?” crossed with the question on purchase intention: “When you observe a digital influencer that you accompany and like, disclosing a product/service of interest to you, how likely are you to purchase this product/service?” resulted in scores for each of the components. The mean of the utilitarian and hedonic components was obtained by calculating the average of the variables within each of the components.

The correlation between the variables of utilitarian and hedonic considerations was moderate ( $r = .47, p < .001$ ). This suggests that these dimensions are distinct and orthogonal.

Multiple regression analyses evaluated the influence of each of the scores related to attitude towards the content and probability of purchase.

The first regression used attitude towards content as a dependent variable and the two components as independent variables. The regression coefficients were positive for both the utilitarian content ( $b = .137$ ,  $t(416) = 3.38$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and for the hedonic content ( $b = .175$ ,  $t(416) = 4.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

These results indicate that consumers evaluate positively both utilitarian and hedonic content. The second regression used the probability of purchase (given an offer and its promotion by the influencer) as a dependent variable and the two components as independent variables. The regression coefficients were positive for the utilitarian content ( $b = .236$ ,  $t(416) = 4.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not for hedonic content ( $b = .075$ ,  $t(416) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .224$ ).

These results indicate that influencers who produce more utilitarian content generate a higher probability of purchase for the products they promote. The hypothesis can be accepted.

#### **4.2.11. H10: Utilitarian or hedonic content do not influence confidence between digital influencers and celebrities**

To test this last hypothesis, a multiple linear regression was conducted, where the utilitarian and hedonic components were the independent variables and confidence in the influencer (vs. celebrity) was the dependent variable.

The results showed that people trust the digital influencer more when they are associated with the utility value offering ( $b = -.161$ ,  $t(415) = -3.04$ ,  $p = .003$ ), but not hedonic ( $b = -.04$ ,  $t(415) = -.678$ ,  $p = .498$ ).

The results lead to refusing this hypothesis, as the respondents only trust digital influencers more than celebrities when these influencers are associated with creating more useful (functional, practical, and similar adjectives) than hedonic content.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1. Main results**

Based on the results of this study, it was observed that most respondents have a positive perception about the content created by digital influencers and recognize the ability of influencers to popularize a product or service.

We sought to understand the conformity and correspondence between the brand and digital influencer. Thus, most people believe that the brand and the influencer when performing a partnership, should belong to the same segment, passing as a consequence more credibility, however, it was observed that there are also a large significant number of people who have a neutrality in relation to this idea, or who even do not agree, revealing that there are several factors that influence the individual to accompany the digital influencer.

It has been evidenced that followers do not like when a digital influencer on their social networks makes many ads and advertisements of brands, because it causes followers to stop observing the content in a positive way and as a consequence decreases the potential to purchase the product advertised.

Regarding attributes, respondents consider that respect is the most important attribute that a digital influencer should possess. It was noticed that physical attractiveness was the least valued attribute, that is, the aesthetic aspect was considered less important when compared to attributes that refer to personal abilities or personality characteristics.

It was found that respondents appreciate the utilitarian and also hedonic content, however, in relation to the probability of purchase, it can be seen that the influencers who produce content directed to the utilitarian aspects, have a higher probability of purchase when disclosing a product or service to followers. Thus, through the utilitarian and hedonic dimensions they did

not allow the differentiation and segmentation of consumers (because they consume both dimensions), but rather the differentiation between influencers.

It should be considered that the TEARS model of Shimp (2003) cannot necessarily help to understand which attributes are important to the influencer, because these attributes may be associated with other aspects, such as utilitarian and hedonic content, and there are also other attributes or variables that have been well valued and are not part of the TEARS model. Therefore, it is necessary to create or evaluate other models and understand whether they are targeted at digital influencers and not only to celebrities.

## **5.2. Practical or theoretical contributions of the study**

The motivation of this research is justified by the intense presence of influencers in social networks in the contemporary context, influencing the decisions of their followers in relation to habits and consumption. Understanding, therefore, what actions and attributes of digital influencers that the public identifies, has as usefulness and contribution to size the impact of the opinions and images provided by the influencer on the lives of followers, and how this can be used in marketing strategies by brands.

In this work, it was analyzed the factors that affect the influence of digital influencers and how his content moderates this effect. Thus, this work can contribute in future studies, to understand the attitudes and characteristics of a specific segment (niche) of digital influencers. In addition, it is important to consider for future research the hedonic and utilitarian distinction when studying digital influencers. Another factor to be highlighted is to propose new models (and not only TEARS) that address attributes to understand influencers.

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