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How Influencers Body Size impacts the users' Intention to Recommend

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INTRODUCTION

Contextualized to the social network environment, this study aims to analyze the impact of influencers' body size on users' Intention to recommend (ItR). In more detail, our study focuses on how male influencers' body size impacts male users' ItR with the mediating role of Risk Perception and the moderating role of the type of product promoted by the influencer.

Consumers are increasingly using social media to gather information on which to base their decisions. Social network sites are numerous, disparate and used for different purposes.¹

Our study uses the context of Instagram which is a daily used social network for more than 1 billion people around the world where most of the audience is composed of users aged between 18-35 years old. Instagram is an image-based social media platform that promotes a new form of communication and self-expression.² On this platform, it is possible to upload, edit, and share pictures and video with other users.³⁴

When surfing Instagram, most of the users pursue the following goals: (a) social interaction, (b) information sharing, (c) self-presentation or expression, (d) recording daily events, (e) forgetting about stressful situations, and (f) watching what others are doing.⁵

Interactions on Instagram can be done with virtual friends or with people which represent possible models to follow online and offline, Influencers.

We define Influencers as individuals who have a central role in the exchange of information and opinions about products and or services which an audience, identified as followers, consider to be relevant.⁶

Indeed, Instagram is the most used platform by opinion leaders and Influencers especially in the fashion industry, who express their personality, style and lifestyle to their audience.⁷ Their potential degree of influence to the said audience can have a direct impact in the performance of a brand and, thus, the association between organization and influencer is extremely relevant in the users' brand consideration.⁸

Usual criteria used by brands in order to classify the influencer are quantitative metrics such as the number of followers or the average number of likes enterprises need also to evaluate the quality of the audience. To

¹ Louis V Casalò, Carlos Flavian, Sergio Ibáñez-Sánchez, Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership, *Journal of Business Research* Volume 117, September 2020, Pages 510-519

² Omnicore Agency, Instagram by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts

³ Clelia Malighetti, Simona Sciara, Alice Chirico, Giuseppe Riva, Emotional Expression of #body on Instagram, June 2020, *SAGE Journals*

⁴ Alhabash, S., Ma, M. (2017). A tale of four platforms: Motivations and uses of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat among college students, *Social Media + Society*

⁵ Bumsoo Kim, Yonghwan Kim, Facebook versus Instagram: How perceived gratifications and technological attributes are related to the change in social media usage. Available from: Kim, B., & Kim, Y. Facebook versus Instagram: How perceived gratifications and technological attributes are related to the change in social media usage. *The Social Science Journal* (2018).

⁶ Louis V Casalò, Carlos Flavian, Sergio Ibáñez-Sánchez, Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership, *Journal of Business Research* Volume 117, September 2020, Pages 510-519

⁷ Louis V Casalò, Carlos Flavian, Sergio Ibáñez-Sánchez, Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership, *Journal of Business Research* Volume 117, September 2020, Pages 510-519

⁸ Evaluating Audience Loyalty and Authenticity in Influencer Marketing via Multi-task Multi-relational Learning. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352173385_Evaluating_Audience_Loyalty_and_Authenticity_in_Influencer_Marketing_via_Multi-task_Multi-relational_Learning

understand the quality of the audience⁹ two essential factors are loyalty and authenticity which represent the users' level of interest toward brands and the genuineness of the audience's engagements, respectively.¹⁰ Focusing on authenticity, even if internet users perfectly know that influencers are paid sponsors of brands, it is important to consider that social media users do not turn to these channels for seeing ads but to enjoy the connection with other people. Indeed, influencers' role is not only to sponsor the brands for enterprises but also to be authentic with their audience in order to satisfy their followers' expectations. Indeed, *Rim Jallouli et al.* found that the perceived authenticity of both the celebrity and his/her content is said to explain favorable audience perceptions stimulating information adoption and dissemination.¹¹

Actually, Influencers' followers like to perceive influencers as "friends" who tell them their real opinion about products, services, brands and experiences. Seeking more and more for genuineness, most of the users pay attention to images and define the reliability of the profile, using the following main criteria: absence of editing (amateurism); absence of posing (spontaneity); absence of overt overall composition (selected social sharing); and consistency in photographic techniques¹².

Authenticity of influencers can be tested through images with the above cited criteria from many points of view and one of them is the body size.

Indeed, from 2012, increasingly the Body Positive Movement, which aimed to confront the unrealistic expectations and unrepresentative portrayals of men and women in popular media and advertising, has become widespread.

For that purpose, numerous studies have been conducted to analyze the effects of users being exposed to an image with idealized physiques compared to average physiques and very interesting findings are out.

A study of Ui-Jeen Yu¹³ analyzed how for women the exposure to thin-idealized model images showed greater body dissatisfaction and lower advertising effectiveness.

In more detail, through a study she conducted on 380 participants, she found that model body size positively influenced body dissatisfaction after model exposure. This means participants exposed to thin models showed greater body dissatisfaction than those participants exposed to average-sized models. Moreover, participants exposed to thin models responded to the ads less positively than those participants exposed to average-sized models.

We found that a big limitation of the study was given by the gender of the respondents, thus, we decided to investigate how Instagram male models' body size impacts the male users Intention to Recommend.

⁹ Martinez-Lopez, F. J.; Anaya-Sanchez, R.; Fernandez Giordano, M.; and Lopez-Lopez, D. 2020. Behind influencer marketing: key marketing decisions and their effects on followers' responses. *Journal of Marketing Management* 36(7-8): 579–607.

¹⁰ Lewis, D.; and Bridger, D. 2011. *Soul of the New Consumer: Authenticity-What We Buy and Why in the New Economy*. Nicholas Brealey
¹¹ Pöyry, E., M. Pelkonen, E. Naumanen, and S.M. Laaksonen. 2019. A call for authenticity: Audience responses to social media influencer endorsements in strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 13, no. 4: 336–51

¹² IPhoebe Maaresa Sandra Banjaca Folker Hanuscha, The labour of visual authenticity on social media: Exploring producers' and audiences' perceptions on Instagram, February 2021, *Poetics* Volume 84

¹³ Yu U-J (2014) Deconstructing college students' perceptions of thin-idealized versus non idealized media images on body dissatisfaction and advertising effectiveness. *Cloth Text Res J* 32(3):153–169

With intention to recommend we mean the likelihood that a person will say good things about a product/brand/ experience/ service to other people and even suggest them to buy it.

Moreover, we wanted to understand whether the relationship between these two variables was moderated by the type of product, in particular between hedonic and utilitarian products.

With “hedonic” product, we mean a product that provides more experiential use, pleasure and excitement, while with “utilitarian” we intend a product primarily instrumental and/or functional to some intent.

Finally, we aimed to analyze if the relationship between the dependent and the independent variable was influenced by the risk perception of users.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The variables of our model are Influencer’s body size (Independent Variable), Intention to recommend (Dependent Variable), Type of product (Moderator) and Risk Perception (Mediator).

BODY SIZE

In 1986, Fisher, in the study of Development and structure of the body image (Vols. 1–2) defined the body image as “a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about one’s own body.” The definition of body image incorporates a person’s perceptions and attitudes not only about his or her physical appearance but also that of the others.¹⁴

In the era of social media, where only on Instagram everyday more than 95 million photos per day (Instagram, June 2018) are published, users are constantly in contact with other accounts that flaunt ideals of perfection. Indeed, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that mass media images significantly contribute to the development and evolution of sociocultural beauty ideals.

These ideals of beauty, to which we are all more or less subject, inevitably lead to their being internalized as a result of their diffusion. The internalization of these ideals starts first and foremost from the tendency to confront that each of us has in a different way.

¹⁴ Fisher, S. (1986). Development and structure of the body image (vols. 1, 2). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Indeed, it has been found by Lennon et al. in 1999 that people experience social comparisons either consciously or unconsciously with idealized media images.¹⁵ The social tendency to compare, specifically when referred to the body sphere, led to numerous consequences.¹⁶ Tiggemann and Zaccardo¹⁷ showed that brief exposure to ‘fitspiration’ images on *Instagram* (generally thin and toned women in exercise attire) led to increased negative mood and body dissatisfaction in young women compared to exposure to neutral, *Instagram* travel images, findings that have been replicated with exposure to both celebrity and peer *Instagram* images.¹⁸ In 2013 Fang Wana Tamara L. et al.¹⁹ analyzed the moderating role of exposure to idealized female images, and found a difference based on how the message recipient is consciously aware of the source of the decrement in self-image. When consciousness is high, a self-defensive process of self-repair takes place, with the message recipient denigrating the idealized images and, thus, improving their own self-image. These negative feelings are automatically transferred to the product or brand in the advertisement. On the contrary, when message recipients are not consciously aware of the idealized source, the defense mechanism is muted, leading to a decrement in self-image, which in turn leads to greater acceptance of the endorsed product, as a means to attain the ideal.^{20 21}

Even if most of the research in the field has been done referring to women, the creation, the diffusion and internalization of beauty ideals is not only a female matter.

While female gender, media portrayals of women have increasingly become thinner and taller, for men since the 1970s, male bodies in the media have become increasingly muscular²² but in recent years men’s bodies have been expected to be increasingly lean as well.²³ The combination of muscularity and leanness has been labeled the V-shape body due to the representation of large muscular arms, chest and shoulders, and narrow hips and waist.²⁴

For men, as for women, as the social pressure to attain an “ideal” physique increases, the discrepancy between that ideal and one’s body increases as well. This dynamic is more readily recognized for women than for men. As men are socialized not to discuss their body image concerns, negative self-concept and esteem may

¹⁵ J.K. Thompson, L.J. Heinberg, M. Altabe, S. Tantleff-Dunn, *Exacting beauty: Theory, assessment, and treatment of body image disturbance* American Psychological Association; US, Washington, DC (1999)

¹⁶ Slater A, Cole N, Fardouly J. The effect of exposure to parodies of thin-ideal images on young women’s body image and mood. *BodyImage*. 2019; 29:82–9.

¹⁷ M. Tiggemann, M. Zaccardo, “Exercise to be fit, not skinny”: The effect of fitspiration imagery on women’s body image, *Body Image*, 15 (2015), pp. 61-67

¹⁸ Slater A, Cole N, Fardouly J. The effect of exposure to parodies of thin-ideal images on young women’s body image and mood. *BodyImage*. 2019; 29:82–9.

¹⁹ Wan, F., Ansons, T., Chattopadhyay, A. & Leboe, J. (2013). Defensive reactions to slim female images in advertising: The moderating role of mode of exposure. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 120, 37–46

²⁰ M.A. Kamins, An investigation into the ‘Matchup’ hypothesis in celebrity advertising: When beauty may be only skin deep, *Journal of Advertising*, 19 (1) (1990), pp. 4-13

²¹ C.C. Micu, R.A. Coulter, L.L. Price, How product trial alters the effects of model attractiveness: An adapted etic approach in Romania, *Journal of Advertising*, 38 (2) (2009), pp. 69-82

²² Luciano, L. (2007). Muscularity and masculinity in the United States: A historical overview. In J. K. Thompson & G. Cafri (Eds.), *The muscular ideal* (pp. 41–66). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

²³ Pope, C. G., Pope, H. G., Menard, W., Fay, C., Olivardia, R., & Phillips, K. A. (2005). Clinical features of muscle dysmorphia among males with body dysmorphic disorder. *Body Image*, 2, 395–400, 2005.09

²⁴ Labre, M. P. (2005). Burn fat, build muscle: A content analysis of Men’s Health and Men’s Fitness. *International Journal of Men’s Health*, 4, 187–200. doi:10.3149/jmh.0402.187.

reinforce behaviors resulting in weight gain.²⁵ In accordance with the results of several studies^{26 27 28 29}, Hannah L. Quittkat, Andrea S. Hartmann, Rainer Düsing, Ulrike Buhlmann and Silja Vocks reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction in women than in men but they even found higher weight dissatisfaction in men than in women, which is also in contrast to previous findings.³⁰

Therefore, it might be possible that women may be more satisfied with their weight while still reporting more body dissatisfaction.³¹

This research, however, will not take into account the body dissatisfaction caused by exposure to idealized models but the study is concerned with understanding the relationship between male endorser body size perception on Instagram and male users' intention to recommend.

To understand the relationship between celebrity endorser source and advertising effectiveness, Clinton Amos and co.³² reports many factors impacting the perception of the endorser including celebrity attractiveness. Kahele and Homer in 1985 confirmed that physically attractive celebrities are generally viewed more favorably but Caballero et al demonstrated that endorser attractiveness had no effect on advertising effectiveness.³³

Thus, the effect and effectiveness of model attractiveness still has uncertain results that cannot yet be explained in a unique way. In this study, however, we aim to investigate this relationship within the context of social networks.

PERCEIVED RISK

Bauer first introduced the concept of perceived risk as “a psychological, subjective construct to explain such phenomena as information seeking and brand loyalty”.³⁴

Cunningham defined risk as “the amount that would be lost if the consequences of an act were not favorable, and the individual’s subjective feeling of certainty that the consequences will be unfavorable.”³⁵

²⁵ Montgomery Sklar, E. (2017). Body Image, Weight, and Self-Concept in Men. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 11(3), 252–258

²⁶ Esnaola I, Rodríguez A, Goñi A., Body dissatisfaction and perceived sociocultural pressures: gender and age differences. *Salud Ment* (2010) 33(1):21–9.

²⁷ Tiggemann M (2004) Body image across the adult life span: stability and change. *Body Image* 1(1):29–41

²⁸ The adult body: how age, gender, and body mass index are related to body image.

Algars M, Santtila P, Varjonen M, Witting K, Johansson A, Jern P, Sandnabba NK J Aging Health. 2009 Dec; 21(8):1112-32.

²⁹ Tellor D, Fuller-Tyszkiewicz M, McCabe MP, Ricciardelli LA. Body image and self-esteem across age and gender: a short-term longitudinal study. *Sex Roles* (2010) 63(9–10):672–81. 10.1007/s11199-010-9813-3

³⁰ Quittkat HL, Hartmann AS, Düsing R, Buhlmann U, Vocks S (2019) Body dissatisfaction, importance of appearance, and body appreciation in men and women over the lifespan. *Front Psychiatry* 10(864):1–12

³¹ Quittkat HL, Hartmann AS, Düsing R, Buhlmann U, Vocks S (2019) Body dissatisfaction, importance of appearance, and body appreciation in men and women over the lifespan. *Front Psychiatry* 10(864):1–12

³² Clinton Amos Gary R. Holmes Gary R. Holmes David Strutton David Strutton, “Exploring the relationship between celebrity endorser effects and advertising effectiveness: A quantitative synthesis of effect size”, *Journal of Advertising*, 209-234, 2008

³³ Clinton Amos Gary R. Holmes Gary R. Holmes David Strutton David Strutton, “Exploring the relationship between celebrity endorser effects and advertising effectiveness: A quantitative synthesis of effect size”, *Journal of Advertising*, 209-234, 2008

³⁴ Bauer, R. A. (1960). Consumer behavior as risk taking. In: Hancock, R. S. (Ed.).

Dynamic marketing for a changing world. Chicago: American Marketing Association, 389-398

³⁵ Cunningham, S.M. The major dimensions of perceived risk. In D.F. Cox (Ed.), Risk-taking and information-handling in consumer behavior. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1967. Pp. 82-108. (a)

Risk can also be defined as the “variation in the distribution of possible outcomes, their likelihoods and their subjective values”.³⁶

Based on these definitions, risk is defined in this paper as the expectations of any loss or any negative consequences as a result of sponsored products by influencers.

Forsythe and Shi reported many types of risk in the online consumption field like financial, product performance, social, psychological and time/convenience loss.³⁷

In this study we are going to focus on Perceived Performance Risk and Perceived Social Risk.

Perceived performance risk is defined as concern over the functionality of the source of information (Influencers on Instagram) and communication channel (Instagram)

Perceived performance risk has been studied to be one of the main antecedents of intention to purchase together with Information quality and trust.³⁸ In particular, the perspective of consumers' intention to purchase is negatively influenced by mistrust and perceived risk and positively by quality information.

In turn, perceived risk has two determinants. Gabriel Sperandio et al. found that information quality has a positive and direct effect over distrust and perceived risk in the online purchase website while distrust has a negative and direct effect over perceived risk.³⁹

Perceived performance risks can be also affected by the source of information, which, in this case, are influencers.

A Master thesis research conducted at NOVA University in Lisbon, Marta Neto de Almeida, investigated how the types of influencer used to promote the products impact on the risk perception of the consumer. She concluded that trust is largely more associated with micro-influencers than celebrities, they are considered more credible and expert than celebrities, and respondents have lower skepticism towards them. Perceived risk showed to be a really important factor for women when buying beauty products.⁴⁰

Perceived social risk involves the likelihood that online shopping will affect the way others think of the online prospective shopper. Generally, consumers have the subjective norms that they are concerned about the opinions of their family, peers and friends with respect to their own actions and subsequently their responses

³⁶ Mitchell, V. , Consumer perceived risk: conceptualizations and models, (1999), European Journal of Marketing, 33, 163-195.

³⁷ Forsythe, S. M., & Shi, B. (2003). Consumer patronage and risk perceptions in internet shopping. Journal of Business Research, 56, 867-875

³⁸ Gabriel Sperandio Milan, Suélen Bebbber, Deonir De Toni & Luciene Eberle, Information Quality, Distrust and Perceived Risk as Antecedents of Purchase Intention in the Online Purchase Context, Journal of Management Information System & E-commerce December 2015, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 111-129

³⁹ Gabriel Sperandio Milan, Suélen Bebbber, Deonir De Toni, Luciene Eberle, Information Quality, Distrust and Perceived Risk as Antecedents of Purchase Intention in the Online Purchase Context, Journal of Management Information System & E-commerce, December 2015, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 111-129

⁴⁰ Marta Neto de Almeida, INFLUENCER MARKETING ON INSTAGRAM, How Influencer Type and Perceived Risk Impact Choices in the Beauty Industry, 2019

would be determined by people around them.⁴¹ Weib described this type of risk as a personally identified risk of suffering status loss in an individual's environment.⁴²

Perceived Social risk can be seen from the perspective of product, brand, and way of shopping. About the product, Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, & Best mentioned that apparel, like other symbolic goods, are more subjected to social risk than other types of product.⁴³⁴⁴

In our study Perceived social risk can be seen from three perspectives: the influencer, the channel (Instagram) and the product itself. Users actions are encouraged or discouraged by people surrounding him/her who have favorable or unfavorable perceptions of the Influencer himself, of the social media and of the product.

PRODUCT TYPE

Consumer choices are driven by utilitarian and hedonic considerations. Broadly speaking, hedonic goods provide for more experiential consumption, fun, pleasure, and excitement (designer clothes, sports cars, luxury watches, etc.), while utilitarian goods are primarily instrumental and functional (microwaves, minivans, personal computers, etc.;).⁴⁵⁴⁶⁴⁷

The difference between hedonic and utilitarian products can be based from the perspective of motivation.

When the consumer has a mission or a task and the completion of this depends on the acquisition/ efficient use of that product we have utilitarian motivations.⁴⁸ On the contrary, hedonic consumers enjoy the shopping process and it is not only about completing a task. In this case, shopping is not a boring task, but it is a real moment of happiness, awakening and enjoyment⁴⁹

⁴¹ Nasir, M.A. Wu, J., Yago, M. & LI, H. (2015). Influence of Psychographics and Risk Perception on InternetBanking Adoption: Current State of Affairs in Britain. *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*, 5(2), 461-468

⁴² Weib, S. (2015). *Determinants of Private Label Attitude: Predicting Consumers' Brand Preferences Using Psychographics*. Austria. Springer.

⁴³ Hawkins, D.I., Mothersbaugh, D.L. & Best, R.J. (2007). *Consumer behavior: building marketing strategy*(10th Ed). New York. McGraw-Hill.

⁴⁴ Mokoena, B.A. & Maziriri, E.T. (2017). A Regression Analysis of Generation Y Female Students' Perceptions on Social Risk, Buying Behaviour and Apparel Store Choice. *Journal of Economics and Behavioural Studies*, 9(1), 157-165.

⁴⁵ Dhar, R., & Wertenbroch, K. (2000). Consumer choice between hedonic and utilitarian goods. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37(1), 60-71

⁴⁶ Hirschman, Elizabeth C., and Morris B. Holbrook (1982), "Hedonic Consumption: Emerging Concepts, Methods and Propositions," *Journal of Marketing*, 46 (Summer), 92-1

⁴⁷ Strahilevitz, Michal A., and George F. Loewenstein (1998), "The Effect of Ownership History on the Valuation of Objects," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25 (December), 276-

⁴⁸ To, P.-L.; Liao, C.; Lin, T.-H. Shopping motivations on Internet: A study based on utilitarian and hedonic value. *Technovation* 2007,27, 774-787

⁴⁹ To, P.-L.; Liao, C.; Lin, T.-H. Shopping motivations on Internet: A study based on utilitarian and hedonic value. *Technovation* 2007,27, 774-787

Products purchased for pleasure have a different level of impact than products purchased for functional purposes and, despite hedonic purchases are more enjoyable, where a decision must be made to give up certain products, products for pleasure are usually the ones to be given up first.⁵⁰

The distinction on product types can be done in terms of value too. Most of the products are characterized by both experiential (hedonic) and functional (utilitarian) value; in particular a given product can possess different levels of utilitarian and hedonic value for any given consumer. To that purpose many studies have been conducted and confirm that product value impacts on purchase satisfaction.⁵¹

Utilitarianism is related to the traditional notion of an instrumental product. utilitarian attributes emphasize the functionality of the product, resulting in satisfaction. Whereas this type of consumption is targeted to achieve a goal and the desire to satisfy a basic need in the hedonic approach, products are not considered mere objects, but as symbols. Hedonic value includes excitement and pleasure in the shopping experience.

Wagner Junior Ladeira, Walter Meucci Nique, Diego Costa Pinto & Adilson Borges found that only hedonic product value influences satisfaction. That is, consumers prefer products that help them to accomplish hedonic (than utilitarian) value. This doesn't mean that utilitarian products are not satisfying for the consumer but that they can satisfy the consumer if they also have a hedonic value to the consumer.⁵²

These two types of perceived value are likely to operate in parallel for any given consumer decision, whereby perceived hedonic value would impact consumer judgment through an automatic process and utilitarian value would operate through a conscious evaluative process.⁵³ Research suggests that these two processes can operate in a parallel or sequential manner⁵⁴ and can also be related to each other.^{55 56}

Online opinion leaders are used to promote the experiential (hedonic) and functional (utilitarian) value of products and services over different online forums.

About hedonic side, Influencers and celebrities carry a certain social prestige to their follower base so that, when they or other popular figures endorse a product or service online, they attach and influence their social status and personal brand to that product or service.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ To, P.-L.; Liao, C.; Lin, T.-H. Shopping motivations on Internet: A study based on utilitarian and hedonic value. *Technovation* 2007, 27, 774–787

⁵¹ Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan, 2007, 2008; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, 1992; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003

⁵² Ladeira, W. J., Nique, W. M., Pinto, D. C., & Borges, A. (2016). Running for pleasure or performance? How store attributes and hedonic product value influence consumer satisfaction. *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 26(5), 502–520

⁵³ Consumer judgment from a dual-systems perspective: Recent evidence and emerging issues, S.D. Bond, J.R. Bettman, M.F. Luce, *Review of Marketing Research*, 5 (2009), pp. 3-37

⁵⁴ R. Bhargave, A. Chakravarti, A. Guha, Two-stage decisions increase preference for hedonic options, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 130 (2015), pp. 123-135

⁵⁵ Price promotion for emotional impact, A. Aydinli, M. Bertini, A. Lambrecht, *Journal of Marketing*, 78 (4) (2014), pp. 80-96

⁵⁶ R. Bhargave, A. Chakravarti, A. Guha, Two-stage decisions increase preference for hedonic options, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 130 (2015), pp. 123-135

⁵⁷ M. Thomson, Human brands: Investigating antecedents to consumers' strong attachment to celebrities, *Journal of Marketing*, 70 (3) (2006), pp. 104-119

Online opinion leaders are not used to sponsor only hedonic products, they can also provide important functional information to drive the utilitarian value of products through the breadth, timeliness, and detail of specialist information, as well as domain-specific authority.⁵⁸ The information provided by opinion leaders is not usually perceived by consumers as motivated purely by commercial interests⁵⁹ but, in contrast, opinion leaders specialized in certain fields are characterized by notable authority in the eyes of consumers.

Although influencers may deal with both hedonic and utilitarian topics in their profiles, one of the objectives of this study is to fill this gap by studying the perception differences between hedonic or utilitarian products sponsored by influencers and in particular how this diversity impacts on users' intention to recommend with idealized body size influencer or averaged size.

INTENTION TO RECOMMEND

In our study the intention to recommend is referred to the Influencer's post or product sponsored in the same. User's intention to recommend a particular account of a brand community on Instagram consists in the presentation, on the part of a user, of an account about a brand to other users.

The reason behind this behavioral intention may be found in the fact that both the sender and the receiver of the message could share the same needs, interests or problems, and the information published on that account could be regarded as relevant by them.

Many are the determinants of recommendations, but satisfaction is the major determinant of behavioral intentions, including the intention to recommend a specific webpage to other consumers. In other words, Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on Intention to recommend, that means that satisfied consumers are more likely to recommend the considered object than not satisfied ones. Recommendation is also said to be Positive Word of mouth.

The power of interpersonal influence through word-of-mouth communication has been well recognized in the consumer literature^{60 61 62}. Prior studies have found that consumers perceive WOM as more trustworthy and persuasive than traditional media, such as print ads, personal selling, and radio and TV advertising. Word of mouth evolved in the Electronic Word of mouth through the diffusion of social media and internet use and it is shaped in many forms where the main are comments and reviews.

⁵⁸ H.S. Nair, P. Manchanda, T. Bhatia ,Asymmetric social interactions in physician prescription behavior: The role of opinion leaders, , *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47 (5) (2010), pp. 883-895

⁵⁹ T. Bao, T.S. Chang, Finding disseminators via electronic word of mouth message for effective marketing communications, *Decision Support Systems*, 67 (2014), pp. 21-29

⁶⁰ J. Arndt Role of product-related conversations in the diffusion of a new product, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 4 (1967), pp. 291-295

⁶¹ P.M. Herr, F.R. Kardes, J. Kim , The effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion: an accessibility-diagnostics perspective, , *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17 (4) (1991), pp. 454-462

⁶² C.W. King, J.O. Summers, Overlap of opinion leadership across consumer product categories, , *Journal of Marketing Research*, 7 (1970), pp. 43-50

It's important for us to highlight that in this study, even if the source of information is an online social platform, we are not going to study the EWOM (thus the spread of an opinion through an online channel) but the intention to recommend (intention to spread positive WOM). For more clarification we reported here below the main points of difference between WOM and eWOM.

The comparison between WOM and eWOM reveals some significant differences

The first is about the source - receiver relationship. In WOM the source is known, and the receiver has an inherent judgement of his or her expertise whereas, in EWOM source and receiver are Potentially unknown.

⁶³

Indeed, in WOM the channel involves face-to-face or over-the-phone communication with a person with whom the receiver has developed a relationship. Conversely, in eWOM the connection is mediated through technology, thus many of the personal cues are lost.⁶⁴

The third distinction regards information solicitation. In WOM, information is solicited from known sources for a specific purpose.⁶⁵ Importantly, solicited WOM is perceived as more credible than unsolicited, due to the pre-selection of those with presumed or expert credibility to solicit information from.⁶⁶ In the case of eWOM, further information may be solicited within online communities in the hope that more knowledge may be gleaned from a wider pool of "friends".⁶⁷ EWOM solicitation can be viewed as an opportunity for the audience dimension but, at the same time, solicitation within social media is also associated with higher perceived risk.

⁶⁸.

For WOM, messages are retained based on the ability to recall previous conversations.⁶⁹ In the case of eWOM, messages can be stored and are made more accessible to a wider audience than WOM⁷⁰.

In our study, the object of WOM is an influencer's post on an Instagram account. Talking about the post implies the possibility to see it on Instagram and in particular on that profile. In particular, Casaló et al. found that Intention to follow and to recommend an Instagram account is determined by user's satisfaction. In the context user's satisfaction, main antecedents are perceived enjoyment and usefulness.⁷¹

⁶³Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K.P., Walsh, G. and Gremler, D.D. Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? , (2004), Journal of Interactive Marketing, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.38–52

⁶⁴ Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K.P., Walsh, G. and Gremler, D.D. Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? , (2004), Journal of Interactive Marketing, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.38–52

⁶⁵ Stern, B. A revised model for advertising: Multiple dimensions of the source, the message, and the recipient, (1994), Journal of Advertising, 23(2), 5–16.

⁶⁶ Gartner, W. C. , Image formation process, (1993), Journal. of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 2(2), 191–216

⁶⁷ Cheung, M. Y., Luo, C., Sia, C. L., & Chen, H. , Credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: Informational and normative determinants of on-line consumer recommendations, (2009), International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 13 (4), 9–38

(1) (PDF) *Social Media in Destination Choice: Distinctive Electronic Word-of-Mouth Dimensions*.

⁶⁸ Electronic word-of-mouth: Motives for and consequences of reading customer articulations on the internet, Hennig-Thurau, T., & Walsh, G. (2003), International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 8(2), 51–74.

⁶⁹ Buttle, F. A. (1998). Word of mouth: Understanding and managing referral marketing, Journal of Strategic Marketing, 6 (3), 241–254

⁷⁰ Cheung, M. Y., Luo, C., Sia, C. L., & Chen, H., Credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: Informational and normative determinants of on-line consumer recommendations, (2009), International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 13(4), 9–38

⁷¹ Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibanez-Sanchez, S. , Antecedents of consumer intention to follow and recommend an Instagram account, (2017), Online Information Review, 41(7), 1046-1063

With perceived enjoyment we mean the degree of fun that can be derived from using the system⁷² and, in the context of social networking sites, spending their free time as well as relaxing or escaping from boredom are some of the main motivations of users while interacting on them.⁷³

Perceived usefulness is related to the use of a specific technology to improve productivity or performance⁷⁴ which, in the context of social networking websites, is connected with obtaining convenient and useful information⁷⁵ that may result in an improvement while performing a task or making a decision.

The Intention to recommend is the dependent variable of our study and we want to know how the degree of idealization in influencer body size and the type of product sponsored in the social media affect the users intention to recommend.

HYPOTHESIS

Based on the theoretical framework presented, it is possible to underline some prepositions which represent the hypothesis of our thesis.

Previous studies have found that attractive models with beautiful faces and thinness are perceived as more favorable, effective, and trustworthy in advertising.⁷⁶⁷⁷⁷⁸ However, advertising effectiveness using highly attractive models has been inconsistently supported and questioned by several studies which support effectiveness of models that are average in attractiveness and/or body size^{79 80}.

Tsai and Change in 2007 found that normally attractive models in underwear advertisements were more effective for young adolescents than highly attractive models, resulting in more favorable brand attitudes and greater purchase intention.⁸¹

⁷²Van der Heijden, H. , User acceptance of hedonic information systems, (2004), MIS quarterly, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 695-704.

⁷³ News sharing in social media: The effect of gratifications and prior experience, Lee, S., & Ma, L. (2012), Computers in Human Behavior, Vol. 28 No.2, pp. 331-339.

⁷⁴ Davis, F. D. (1989), "Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology", MIS quarterly, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 319-340.

⁷⁵ Basak, E., & Calisir, F. , An empirical study on factors affecting continuance intention of using Facebook, (2015), Computers in Human Behavior, Vol. 48, pp. 181-189

⁷⁶ Baker, M. J. and Churchill, G. A. Jr. (1977). The impact of physical attractive models on advertising evaluations. Journal of Marketing Research, 14, p. 538-555.

⁷⁷ Till, B. D., and Busler, M. (2000). The match-up hypothesis: Physical attractiveness, expertise, and the role of fit on brand attitude, purchase

⁷⁸ Kahle, L. R. and Homer, P. M. (1985). Physical attractiveness of celebrity endorser: A social adaptation perspective. Journal of Consumer Research, 11, p. 954-961.

⁷⁹ Murray D. and Price B. (2011) The globalization of beauty – Aspiration or threat? A comparison of the effect of Western beauty types and Western females attitudes and purchase intentions. International Journal of Business Research 11(2): 146-155.

⁸⁰ Tsai, C., & Chang, C. (2007). The effect of physical attractiveness of models on advertising effectiveness for male and female adolescents. Adolescence, 42(168), 827-836

⁸¹ Tsai, C., & Chang, C. (2007). The effect of physical attractiveness of models on advertising effectiveness for male and female adolescents. Adolescence, 42(168), 827-836

Average-looking models in ads for appearance-related products could be more effective because highly attractive models may serve to deflate the self- image and/or inflate body anxiety and dissatisfaction of some consumers, thereby decreasing ad effectiveness for consumers discouraged about their appearance.^{82 83}

As we previously reported, satisfaction about brand, product and advertising encourages positive WOM. As a consequence, a feeling of dissatisfaction and anxiety discourage the ads viewer to remember the ads. For this reason, we believe that the dissatisfaction caused by idealized body image discourages the WOM.

Moreover, other than user satisfaction, it is important for customers to perceive the congruence between themselves and the influencers.⁸⁴ To that purpose, consumers might perceive more similarity with models that are average in attractiveness, resulting in more attraction to the models. In similarity–attraction theory,⁸⁵ it was suggested that people were attracted to relationships with others whom they believed held similar attributes and attitudes.

When followers find an influencer who reflects their own values, personality, or image, and followers express more favorable attitudes toward the model and the sponsored product, in line with cognitive dissonance⁸⁶, balance⁸⁷, and congruity,⁸⁸ theories, which predict that greater alignment evokes more positive attitudes. This favorable attitude then generates positive behavioral intentions to purchase and recommend, as indicated in previous research^{89 90}.

H1: Influencers attractiveness, measured through body size, negatively impacts the user's Intention to recommend. The more model body size is perceived idealized, the lower the intention to recommend. The more model body size is perceived on average, the higher the intention to recommend.

Human self-presentation behavior is driven by self-esteem and belonging needs. Status aspirations influence an individual's behavior, and consumption objects may satisfy certain needs. Specialized literature on marketing defines it as „acquisition and use of consumer' goods symbolizing status, both to the individual and to relevant others, motivated by a desire to maintain, protect, and/or enhance one's social status”⁹¹. Social Network Sites provide the individual with the necessary tools to display and promote the self to a large

⁸² Bower, A. B., & Landreth, S. (2001). Is beauty best? Highly versus normally attractive models in advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 30, 1–12

⁸³ Yu, U.-J., M. L. Damhorst, and D. W. Russell. 2011. The impact of body image on consumers' perceptions of idealized advertising images and brand attitudes. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 40 (1):58–73.

⁸⁴ Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers, Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2021), *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 186-195.

⁸⁵ Byrne, D. (1971). *The attraction paradigm*. New York: Academic Press

⁸⁶ Festinger, L. (1962). Cognitive dissonance, *Scientific American*, 207(4), 93–107

⁸⁷ Heider, F. (1946), *Attitudes and cognitive organization*. *The Journal of psychology*, 21(1), 107-112

⁸⁸ Osgood, C. E., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. *Psychological Review*, 62(1), 42-55

⁸⁹ De Matos, C. A., & Rossi, C. A. V. (2008). Word-of-mouth communications in marketing: a meta-analytic review of the antecedents and moderators. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(4), 578-596

⁹⁰ Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers, Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2021), *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 186-195

⁹¹ Millan E. and Mittal, B. (2017): Consumer preference for status symbolism of clothing: the case of the Czech Republic, p. 2, in *Psychology & Marketing*, vol. 34, issue no. 3, p. 309-322.

audience: friends, followers and other users in the network.⁹² Instagram is an image-based social media platform that promotes self-expression and self-promotion through Images of the self, feelings, actions, associations with brands or celebrities, places, possessions and many other types of information made publicly available. Concerts, gourmet food, art, flowers, designer clothes, sports cars, luxury items are hedonic goods. They are characterized by an emotional and sensory experience such as fun or pleasure.

Once said that, we believe that, although social network contents are also related to utilitarian products, hedonic products and experiences certainly create more hype and buzz within the social context.⁹³

Thus, we formulated our hypothesis as it follows

H2: The type of product sponsored by influencers on Instagram impacts the users intention to recommend users. The more the product advertised by the influencer is perceived as hedonic, the greater the intention to recommend by users. The more the product advertised by the influencer is perceived as utilitarian, the lower the users intention to recommend.

The relationship of customer perceived risk and customer satisfaction has been long studied from many key points. Authors found that perceived risk strongly influences customer satisfaction. By increasing the burden of loss and risk, customers watch for alternatives to minimize the risk of loss. Given that correlation of perceived risk and on customer satisfaction is negatively at high level and that satisfaction is the main determinant for positive WOD we can elaborate the hypothesis as follows.

H3: Perceived risk (from looking at influencers' posts) negatively impacts users' intention to recommend. The higher the perceived risk, the lower the intention to recommend; the lower the perceived risk, the higher the user's intention to recommend.

To facilitate the comprehension of the model here below in figure 1 the graphical representation.

⁹² Meda Mucundorfeanu, Cora Lupaş , I Have, I Post, Therefore I Am! Hedonic Consumption as a Tool for Self-Promoting Behavior on Social Networking Platforms. , Volume 63 (Lxiii) 2018, Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Ephemerides
Meda Mucundorfeanu, Cora Lupaş , I Have, I Post, Therefore I Am! Hedonic Consumption as a Tool for Self-Promoting Behavior on Social Networking Platforms. , Volume 63 (Lxiii) 2018, Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Ephemerides

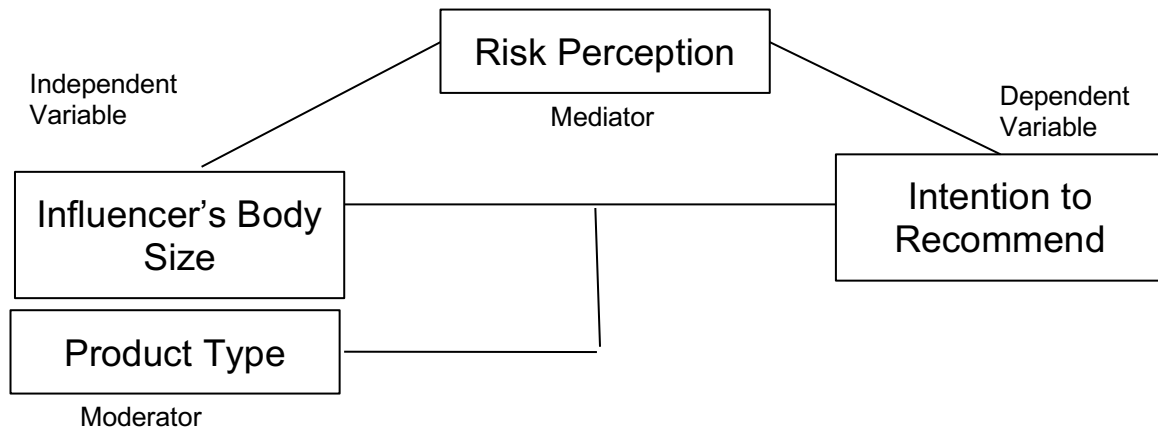


Figure 1: Graphical Research Model

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data collection method we opted for, was based on an electronic survey, built on Qualtrics. Essentially, the aim of the research was to let respondents see a visual stimulus and answer some related questions. The purpose of the experimental stimuli was to highlight respectively the four conditions we presented:

1. Idealized body Influencer with Hedonic product
2. Idealized body Influencer with Utilitarian product
3. Average body size Influencer with Hedonic product
4. Average body size Influencer with Utilitarian product

The design was a between-subject with each of the respondents being exposed to just one of the stimuli.

After being shown the stimuli, each respondent was asked about the risk perception of the product promoted by the influencer.

We focused on two types of risk perception: Performance risk and Social risk.

Perceived performance risk is defined as concern over the functionality of the communication channel which in our case in the Social media platform Instagram. This risk includes the difficulty of ascertaining, from Web pictures, the characteristics of the products, leading to a concern that the product delivered may not be exactly as it appeared when displayed on the Web site.

Perceived social risk involves the likelihood that online shopping will affect the way others think of the online prospective shopper.

Last questions were related to the respondents intention to recommend in order to measure the likelihood of spreading the information gathered through the influencer image.

All the responses obtained were anonymous and not traceable to the respondents; Everybody was provided a little monetary incentive to participate.

Before submitting the final questionnaire, we tested the manipulations and their ability to highlight different perceptions, we ran a pretest.

STIMULI BUILDING

The stimuli were based on an Instagram screenshot of an Influencer on the classic feed of Instagram. The processing of the stimuli included the help of two friends who volunteered to take some photos.

The first of my friends is a professional swimmer who is slim, musculus and lean, as the actual idealized body.

The second of my friends has an average size body.

They are both 23.

The photos needed to comply with very strict criteria:

- photos need to have the same background, the same light in the same context
- the subjects of the photos need to have the same position
- in order to avoid any bias, we virtually modified through Photoshop their faces to use the same countenance
- they had to wear the same clothes
- in the photo with the hedonic product there must not be the utilitarian product
- in the photo with the utilitarian product there must not be the hedonic product

Based on these criteria, we had to use the same photo with the same subject but with different body size and objects to sponsor.

A problem we faced was related to the selection of the objects.

It would be easier for us to use clothing as hedonic objects, but our photos should contain the same influencer wearing no different clothes.

So, we opted for two products that were not essential in the image building, like a pair of jeans, and were completely detached from the context.

The hedonic product we chose was a simple pair of handcrafted and made in titanium sunglasses with a stylish shape for men.

The utilitarian product was a water bottle carefully crafted, easy to carry, sustainable and reusable.

For both the products photos were accurately edited in order to make the brands not recognizable.

Here below the four visual stimuli used for the surveys (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5).

Figure 2: Stimulus consisted in Idealized body influencer and Hedonic Product



Figure 3: Stimulus consisted in average body size influencer and Hedonic product



Figure 4: Stimulus consisted in idealized body size influencer and Utilitarian product



Figure 5: Stimulus consisted in Average body size influencer and utilitarian product



PRE-TEST STRUCTURE

The pre-test, elaborated through Qualtrics and submitted to 160 respondents, 40 per stimulus, was composed by 2 parts

The first part consisted of asking the respondent to look at the image.

Each respondent was subjected to only one stimulus, so each respondent was submitted only to one of the four stimuli created (between subject design). The reason for this choice is the aim to obtain a perception as real as possible and to prevent the respondent from making comparisons between the various stimuli.

The second part of the pre-test was composed of two questions: one related to the perception of body size of the influencer in the image just shown and the other related to the classification of the product as utilitarian or hedonic.

We showed the respondents the four stimuli and we asked whether they considered the body size of the influencer on average or idealized. We used a 7-points likert scale.

Once collected, the analysis proved that a statistically significant difference was found between the two body sizes. The first was identified as idealized while the second as an average sized body.

To get the perception of the two products, each respondent was asked whether, in their personal opinion, the specific object on the image (the bottle or the sunglasses) was considered utilitarian or hedonic. We used a 7-points likert scale. To avoid every possible misunderstanding, we attach both the definitions as follow:

*“Please, keep in mind that for **Hedonic** we intend a product that provides more experiential use, pleasure and excitement.*

*For **Utilitarian** we intend a product primarily instrumental and/or functional to some intent.”*

Once collected, the analysis proved that a statistically significant difference was found between the two products. In particular the bottle was considered a Utilitarian product while sunglasses were a hedonic one.

The pre-test showed that the validity of our stimuli was confirmed.

THE MAIN TEST

After verifying the validity of our conditions in the pre-test, we focused on the main test elaboration.

PURPOSE and DESIGN

The purpose of our test was to understand whether an influencer's body size could have an impact on users' intention to recommend. In particular we wanted to better analyze the relationship moderating for the type of product the influencer was sponsored taking in consideration hedonic and utilitarian differences and mediating for the risk perception of users.

THE MAIN TEST STRUCTURE

The main test was composed of three sections.

The first part consisted of asking the respondent to look at the image, like in the pre-test.

Each respondent was subjected to only one stimulus, so each respondent received only one of the four stimuli created. The reason for this choice was to obtain a perception as real as possible and to prevent the respondent from making comparisons between the various stimuli.

The second part aimed to obtain risk perception from the respondents. Respondents were asked to answer questions related to their concern about the technical and aesthetical characteristics of the product, size, functionality and performance and about social concern on the others' consideration in using the product sponsored by the influencer.

In the last section respondents were asked two questions which aimed to analyze the likelihood the respondent would spread Positive Word of Mouth about the sponsored product after watching the image of the influencer in their personal feed on Instagram.

SCALES OF MEASUREMENT

In this section, I will present the items we have used to build each of the scales for the test.

To measure risk perception, we presented six sentences and respondents were asked to rate from 1 to 7 on a Likert scale their agreements on the basis of their feelings. The scales we used for measuring Performance and Social Perceived Risk were firstly elaborated by Ahmad M. Hassan et al. in 2006 in “conceptualization and measurement of perceived risk in online shopping”.

Here below, the scale of measurement adapted to our study.

Performance perceived Risk - Scale of Measurement

It is difficult to ascertain the characteristics of the sunglasses such as quality, size, color, and style by just looking at the picture of the influencer shown.

It is difficult to feel, try or/and experience the sunglasses prior to purchase looking at the picture of the influencer shown.

I am concerned that the sunglasses delivered may not be exactly as it appeared when displayed in the picture of the influencer shown.

Social Perceived Risk - Scale of Measurement

If I bought the sunglasses shown in the image of the influencer, I think my friends would hold me in higher esteem.

If I bought the sunglasses shown in the influencer image, I think my friends would think I am cool.

If I buy the sunglasses shown by the influencer, some friends would think I am trying to show off

For the intention to recommend we asked to assess to what extent respondents agree/disagree with some statements about their likelihood of spreading positive WOM.

The scale is composed of three, 7-points likert type statements.

The scales we used for measuring the WOM by users was first elaborated by Maxham and Netemeyer in 2002.

Here below, the scale of measurement adapted to our study.

Positive WOM tendency - Scale of Measurement

I would recommend the sunglasses showed by the influencer for purchase to my friends

If my friends were looking to purchase a pair of sunglasses, I would tell them to try to watch the image of the influencer

How likely are you to spread positive word of mouth about the product advertised by the influencer?

The SAMPLE

Since the study was referred to the male sphere, using male influencers, the sample we needed was composed by only men. With the goals of not subjecting the same respondent to multiple stimuli and collecting at least 70 answers for stimulus we decided to use the platform Prolific. Prolific is a survey panel where, in return for a financial contribution, you can collect responses from all over the world and filter them by audience. The only filter we selected was gender, as the research only referred to the perception of the male audience.

Every respondent was paid with the symbolic value of 50 cent per answer.

The sample was made up of 312 respondents (after data cleaning). Once we collected our answers, an attention check was made, and every incomplete answer was deleted. Moreover, aiming to collect responses to whom people paid attention, we also deleted all the answers made in less than 30 seconds.

In more detail we collected 74 for the first stimulus (Idealized body size and Hedonic product), 79 for the second (Idealized body size and Utilitarian product), 83 for the third (Averaged body size and Hedonic product) and 76 for the last (Averaged body size and Utilitarian product).

RESULTS

Before analyzing the results and discussing the findings, a thorough cleaning of the data was carried out to remove incomplete answers. In the end, the final dataset consists of 310 responses.

The following results were analyzed using the software IBM SPSS Statistics.

First of all, the 4 different stimuli were coded as follows

BS 1: for idealized body size

BS 2: for average body size

PT 1: for hedonic product

PT 2: for utilitarian product

Consequently, we had to inspect the validity and reliability of the multi-item scales we used to assess both the risk perception and the Intention to recommend. This step is fundamental to check whether the scale measures that it is intended to measure and whether it produces similar results under consistent conditions.

Through KMO and Bartlett Test we checked for sampling adequacy, while with communalities we inspected the amount of variance in each variable that is accounted for. After confirming the suitability of the factor analysis for our data, we need to define the number of factors to retain and it appears that Risk Perception had to be distinguished between Perceived Performance Risk and Social Perceived Risk, while Intention to Recommend was represented by one unique factor. Finally, to test scales reliability we used Crombach's Alpha and Results of this analysis suggest that the three scales were reliable, meaning that they are accurate, consistent, and reproducible.

For this reason, such scales are useful for measuring respondents' risk perception in performance and social perspectives and users' intention to recommend.

Hypothesis testing

The first step of our analysis, through the use of a two-way ANOVA, aimed to test the moderator effect of Product type in the relationship between the Independent variable (body size) and the dependent variable (Intention to recommend).

We firstly evaluated the effect of body size on users' intention to recommend with a univariate analysis. The results show that respondents who were presented with an image of an influencer with an idealized physique did not respond significantly differently to those who were presented with an image of the influencer with an average physique. It can be seen from the table below that the p value is 0,469 which is $>0,05$. It is possible to conclude from this analysis that the influencer's body size is not a significant predictor for users intention to recommend (Tab 1). Thus, it is possible to reject the H1 hypothesis elaborated before.

Confronti pairwise

Dependent Variable: Intention to Recommend

Body Size (I)	Body Size (J)	Difference between means (I-J)	Errore std	Sign	95% CI for the difference	
					Limite Inferiore	Limite superiore
Idealistic	On Average	-0,126	0,173	0,469	-0,467	0,215
On Average	Idealistic	0,126	0,173	0,469	-0,215	0,467

Based on estimated marginal averages

Adaptation for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni

Tab 1: Pairwise Comparison between Intention to recommend and Body Size (SPSS analysis)

We used the same test (univariate test) to assess respondents' Intention to recommend in relation to the product type. The results show that respondents who were presented with an image of an influencer sponsoring a hedonic product responded significantly differently to those who were presented with an image of an influencer sponsoring a utilitarian product (mean (hedonic product) = 4,3874; mean (utilitarian product) = 3,3711). It can be seen from the table below that the p value is 0,000 therefore $<0,05$ (Tab 2). Thus, the type of product advertised by the influencer is a significant predictor for users intention to recommend but we still don't know whether the effect is positive or negative. In order to better understand the effect, we used the Hayes model in the following analysis, after the study of the combined effect between body size and product type.

Confronti pairwise

Dependent Variable: Intention to Recommend

Product Type (I)	Product Type (J)	Difference between means (I-J)	Errore std	Sign	95% CI for the difference	
					Limite Inferiore	Limite superiore
Hedonic	Utilitarian	1,011	0,173	0,00	0,67	1,352
Utilitarian	Hedonic	-1,011	0,173	0,000	-1,352	-0,67

Based on estimated marginal averages

Adaptation for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni

Tab 2: Pairwise Comparison between Intention to recommend and Type of product (SPSS analysis)

The next step was about evaluating the combined effect between influencers Body Size and Product Type sponsored by the influencer on users intention to recommend. The table (Tab 3) below shows that there was a significant interaction between the effect of body size and product type on ItR ($F(1,306) = 7,89, p < 0.05$). Thus, product type is a moderating effect between body size and Intention to Recommend.

Between Subject Effects Test

Dependent Variable: Intention to Recommend

Origin	Sum of squares of type III	gl	Mean Square	F	Sign.
Correcr Model	99,7980	3	33,2660	14,3290	0,000
Intercept	4678,6440	1	4678,6440	2015,3050	0,000
Body Size	1,2200	1	1,2200	0,5260	0,469
Product Type	79,0370	1	79,0370	34,0450	0,000
Body Size * Product Type	18,3190	1	18,3190	7,8910	0,005
Error	710,3960	306	2,3220		
Total	5443,7500	310			
Corrected Total	810,1940	309			

R-square = ,123 (Adapted R-square = ,115)

Tab 3: Between Subject effects test between Body Size and Product Type on intention to Recommend (SPSS analysis)

PROCESS v3.5 analysis have been performed in order to inspect the relationship between the Body Size (IV) , Intention to Recommend (DV) , Product Type (Moderator) and Risk Perception (Mediator).

We defined 3 models:

1. DV: Intention to Recommend
IV: Body Size
Moderator: Product Type
2. DV: Intention to Recommend
IV: Body Size
Mediator: Performance Perceived Risk
3. DV: Intention to Recommend
IV: Body Size
Mediator: Social Perceived Risk

The first model aims to analyze the Moderator effect on the relationship between body size and Intention to Recommend.

From the Hayes Analysis it is possible to see that $R^2=0,12$. R^2 explains the proportion of the variation in the dependent variable (ItR) that is predictable from the independent variable(s) (Body size and Product Type). Thus, 12% of the Intention to recommend variance is explained by the two independent variables. This percentage suggests that there may be other variables to consider for a more specific model.

From the table (Tab 4) below it can be seen that Body Size ($p=0,016$), Product Type ($p=0,00$) and the interaction between the two variables ($p=0,005$) are statistically significant.

OUTCOME VARIABLE: Intention to Recommend

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0,0351	0,1232	2,3216	14,3292	3	306	0

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	7,4093	0,8808	8,4117	0,000	5,6761	9,1426
Body Size	-1,3349	0,5523	-2,4169	0,0162	-2,4217	-0,2481
Product Type	-2,4718	0,5484	-4,5068	0,000	-3,551	-1,3926
INT 1	0,9737	0,3466	2,809	0,0053	0,2916	1,6557

INT 1 = Body Size * Product Type

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates

	constant	Body Size	Product Type	INT 1
constant	0,7759	-0,462	-0,4592	0,2742
Body Size	-0,462	0,305	0,2742	-0,1818
Product Type	-0,4592	0,2742	0,3008	-0,1804
INT 1	0,2742	-0,1818	-0,1804	0,1201

Tests of highest unconditional interactions

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
Body Size * Product Type	0,0226	7,8906	1	306	0,0053

Tab 4: Model Summary (SPSS analysis)

Another important parameter to consider in the process Analysis is R2-chng because it gives the effect of the moderation (statistically the interaction) beyond the main effects. In our model $R^2\text{-chng}=0,02$ which means that 2% of the variance is explained by the interaction effect. Thus, 12% of the variance explained by the model, 10% is explained by the variables themselves (without interaction) and 2% is due to the interaction between the two variables body size and product type.

Watching at the conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator (Tab 5), only utilitarian products have a positive effect (Effect=0,61) on Intention to recommend compared to body size; and effect is significantly different ($p\text{-value}=0,0118$).

Conditional effect of the focal predictor at values of the moderator

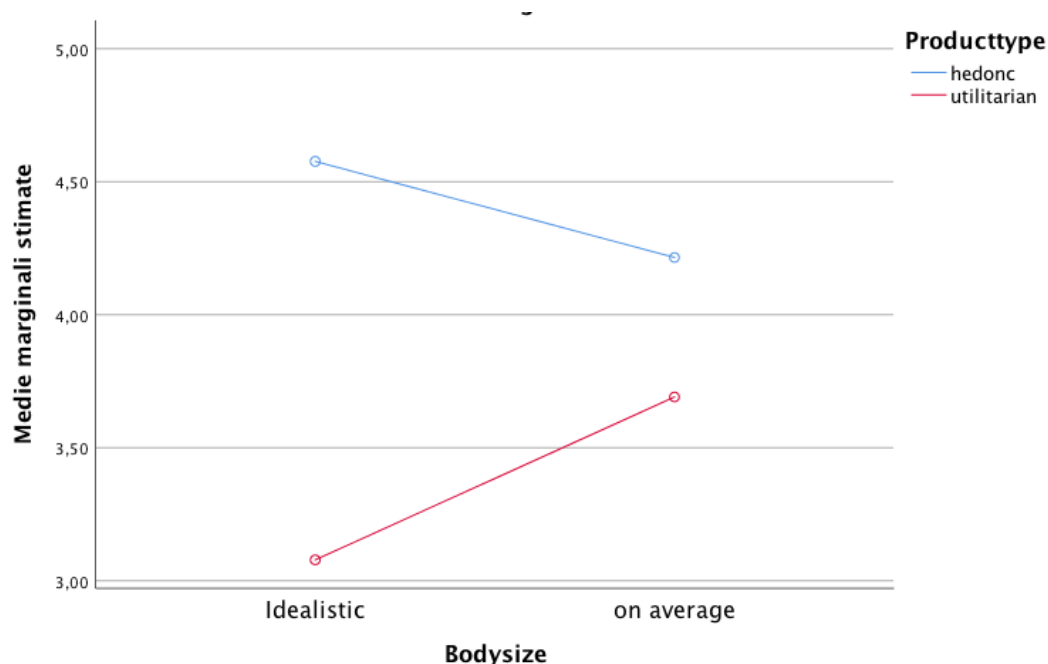
Product Type	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Hedonic	-0,3612	0,2483	-1,455	0,1467	-0,8497	0,1273
Utilitarian	0,6125	0,2419	2,5319	0,0118	0,1365	1,0885

Tab 5: Conditional effect of the Moderator - Product Type (SPSS analysis)

Thus, when talking about Utilitarian products, the engagement of Idealized body size influencers impacts negatively on Intention to recommend in comparison to average body size influencers.

The effect of body size when sponsoring hedonic products does not report a significant difference in terms of Intention to recommend (p value= 0,1467).

In the ANOVA analysis previously reported we got that the type of product was a significant predictor of Intention to recommend but it was not clear the effect of product type until now.



Graph 1: effect of body size sponsoring hedonic vs utilitarian products

From the graph (Graph 1) it is possible to see that, for utilitarian products the use of Idealized body size influencer impacts negatively the users intention to recommend while, the engagement of average body size influencers has a positive effect on users tendency to spread positive word of mouth. The graph also reports the case of hedonic products, which result to be opposite to utilitarian products but not significant.

The second model aims to analyze the Mediator effect on the relationship between Performance Perceived Risk and Intention to Recommend.

The first outcome studies the effect of Body Size on RP1 (Tab 6) R-sq is equal to 0,01 thus the model doesn't fit the dataset. Moreover, the p value of Body Size is $> 0,05$, the effect is not significant.

OUTCOME VARIABLE: Performance Perceived Risk

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0,1027	0,0106	1,5694	3,2745	1	307	0,0713

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3,4625	0,2251	15,3787	0,000	3,0195	3,9055
Body Size	0,2579	0,1425	1,8095	0,0713	-0,0225	0,5384

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates

	constant	Body Size
constant	0,0507	-0,0304
Body Size	-0,0304	0,0203

OUTCOME VARIABLE: Intention to Recommend

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0,4838	0,2341	2,0261	46,7572	2	306	0,000

Model

Model	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	5,7393	0,3404	16,8617	0,0000	5,0696	6,4091
Body Size	0,3506	0,1628	2,1536	0,0320	0,0303	0,671
Performance Perceived Risk	-0,6224	0,0648	-9,5988	0,0000	-0,7501	-0,4948

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:

	constant	Body Size	Performance Perceived Risk
constant	0,1159	-0,0355	-0,0146
Body Size	-0,0355	0,0265	-0,0011
Performance Perceived Risk	-0,0146	-0,0011	0,0042

TOTAL EFFECT MODEL**OUTCOME VARIABLE: Intention to Recommend**

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0,0587	0,0034	2,6275	1,0624	1	307	0,3035

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3,5841	0,2913	12,3029	0,000	3,0109	4,1573
Body Size	0,1901	0,1844	1,0307	0,3035	-0,1728	0,5530

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:

	Body Size	constant
constant	0,0849	-0,051
Body Size	-0,051	0,0849

TOTAL, DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT OF X ON Y

Total effect of x on y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
0,1901	0,1844	1,0307	0,3035	-0,1728	0,553

Direct effect of x on y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
0,3506	0,1628	2,1536	0,032	0,0303	0,671

Indirect effect of x on y

Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
-0,1605	0,093	-0,3481	0,0149

Tab 6: Model Summary of the moderating effect of Performance Perceived Risk (SPSS analysis)

To understand whether Performance Risk Perception represents a moderator of the model, we watched at the interaction between variables represented in the image 2

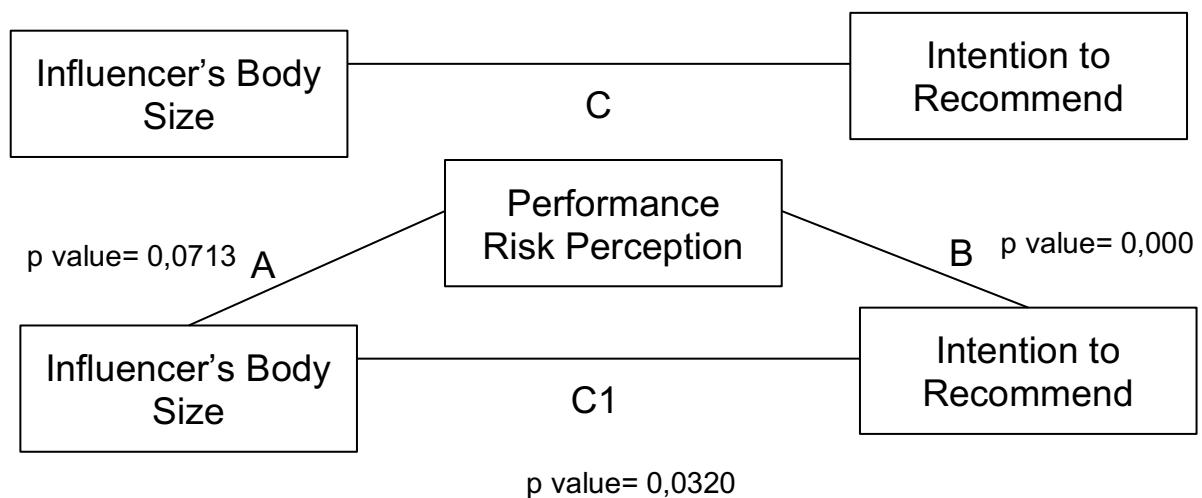


Image 2: Graphical model of Mediating effect of Performance Perceived Risk

From the data gathered it is possible to see that even if path b (p value = 0,000) and c1 (p value = 0,0320) are statistically relevant, the effect of Body Size on Performance Risk Perception (path A) is not significant (p value = 0,0713). For mediation to be true it is necessary to have both path a and b significant thus, we can conclude that Performance Risk Perception does not represent a mediating effect.

The third model aims to analyze the Mediator effect on the relationship between Social Perceived Risk and Intention to Recommend.

The first outcome studies the effect of Body Size on RP2 (Tab 7) R-sq is equal to 0,02, and the p value of Body Size is < 0,05, the effect is significant.

From the analysis it is not possible to confirm the H3, when considering only Performance Perceived Risk.

OUTCOME VARIABLE: Social Perceived Risk

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0,1499	0,0225	1,9342	7,0592	1	307	0,0083

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	5,0097	0,2499	20,0428	0,000	4,5178	5,5015
Body Size	-0,4204	0,1582	-2,6569	0,0083	-0,7318	-0,1091

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates

	constant	Body Size
constant	0,0625	-0,375
Body Size	-0,0375	0,025

OUTCOME VARIABLE: Intention to Recommend

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0,1273	0,0162	2,6024	2,5191	2	306	0,0822

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4,2445	0,4405	9,6356	0,0000	3,3777	5,1113
Body Size	0,1347	0,1856	0,7254	0,4688	-0,2306	0,5
Performance Perceived Risk	-0,1318	0,0662	-1,9914	0,0473	-0,2621	-0,0016

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:

	constant	Body Size	Social Perceived Risk
constant	0,1940	-0,0597	-0,022
Body Size	-0,0597	0,0345	0,0018
Social Perceived Risk	-0,022	0,0018	0,0044

TOTAL EFFECT MODEL

OUTCOME VARIABLE: Intention to Recommend

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0,0587	0,0034	2,6275	1,0624	1	307	0,3035

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3,5841	0,2913	12,3029	0	3,0109	4,1573
Body Size	0,1901	0,1844	1,0307	0,3035	-0,1728	0,553

Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:

	Body Size	constant
constant	0,0849	-0,0510
Body Size	-0,0510	0,034

TOTAL, DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT OF X ON Y

Total effect of x on y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
0,1901	0,1844	1,0307	0,3035	-0,1728	0,5530

Direct effect of x on y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
0,1347	0,1856	0,7524	-0,4688	-0,2306	0,5

Indirect effect of x on y

Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
0,0554	0,036	-0,0061	0,1317

Tab 7: Model Summary of the moderating effect of Social Perceived Risk (SPSS analysis)

To understand whether Performance Risk Perception represents a moderator of the model, we watched the interaction between variables named as the image 3.

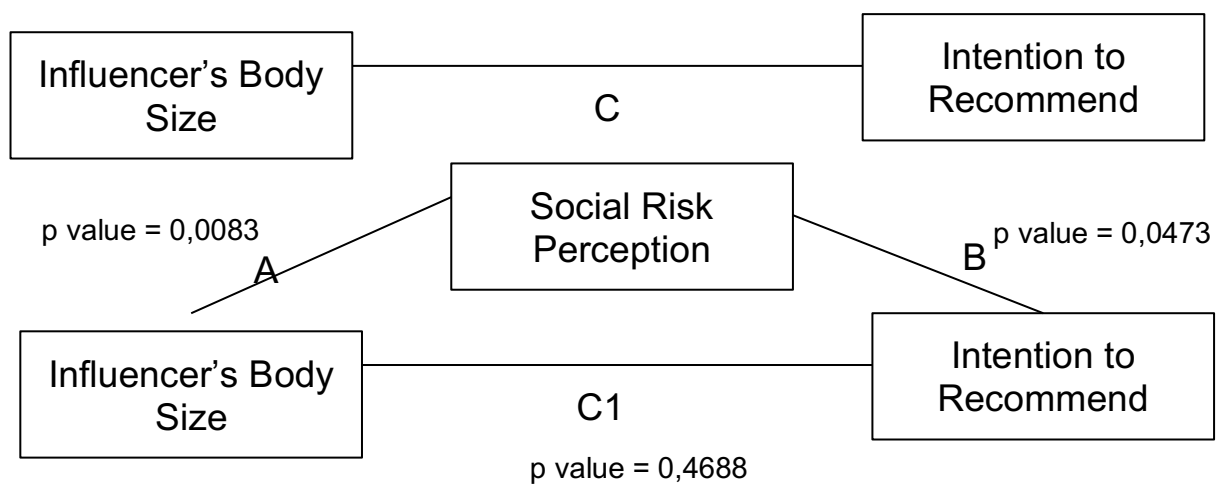


Image 3: Graphical model of Mediating effect of Social Perceived Risk

From the data gathered, it is possible to see that both path A (p value = 0,0083) (effect of Body Size on Social Risk Perception) and path B (p value = 0,0473) (effect of Social Risk Perception on Intention to Recommend) are significant. $C1$ results to be not significant (p value = 0,4688) but the coefficient is different from 0 ($\text{coef}=0,13$). Since the direct effect is minor than the total effect, thus $C > C1$, we can conclude that Social Risk Perception is a Partial Mediating effect.

In particular we calculated that 28% of the variance of Intention to Recommend is explained by the Mediating Effect.

From the analysis, it is possible to confirm the H3 since a partial mediating effect has been found. Thus partially, Social Perceived risk negatively impacts users' intention to recommend.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how male influencers body attractiveness, while sponsoring products, impacts on users intention to recommend the product itself in case of hedonic or utilitarian types of products. Moreover, we wanted to investigate whether this effect was mediated by Performance Risk Perception or Social Risk Perception.

Thanks to the analysis of the data gathered during the research, we got different findings.

We found that in general users tend to recommend more likely hedonic products than utilitarian products. This is probably due to the hype that hedonic value causes during the purchase journey. Indeed, hedonic purchases and search before purchase are real enjoyable moments. In the field of hedonic products, the analysis shows that body size does not impact the intention to recommend. Indeed, the effect of influencers body size on Intention to recommend while sponsoring hedonic products is not significant. By contrast, for Utilitarian products, attractiveness, expressed through the level of body size idealization, has a negative effect on users' intention to recommend. It means that influencers perceived as normal in terms of body size enhance more positive WOM than idealized models, when considering functional products.

Moreover, results showed that Perceived Performance Risk is not significantly associated with Body Size Perception. Specifically, the body Size perception does not influence the Performance Risk perceived by users. Thus, Perceived Performance Risk does not explain the relationship between Influencers body size and Users Intention to recommend.

Finally results showed that Perceived Social Risk work as a mediator in the relationship between Influencers body size and Users Intention to recommend. Specifically, Users Intention to recommend is explained for 28% by the Perceived Social Risk (partial mediation).

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The present study contributes to academic literature by providing empirical evidence that, in social media, endorsers impact the perception of the product, the risk associated with and the consequent Intention to recommend, for male users. In particular body size idealization has different effects when considering two different types of product (hedonic vs utilitarian) in the male sphere. In the field of hedonic products, the analysis shows that body size does not impact the intention to recommend since the effect of influencers body size on Intention to recommend while sponsoring hedonic products is not significant.

By contrast, for products characterized by utilitarian value, it is more useful to use average body size influencers because idealized body size has a negative effect on users' intention to recommend.

The study provided insight regarding the potential use of non-idealized model images and the role of social risk for more effective advertising strategies for male consumers.

Findings from this study are subject to limitations that provide ideas or insight for future research. First of all, the research has been conducted exclusively in the context of social networks, particularly Instagram, and effects on users can be different according to the communication channels used.

Secondly, this research does not take into account age and nationality, thus differences can be detected among cultures, groups and generations.

Results from this study may be also be affected by individual differences (e.g., more appearance oriented vs. less appearance oriented behaviour or more body concerned vs. less body concerned) of media exposure. Furthermore, one idea for future research would be to distinguish between appearance and non-appearance products which are differently perceived by consumers.

Concluding, many are the possible factors contributing to the Intention of users to recommend, like their social media attitude, perceived utility of influencer message or the reliability of the influencer.

Thus, future research on possible factors associated with body image and users Intention to recommend may provide an advanced understanding to deconstruct consumers' perceptions and advertising effectiveness of idealized and average sized body influencers images.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Contextualized to the social network environment, this study aims to analyze the impact of influencers' body size on users' Intention to recommend (ItR). In more detail, our study focuses on how male influencers' body size impacts male users' ItR with the mediating role of Risk Perception and the moderating role of the type of product promoted by the influencer.

Consumers are increasingly using social media to gather information on which to base their decisions. Social network sites are numerous, disparate and used for different purposes.⁹⁴

Our study uses the context of Instagram which is a daily used social network for more than 1 billion people around the world where interactions can be done with virtual friends or with people which represent possible models to follow online and offline, Influencers.

We define Influencers as individuals who play a central role in the exchange of information and opinions about products and or services which an audience, identified as followers, consider to be relevant.⁹⁵

Their potential degree of influence to the said audience can have a direct impact in the performance of a brand and, thus, the association between organization and influencer is extremely relevant in the users' brand consideration.⁹⁶

Actually, Influencers' followers like to perceive influencers as "friends" who tell them their real opinion about products, services, brands and experiences. Seeking more and more for genuineness, authenticity of influencers can be tested through the body size point of view.

Numerous studies have been conducted to analyse the effects of users being exposed to an image with idealized physiques compared to average physiques and very interesting findings are out.

A study of Ui-Jeen Yu analyzed how for women the exposure to thin-idealized model images showed greater body dissatisfaction and lower advertising effectiveness.⁹⁷

We found that a big limitation of the study was given by the gender of the respondents, thus, we decided to investigate how Instagram male models' body size impacts the male users Intention to Recommend.

Moreover, we wanted to understand whether the relationship between these two variables was moderated by the product type, in particular between hedonic and utilitarian products.

⁹⁴ Louis V Casalò, Carlos Flavian, Sergio Ibáñez-Sánchez, Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership, *Journal of Business Research* Volume 117, September 2020, Pages 510-519

⁹⁵ Louis V Casalò, Carlos Flavian, Sergio Ibáñez-Sánchez, Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership, *Journal of Business Research* Volume 117, September 2020, Pages 510-519

⁹⁶ Seungbae Kim, Xiusi Chen¹, Jyun-Yu Jiang, Jinyoung Han, Wei Wang, Evaluating Audience Loyalty and Authenticity in Influencer Marketing via Multi-task Multi-relational, *Fifteenth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM2021)*

⁹⁷ Yu U-J (2014) Deconstructing college students' perceptions of thin-idealized versus non-idealized media images on body dissatisfaction and advertising effectiveness. *Cloth Text Res J* 32(3):153–169

Finally, we aimed to analyze if the relationship between the dependent and the independent variable was influenced by the risk perception of users.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The variables of our model are Influencer's body size (Independent Variable), Intention to recommend (Dependent Variable), Type of product (Moderator) and Risk Perception (Mediator).

BODY SIZE

In 1986, Fisher, in the study of Development and structure of the body image (Vols. 1–2) defined the body image as “a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about one's own body.” The definition of body image incorporates a person's perceptions and attitudes not only about his or her physical appearance but also that of the others.⁹⁸

In the era of social media, where only on Instagram everyday more than 95 million photos. Indeed, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that mass media images significantly contribute to the development and evolution of sociocultural beauty ideals.

These ideals of beauty inevitably lead to their being internalized as a result of their diffusion causing people to experience social comparisons with idealized media images, either consciously or unconsciously, eliciting positive and negative feelings, automatically transferred to the product or brand in the advertisement.⁹⁹

For men, as for women, as the social pressure to attain an “ideal” physique increases, the discrepancy between that ideal and one's body increases as well. Nonetheless, the effect and effectiveness of model attractiveness still has uncertain results that cannot yet be explained in a unique way. In this study, however, we aim to investigate this relationship within the context of social networks.

PERCEIVED RISK

Cunningham in 1967 defined risk as “the amount that would be lost if the consequences of an act were not favorable, and the individual's subjective feeling of certainty that the consequences will be unfavorable.”¹⁰⁰

Based on this definition, risk is defined in this paper as the expectations of any loss or any negative consequences as a result of sponsored products by influencers.

Forsythe and Shi reported many types of risk in the online consumption field like financial, product performance, social, psychological and time/convenience loss.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Fisher, S. (1986). Development and structure of the body image (vols. 1, 2). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

⁹⁹ J.K. Thompson, L.J. Heinberg, M. Altabe, S. Tantleff-Dunn, Exacting beauty: Theory, assessment, and treatment of body image disturbance American Psychological Association; US, Washington, DC (1999)

¹⁰⁰ Cunningham, S.M. The major dimensions of perceived risk. In D.F. Cox (Ed.), Risk-taking and information-handling in consumer behavior. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1967. Pp. 82-108. (a)

¹⁰¹ Forsythe, S. M., & Shi, B. (2003). Consumer patronage and risk perceptions in internet shopping. Journal of Business Research, 56, 867-875

We are going to focus on Perceived Performance Risk and Perceived Social Risk.

Perceived performance risk is defined as concern over the functionality of the source of information (Influencers on Instagram) and communication channel (Instagram)

Perceived social risk involves the likelihood that online shopping will affect the way others think of the online prospective shopper. Generally, consumers have the subjective norms that they are concerned about the opinions of their family, peers and friends with respect to their own actions and subsequently their responses would be determined by people around them.¹⁰²

PRODUCT TYPE

Consumer choices are driven by utilitarian and hedonic considerations. Broadly speaking, hedonic goods provide for more experiential consumption, fun, pleasure, and excitement (designer clothes, sports cars, luxury watches, etc.), while utilitarian goods are primarily instrumental and functional (microwaves, minivans, personal computers, etc.;).¹⁰³¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵

The difference between hedonic and utilitarian products can be based from the perspective of motivation.

When the consumer has a mission or a task and the completion of this depends on the acquisition/ efficient use of that product we have utilitarian motivations.¹⁰⁶ On the contrary, hedonic consumers enjoy the shopping process and it is not only about completing a task. In this case, shopping is not a boring task, but it is a real moment of happiness, awakening and enjoyment¹⁰⁷

The distinction on product types can be done in terms of value too. Most of the products are characterized by both experiential (hedonic) and functional (utilitarian) value; in particular a given product can possess different levels of utilitarian and hedonic value for any given consumer. To that purpose many studies have been conducted and confirm that product value impacts on purchase satisfaction.¹⁰⁸

Online opinion leaders are used to sponsor both hedonic and utilitarian products.

¹⁰² Nasir, M.A. Wu, J., Yago, M. & LI, H. (2015). Influence of Psychographics and Risk Perception on Internet Banking Adoption: Current State of Affairs in Britain. *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*, 5(2), 461-468

¹⁰³ Dhar, R., & Wertenbroch, K. (2000). Consumer choice between hedonic and utilitarian goods. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37(1), 60-71

¹⁰⁴ Hirschman, Elizabeth C., and Morris B. Holbrook (1982), "Hedonic Consumption: Emerging Concepts, Methods And Propositions," *Journal of Marketing*, 46 (Summer), 92-100

¹⁰⁵ Strahilevitz, Michal A., and George F. Loewenstein (1998), "The Effect of Ownership History on the Valuation of Objects," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25 (December), 276-280

¹⁰⁶ To, P.-L.; Liao, C.; Lin, T.-H. Shopping motivations on Internet: A study based on utilitarian and hedonic value. *Technovation* 2007,27, 774-787

¹⁰⁷ To, P.-L.; Liao, C.; Lin, T.-H. Shopping motivations on Internet: A study based on utilitarian and hedonic value. *Technovation* 2007,27, 774-787

¹⁰⁸ Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan, 2007, 2008; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, 1992; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003

One of the objectives of this study is to fill this gap by studying the perception differences between hedonic or utilitarian products sponsored by influencers and in particular how this diversity impacts on users' intention to recommend with idealized body size influencer or averaged size.

INTENTION TO RECOMMEND

In our study the intention to recommend is referred to the Influencer's post or product sponsored in the same.

Many are the determinants of recommendation but satisfaction is the major determinant of behavioral intentions, including the intention to recommend a specific webpage to other consumers. Recommendation is also said to be Positive Word of mouth.

Prior studies have found that consumers perceive WOM as more trustworthy and persuasive than traditional media, such as print ads, personal selling, and radio and TV advertising. Word of mouth evolved in the Electronic Word of mouth through the diffusion of social media and internet use and it is shaped in many forms where the main are represented by comments and reviews.

It's important for us to highlight that in this study, even if the source of information is an online social platform, we are not going to study the EWOM (thus the spread of an opinion through an online channel) but the intention to recommend (intention to spread positive WOM).

In our study, the object of WOM is an influencer's post on an Instagram account. The Intention to recommend is the dependent variable and we want to know how the degree of idealization in influencer body size and the type of product sponsored in the social media affect the users intention to recommend.

HYPOTHESIS

Previous studies have found that attractive models with beautiful faces and thinness are perceived as more favorable, effective, and trustworthy in advertising.^{109 110 111} However, advertising effectiveness using highly attractive models has been inconsistently supported and questioned by several studies which support effectiveness of models that are average in attractiveness and/or body size^{112 113}.

¹⁰⁹ Baker, M. J. and Churchill, G. A. Jr. (1977). The impact of physical attractive models on advertising evaluations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 14, p. 538-555.

¹¹⁰ Till, B. D., and Busler, M. (2000). The match-up hypothesis: Physical attractiveness, expertise, and the role of fit on brand attitude, purchase

¹¹¹ Kahle, L. R. and Homer, P. M. (1985). Physical attractiveness of celebrity endorser: A social adaptation perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 11, p. 954-961.

¹¹² Murray D. and Price B. (2011) The globalization of beauty – Aspiration or threat? A comparison of the effect of Western beauty types and Western females attitudes and purchase intentions. *International Journal of Business Research* 11(2): 146-155.

¹¹³ Tsai, C., & Chang, C. (2007). The effect of physical attractiveness of models on advertising effectiveness for male and female adolescents. *Adolescence*, 42(168), 827-836

Average-looking models in ads for appearance-related products could be more effective because highly attractive models may serve to deflate the self- image and/or inflate body anxiety and dissatisfaction of some consumers, thereby decreasing ad effectiveness for consumers discouraged about their appearance.^{114 115}

It is important, for customers, to perceive the congruence between themselves and the influencers.¹¹⁶ In similarity–attraction theory,¹¹⁷ It has been suggested that people were attracted to relationships with others whom they believed held similar attributes and attitudes.

H1: Influencers attractiveness, measured through body size, negatively impacts the user's Intention to recommend. The more model body size is perceived idealized, the lower the intention to recommend. The more model body size is perceived on average, the higher the intention to recommend.

Human self-presentation behavior is driven by self-esteem and belonging needs. Status aspirations influence an individual's behavior, and consumption objects may satisfy certain needs. Specialized literature on marketing defines it as „acquisition and use of consumer goods symbolizing status, both to the individual and to relevant others, motivated by a desire to maintain, protect, and/or enhance one's social status”¹¹⁸. Social Network Sites provide the individual with the necessary tools to display and promote the self to a large audience: friends, followers and other users in the network.¹¹⁹ Thus, we believe that, although social network contents are also related to utilitarian products, hedonic products and experiences certainly create more hype and buzz within the social context.¹²⁰

Thus we formulated our hypothesis as it follows

H2: The type of product sponsored by influencers on Instagram impacts the users intention to recommend users. The more the product advertised by the influencer is perceived as hedonic, the greater the intention to recommend by users. The more the product advertised by the influencer is perceived as utilitarian, the lower the users' intention to recommend.

¹¹⁴ Bower, A. B., & Landreth, S. (2001). Is beauty best? Highly versus normally attractive models in advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 30, 1–12

¹¹⁵ Yu, U.-J., M. L. Damhorst, and D. W. Russell. 2011. The impact of body image on consumers' perceptions of idealized advertising images and brand attitudes. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 40 (1):58–73.

¹¹⁶ Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S., Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers, (2021), *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 186-195.

¹¹⁷ Byrne, D. (1971). *The attraction paradigm*. New York: Academic Press

¹¹⁸ Millan E. and Mittal, B. (2017): Consumer preference for status symbolism of clothing: the case of the Czech Republic, p. 2, in *Psychology & Marketing*, vol. 34, issue no. 3, p. 309-322.

¹¹⁹ Meda Mucundorfeanu, Cora Lupaş , I Have, I Post, Therefore I Am! Hedonic Consumption as a Tool for Self-Promoting Behavior on Social Networking Platforms. Volume 63 (Lxiii) 2018, *Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Ephemerides*

¹²⁰ Meda Mucundorfeanu, Cora Lupaş , I Have, I Post, Therefore I Am! Hedonic Consumption as a Tool for Self-Promoting Behavior on Social Networking Platforms. Volume 63 (Lxiii) 2018, *Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Ephemerides*

The relationship between customer perceived risk and customer satisfaction has been long studied from many key points. Authors found that perceived risk strongly influences customer satisfaction. By increasing the burden of loss and risk, customers watch for alternatives to minimize the risk of loss. Given that correlation of perceived risk and on customer satisfaction is negatively at high level and that satisfaction is the main determinant for positive WOD we can elaborate the hypothesis as follows.

H3: Perceived risk (from looking at influencers' posts) negatively impacts users' intention to recommend. The higher the perceived risk, the lower the intention to recommend; the lower the perceived risk, the higher the user's intention to recommend.

To facilitate the comprehension of the model here below in figure 1 the graphical representation.

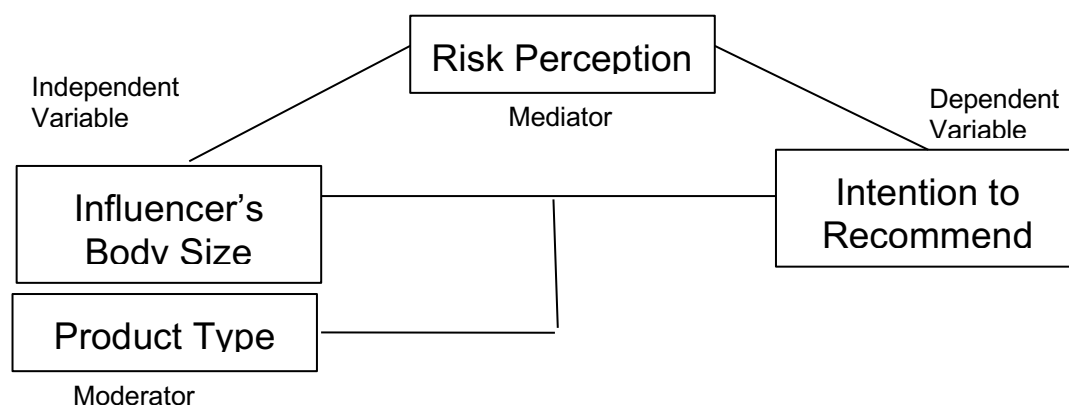


Figure 1: Graphical Research Model

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data collection method we opted for, was based on an electronic survey, built on Qualtrics.

We submitted the 4 visual stimuli which represent the four conditions of the research:

1. Idealized body Influencer with Hedonic product
2. Idealized body Influencer with Utilitarian product
3. Average body size Influencer with Hedonic product
4. Average body size Influencer with Utilitarian product

The design was a between-subject with each of the respondents being exposed to just one of the stimuli.

After being shown the stimuli, each respondent was asked about the risk perception of the product promoted by the influencer and their intention to recommend.

STIMULI BUILDING

The stimuli were based on an Instagram screenshot of an Influencer on the classic feed of Instagram. The processing of the stimuli included the help of two friends who volunteered to take some photos.

THE MAIN TEST

After verifying the validity of our conditions in the pre-test, we focused on the main test elaboration.

THE MAIN TEST STRUCTURE

The main test was composed of three sections.

The first part consisted of asking the respondent to look at the image.

The second part aimed to obtain risk perception from the respondents.

In the last section respondents were asked two questions which aimed to analyze the likelihood the respondent would spread Positive Word of Mouth about the sponsored product after watching the image of the influencer in their personal feed on Instagram.

The SAMPLE

Since the study was referred to the male sphere, using male influencers, the sample we needed was composed by only men. The sample was made up of 312 respondents (after data cleaning). In more detail we collected 74 for the first stimulus (idealized body size and Hedonic product) , 79 for the second (idealized body size and utilitarian product) , 83 for the third (Averaged body size and Hedonic product) and 76 for the last (Averaged body size and Utilitarian product).

RESULTS

Before analysing the results and discussing the findings, a thorough cleaning of the data was carried out to remove incomplete answers. In the end, the final dataset consists of 312 responses.

Hypothesis testing

We firstly evaluated the effect of body size on users' intention to recommend with a univariate analysis. The results show that respondents who were presented with an image of an influencer with an idealized physique did not respond significantly differently to those who were presented with an image of the influencer with an average physique (Tab 1). Thus, it is possible to reject the H1 hypothesis elaborated before.

We used the same test (univariate test) to assess respondents' Intention to recommend in relation to the product type. The results show that respondents who were presented with an image of an influencer sponsoring a hedonic product responded significantly differently to those who were presented with an image of an influencer sponsoring a utilitarian product. Thus, the type of product advertised by the influencer is a significant predictor for users intention to recommend but we still don't know whether the effect is positive or negative.

In order to better understand the effect, we used the Hayes model in the following analysis, after the study of the combined effect between body size and product type.

The next step was about evaluating the combined effect between influencers Body Size and Product Type sponsored by the influencer on users intention to recommend and data analysis showed that product type is a moderating effect between body size and Intention to Recommend.

Tab 3

PROCESS v3.5 analysis has been performed in order to inspect the relationship between the Body Size (IV) , Intention to Recommend (DV) , Product Type (Moderator) and Risk Perception (Mediator).

We defined 3 models:

1. DV: Intention to Recommend
IV: Body Size
Moderator: Product Type
2. DV: Intention to Recommend
IV: Body Size
Mediator: Performance Perceived Risk
3. DV: Intention to Recommend
IV: Body Size
Mediator: Social Perceived Risk

The first model aims to analyze the Moderator effect on the relationship between body size and Intention to Recommend.

From the Hayes Analysis, we derived that when talking about Utilitarian products, the engagement of Idealized body size influencers impacts negatively on Intention to recommend in comparison to average body size influencers, while the effect of body size when sponsoring hedonic products does not report a significant difference in terms of Intention to recommend.

The second model aims to analyze the Mediator effect on the relationship between Performance Perceived Risk and Intention to Recommend.

To understand whether Performance Risk Perception represents a moderator of the model, we watched at the interaction between variables represented in the image 2 and we concluded that Performance Risk Perception does not represent a mediating effect.

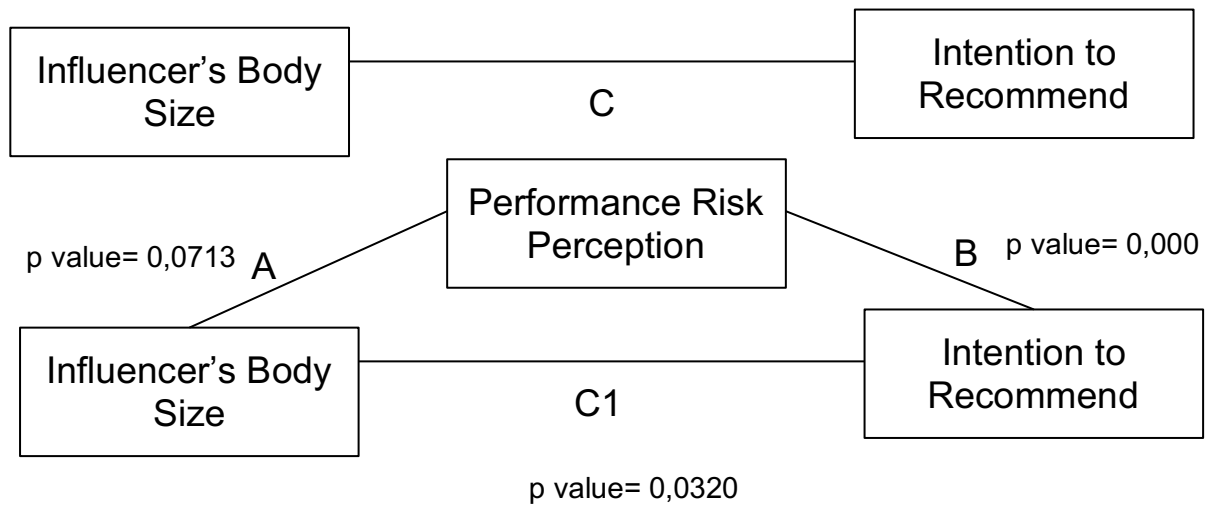


Image 2: Graphical model of Mediating effect of Performance Perceived Risk

The third model aims to analyze the Mediator effect on the relationship between Social Perceived Risk and Intention to Recommend.

To understand whether Performance Risk Perception represents a moderator of the model, we watched the interaction between variables named as the image 3. From the analysis, it is possible to confirm the H3 since a partial mediating effect has been found. Thus partially, Social Perceived risk negatively impacts users' intention to recommend

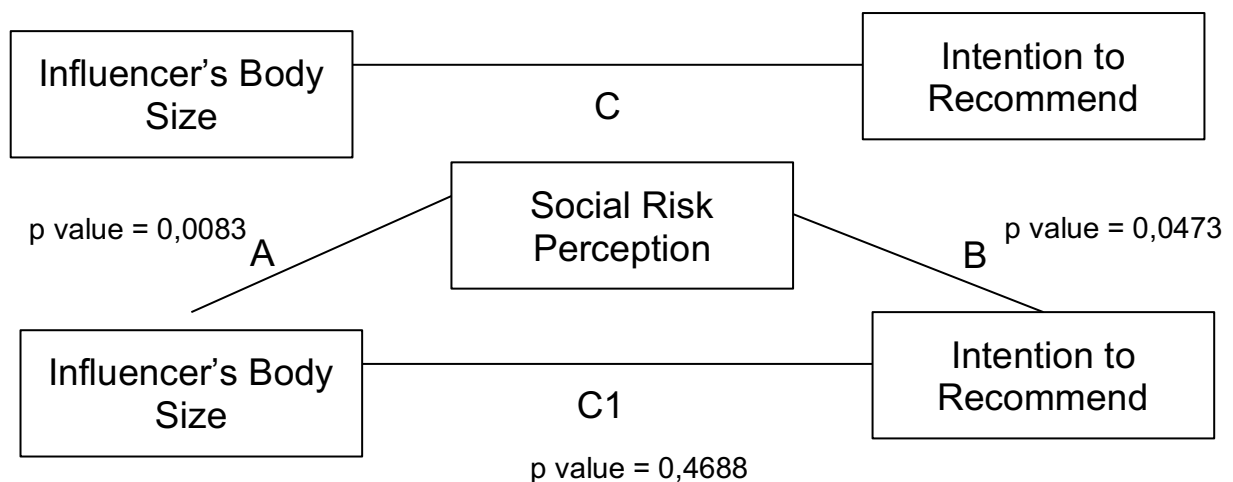


Image 3: Graphical model of Mediating effect of Social Perceived Risk.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how male influencers body attractiveness, while sponsoring products, impacts on users intention to recommend the product itself in case of hedonic or utilitarian types of products. Moreover, we wanted to investigate whether this effect was mediated by Performance Risk Perception or Social Risk Perception.

We found that, in general, users tend to recommend more likely hedonic products than utilitarian products, probably due to the hype that hedonic value causes during the purchase journey. However, in the field of hedonic products, the analysis shows that body size does not impact the intention to recommend. Indeed, the effect of influencers body size on Intention to recommend while sponsoring hedonic products is not significant. By contrast, for Utilitarian products attractiveness, expressed through the level of body size idealization, has a negative effect on users' intention to recommend. It means that influencers perceived as normal in terms of body size enhance more positive WOM than idealized models, when considering functional products.

Moreover, results showed that, whereas Perceived Performance Risk is not significantly associated with Body Size Perception, Perceived Social Risk works as a mediator in the relationship between Influencers body size and Users Intention to recommend (partial mediation).

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The present study contributes to academic literature by providing empirical evidence that, in social media, endorsers impact the perception of the product, the risk associated with and the consequent Intention to recommend, for male users. The study provided insights regarding the potential use of non-idealized model images and the role of social risk for more effective advertising strategies for male consumers.

Findings from this study are subject to limitations that provide ideas or insights for future research. First of all the research has been conducted exclusively in the context of social networks, particularly Instagram, and effects on users can be different according to the communication channels used. Secondly, this research does not take into account age and nationality, thus differences can be detected among cultures, groups and generations.

Results from this study may also be affected by individual differences (e.g., more appearance oriented vs. less appearance oriented behaviour or more body concerned vs. less body concerned) of media exposure. Many are the possible factors contributing to the Intention of users to recommend, like their social media attitude, perceived utility of influencer message or the reliability of the influencer that should be taken into account for future research.

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