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# The effects of Influencer Marketing and the Dupe Trend on TikTok

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## ABSTRACT

For the past few years, the emerging social media TikTok has gained great popularity, particularly among the younger generations, being both a source and a reflection of current trends. The Chinese social media, owned by Byte Dance, is completely based on an algorithm that makes the content go viral by creating trends that easily cross the boundaries of application use and influence the lifestyle of its users. Above all, contents and trends that run on TikTok also influence the consumption habits of those who use it. Consequently, TikTok it is now used as a platform to implement marketing strategies thanks to the power of influence of the so-called “*TikTokers*”. For instance, a trend that is now quite popular on the platform is *dupes*: fashion or beauty cheap products presented as good substitutes to those of luxurious and high-quality brands. Dupe culture has depopulated on TikTok thanks to influencers experts in fashion and beauty. However, this culture is quite controversial from several points of view: first, it is frowned upon by luxury companies or corporations who not only see their goods reproduced at a much lower price, but also suffer from social media influencers who urge consumers to choose the dupe product rather than the original to save money. In addition, the dupe culture is not considered to be sustainable as it encourages fast fashion, which is a major contributor to pollution and waste.

This study aims to investigate the impact of TikTok social media influencers, or the so-called *TikTokers*, in promoting beauty dupe products, i.e. the purchase of products from cheap brands whose characteristics are presented as equal to those of products from more luxurious brands. To study this phenomenon, the between subject experiment methodology is used to compare two different scenarios: the promotion of a luxury product and a dupe product by an influencer on TikTok. The sample of respondents consists of 272 people and is very diverse. The age of interviewees ranges from 15 to 70 and 73,9% is female while 26,1% is male. Their level of education was asked revealing that most of them has obtained a master’s degree or single cycle degree (42,3%) while 26,5% belongs to the high school diploma cluster, and 21,3% and 9,9% respectively to bachelor’s degree and master’s program. From this study it emerged that social media influencer marketing on TikTok increases purchase intention especially for luxury products rather than dupes, whereas when brand awareness is taken into consideration the effect is still verified but it enhances purchase of dupe products more than the luxury ones.

## CHAPTER 1 – Investigation Area

### Introduction

Social media marketing is a recent phenomenon that has undoubtedly changed the buying habits of consumers. It is defined as a marketing tactic in which businesses choose social media influencers with a sizable fanbase to help them market their brands and products to their target consumers (Bu et al., 2022). As such, the great rise of social media, which started a little over a decade ago, has had such an impact on people's lives leading to the creation of new channels for sales and branding activities. In fact, the so-called omnichannel model, which consists in optimizing the customer experience and the performance by a synergistic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints (Verhoef et al., 2012), requires companies to use both online and offline channels to distribute their products and services, given that nowadays people's very lives take place partly online and partly offline. According to Oberlo Statistics, as of 2023, the total number of digital buyers is 2.64 billion, that accounts for 33.3% of the global population. To phrase it differently, one out of every three persons you see is an internet shopper. The number of online shoppers has increased in recent years: there will be 80 million more digital buyers in 2023 than there were in 2022, representing a 3.1% year-over-year rise. Moreover, the number of online shoppers is expected to grow further, reaching 2.71 billion in 2024 and 2.77 billion in 2025.

Among the various online channels that have sprung up in recent years, the one of influencers is one of the newest and, certainly, most dynamic. Whereas a few years ago web personalities were limited to commenting on or recommending products or services to their followers, they have now become influencers. The big evolution of influencer marketing is a direct consequence of the impact of social media on buying behavior of consumers. According to Deloitte Global, the global market for social commerce will exceed \$1 trillion by 2023. Initially driven by a boom during COVID-19, the market is continuing to grow despite the pandemic's ebbs and flows. According to 2021 findings, over one-third of US customers had ever made a direct purchase on social media, and an even higher number claimed that seeing a product on social media was part of their buying path.

Online influencers are people, groups of people, or even virtual characters who have amassed a following on social media and are recognized as digital opinion leaders with a significant social influence on their following (Leung et al., 2022). At the same time, it has become an essential prerogative for brands to arm themselves with influencers in order to make their products visible and popular on social media, targeting the younger age groups of digital natives, such as Generation Z,

who are very proficient computer users that prioritize suggestions and recommendations while making purchases (Kahawandala et al, 2020).

Influencer marketing has therefore been the subject of careful analysis for several years now, but as it has already been stated, it is a very dynamic phenomenon and has undergone great changes over the years. Getting into the specifics, a big boom in influencer marketing surely occurred with the advent of the Chinese social media TikTok. Besides, with the great popularity that this platform obtained especially in the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, many new influencers were born. In addition, the format of this application is a very fertile ground for marketing strategies that have therefore gained even more value thanks to the rise of TikTok: hence, this app is both a source and reflection of current trends, particularly those of the younger generation. Since this is a very recent phenomenon, it is interesting to examine influencer marketing by studying this social media individually.

The phenomenon this study aims to explore is one of the trends that has recently emerged on TikTok: the *dupe* culture. A *dupe* is an abbreviated variant of the term “duplicate”, and it is frequently used to refer to a product that is very similar to a popular brand’s product, but less expensive (Dexerto, 2023). Indeed, for some time now, videos of influencers promoting the use of low-cost products, presenting them as perfect substitutes for luxury or high-quality brands’ items, have been all the rage on TikTok, mostly in the fashion and beauty sectors. The idea of dupes is not new - it was born years ago on YouTube, but it is very intriguing to examine the impact it has on consumer decision making since it has landed on TikTok becoming a real trend. Besides, studying this trend is very interesting especially for its controversial nature: thus, there are several dark sides to the *dupes* phenomenon. First and foremost, luxury companies whose products are shown to be perfectly replaceable for much cheaper ones quite disapprove it and suffer from social media influencers who promote dupes. Furthermore, from an environmental perspective, dupe culture fuels fast-fashion, which is highly responsible for waste production and pollution. Recently, a focus on sustainability from an ecological point of view arise, and it surely makes the *dupes* phenomenon even more problematic and interesting to analyze from this perspective. Moreover, generation Z, the main target user of TikTok’s social media, is the most aware generation concerning environmental issues.

Therefore, considering everything that has been stated so far, this study aims to investigate the impact of TikTok’s social media influencer marketing on the purchase intention of consumers in the fashion and beauty sectors with a focus on the phenomenon of dupe culture, i.e. the purchase of products from cheap brands whose characteristics are presented as equal to those of products from more

luxurious brands. So, the purpose of this research is to understand how the type of product (dupe or luxury) impacts on the purchase intention of consumers exposed to influencer marketing on TikTok, taking into consideration the ulterior moderation of brand awareness. The methodology used to conduct the study is the between subject experiment that allows to compare results of two different scenarios that are randomly assigned to respondents. The two scenarios consist of a textual description of a promotion of a mascara on TikTok, and they only differ for the type of product and for the brand that commercializes the product: in one case the advertised item is a luxurious Chanel mascara, whilst in the second the product is marketed by Essence. After reading about this adv, respondents are asked to fill in questions concerning their intention to buy the product after being exposed to the promotion, their level of brand awareness, perceived quality, and product knowledge. Finally, some demographic questions about their gender, age and level of education are included. The sample of respondents consists of 272 Italian people between 15 and 70 years old, whose level of education vary among high school diploma (26,5%), bachelor's degree (21,3%), master's degree or single cycle degree (42,3%) and master program (9.9%).

The study of social media influencer marketing has grown in importance in recent years, as more businesses resort to influencers to advertise their products and services. However, there is currently a gap in the literature about the efficiency of TikTok influencer marketing, particularly its impact on customer purchase behavior. This study's aim is to address that lack by investigating the efficiency of social media influencer marketing on TikTok, with a particular emphasis on the beauty and fashion industries. Influencers and content makers on TikTok are spreading *dupes*, or cheaper alternatives to high-end cosmetics and fashion products. This concept is gaining traction and has the potential to disrupt luxury firms' typical marketing techniques. However, there is currently a scarcity of research on this topic, that can be summed up in the following areas of insufficient literature:

- Inadequate effectiveness research: more research is needed to compare dupes and high-end products in terms of quality and performance to the original product.
- Insufficient consumer behavior research: deeper consumer behavior research on duplicate items is required, particularly how consumers react to them.
- Consumer attitudes and perceptions: More research on how customers perceive and use dupe items, including their attitudes about these products and how they influence their purchasing decisions, is required.

This lack in the literature emphasizes the need for additional research in this area. For example, studies may investigate how much the dupe trend influences consumers' shopping decisions, and whether it has a stronger impact on younger, more diverse audiences who are more active on TikTok. Academic research can give significant insights for retailers and marketers wishing to exploit influencer marketing methods on TikTok, particularly in the beauty and fashion sectors, by addressing this literature scarcity. This research can help marketers better understand TikTok users' tastes and behaviors, allowing them to develop more effective marketing tactics that resonate with their target demographic.

Academic research on TikTok influencer marketing has substantial ramifications for the retail business. For starters, influencer marketing has developed as a critical marketing tactic for many brands, notably those in the fashion and beauty industries. Specifically for fashion brands, interactive social media advertising should be used to strengthen positive brand views and consumer interactions (Kim et al., 2023). Retailers can tap into their vast and engaged audiences by collaborating with social media influencers to generate authentic, relatable content that connects with consumers. However, the effectiveness of TikTok influencer marketing has not been well researched, and this is where this study can make a vital contribution. As a result, it explores the impact of various types of influencers' content on consumer behavior. Retailers may customize their influencer marketing campaigns to better engage with consumers and increase sales by identifying which sorts of content are most effective. Indeed, the purpose of the social media marketing campaign can influence its implementation: if the goal is to enhance brand exposure, major influencers and celebrities should be involved. While if the goal is to increase trust among potential customers, micro influencers and important opinion leaders should be considered. (Mou et al., 2015). In addition, the study sheds light on the role of influencer marketing in the greater retail ecosystem. It can, for example, investigate how TikTok influencer marketing interacts with other marketing channels such as social media advertising and email marketing. Understanding how these many channels interact allows companies to create more comprehensive marketing campaigns that engage customers across several touchpoints. Academic research can assist businesses make better educated judgments regarding their marketing budgets and strategies by evaluating the impact of TikTok influencer marketing on consumer purchase behavior. For example, if data shows that TikTok influencer marketing is particularly beneficial for premium products in the beauty and fashion sectors, shops can devote more resources to this technique. If the analysis indicates that TikTok influencer marketing is ineffective for sorts of items or target demographics, retailers can change their strategy accordingly. Overall, a research paper on TikTok influencer marketing can have significant ramifications for the retail

business. This is because TikTok has grown in popularity as a platform for influencer marketing, and as a result, shops are using it to promote their products and services. As a result, assisting merchants in better understanding how to exploit this platform to increase sales and establish true relationships is becoming both exciting and vital.

### **1.1 Social Media Influencer Marketing**

Social media influencer marketing is a practice that is gaining more and more success in response to the great impact that social media platforms have on people's lives. It has been defined in previous literature as the implementation of influential opinion leaders (influencers), celebrity or non-celebrity, with great numbers of followers on social platforms, to foster positive responses (both attitudinal and behavioral) in their followers concerning the brand's interests by using posting ad hoc content on such platforms, which also allows influencers and followers to participate in the co-creation of the brand image on social media (Francisco et al., 2019). Those applications can be used to create interaction between companies and consumers, to network with other parties in the industry, and, of course, to build an online presence (Nurfadila et al., 2020). Therefore, the evolution of social networks and the relationship that people have with these platforms has shaped a new role of the latter in the lives of individuals creating many new opportunities even from the marketing point of view. Nonetheless, social media influencers have attracted companies and brands since they are a powerful potential marketing channel also for the social relationship assets with whom they can collaborate (Masuda et al., 2022).

According to Sprout Social (2023), social media are continuing to grow over the years. Indeed:

- In 2023, the number of total social media users is estimated to reach 4.89 billion of people.
- The average user monthly bounces between seven different social platforms.
- The amount of time spent on social media by its user is now 151 minutes per day and it's higher than ever.
- TikTok is the fastest-growing social media platform, with a whopping 100% user growth rate between 2020 and 2022.

Thus, thanks to the rise of social networks a new role was born: the influencer, defined as those people on social media that have a number of followers that is so significant that they become able to influence their followers' behavior (Isyanto et al., 2020). Influencers are content production specialists with whom consumers interact and who help spread the word more broadly on social



media. (Campbell et al., 2020). This is a very recent phenomenon since until a few years ago nobody would have thought that being famous on social media could create job opportunities both for the web stars and companies. Influencers are engaged along with celebrity endorsers since they appear to be more like regular consumers (Legget, 2022). Hence, a distinction between influencers and celebrity endorsers must be clarified: celebrity endorsers are public figures who use their recognition on behalf of a consumer good by showing it in advertisements (Nurfadila et al., 2020), whereas influencers are individuals who build their popularity directly on social media, so that the reason of their fame is only linked to their success on such platforms. So, the main difference between influencers and celebrity endorsers is the fact that the firsts become famous on the social media, whereas the seconds are already famous before landing on such platforms.

According to Pawar (2023) by 2023, the influencer marketing market is projected to be worth about \$20 billion 59 percent of respondents say they have a separate budget just for content marketing, and 75 percent say they now plan to set aside money for influencer marketing. Furthermore, influencer marketing has a power to generate 11 times more return compared to that of digital marketing technique (Vidani et al., 2021).

According to Keller and Berry (2003), an influencer must have an ACTIVE profile, where the acronym stays for: *Ahead in adoption, Connected, Travelers, Information hungry, Vocal, Exposed to media.*

Different categories of online influencers have been defined in previous literature according to their level of fame evaluated considering the number of followers of their social media accounts. The four categories of influencers are the following ones and are described by Isyanto (2019):

1. Nano influencers: they are users whose profiles are followed by less than 1000 users. Their advantage is managing accounts with very high rates of involvement, reaching a much larger percentage of followers than that of mega and macro influencers. Usually, they focus on specific market niches, often without real industry leaders, making them the only reference points. Finally, even nano influencers are followed by so-called "true fans", or loyal followers thanks to the constant care of interactions.
2. Micro influencers: they are followed by less than 100 thousand followers. They enjoy a good following in specific market niches thanks to the fact that interactions by followers are more manageable with spontaneity and naturalness. In fact, the micro-influencer is a character who uses social channels to communicate their passions with creativity without a marketing

strategy behind. Karagür et al. (2022) assessed this category is associated with the highest degree of trustworthiness.

3. Macro influencers: they are bloggers, instagrammers, youtubers etc. that have become established professionals in this field. Their profiles accounts from 100 thousand to one million of followers circa. Their content is considered to be high quality and they're generally passionate about specifics topics (cooking, beauty, sport, cinema, fashion...).
4. Mega influencers: overall, they are actual celebrities since they are very well-known around the world just like cinema stars, fashion icons, sport champions and so on... Their profiles on social media are followed by more than one million users.

## **1.2 The Effect of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Behavior**

Several studies were conducted both to understand the effect of influencer marketing on consumers' purchase behavior and to study the nature of influencers' power to define how they manage to affect individuals' choices. Three aspects of influencers' power should be underlined:

1. The credibility of their consumer peer status:

Marketers should be careful when selecting opinion leaders to represent their company due to the growing skepticism around the legitimacy of opinion leaders (Djafarova et al., 2021). It has been established that influencers give off a sense of trust to their followers due to their consumer peer status (Forbes, 2016) so that companies want to collaborate with them to make sure their product is endorsed by people who are trusted by customers (Hanlein et al., 2020). By the way, one of the elements that differentiates social media influencers and celebrities like VIPs is the actual ability of the firsts to engage with their followers directly and informally, creating a real connection with them. Influence marketing encourages sincere and truthful connection with customers who are prone to believe in the "real" facts and viewpoints by the influencers they interact with (Paço et al., 2017). Instead of being certified by any formal institutions, influencers get followers by actively sharing material on social media, whereas celebrities usually achieve success in credentialed, institutional environments, such as acting, music, or athletics (McQuarrie et al., 2013 as cited in Leung et al., 2022). The connection between influencers and followers leads to the creation of sort of "digital relationship", that is based on trust and credibility (Vidani et al., 2021): influencers online are used to give advice to their fans with whom they also share information about their life that makes those feel like they really know them. They keep up lively connections and frequently reply to and communicate with followers (Leung et al., 2022). In addition, the peer component makes it possible

to develop a stronger consumer-brand relationship naturally and more effectively than through simple marketing communications (Forbes, 2016). Consequently, as consumers, they feel like the opinion of influencers not only is worth to trust but also is kind of a model or a guide to follow. However, is not given that consumers would trust influencers, they must earn their credibility, which is one of the key features they should demonstrate along with authenticity and knowledge, to have effective and positive power over their followers, especially for younger generations like gen Z. Indeed, the reputation and dependability of an influencer have a direct impact on a consumer's decision to make a purchase (Pawar, 2023). Especially for generation Z, it's crucial for influencers to act responsibly and to prove their honesty: this age group penalizes both brands and influencers for acting unaccountably, as they perceive the act of sneakily pushing the brand program to a hypocritical and immoral trade gain (Pardhan et al., 2023).

Anyway, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to achieve high levels of visibility and engagement, even when working with original, genuine, and distinctive material. Artificial intelligence algorithms increasingly power TikTok and Instagram, determining what material users view on their feeds (Haenlein et al., 2020).

## 2. The social influencer theory:

According to Bandura's social influencer theory, people's way of behaving is, consciously or not, learned through example. Hence, individuals watching influencers' actions and behaviors are more prone to imitate what they see. Eventually, consumers follow actions and habits they learn from influencers' content on social media platforms. They are inclined to adopt new habits and to reconsider their own ones in favor of influencers' opinion. Eventually, this touches their buying decisions too. Thus, if consumers are predisposed to reproduce the actions of the examples they are exposed to, they easily extend this behavior to their consumption habits. Here is where companies come into play, turning this behavioral instinct into a marketing strategy (Forbes, 2016) with the purpose of affecting consumers' buying decision. Overall, it is not deniable that influencer marketing taps into social influencer theory reshaping consumers purchase decisions thanks to the endorsement of products by public figures who can impact on their followers' intentions and opinions.

## 3. WOM's power

Another important element concerning influencers' power is its alignment with WOM, i.e. mouth communication between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a

product, or a service (Lang et al., 2013). Besides, influencers are kind of eWOM masters (Forbes, 2016). EWOM is defined as any positive or negative statement made by a customer or an expert or an ordinary person about a product or service which becomes viral via the Internet (Zohora et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the development of the Internet has influenced the way consumers communicate and provided them with easy and fast ways to share their opinion and confront themselves with their peers. WOM is generally considered to be more credible by consumers due to its external nature: especially, with high levels of perceived source credibility, e-WOM is considered to be more than when it's low (Lopez et al., 2014). Differently from general marketing communication tools, it can decrease consumer resistance since it stems from the other customers' experiences (Fan et al., 2013). In spite of that, previous literature assessed that when consumers become more conscious of the possible manipulation of influencers' online opinions by firms, they would start being increasingly skeptical of e-WOM and expert users will learn how to distinguish fake and sincere opinions (Lopez et al., 2014). Due to its relevant power, eWOM is one of the most important touchpoints in shaping consumer behavior (Zohus et al., 2021). Influencer marketing impacts on WOM because its main actors are opinion leaders whose social media contents is shared by consistent numbers of users and can reach wide sets of customers.

### **1.3 TikTok**

During the pandemic, social media were crucial for individuals to continue the activities they were used to, especially for younger people since they were the only way of self-expression and social interaction (Dewi et al., 2021; Mikhael et al., 2019). Indeed, that was the time when TikTok gained great popularity. TikTok is a short-form video-based social media which is becoming very popular among both consumers and advertisers (Wang et al., 2020), notably among younger people like generation Z. TikTok's appeal to this age group it's stronger since it offers them a space to relate with others and express their emotions, that was extremely precious during the pandemic lockdowns (Darmatama et al., 2021). Like many social media platforms did, TikTok experienced a great rise in its usage during the COVID-19 lockdown. Some interesting data demonstrating the impressive rise of this social media during the pandemic restrictions are the following:

- The app experienced a 27% increase of downloads in the first 23 days of March 2020, compared to February with 6.2 million downloads (Music Business World wide's report, 2020).
- It was the most downloaded app in 2020, reaching 850 million downloads (Forbes, 2021).

- It more than doubles its user base between 2019 and 2021, switching from 291.4 million to 655.9 million users. TikTok is now the third largest of the Big Five worldwide social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter) (Insider Intelligence, 2023).

A recent study of young TikTok users demonstrated that the most prevalent user goals were archiving (recording life events), self-expression (showing off one's qualities, values, talents), social interaction (communication and contact with others), and escapism (forgetting about one's daily life) (Omar et al., 2020). According to Comscore, 32.5% of TikTok users in the U.S. comes from the 10-19 age group, and 29.5% from the 20-29 one. Recent studies confirmed that Generation Z's consumer behavior greatly influences their propensity to purchase, and that emotional, entertaining, and informative dimensions of TikTok video commercials favorably influence customer behavior (Araujo et al., 2022). Furthermore, one of gen Z's main characteristics is their very low attention span, which is perfectly encountered by the short form of TikTok videos, and this feature is connected to the accelerated pace of modern life (Wang et al., 2020). The boom of TikTok has led the owners of other social media platforms to add new features to their apps in order to update to the new trend of the Chinese social media: Reels on Instagram and YouTube Shorts were born as a consequence of the TikTok's rise. The platform is known for its skit videos, lip syncing, but at the same time it is also used for many other types of content including informational content, *Do it Yourself*, political and social activism, everyday tips, dance challenges and so on (Unni et al., 2021; Alley et al., 2022).

TikTok differs from other social media by several factors. Firstly, for the type of content: there are no image or text communication, only short videos (Chu et al., 2022). Following, it is a particular social media due to the algorithm that manages the virality of content. Hence, TikTok's home page is divided into two sections: the *For You* and the *Following*. The first one shows videos of users the owner of the accounts directly chooses to follow and to interact with, whereas the latter displays viral content of users who are not necessarily followed by the owner of the account and that are selected by an algorithm that profiles the user so as to show him videos that may be of interest to him. TikTok's technology detects individuals who are more likely to engage with specific content. (Chu et al., 2022). Viral behaviors are prominent in social media because users can interact with user-generated material by like, sharing, commenting, and updating their status (Alhabash et al., 2019). Consequently, social media facilitates the development and sharing of knowledge between people with similar goals and behaviors (Dewi et al., 2021).

This turned out to be a very powerful feature of social media apps from a marketing perspective since viral behavioral intentions are parallels for offline behaviors, such as products purchase. Despite that,

not all virality metrics do increase the acceptance of the message, so marketers should carefully deal with this element (Kim et al., 2018). It is usual for social media users to post product and brand suggestions and reviews with their followers. (Chu et al., 2022) and it has been largely demonstrated that today social media apps are a proper online channel consumers use to search for information in the pre-purchase stage of their customer journey. Overall, there are three ways of marketing on TikTok: collaborating with companies or official TikTok accounts in advertising, working with influencers and market using personal accounts or self-publishing (Dewi et al., 2021). TikTok has become increasingly suitable for influencer marketing campaigns due to its wide user base and to reach younger generations. Although, these are not the only reasons why firms are now willing to exploit TikTok to implement influencer marketing advertisement. Recent studies from Influencer Marketing Hub have proved that the average engagement rate on TikTok is 17,96%, making it one of the most engaging social media for marketing purposes, and the average cost per thousand views, also known as CPM, is lower than other platforms and YouTube and Instagram and its amount is \$20. Therefore, brands are increasingly starting to include TikTok in their media plans in order to exploit its big popularity and to reach younger generations. TikTok is the cheapest and most enjoyable tool for creating quality digital marketing content but also to build a network among people, which is essential for marketers and customers. So, marketers easily create a content video to market their product, and consumers can quickly learn about the product they are interested in (Akbari et al., 2022).

#### **1.4 The *Dupe* Trend on TikTok**

According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, in the beauty area, “*dupe*” — short for duplicate — is online slang describing cheaper, mostly drugstore versions of luxury cosmetics or fashion items. The dupes trend started many years ago – the first dupe video on YouTube is from 2008, and basically consist in finding cheap products that can substitute luxurious items. These products are claimed to be an excellent way for customers to spend less money while still receiving the benefits of high-end beauty products. Drugstore makeup brands that offer comparable hues and formulas to luxury brands, as well as skincare products that include similar active components to higher-quality goods, are notable examples of dupes. Many beauty influencers and bloggers frequently publish their favorite dupes on social media and other online platforms to assist their followers in finding less expensive equivalents to their favorite beauty products.

This trend became viral when it hit TikTok and the big popularity the app is gaining. Therefore, finding dupes on TikTok it’s now a real thing: by typing the hashtag “dupes” into the TikTok platform

search bar, millions of videos (published by influencers and normal users) would appear. Moreover, given the actual popularity of the trend, a specific “sound” has been developed and is currently used by influencers and normal users only for that kind of videos. Indeed, as the TikTok platform functions, trends develop through specific sounds that are then associated with a certain kind of video and concept. When the user searches for a sound, all the videos created with it appear to him, so when users click on the sound of the dupe videos, they find all the videos that are published about it.

The trend of the dupe culture on TikTok is widespread especially in the beauty sector. Lately drugstore cosmetics are being strongly enhanced by influencers claiming their value is not far lower compared to luxury make-up products and bringing their cost-effectiveness out. The app’s most frequent users are Generation Z and millennials, who are less likely to have spare financial resources to purchase high-end goods. (Bec Oakes, 2022). Gen Z consumers consult digital media more than other generations since they grew up with it, much like Gen Y did with television. (Laor et al., 2022).

The principal ways that beauty influencers promote dupes range from unboxing videos, designer dupe hauls, sponsorships, giveaways (Chaudhry, 2022) and video in which they test the products by comparing them directly with the “originals”. For example, when it comes to lip products like lip glosses or lipsticks, influencers use both products on half of their lips in order to show how, as they claim, the final effect is equivalent. Consequently, in recent times many drugstore make-up products have become viral thanks to the dupe trend on TikTok. A concrete and very fresh example is the one of Labello’s lip balms: thanks to the Italian makeup influencer Alessia Morelli, they became viral at that point that they were sold out everywhere in Italy - whereas normally they are always available at supermarkets and hardware stores. Alessia Morelli, who is now known and presents herself as “the Labello queen” has recently started to work for the brand as brand ambassador collaborating also with other Italian beauty influencers. This is just one of many cases where a cheap beauty product has gone sold out thanks to TikTok viral influencers videos. It must be clarified that, some of those cases (just like the Labello one) do not fall into the category of influencer marketing because they were not demanded by brands but were just a spontaneous advice from beauty experts which ended up in becoming viral. Hence, as it has been previously stated, influencer marketing is a strategy that consists in a firm selecting and incentivizing online influencers to engage their followers on social media to promote the firm’s offerings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing firm performance (Leung et al., 2022). So, whenever an influencer video has not been tuned with a brand, it cannot be defined as an influencer marketing content. Notwithstanding, given the popularity that drugstore cosmetics are gaining through the TikTok platform, such brands are increasingly employing TikTok influencers in order to advertise their offerings, just like Labello did. Besides, this study’s purpose is the one of test

the effect of influencer marketing videos concerning make-up products on purchase intention comparing the results of luxury products' and cheap or dupes promotion.

As mentioned above, there are multiple reasons why the dupe phenomenon is interesting to study. From a sustainability perspective, it's curious to examine this trend because it contrasts the eco-friendly attitude consumers are lately adopting when shopping. As a matter of fact, dupe culture somehow enhances fast fashion and beauty consumption, which is not sustainable since it is responsible for pollution and waste that seriously harms the planet. The fast fashion phenomenon has revolutionized the industry leading to a culture of impulse buying, where consumers are weekly offered new items and styles. This trend affects mainly young females, who are not totally conscious of the social impact of their buying behavior. (Mintel, 2007; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009 as cited in McNeill et al., 2015). Fast fashion is responsible for negative environmental impact more than traditional firms since it introduces multiple styles simultaneously (Long et al., 2022). Undoubtedly, the world is facing many environmental problems, which humans are responsible for: individuals have increased carbon dioxide concentration by more than 33% through deforestation, urbanization, manufacturing, auto emissions, and burning of fossil fuels. The decomposition of waste in landfills increases methane levels, not to mention the net increase of producing a product from new materials in comparison with recycled materials (Trudel et al., 2019). Recently, it's like humans are finally realizing how much their actions damage the planet and are starting to adopt more sustainable behaviors especially when shopping. There is a causal relationship between existential dangers to our biosphere and our unsustainable consumption practices (Haider et al., 2022): every decision of what to buy, how much to buy, how much to consume, and how to dispose directly impacts on the environment and future generations, and the cumulative effect of each individual consumer's consumption is devastating (Trudel et al., 2019). Apparel and beauty are two of the world's most polluting businesses, using massive amounts of raw materials, causing major pollution, leaving a significant carbon footprint, and producing alarming amounts of waste. (Brewer, 2019). The textile sector bears responsibility for a significant environmental burden, particularly due to the high volume of waste produced and the use of pesticides in producing cotton (Achabou et al., 2013). Several luxury brands, such as Gucci, Stella McCartney and Yves Saint Laurent, are increasingly using green raw materials like organic cotton and natural dyes and cutting the use of leather, fur and endangered natural resources (Dekhili et al., 2019). Pilgrimiene et al. (2020) detected six factors that positively impact customer engagement regarding sustainable consumption: environmental attitude, perceived responsibility, perceived behavioral efficiency, conditions for sustainable consumption, social environment, and promotion of sustainable consumption. Moreover, Perez et al. illustrated the



centrality of the eco-friendly attribute in the description of the product is fundamental to make consumers perceive the final output is truly sustainable. Nonetheless, previous literature demonstrated customers' opinion are polarized when it comes to the combination of luxury and eco friendliness: some of them perceive a contradiction between the two, whilst others believe there are possibilities to make it work and that the luxury industry need to do that to remain competitive (Kunz et al., 2020)

Concerning the beauty industry, many brands are starting to launch new products only made of natural materials. Although though natural cosmetics are more expensive, many consumers choose to purchase them because they value protecting the environment and their own health. (Amberg et al., 2019). According to Bom et al. (2020), the use of raw and natural materials is considered by consumers as one of the sustainable initiatives with more impact. Particularly for luxury brands, the firms' eco-friendly side has a strong positive relationship to the perception of fashion, so it is desirable that luxury, high-end, and rapid fashion companies reconsider how they convey their ethical business practices (Blasi et al., 2019).

However, this is not the only reason why luxury goods are more sustainable than other types of products. Besides, luxury goods score high on the following four dimensions: financial dimension (e.g., price, resale price), functional dimension (e.g., durability, quality, reliability), individual dimension (e.g., hedonism, selfidentity), and social dimension (e.g., conspicuousness, status signaling) (Sun et al., 2021). Unlike fast fashion, the word luxury is also associated with high quality, know-how, slow time, the preservation of handmade traditions, transmission from generation to generation of timeless products: these associations will be in agreement with sustainability (Kapferer et al., 2015). Plus, an aspect that should be seriously taken into consideration is product durability: not only it contributes to waste reduction, but it also offers tangible advantages to consumers and companies (Sun et al., 2021). Indeed, Sun et al. proved that it would be more sustainable for consumers to purchase luxury goods rather than more mid or low-end products, because luxurious items are more durable so they need to be substituted with new ones far less than normal products.

Although, dupe products are not harming luxury companies due to the *Robin Hood approach*: it basically means that consumers that can afford to buy items from high quality brands will continue to do it not considering dupes. On the other hand, dupes will be purchased by consumers that cannot afford to buy the original and more expensive versions of the products. Indeed, even the dupes

principle is still quite controversial, luxury brands seems not to be worried of the trend's popularity among young customers. By the way, the distinction between inspiration and plagiarism is really thin but luxury brands have traditionally served as a source of inspiration for merchants.

## **CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Product Type and Purchase Intention**

The variable of the purchase intention has been widely investigated in literature as of the reasons why a customer chooses to buy from a particular brand (Shah et al., 2012). It has been defined as the preference of consumer to buy a product or service (Younus, 2015). In other words, purchase intention consists in consumers' plan on purchasing a product or service in the next future (Wu et. al, 2011, as cited in Arauju et al., 2022).

The factors influencing consumers' purchase intention decisions have been deeply studied proving that the actual quantity of variables able to affect customers' purchase decisions is very consistent. Previous research has shown that factors including brand attitude, brand image, quality, brand knowledge, brand traits, and brand loyalty all significantly affect the likelihood of purchase intention (Tariq et al., 2013). More studies have shown that additional elements affecting the purchase intention are brand advertising and name, packaging, price (Mirabi et al., 2015) and consumer perceptions, product packaging or design, celebrity endorsements, and customer knowledge (Younus, 2015). Researchers clarified that emotional experience and social experience have significant impacts on the purchase intention as well (Nasermoadeli et al., 2013). Porter (1974) demonstrated that buying behavior is also conditioned by the degree of existing competition in the market (Shah et al., 2012). Furthermore, since technology advances allow people to communicate with both businesses and other customers, and has been identified as a potential driver of customers' purchase behavior, social media advertising is constantly being applied by businesses to persuade clients to make purchases (Araujo et al., 2022). Concerning the fashion market, existing literature shows that a crucial role is played also by social media interactivity which positively affects perceived value, immersive experience, and purchase intention since it enhances the perceived value of products (Hewei et al., 2022). Whereas in the beauty sector, among all sources in various media, *vlogs* (video blogs) are thought of as a highly reputable source by online users, that are capable of conditioning individuals' purchase intentions. Consumers get familiar with beauty vloggers and the content they offer on social media platforms, which creates a situation where trust can develop between consumers and beauty vloggers (Ananda et al., 2016) eventually influencing their purchase intention decisions. As it was extensively stated above, research studies have shown that the use of influencer marketing is currently one of the most

successful ways to influence consumer buying intentions. Customer experience has been analyzed too with the purpose of understanding its role towards consumers' purchase intention behaviors. Studying purchase intention variations to variables is very important since it gives firms the possibility of arranging their strategies in coherent ways in order to attract the most of their potential consumers and profit (Zarrad et al., 2012). In this study, purchase intention is analyzed considering the way it varies according to the type of product that is promoted through influencers campaign on TikTok, and is assumed to be conditioned by the latest.

On the other hand, product type – which is the independent variable, is explainable in two levels: luxury and dupe. Byrdie defines dupes as products which are very similar to others from higher quality or luxury brands that are sold for a much lower price. The dupe trend has grown so popular on TikTok that videos with the hashtag #dupe have been watched over 1.3 billion times, and an increasing amount of users are proudly posting the cheaper alternatives to popular clothes and beauty items they've discovered. (Bec Oakes, 2022). Given its contentious nature as discussed in Chapter One, as well as the popularity and consequent quantity of dupe products that have gone viral all over the world as a result of it, it is intriguing to learn how the variable of product type might affect purchase intention, which has been widely demonstrated to be easily influenced.. Thus,

*H1. Consumers are more willing to buy products promoted by influencers on TikTok if the product is a dupe.*

## **Brand Awareness**

A prospective buyer's capacity to recognize or recall a brand is referred to as brand awareness (Aaker 1961 as cited in Bilgin et al., 2018). Brand awareness is very important for firms to develop but it takes quite a considerable amount of time to do so. This because it primarily takes time to develop an effective awareness effort and secondly for the desired message to reach potential customers, who will all respond to it in different moments (Gustafson et al., 2007). Brand awareness is a crucial element for companies because it has a significant impact on consumer decision-making by affecting the brands that consumers consider as well as the brands they choose to consider (MacDonald et al., 2000). Indeed, consumers tend to shop from brands they have information about (Bilgin et al., 2018). Buying from known brands is kind of a certainty for consumers: it reduces the risk of trying an unknown alternative that could be disappointing or unreliable. According to Keller (2009), brand awareness consists of customers' capacity to remember or recognize a brand in various circumstances. Aaker (1996) stated that brand awareness is composed of four levels, namely:

1. *brand recognition*, consisting of the familiarity of the consumer with the company.
2. *brand recall*, which is the act of the brand popping into consumers' mind when a range of product is introduced.
3. *top of mind*, being as such means becoming the most aware company in the whole product category.
4. *brand dominance*, achievable by completely replacing a product category.

Previous literature proved that social media marketing significantly emphasizes brand awareness as well as brand image and brand loyalty (Godey et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2012; Duffet, 2017; Seo et al., 2018) and that CSR actions have positive effects on brand awareness (Ismael et al., 2022). Hence, social media can considerably increase awareness by reminding consumers of brands and making them stay in their mind (Bilgin et al., 2018). Overall, it has been largely established that brand awareness is a very influencing variable concerning consumers' purchase decisions and due to this reason it is interesting to analyze how this can hijack the effects that influencer marketing and the type of product that promoted have on the intention of buying of consumers that are exposed to such strategy. In this study, brand awareness and its effect will be analyzed in this study considering it as a moderator impacting on the decision of buying cosmetic products sponsored on TikTok. Hence,

*H2. High levels of brand awareness enhance consumers' purchase intention to buy dupe products promoted by influencers on TikTok.*

## **2.3 Control Variables**

### **Perceived Quality**

Previous studies has defined perceived quality as consumers' overall judgment on the superiority of a product (Zeithaml, 1988 as cited in Das et al., 2014). Indeed, it is a very critical feature for many aspects of a brand, such as its reputation. Stydilis et al. (2020) reviewed several marketing-oriented interpretations of perceived quality.

- Mitra et al., (2006) consider perceived quality as perception of the customer contrasting with the objective quality.
- Zeithaml (1988) defines it as subjective customer judgement on the overall product superiority.
- As defined by Aaker (2009), perceived quality is the customer's view of the general excellence or superiority of a product or service in comparison to alternatives.

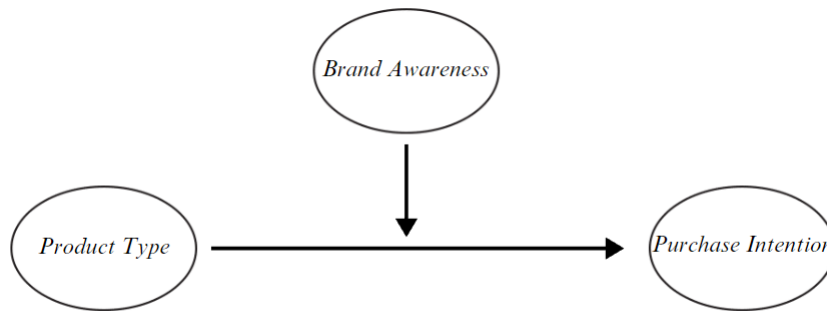
Perceived quality was introduced in the study as a control variable due to different reasons. First and foremost, perceived quality is generally considered as the degree of reliability and quality of products, and this aspect plays a very important role in the beauty sector since those kinds of products are directly applied on consumers' body. Indeed, customers want to feel they are not making use of products that could possibly damage their skin. For this reason, quality has a crucial role for makeup items. Normally, consumers associate luxury brand with high quality because they assume there is a positive relation between price and quality, and luxury products are considered of high value since they are expensive and difficult to obtain. Therefore, the qualities of the luxury cosmetic product are important to attract customer and meet their expectations (Mobil et al., 2019). Hence, according to a 2022 report from Statista, the most important features for US consumers when purchasing beauty products are that they are clean, natural, and chemicals-free, which are all quality-correlated characteristics. Along the lines of what has so far been stated, perceived quality is undoubtedly a major driver for purchase. Indeed, previous literature demonstrated its influence on intention to purchase (Asshidin et al., 2016; Bolton, 1998 and Richardson et al., 1994 as cited in Das et al., 2014). This is a further reason why this variable is added in the study as a control variable, because its impact on purchase intention is so relevant not to be taken into consideration when investigating the effect of the type of brand promoted on social media on consumers' buying decisions.

### **Product Knowledge**

Product knowledge represents consumers' awareness of information regarding a certain product (Brucks, 1985). This variable has been previously measured both as subjective and objective knowledge: these two concepts are often difficult to consider separately from a consumer point of view. Subjective knowledge is intended to be the one acquired via consumer experience with the product (Wang et al., 2016). On the other hand, objective knowledge is composed of different type of consciousness such as cost knowledge, quality knowledge and so on. Product knowledge is a very important variable to consider when analyzing consumers' intention to buy since it influences shopping evaluation of information translation and preferences, as well as their purchasing behavior (Wang et al., 2019). Nautiyal et al., (2022) demonstrated that the more knowledge is acquired by consumers, the less they will be affected by higher prices of products. Indeed, knowledge about the reasons of premium prices is fundamental for consumers to complete their purchases. Overall, product knowledge is crucial for consumers to make more conscious decisions and to have more all-embracing judgements on products. This variable was included in the study as a control variable because, as previous literature widely proved (Ghalandari et al., 2012; Chiou et al., 1998; Berger et

al., 1994), it is able to affect purchase intention of customers, which is a variable of interest of this research.

Figure 1: conceptual model



In order to sum up everything that has been explained so far, the figure above illustrates the conceptual model of this analysis.

Indeed, product type is the independent variable, purchase intention is the dependent one and brand awareness it's the moderator.

The main effect this research aims at exploring it's the one of product type on purchase intention. Then, the moderating effect of brand awareness on the aforementioned main effect is studied as well.

Control variables concerning sex, education, age, product knowledge and perceived quality are included in the investigation too.

## CHAPTER 3 - Data and Research Methodology

### 3.1 Context relevant selection

The choice of analyzing the promotion of a makeup product by a TikTok influencer lies in the big popularity of the cosmetic dupe trend on TikTok. Even though this trend started many years ago on YouTube regarding mainly fashion clothing items, currently its main area of interest on TikTok is the one of makeup and more generally beauty products.

The beauty industry is today one of the most prosperous and it is valued more than \$100 billion globally. The men's personal care business is predicted to be worth \$276.9 billion by 2030, with the skincare industry earning up to \$177 billion by 2025. Moreover, in 2022, beauty companies' budget

for advertising is expected to be around \$7.7. In 2022, cosmetic companies' online sales total amount counted \$17.09 billion ((The Ultimate List of Beauty Industry Stats (2023), 2022).

These current data are impressive and demonstrate how quickly the industry has recovered after the pandemic. Before COVID-19, the beauty industry in Italy was a significant contributor to the country's economy, generating billions of euros in revenue each year. In 2019, the Italian cosmetics market was valued at €12 billion, with skincare products accounting for the largest share of sales. The makeup segment of the market was also significant, with sales reaching €1.7 billion (Assolombarda – Cosmetica, 2022).

The pandemic had a significant impact on the beauty industry in Italy and around the world. Due to lockdowns, store closures, and reduced consumer spending, the industry experienced a sharp decline in sales. According to a report by McKinsey & Company, the global beauty industry experienced a 20% decline in sales in 2020 due to COVID-19. Despite the crisis, the makeup industry managed to rapidly recover and achieve excellent results within the two years following the pandemic.

Parallel trends are emerging in the cosmetics industry in other countries as well. Referring to NPD, beauty sales increased by 14% during 2022 in USA. Larissa Jensen, beauty industry advisor at NPD, predicted that in 2022, the prestige beauty industry's sales gains will be led by the makeup category's recovery and creativity. Following a dark time engulfed by the pandemic, a resurgence in makeup artistry is occurring, as customers experiment with color once more.

The cosmetic industry is undoubtedly one of the most interesting to investigate about concerning TikTok influencer because it is very suitable for the purpose of influencer marketing on this social media. Cosmetic companies can use the platform to promote their products and attract a younger audience interested in beauty content through product tutorials or demos, with influencers demonstrating how to utilize the goods and the effects they produce. Beauty influencer marketing on TikTok has grown in popularity in recent years, owing to the app's user base's special interest in this content. A 2022 survey from Influencer Marketing Hub demonstrated that 65% of women have purchased a beauty or skincare product after seeing it on social media. Overall, since the impressive rise of TikTok during the pandemic lockdowns, it has become a successful channel for makeup influencer marketing, with high interaction rates and a receptive audience.

### 3.2 Methodology

Primary data was acquired utilizing a structured questionnaire and systematic sampling to test the hypotheses. The questionnaire was created with Qualtrics and the analysis was performed using SPSS.

In order to execute the analysis, a between subject and experiment design experiment was launched. This type of research consists of causal estimates derived by contrasting the behavior of those in one experimental condition with that of those in another as long as group assignment is random (Charness et al., 2012). This method perfectly suits the study's purposes since it allows to randomly expose respondents to one of two different scenarios. In order to distribute the survey, Qualtrics was used and set to randomize the scenarios equally among the interviewees. The two scenarios expose the respondent to two identical situations with different conditions, namely the promotion of a cosmetic product – a mascara that is supposed to create a *false eye-lashes* effect on customers' eye lashes – from the brands Chanel and Essence. The choice of mascara as the product being sponsored falls on the fact that it is one of the products most likely to be used, in the field of beauty. According to NPD's *Makeup Attitudes and Usage Report for 2022*. Overall, mascara is the most popular beauty product, followed by foundation, eye shadow, eye liner, and lipstick. Indeed, not all people who wear makeup make use of all kinds of products. However, mascara is a *must-have* and so it was chosen as the subject of the promotion for this reason. In Italy, the make-up sector's leader is the face-makeup category as well, followed by lip make-up, according to Global Data's *Country Profile: Make-Up in Italy* report. In Italy, according to Cosmetica Italia's annual report of 2022, products dedicated to the eyes recorded the greatest growth. In fact, overall, this product family grew by 17 percent with positive trends across all the subcategories: in particular, mascaras increased by 15.6 percent reaching a consumption share of 193 million and consolidated the weight in value, nearly 40 percent, of total eye makeup product sales.

In order to properly associate the product described with the type of brand that marketed it, the description of the mascara focused on two different attributes: the high quality for the luxury brand (Chanel), and the convenience for the dupe brand (Essence). This is the only part of the description that differentiate the two scenarios.

In both cases, interviewees are asked to carefully read a brief text where the promotion of the product is described. Both the sponsored product and the influencer described are fictitious. After carefully reading the description of the product promotion, respondents are asked to answer questions: those are the same in the two scenario cases.



### 3.2 Measurement

With some adjustments, all constructs were adopted from earlier literature. Since the sample solely contains respondents from Italy, all the scales and items on the questionnaire were presented in Italian. Respondents were asked to rate each proposed statement using a five- or seven-point scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five or seven (depending on the research's many items) (strongly agree). At the end of the survey, demographic questions regarding age, gender, and education were included.

The first set of questions respondents were asked to answer consisted of the *purchase intention* scale aimed at examining the extent to which they were inclined to buy the product after reading about its influencer promotion on TikTok. Specifically, the scale used to measure this variable was *Intention to purchase recommended brands* that was validated by Jiménez-Castillo et al. in their 2019 study *The role of digital influencers in brand recommendation: Examining their impact on engagement, expected value and purchase intention* on International Journal of Information Management. This specific scale was chosen since it perfectly suits the research objective being it suited to situations where the purchase intention is measured after customers are exposed to influencer marketing advertisements. The scale is measured on 5-point Likert scale and it is composed of three items:

1. *"I would follow brand recommendations from this influencer"*
2. *"I would purchase the brand based on the advice I am given by this influencer"*
3. *"In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by this influencer that I follow"*

Following, the *brand awareness* set of questions was presented to measure the moderation effect of this variable, using a scale from a study by Yoo et al., namely *Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale* on Journal of Business Research in 2001. This scale was made of three items and was measured on a 5-point Likert scale as well.

1. *"I am aware of (brand) (product category)"*
2. *"I can recognise (brand) (product category)"*
3. *"Some characteristics of (brand) (product category) come to mind quickly"*

The same study provided also the scales measuring the first control variable of *perceived quality*. The scale was composed of four items and was measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

1. *"It is likely that (brand) (product category) are of very high quality"*
2. *"It is likely that (brand) (product category) are of very consistent quality"*

3. *“It is likely that (brand) (product category) offer excellent features”*
4. *“It is likely that (brand) (product category) are very reliable”*

Finally, the last scale measuring *product knowledge* was validated by Cole and Balasubramanian in 1993 in their research named *Age differences in consumers’ search for information: public policy implications* on Journal of Consumer Research. This scale contains three items and it is measured with a 7-point Likert scale.

1. *“I am interested in (product category)”*
2. *“Compared to other people I know more about (product category)”*
3. *“My friends consider me an expert on (product category)”*

As previously stated, at the end of the survey three sets of demographic questions were added in order to detect more information about the interviewees. Namely, age, gender and education were asked to them.

After collecting a good number of responses to the survey, SPSS has been used in order to analyze the data. A t-test was performed to verify the statistical significance of the main effect, which is the effect of the independent variable, in our case product type, on the dependent one, which is purchase intention. Sequentially, a regression using Process’s model 1 is operated in order to investigate the effect of all the variables taken into account in the conceptual model on purchase intention. In this way, the moderator is considered in the analysis and its interaction effect with product type is analyzed to verify its statistical significance. Control variables like perceived quality, product knowledge, age, sex and education are included in this latter analysis as well. Finally, the slope analysis was performed to assess how the moderating variable interacts with the independent variable with higher precision and accuracy.

### **3.3 Sample**

A total of 340 Italian people, recruited via email, Whatsapp and Instagram stories were asked to participate to the study by filling the survey through Qualtrics. The number of completed collected survey is 272. As previously stated, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions. The sample is very heterogeneous. Respondents’ age are between the ages of 15 and 70, and the average age is 27. The major age group is the one of 21-24 years old which represents 59% of the total number of interviewees.

Moving onto the gender, 73,9% of the respondents were females, whereas 26,1% of them was male. Even though the segment of male consumers in the makeup market is increasing recently, thanks to

male beauty bloggers such as Jake-Jamie Ward - known on social media as The Beauty Boy, who started the #makeupisgenderless movement, still the biggest part of makeup buyers is composed of females. As a matter of fact, according to Ipsos roughly one-third of all men are open to using cosmetics in USA. According to a study from Statista, in 2020 men's segment in the USA mascara market was significantly smaller than the females one. In particular, the range between 18-29 years old, men using mascara represented just 27% of the population, whereas it counted 12% for 30-49 and 4% for 50+ the male segment counted just the 4%. For this reason, a higher percentage of females respondents were asked to participate to the analysis, but still a consistent amount of males was included as well.

The educational level of interviewees was also required. According to the findings, the single cycle or Master of Science degree sector accounts for 42.3% of the total. This is immediately succeeded in the following sequence by the clusters that come next: high school diploma (26,5%), bachelor's degree (21,3%), and finally master's program (9,9%). Tab 1 contains all the results disclosed above.

*Tab. 1: Descriptive statistics for the whole sample*

Variable	Mean	Minimum Value	Maximum Value
Age	27,32	15	70
Variable		Percentage	
Gender	Female	73,90%	
	Male	26,10%	
Education	High-school diploma	26,50%	
	Bachelor's Degree	21,30%	
	Master's Degree	42,30%	
	Master Program	9,90%	

*Source: our calculations*

## **CHAPTER 4 - Results and Conclusion**

### **4.1 Results**

First and foremost, the analysis confirmed that the two scenarios were equally assigned to respondent as 135 were the number of interviewees who were exposed to the luxury case and the remaining 137 to the dupe case. Concerning the dependent variable, which is purchase intention, results show the

average response is up to 2,8. The mode of this variable is 4, which is the second highest level (since the scale is 1-5) and demonstrates consumers' high willingness to buy the product.

Proceeding with the moderator (brand awareness), the average response of interviewees is about 3,46. Looking at the frequencies, it can be easily noticed that the highest frequencies – 44 and 56 – correspond to high levels of awareness, which are respectively 4 and 5 on a 5 point Likert scale.

The two control variables, perceived quality and product knowledge, register average responses of 3,24 and 2,98. Overall, perceived quality's frequencies show a variegated distribution of respondents' choices: 47% is the total number of replies among 1 and 3 which, on a 5 points Likert scale, are levels associated to low perception of quality. On the other hand, the remaining 53% counts for all the replies above 3, namely the perception of high quality. To sum up, the total number of respondents were almost equally distributed concerning the perceived quality. Passing on to product knowledge, results report that 60% of respondents are associated with lower values of knowledge (between 1 and 3) whilst the 40% is the percentage of high levels of information about the product described in the survey. Tab 2 displays all of the outcomes that have been reported thus far.

*Tab 2: Descriptives for all variables*

Variable	Mean
Purchase Intention	0,5037
Product Type	2,8076
Brand Awareness	3,4583
Perceived Quality	3,2371
Product Knowledge	2,973

*Source: our calculations*

A correlation analysis (see Tab 3) was conducted in order to detect possible multicollinearity issues. Since no value is superior to 0,7, it can be definitely stated there is no problem of multicollinearity meaning the selected variables for the analysis are not redundant and are providing different information.

Tab 3: correlation analysis for all variables

		ETA	IV	DV	MOD	PQ	PK	GEN	EDU
Age	Correlazione di Pearson	1	-,250**	-0,098	-,167**	,135*	-0,084	0,023	,416**
	Sign. (a due code)		0,000	0,106	0,006	0,026	0,168	0,701	0,000
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272
Product Type	Correlazione di Pearson	-,250**	1	,206**	-,164**	-,580**	0,031	-0,113	-0,021
	Sign. (a due code)	0,000		0,001	0,007	0,000	0,606	0,062	0,724
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272
Purchase Intention	Correlazione di Pearson	-0,098	,206**	1	,260**	0,043	,550**	-,354**	-0,027
	Sign. (a due code)	0,106	0,001		0,000	0,482	0,000	0,000	0,653
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272
Brand Awareness	Correlazione di Pearson	-,167**	-,164**	,260**	1	,340**	,501**	-,379**	-0,027
	Sign. (a due code)	0,006	0,007	0,000		0,000	0,000	0,000	0,659
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272
Perceived Quality	Correlazione di Pearson	,135*	-,580**	0,043	,340**	1	,275**	-0,007	0,048
	Sign. (a due code)	0,026	0,000	0,482	0,000		0,000	0,912	0,434
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272
Product Knowledge	Correlazione di Pearson	-0,084	0,031	,550**	,501**	,275**	1	-,455**	0,050
	Sign. (a due code)	0,168	0,606	0,000	0,000	0,000		0,000	0,416
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272
Gender	Correlazione di Pearson	0,023	-0,113	-,354**	-,379**	-0,007	-,455**	1	0,014
	Sign. (a due code)	0,701	0,062	0,000	0,000	0,912	0,000		0,813
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272
Education	Correlazione di Pearson	,416**	-0,021	-0,027	-0,027	0,048	0,050	0,014	1
	Sign. (a due code)	0,000	0,724	0,653	0,659	0,434	0,416	0,813	
	N	272	272	272	272	272	272	272	272

Source: our calculations

Hereinafter, a T test (see Tab 4) was performed to check the main effect of the independent variable on the dependent one, which respectively are product type and purchase intention. This analysis confirmed the effect is statistically significant ( $p < 0,001$ ). Considering this, it can be affirmed that H1 is not rejected. By comparing the means of the two scenarios, luxury and dupe, this test, which only considers the dependent and independent variables, proves consumers are more willing to buy

promoted products on TikTok in the case of dupes rather than luxury goods. Indeed, luxury's mean (2,57) is slightly lower than the dupe one (3,04).

*Tab 4: T-Test on purchase intention of respondents*

Group	Number of respondents	Purchase intention	Std. Deviation
Scenario luxury	135	2,5704	0,08996
Scenario dupe	137	3,0414	0,10201
t	p value	Mean Difference	
-3,459	<,001	-0,47099	
-3,463	<,001	-0,47099	

*Source: our calculations*

Regression was also performed to go even deeper with data analysis. The results of this last analysis confirm again the statistical significance of the effect of the independent variable on the employee ( $p=0,004$ ) (see Tab 5). So this latter examination confirms that H1 is not rejected in this research. Thus, product type influences purchase intention of consumers that are exposed to social media influencer marketing videos on TikTok, especially for luxury products.

*Tab 5: Regression analysis*

Modello		Coefficienti non standardizzati		Coefficienti standardizzati	t	Sign.
		B	Errore standard	Beta		
	(Costante)	1,467	0,364		4,030	0,000
	IV	0,435	0,148	0,190	2,930	0,004

*Source: our calculations*

With the purpose of analyzing H2 meaning the interaction effect of product type and brand awareness on purchase intention, a regression analysis was necessary to study the moderation of the aforementioned variables and the effect of control variables (perceived quality, product knowledge, gender, age and education) and it was conducted using Process model 1 (see Tab 6). This study suggest that the interaction effect of product type and brand awareness is statistically significant ( $p=0,000$ ). Results of this analysis show that the relationship between the dependent and independent

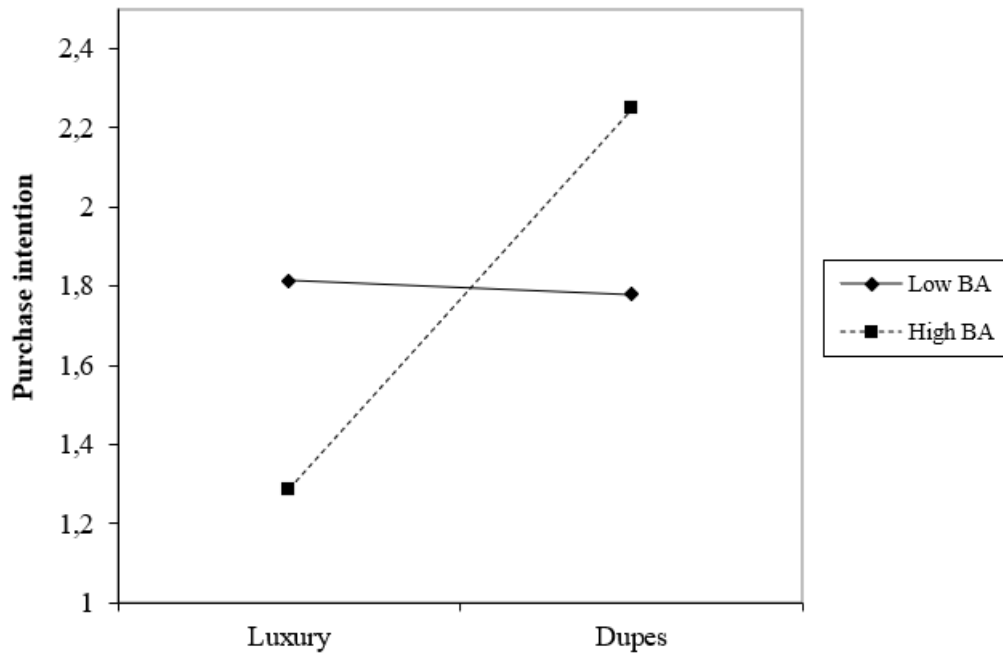
variable is positively moderated by the moderator. Indeed, with high levels of awareness consumers prefer to buy dupe products, whereas when brand awareness is low, they opt for luxury. These results are indicated by the following slope analysis (see Figure 2), which illustrates that in the absence of brand awareness consumers' preference is sensitive to luxury, but when there is a high level of brand awareness the preference shifts to dupes. In summary, slope analysis with moderation advances precision, reveals interaction effects, illuminates conditional effects, deepens our comprehension of relationships, and informs practical consequences.

*Tab 6: Regression analysis with Process model 1*

Variable					
	coefficient	se	t	p	
constant	2,2654	0,3993	5,6729	0	
IV	-0,8791	0,3402	-2,584	0,0103	
MOD	-0,207	0,0726	-2,8499	0,0047	
Interaction effect (IV*MOD)	0,388	0,091	4,2618	0	
PQ	0,0606	0,0714	0,8481	0,3971	
PK	0,3625	0,0506	7,1569	0	
Gender	-0,2608	0,1477	-1,7662	0,0785	
Education	-0,0472	0,0626	-0,7545	0,4512	
Age	-0,0028	0,0058	-0,478	0,6331	
Test of highest order unconditional interactions:					
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
IV*MOD	0,042	18,1627	1	263	0

*Source: our calculations*

Figure 2: Slope analysis



Source: our calculations

Considering the control variables, the study shows perceived quality does not influence purchase intention ( $p=0,3971$ ) altogether with age ( $p=0,63319$ ), gender ( $0,0785$ ) and education ( $p=0,4512$ ). On the other hand, product knowledge does impact on the dependent variables since its significance level is higher than 0,05 ( $p=0,000$ ).

#### 4.2 Discussion

The performed analysis provides very interesting results concerning consumers behavior towards sponsored beauty products on TikTok and the dupe trend. Indeed, findings demonstrate that consumers' purchase choices are conditioned by different factors. Primarily, the analysis allows us to understand the preference of buyers when they are exposed to videos of influencers promoting dupe and luxury products on TikTok. Overall, as it was already tested in previous literature (Li et al., 2011), influencer social media marketing has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention. Taking into account the difference of the two product types –a luxury product and a dupe one, the intention to buy a luxury product was quite higher than the one of buying a dupe. Indeed, this finding confirms what previous studies already showed, that social media influencer marketing can increase consumers' willingness to buy luxury products in the beauty market (Jansom et al., 2021). The cosmetics market is very suitable for this type of campaigns as there are several contents that can be



created on social media to promote products. Tutorials and unboxing are the types that get the most views on TikTok. As mentioned above, there are several factors that affect consumers when advertising on TikTok. First, consumers themselves often look for videos where makeup products are used to better understand the yield they have once applied. Secondly, influencers (especially nano and micro, whose TikTok crawls with) give a sense of more confidence to consumers who trust their reviews a lot. Indeed, as it was previously stated in this study in reference to Bandura's social theory, humans learn by example, so they are likely to reproduce behaviors that they see from their peers or from other people. This is surely one of the reasons why influencers are perfect drivers to advertise products, because they give the initial example to their followers that are then more prone to make certain shopping choices because they tend to replicate other people's behaviors. Notwithstanding, the surrounding environment and the stimuli that come from it are very influential factors on people, their decisions and their ways of doing things (Li et al., 2013). Leveraging this aspect of human behavior, social media has now become the major driver for delivering new trends. Moreover, the younger generations, who are the most influenced on social media, are much more inclined to want to adapt to what they see online (Kowalska et al., 2012). Consequently, the term FOMO has recently been coined to indicate the fear that young people have to miss something that their peers are experiencing. In fact, since everyone shares their lives openly on social media, it is easier not only to know what others are doing, but also to know what we might risk losing. And this is also one reason why influencer marketing on social media is successful, because people don't want to lag behind others and if they see other users buying and using a certain product, which is also sponsored by celebrities on social media, it is even more likely that they eventually decide to buy it.

However, the interesting result of this study is that when brand awareness, which was the moderator in this study's conceptual model, gets to be taken into consideration, the actual intention to purchase dupe products becomes higher than the one of purchasing luxurious items. Indeed, as it was supposed in H2, higher levels of awareness of the brand that promotes the product through TikTok enhance customers' intention to actually buy it. A factor that must be taken into account and that was already clarified previously in this study is that makeup and beauty products are used by consumers directly on their skin, so they are, on average, going to look for products they can trust in terms of quality due to their direct application on the body. This research shows that with higher levels of awareness, consumers are more willing to buy products that are sold for very low prices comparing to luxury brand. Indeed, the element of price, which is presumed to also be an indicator of quality (Rao et al., 1989) is crucial in this analysis. What results show is that, if the brand which promotes the dupe product through TikTok influencer marketing is well known by the customer, then it is probable that

the TikTok user will buy the item. On the contrary, when the brand that promotes the dupe on TikTok is not known by the one who sees the adv, then the chance of them purchasing the products are lower. This result might be connected to the fact that, with lower prices, consumers are only trusting brands they already know and might have tried in their past shopping experiences, due to the direct effect that cosmetic products have on skin. Similar results were demonstrated by Ha in 2004, who showed that consumers are influenced by different elements that impact their feelings of trust towards brand online like security, privacy, brand awareness, WOM, good online experience and quality of information. Indeed, it was necessary for brand awareness to be considered in order to better understand how consumers behave in different situations, since they are very susceptible to many variables when shopping, especially online. Indeed, consumers tend to be more cautious when shopping online (Tsao et al., 2010) due to the lack of sensorial experience. In these circumstances, they tend to rely more on brand awareness (Mudzakkir et al., 2015) because it gives off a sense of trust and reliability. Indeed, consumers who shop online are more willing to buy from brands they know rather than from brands they have never heard of (Dabbous et al., 2020).

It should also be considered that, currently, the dupe trend is really viral on TikTok, mostly among young consumers. As it was demonstrated by Rabidas et al. (2020), consumers are influenced by viral trends that can impact on their shopping behavior. Indeed, this might be a solid reason why, as shown by the study, consumers' intention to buy dupes that are advertised on TikTok is higher compared to the high-end products case. Indeed, when products "go viral" on social media, consumers are much more willing to buy it (Gunawan et al., 2015). Since the dupe trend has been popular on social media for several years, it is likely that this has impacted consumer purchasing decisions, making them more inclined to try beauty products from cheaper or drugstore brands. Since in recent years many products marketed by such brands have become viral on TikTok to the point of being sold out in all physical and virtual stores, consumers may have learned that even brands of this kind actually offer products with a good yield.

To recap each of the things that has been discussed at this point, consumers' purchase intention is influenced by advertising of beauty products on TikTok, due to different reasons that have been reviewed above. The effect of this relationship is stronger for luxurious products rather than for dupes. However, consumers are more willing to buy dupe products if they know well the brand that markets the advertised item. Indeed, brand awareness and product type have a combined effect on purchase intention that alters consumers' buying decisions depending on customer perceptions of the variables.

### 4.3 Implications

The findings of this study are quite interesting and have the potential to establish the groundwork for various important managerial and marketing implications. First, this study indicates that, even on the TikTok platform, influencer marketing increases customer purchase intent, as has been widely established in past studies on other social media platforms. In addition, Furthermore, given the popularity of the dupe trend of cosmetic items, this research delves further into how consumer behavior can differ based on the product advertised through influencer marketing videos on TikTok.

As a result, customer behavior has proven to be extremely diverse depending on the sort of goods promoted via TikTok as well as the level of awareness of the brand. These findings have valuable implications for businesses to consider when implementing influencer marketing campaigns on TikTok, which is currently the best platform to use for this type of advertising due to its growing popularity in recent years. Following, some of the most interesting implications are described:

- Invest on influencer collaborations on TikTok: influencer marketing has evolved as an important method for engaging customers and increasing buy intentions for beauty products. To advertise their make-up products, cosmetic companies can actively seek out appropriate influencer collaborations on TikTok, since is the perfect social media to this purpose due to its fame and short video format. Choosing influencers who are relevant to their product supply and target audience has a big impact on clients' purchasing decisions.
- Highlight product authenticity and quality: the outcomes of this study highlight the impact of influencer marketing on make-up dupes. When developing social content to sell their products, businesses must prioritize authenticity and quality. Furthermore, influencer marketing is more effective when buyers perceive the product to be of good quality.
- Engage clients through user-generated content: TikTok is well-known for its ecosystem of user-generated content (UGC). Encouraging customers to create their own content featuring beauty goods and share their positive experiences is something that can bring good returns from various perspectives, such as consumer loyalty and brand reputation, and can increase their purchasing intention. UGC becomes a powerful social evidence in this way, amplifying the effect of influencer marketing. Brands should use UGC in campaigns, challenges, or contests to increase engagement and brand loyalty.
- Stay current with TikTok's viral trends: TikTok is the platform where trends begin and end the quickest. As a result, it is critical for businesses who opt to employ TikTok influencer marketing campaigns to have a clear perspective of current trends in order to leverage them

and obtain better visibility. In this way, influencer campaigns can be even more effective thanks to TikTok's trend virality and by showing consumers that the brand keeps up with tendencies.

These implications can be extremely beneficial for managers and marketers who wish to increase their brand's presence on TikTok and advertise products through influencer marketing campaigns.

#### **4.4 Limitations and further research**

Even though this study provides very useful insights concerning social media marketing and influencers on TikTok, there are still some limitations that would be interesting to cover in future research. Indeed, considering how much is TikTok still growing today, interesting new research ideas keep popping up and can lead to profound results on consumer behavior on social media, so future researchers should always keep an eye on such platform to catch and investigate them.

- **Sample's size:** the sample of this study is composed of 272 people. To get even more reliable and generalized results, it would be useful to expand the number of respondents to get more answers: these could confirm or modify the results obtained with this search.
- **Sample's nationality:** the sample of this research consists only of respondents of Italian nationality. It would be useful and interesting to include in the study people of different nationalities in order to verify if the results are similar in other countries outside Italy as well, or if they tend to vary depending on the nationality of the people that are interviewed.
- **Lack of qualitative data:** qualitative research methods can provide more complex data than quantitative surveys. Because of the multiple-choice response alternatives, participants' perspectives and motivations about influencer marketing and the dupe trend may not have been thoroughly examined. Interviews or focus groups would undoubtedly provide interesting insights about consumer behavior. Indeed, respondents might shed light on their considerations and give more details about the reasons for their shopping decisions.
- **Lack of considerations about the influencer:** it would be interesting to dive deeper into this analysis investigating whether certain characteristics of the influencer described in the survey may alter consumers' purchase decisions. Some elements that might be taken into account include influencer's credibility, influencer's trustworthiness, influencer's reliability and influencer's competence and pertinence to the advertised products' market sector.
- **Use of different types of stimuli:** the study was composed of a text description concerning a TikTok video of an influencer promoting a makeup product. However, using a different type

of stimuli such as a real video or pictures might have been more incisive and engaging, and consequently this may have led answerers to different responses.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This study examines the influencer marketing technique used to promote make-up products on TikTok, a platform that has recently garnered millions of users because of its dynamic content. Since TikTok has only recently gained popularity, there is currently a scarcity of literature on the subject. One of the most successful recent trends has been the use of *dupes*, or makeup or fashion products that are promoted by influencers as alternatives to high-end products. The dupe trend is interesting to explore because of its controversial nature, particularly from the standpoint of sustainability, which is now receiving special attention, as the brand promoters of the so-called “dupes” are frequently drugstore brands that feed the so-called “fast fashion” industry, which is responsible for severe levels of pollution and waste creation.

Based on this analysis, it is assumed that the type of product promoted on TikTok by influencers can influence the purchasing intentions of consumers, specifically that consumers are more likely to buy the product when it is a dupe, but less so when it is luxurious. Furthermore, the influence of moderation that brand awareness has on purchase intention is explored, assuming that customers are more willing to buy sponsored products on TikTok when they have a high level of brand awareness of the brand that markets them, especially in the case of dupes.

To perform the study, a sample of 272 Italians aged between 15 to 70 were subjected to an in-between subject experiment. This denotes that they took part in a survey in which they are exposed to a description of a mascara in a TikTok video posted by an Italian fictitious influencer, and are randomly allocated to one of two scenarios: one in which the promoted product was labeled Chanel (luxury) and one in which it was Essence (dupe). After reading about the advertisement, respondents are instructed to complete questionnaires based on prevalidated scales that assess their purchase intention, brand awareness, perceived quality, and product knowledge. They are also requested to provide their gender, age, and educational level.

To analyze the data collected through surveys, descriptive analysis, an independent sample t-test and a regression were performed on SPSS. The t test aims to verify the statistical significance of the main effect, that is, the effect of the independent variable (product type) on the dependent one (purchase intention). Regression (using Process model 1) investigates the effect that all variables of the

conceptual model (including brand awareness and control variables) have on the employee. Finally, a slope analysis has been added to detail even more the results obtained.

The findings of this study show that TikTok's influencer marketing has a beneficial impact on purchase intent. According to the analysis, this effect is stronger for luxury goods, contrary to what the hypothesis suggests. Instead, regression demonstrates that when brand knowledge and control variables are included, the effect changes: it is stronger for dupes than for luxury products in this case.

The results of this analysis are very intriguing since they indicate several elements of consumer behavior related to TikTok influencer marketing that can be useful if taken into account by firms who want to adopt similar methods on this social media. Nevertheless, some limitations in this study such as some of the characteristics of the sample and of the methodology may be explored in future studies to obtain even deeper results.

## Summary

Social media marketing is a proper phenomenon of recent years that has undoubtedly changed buying habits of consumers. It is defined as a marketing tactic in which businesses choose social media influencers with a sizable fanbase to help them market their brands and products to their target markets (Bu et al., 2022). Online influencers are people, groups of people, or even virtual characters who have amassed a following on social media and are recognized as digital opinion leaders with a significant social influence on their following (Leung et al., 2022). The phenomenon this study aims to explore is one of the trends that has recently emerged on TikTok: the *dupe* culture. A *dupe* is an abbreviated variant of the term “duplicate”, and it is frequently used to. The idea of dupes is not new - it was born years ago on YouTube, but it is very intriguing to examine the impact it has on consumer decision making since it has landed on TikTok becoming a real trend. Besides, studying this trend is very interesting especially for its controversial nature: thus, there are several dark sides to the *dupes* phenomenon.

The methodology used in order to conduct the study is the between subject experiment that allows to compare results of two different scenarios that are randomly assigned to respondents. The two scenarios consist of a textual description of a promotion of a mascara on TikTok, and they only differ for the type of product and for the brand that commercializes the product: in one case the advertised item is a luxurious Chanel mascara, whilst in the second the product is marketed by Essence. After reading about this adv, respondents are asked to fill in questions concerning their intention to buy the product after being exposed to the promotion, their level of brand awareness, perceived quality, and product knowledge. Finally, some demographic questions about their gender, age and level of education are included.

The study of social media influencer marketing has grown in importance in recent years, as more businesses resort to influencers to advertise their products and services. However, there is currently a gap in the literature about the efficiency of TikTok influencer marketing, particularly its impact on customer purchase behavior. This study’s aim is to address that lack by investigating the efficiency of social media influencer marketing on TikTok, with a particular emphasis on the beauty and fashion industries. Influencers and content makers on TikTok are spreading *dupes*, or cheaper alternatives to high-end cosmetics and fashion products. This concept is gaining traction and has the potential to disrupt luxury firms’ typical marketing techniques. However, there is currently a scarcity of research on this topic.

Social media influencer marketing is a practice that is gaining more and more success in response to the great impact that social media platforms have on people's lives today. It has been defined in previous literature as the implementation of influential opinion leaders (influencers), celebrity or non-celebrity, with great numbers of followers on social platforms, to foster positive responses (both attitudinal and behavioral) in their followers concerning the brand's interests by using posting ad hoc content on such platforms, which also allows influencers and followers to participate in the co-creation of the brand image on social media (Francisco et al., 2019). According to Pawar (2023) by 2023, the influencer marketing market is projected to be worth about \$20 billion 59 percent of respondents say they have a separate budget just for content marketing, and 75 percent say they now plan to set aside money for influencer marketing. Different categories of online influencers have been defined in previous literature according to their level of fame evaluated considering the number of followers of their social media accounts: nano influencers, micro influencers, macro influencers and mega influencers.

Several studies were conducted both to understand the effect of influencer marketing on consumers' purchase behavior. Three aspects of influencers' power should be underlined:

4. The credibility of their consumer peer status:

Marketers should be careful when selecting opinion leaders to represent their company due to the growing skepticism around the legitimacy of opinion leaders (Djafarova et al., 2021). In addition, the peer component makes it possible to develop a stronger consumer-brand relationship naturally and more effectively than through simple marketing communications (Forbes, 2016). However, is not given that consumers would trust influencers, the reputation and dependability of an influencer have a direct impact on a consumer's decision to make a purchase (Pawar, 2023).

5. The social influencer theory:

According to Bandura's social influencer theory, people's way of behaving is, consciously or not, learned through example. Hence, individuals watching influencers' actions and behaviors are more prone to imitate what they see. Eventually, consumers follow actions and habits they learn from influencers' content on social media platforms. They are inclined to adopt new habits and to reconsider their own ones in favor of influencers' opinion. Eventually, this touches their buying decisions too.



WOM's power:

Another important element concerning influencers' power is its alignment with WOM, i.e. mouth communication between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service (Lang et al., 2013). Besides, influencers are kind of eWOM masters (Forbes, 2016). WOM is generally considered to be more credible by consumers due to its external nature: especially, with high levels of perceived source credibility, e-WOM is considered to be more than when it's low (Lopez et al., 2014). Differently from general marketing communication tools, it can decrease consumer resistance since it stems from the other customers' experiences (Fan et al., 2013).

TikTok is a short-form video-based social media which is becoming very popular among both consumers and advertisers (Wang et al., 2020), notably among younger people like generation Z. TikTok's appeal to this age group it's stronger since it offers them a space to relate with others and express their emotions, that was extremely precious during the pandemic lockdowns (Darmatama et al., 2021). Like many social media platforms did, TikTok experienced a great rise in its usage during the COVID-19 lockdown. The platform is known for its skit videos, lip syncing, but at the same time it is also used for many other types of content including informational content, *Do it Yourself*, political and social activism, everyday tips, dance challenges and so on (Unni et al., 2021; Alley et al., 2022).

TikTok is a particular social media due to the algorithm that manages the virality of content. TikTok's technology detects individuals who are more likely to engage with specific content. (Chu et al., 2022). Viral behaviors are prominent in social media because users can interact with user-generated material by like, sharing, commenting, and updating their status (Alhabash et al., 2019). Consequently, social media facilitates the development and sharing of knowledge between people with similar goals and behaviors (Dewi et al., 2021).

According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, in the beauty area, "*dupe*" — short for duplicate — is online slang describing cheaper, mostly drugstore versions of luxury cosmetics or fashion items. The dupes trend started many years consist in finding cheap products that can substitute luxurious items. These products are claimed to be an excellent way for customers to spend less money while still receiving the benefits of high-end beauty products. Drugstore makeup brands that offer comparable hues and formulas to luxury brands, as well as skincare products that include similar active components to higher-quality goods, are notable examples of dupes.

The trend of the dupe culture on TikTok is widespread especially in the beauty sector. Lately drugstore cosmetics are being strongly enhanced by influencers claiming their value is not far lower compared to luxury make-up products and bringing their cost-effectiveness out.

As mentioned above, there are multiple reasons why the dupe phenomenon is interesting to study. From a sustainability perspective, it's curious to examine this trend because it contrasts the eco-friendly attitude consumers are lately adopting when shopping. As a matter of fact, dupe culture somehow enhances fast fashion and beauty consumption, which is responsible for pollution and waste that seriously harms the planet. Fast fashion is responsible for negative environmental impact more than traditional firms since it introduces multiple styles simultaneously (Long et al., 2022). Apparel and beauty are two of the world's most polluting businesses, using massive amounts of raw materials, causing major pollution, leaving a significant carbon footprint, and producing alarming amounts of waste. (Brewer, 2019).

Although, dupe products are not harming luxury companies due to the *Robin Hood approach*: it basically means that consumers that can afford to buy items from high quality brands will continue to do it not considering dupes. On the other hand, dupes will be purchased by consumers that cannot afford to buy the original and more expensive versions of the products. Indeed, even the dupes principle is still quite controversial, luxury brands seems not to be worried of the trend's popularity among young customers.

The variable of the purchase intention has been defined as the preference of consumer to buy a product or service (Younus, 2015). In other words, purchase intention consists in consumers' plan on purchasing a product or service in the next future (Wu et. al, 2011, as cited in Arauju et al., 2022). In this study, purchase intention is analyzed considering the way it varies according to the type of product that is promoted through influencers campaign on TikTok, and is assumed to be conditioned by the latest.

On the other hand, product type – which is the independent variable, is explainable in two levels: luxury and dupe. Thus,

*H1. Consumers are more willing to buy products promoted by influencers on TikTok if the product is a dupe.*

A prospective buyer's capacity to recognize or recall a brand is referred to as brand awareness (Aaker 1961 as cited in Bilgin et al., 2018). Brand awareness is very important for firms to develop but it

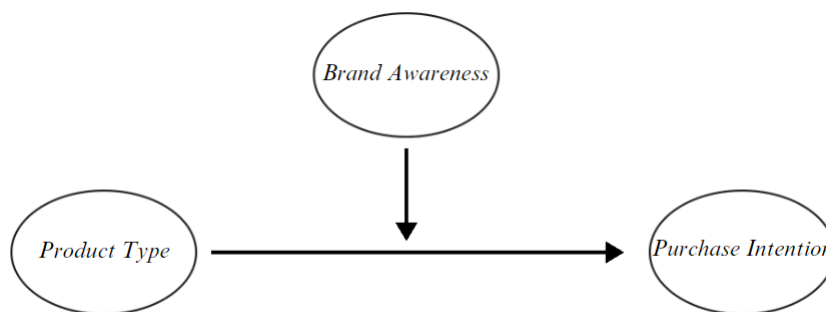
takes quite a considerable amount of time to do so. This because it primarily takes time to develop an effective awareness effort and secondly for the desired message to reach potential customers, who will all respond to it in different moments (Gustafson et al., 2007). In this study, brand awareness and its effect will be analyzed in this study considering it as a moderator impacting on the decision of buying cosmetic products sponsored on TikTok. Hence,

*H2. High levels of brand awareness enhance consumers' purchase intention to buy dupe products promoted by influencers on TikTok.*

Previous studies has defined perceived quality as consumers' overall judgment on the superiority of a product (Zeithaml, 1988 as cited in Das et al., 2014). Indeed, it is a very critical feature for many aspects of a brand, such as its reputation. Stydilis et al. (2020) reviewed several marketing-oriented Perceived quality was introduced in the study as a control variable since it is undoubtedly a major driver for purchase. Indeed, previous literature demonstrated its influence on intention to purchase (Asshidin et al., 2016; Bolton, 1998 and Richardson et al., 1994 as cited in Das et al., 2014).

Product knowledge represents consumers' awareness of information regarding a certain product (Brucks, 1985). This variable has been previously measured both as subjective and objective knowledge: these two concepts are often difficult to consider separately from a consumer point of view. Subjective knowledge is intended to be the one acquired via consumer experience with the product (Wang et al., 2016). On the other hand, objective knowledge is composed of different type of consciousness such as cost knowledge, quality knowledge and so on. This variable was included in the study as a control variable because, as previous literature widely proved (Ghalandari et al., 2012; Chiou et al., 1998; Berger et al., 1994), it is able to affect purchase intention of customers, which is a variable of interest of this research.

*Figure 1: conceptual model*



The choice of analyzing the promotion of a makeup product by a TikTok influencer lies in the big popularity of the cosmetic dupe trend on TikTok.

In order to execute the analysis, a between subject and experiment design experiment was launched. This type of research consists of causal estimates derived by contrasting the behavior of those in one experimental condition with that of those in another as long as group assignment is random (Charness et al., 2012). To distribute the survey, Qualtrics was used and set to randomize the scenarios equally among the interviewees. The two scenarios expose the respondent to two identical situations with different conditions, namely the promotion of a cosmetic product – a mascara that is supposed to create a *false eye-lashes* effect on customers' eye lashes – from the brands Chanel and Essence. The choice of mascara as the product being sponsored falls on the fact that it is one of the products most likely to be used, in the field of beauty. According to NPD's *Makeup Attitudes and Usage Report for 2022*. In order to properly associate the product described with the type of brand that marketed it, the description of the mascara focused on two different attributes: the high quality for the luxury brand (Chanel), and the convenience for the dupe brand (Essence). This is the only part of the description that differentiate the two scenarios. In both cases, interviewees are asked to carefully read a brief text where the promotion of the product is described. Both the sponsored product and the influencer described are fictitious. After carefully reading the description of the product promotion, respondents are asked to answer questions: those are the same in the two scenario cases.

With some adjustments, all constructs were adopted from earlier literature. Since the sample solely contains respondents from Italy, all the scales and items on the questionnaire were presented in Italian.

The first set of questions respondents were asked aimed at examining the extent to which they were inclined to buy the product and the scale used to measure this variable was *Intention to purchase recommended brands* that was validated by Jiménez-Castillo et al. in their 2019 study *The role of digital influencers in brand recommendation: Examining their impact on engagement, expected value and purchase intention* on International Journal of Information Management.

Following, the *brand awareness* set of questions was presented to measure the moderation effect of this variable, using a scale from a study by Yoo et al., namely *Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale* on Journal of Business Research in 2001.

The same study provided also the scales measuring the first control variable of *perceived quality*.

Finally, the last scale measuring *product knowledge* was validated by Cole and Balasubramanian in 1993 in their research named *Age differences in consumers' search for information: public policy implications* on Journal of Consumer Research.

As previously stated, at the end of the survey three sets of demographic questions were added in order to detect more information about the interviewees. Namely, age, gender and education were asked to them.

A total of 340 Italian people, recruited via email, Whatsapp and Instagram stories, were asked to participate to the study by filling the survey through Qualtrics. The number of completed collected survey is 272. As previously stated, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions. The sample is very heterogeneous. Respondents' age are between the ages of 15 and 70, and the average age is 27. The major age group is the one of 21-24 years old which represents 59% of the total number of interviewees.

Moving onto the gender, 73,9% of the respondents were females, whereas 26,1% of them was male.

The educational level of interviewees was also required. According to the findings, the single cycle or Master of Science degree sector accounts for 42.3% of the total. This is immediately succeeded in the following sequence by the clusters that come next: high school diploma (26,5%), bachelor's degree (21,3%), and finally master's program (9,9%).

First and foremost, the analysis confirmed that the two scenarios were equally assigned to respondent as 135 were the number of interviewees who were exposed to the luxury case and the remaining 137 to the dupe case. Concerning the dependent variable, which is purchase intention, results show the average response is up to 2,8. The mode of this variable is 4, which is the second highest level (since the scale is 1-5) and demonstrates consumers' high willingness to buy the product.

Proceeding with the moderator (brand awareness), the average response of interviewees is about 3,46. Looking at the frequencies, it can be easily noticed that the highest frequencies – 44 and 56 – correspond to high levels of awareness, which are respectively 4 and 5 on a 5 point Likert scale.

The two control variables, perceived quality and product knowledge, register average responses of 3,24 and 2,98. Overall, the total number of respondents were almost equally distributed concerning the perceived quality. Passing on to product knowledge, results report that 60% of respondents are associated with lower values of knowledge (between 1 and 3) whilst the 40% is the percentage of high levels of information about the product described in the survey.

A correlation analysis was conducted in order to detect possible multicollinearity issues. Since no value is superior to 0,7, it can be definitely stated there is no problem of multicollinearity meaning the selected variables for the analysis are not redundant and are providing different information.

Hereinafter, a T test was performed to check the main effect of the independent variable on the dependent one, which respectively are product type and purchase intention. This analysis confirmed the effect is statistically significant ( $p < 0,001$ ). Considering this, it can be affirmed that H1 is not rejected. By comparing the means of the two scenarios, luxury and dupe, this test, which only considers the dependent and independent variables, proves consumers are more willing to buy promoted products on TikTok in the case of dupes rather than luxury goods. Indeed, luxury's mean (2,57) is slightly lower

Regression was also performed to go even deeper with data analysis. The results of this last analysis confirm again the statistical significance of the effect of the independent variable on the employee ( $p = 0,004$ ). So this latter examination confirms that H1 is not rejected in this research. Thus, product type influences purchase intention of consumers that are exposed to social media influencer marketing videos on TikTok, especially for luxury products.

With the purpose of analyzing H2 meaning the interaction effect of product type and brand awareness on purchase intention, a regression analysis was necessary to study the moderation of the aforementioned variables and the effect of control variables (perceived quality, product knowledge, gender, age and education) and it was conducted using Process model 1 (see Tab 6). This study suggest that the interaction effect of product type and brand awareness is statistically significant ( $p = 0,000$ ). Results of this analysis show that the relationship between the dependent and independent variable is positively moderated by the moderator. Indeed, with high levels of awareness consumers prefer to buy dupe products, whereas when brand awareness is low, they opt for luxury. These results are indicated by the following slope analysis (see Figure 2), which illustrates that in the absence of brand awareness consumers' preference is sensitive to luxury, but when there is a high level of brand awareness the preference shifts to dupes. In summary, slope analysis with moderation advances precision, reveals interaction effects, illuminates conditional effects, deepens our comprehension of relationships, and informs practical consequences.

Considering the control variables, the study shows perceived quality does not influence purchase intention ( $p = 0,3971$ ) altogether with age ( $p = 0,63319$ ), gender (0,0785) and education ( $p = 0,4512$ ). On

the other hand, product knowledge does impact on the dependent variables since its significance level is higher than 0,05 ( $p=0,000$ ).

The performed analysis provides very interesting results concerning consumers behavior towards sponsored beauty products on TikTok and the dupe trend. Primarily, the analysis allows us to understand the preference of buyers when they are exposed to videos of influencers promoting dupe and luxury products on TikTok. Overall, as it was already tested in previous literature (Li et al., 2011), influencer social media marketing has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention. Taking into account the difference of the two product types –a luxury product and a dupe one, the intention to buy a luxury product was quite higher than the one of buying a dupe.

However, the interesting result of this study is that when brand awareness, which was the moderator in this study's conceptual model, gets to be taken into consideration, the actual intention to purchase dupe products becomes higher than the one of purchasing luxurious items. Indeed, as it was supposed in H2, higher levels of awareness of the brand that promotes the product through TikTok enhance customers' intention to actually buy it. This research shows that with higher levels of awareness, consumers are more willing to buy products that are sold for very low prices comparing to luxury brand. Indeed, the element of price, which is presumed to also be an indicator of quality (Rao et al., 1989) is crucial in this analysis. This result might be connected to the fact that, with lower prices, consumers are only trusting brands they already know and might have tried in their past shopping experiences, due to the direct effect that cosmetic products have on skin..

It should also be considered that, currently, the dupe trend is viral on TikTok, mostly among young consumers. As it was demonstrated by Rabidas et al. (2020), consumers are influenced by viral trends that can impact on their shopping behavior. Indeed, when products “go viral” on social media, consumers are much more willing to buy it (Gunawan et al., 2015). Since the dupe trend has been popular on social media for several years, it is likely that this has impacted consumer purchasing decisions, making them more inclined to try beauty products from cheaper or drugstore brands.

The findings of this study are quite interesting and have the potential to establish the groundwork for various important managerial and marketing implications.

Following, some of the most interesting implications are described:

- Invest on influencer collaborations on TikTok since it is the perfect social media to this purpose due to its fame and short video format.

- Highlight product authenticity and quality
- Engage clients through user-generated content: that can bring good returns from various perspectives, such as consumer loyalty and brand reputation, and can increase their purchasing intention
- Stay current with TikTok's viral trends: it is critical to have a clear perspective of current trends in order to leverage them and obtain better visibility.

Even though this study provides very useful insights concerning social media marketing and influencers on TikTok, there are still some limitations that would be interesting to cover in future research considering how much is TikTok still growing today.

- Sample's size
- Sample's nationality
- Lack of qualitative data
- Lack of considerations about the influencer
- Use of different types of stimuli

The results of this study are very intriguing since they indicate several elements of consumer behavior related to TikTok influencer marketing that can be useful if taken into account by firms who want to adopt similar methods on this social media. Nevertheless, some limitations in this study such as some of the characteristics of the sample and of the methodology may be explored in future studies to obtain even deeper results.



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