

# Does the Physical Attractiveness of Instagram Influencers Affect Moroccan Consumer Behavior? A Dyadic Analysis: Influencer vs. Consumer

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**Abstract:** - The phenomenon of social network influencers has become vital in the advertising world, so the main objective of this study is to determine the effect of the physical attractiveness of influencers on the attitude and purchase intention of Moroccan consumers on Instagram, based on a comparative analysis between the opinions of influencers and consumers on the subject. We opted for a qualitative study, in the form of semi-directive interviews, with two groups of ten people each, which consist of 10 highly followed influencers in Morocco and 10 Moroccan consumers, with particular specificities, to obtain relevant results. The results of the present research show that the physical attractiveness of the influencer has a positive effect on the attitude and purchase intention of Moroccan consumers, nevertheless, its effect remains limited depending on the nature of the endorsed product. In addition, we were able to identify negative effects reported by both groups of interviewees, illustrating that the influencer's physical attractiveness can be detrimental to the mental and psychological health of Moroccan consumers, provoking a harmful and destructive comparison to their self-esteem. Today's consumer needs a human reference, real feedback, and proximity to the product, hence the integration of all the elements specific to humans, while also considering their imperfections and defects.

**Key-Words:** - Attitude, Consumers, Comparison, Influencers, Instagram, Psychological health, Physical Attractiveness, Purchase Intention, Self-esteem

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## 1 Introduction

Influencer marketing is about sharing experiences, feelings, and subjectivity. It is the humanization of marketing, making it more real and similar to consumers' daily lives. Today, the world of marketing is going through a profound transformation around the phenomenon of influencers, which resurrects social relationships via electronic word-of-mouth. Advertisers are aware that traditional advertising is attracting fewer and fewer consumers, and advice that comes from interpersonal sources is considered more credible than advertising communication, [1]. Companies are going through the influence to infiltrate the recommendation circle of today's consumers. Aligning with this new consumer trend has become vital, the influencer marketing market would be worth 16.4 billion dollars in 2022, 20 times more than in 2015, and 80% of brand owners believe that

influencer marketing is effective and 89% of them stipulate that the return on investment is comparable and even superior to other channels, [2]. Influencer marketing has become a powerful marketing tool to reach a large number of potential customers in record time at a lower cost, [3].

The interest of this study is to closely examine the opinions of Moroccan influencers and consumers on this phenomenon of influencer marketing, especially on the importance of the physical attraction of influencers in the process of changing the attitude and purchase intention of consumers in Morocco.

The concept of physical attractiveness in the Moroccan media remains a subject that divides social opinion. Moroccan culture considers that media exposure highlighting the physical attributes of a woman, in particular, is certainly not harmless. Therefore, the positive advances in Moroccan laws, generated by the High Authority of Audiovisual

Communication (HACA) of Morocco in 2016, justified in Law 77.03 relating to audiovisuals, shows that Morocco is committed to implementing the principles of « non-discrimination » and « gender equality » in the media field, [4]. In Morocco, it is found that 51% of influencers are women, 33% are men and the remaining 16% are community accounts, [5].

Moreover, to our knowledge, no study has been conducted in this regard in Morocco, and there is little research on the mechanisms of influence of opinion leaders on Instagram and their effect on purchase intentions, [6], in this case on the importance of the physical attractiveness of influencers on the attitude and purchase intention of Moroccan consumers.

Among others, Eastern and Western cultures tend to state that physical attractiveness reflects qualities such as sociability and popularity, [7]. Many people state that beauty or physical attractiveness is personal and that we do not evaluate beauty in the same way, yet in most cases, there is a convergence of opinion about who is most physically attractive, whether it is across cultures, adults, or even children, [8], [9].

Through our research work, we study the effect of the physical attractiveness of influencers, on Instagram, on the attitude and purchase intention of Moroccan consumers, based on a qualitative approach. To do so, we first present the theoretical foundations, develop the research methodology, and then analyze and put the results into perspective.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Influencer Marketing

With the rise of social networks and the influencer referral movement, many researchers have given special attention to influencer marketing.

Influencer marketing is a practice that identifies influential people in a target audience to encourage them to use their influence to spread word of mouth, [10]. Indeed, it is an effective and undeniable practice, [11], that aims to promote products and increase brand awareness through influencers, [12]. It is thus a communication strategy based on popular and influential users in online social media, [13] (Figure 1).

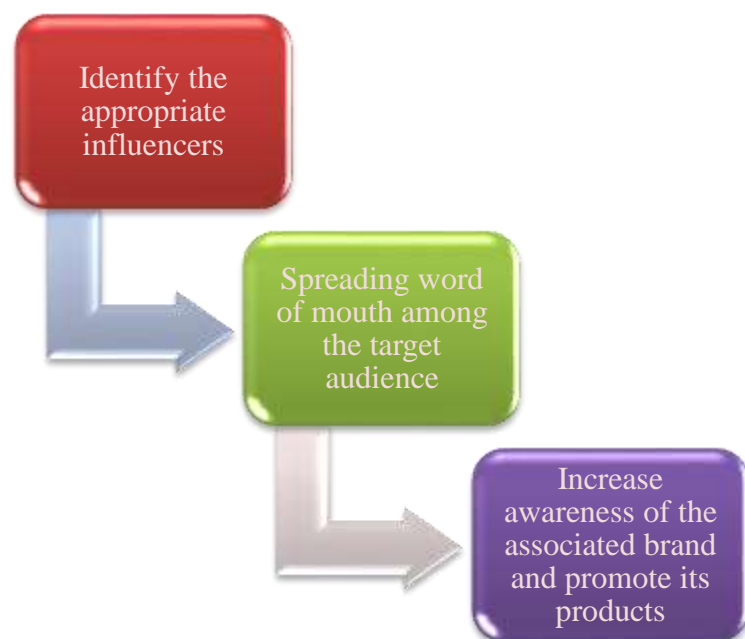


Fig. 1: Influence marketing approach  
Source: Personal elaboration

#### 2.1.1 Social Influence in Influencer Marketing

Marketing has quickly integrated the phenomenon of social influence into its strategy. In psychology, social influence is « The change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that result from interaction with another individual or with a group », [14].

The study, [15], outlines the psychological effect of influence on human beings and states « You have been influenced when you think something you would not have thought, or do something, you would not have done ».

The concept of social influence comes from the theory of, [16], which states that social influence causes changes in the beliefs, actions, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals. These transformations occur through three different forms of influence: compliance, identification, and internalization (Figure 2).

Compliance is certainly a typology of influence that cannot be used within the framework of influence marketing; it engenders a modification of an individual's behavior out of fear of being punished or rejected, without changing his beliefs, or his basic values on the subject.

Identification is the fact of changing behavior by identifying with an individual who is highly valued or perceived as a reference model.

Identification is the act of changing behavior by identifying with an individual who is highly valued or perceived as a role model. This form of influence is one of the levers of influence marketing, especially on social networks, Internet

users identify with influencers and change their habits and beliefs according to them, because they consider them as references, in this case in terms of fashion, clothing or interior design, etc.

Internalization is the fact that an individual decides to change his behavior because it is adequate to his basic principles, which pushes him to make an internal change. In the context of influencer marketing, this form can be essential to certain areas. On Instagram, we find influencers who advocate healthy eating, sports, and fitness, share healthy recipes, or a lifestyle related to well-being, etc. As a result, Internet users who express a willingness to start sports, eat healthily, to adopt a particular lifestyle, are inclined to change their behavior and adhere to the recommendations of these influencers, to have the same result expected by the latter.

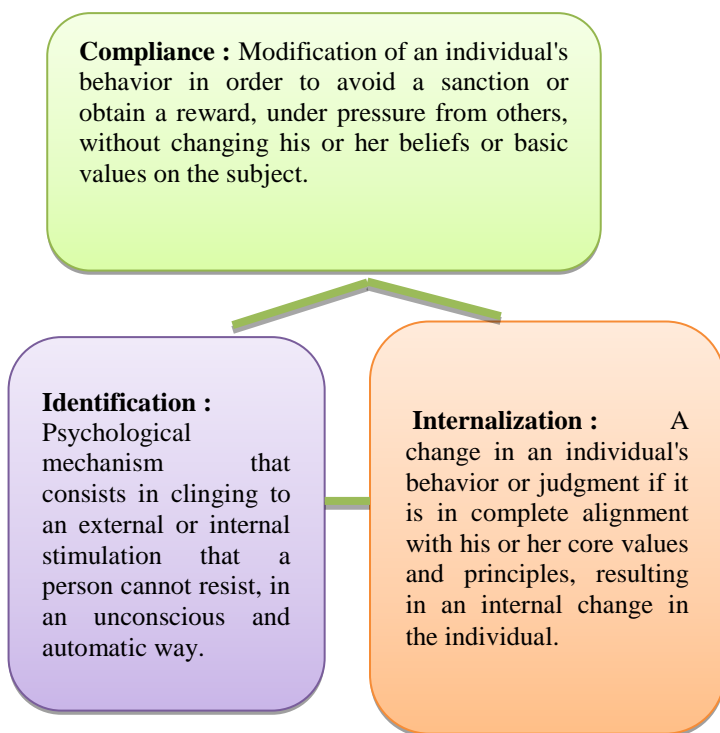


Fig. 2: Forms of social influence  
 Source: Personal elaboration inspired by Kelman (1958)

## 2.2 Understanding the Influencer Phenomenon

Influencer marketing uses the recommendation potential of influencers, more specifically than social network influencers, to promote products and services to target consumers, [17]. Indeed, influencers dominate social relationships nowadays, their power of recommendation defies any other means of communication, and they have

been able to establish a relational closeness based on trust with their community.

The phenomenon of influencers is an update of the « Two Step Flow communication » theory, resulting from a study by, [18], explaining that the media have a very limited impact on the consumer, so this theory could be applied to online opinion leaders or influencers.

Indeed, in the digital age and social networks, influencers are the intermediaries between brands and consumers, Katz and Lazarfield's communication model (Figure 3) applies perfectly to this concept of influence, [5].

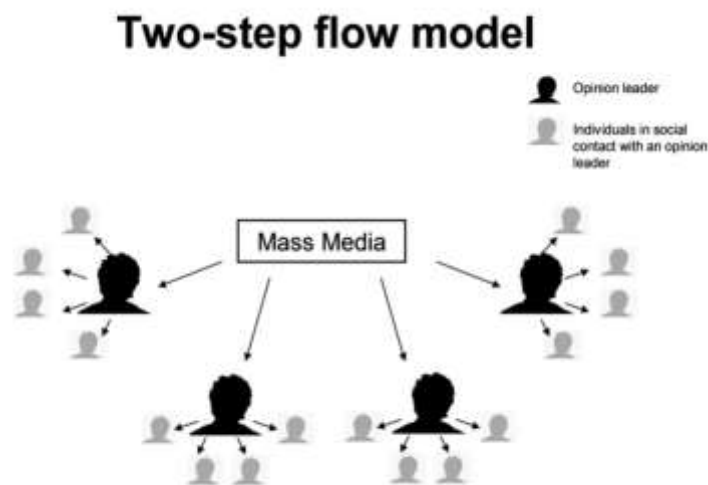


Fig. 3: The two-step flow communication model of, [18]  
 Source : Lazarsfeld et al. (1955)

We also find the concept of « opinion leader » in the diffusion of innovations theory, which highlights the ability of these individuals to influence the attitudes and behaviors of others through social influence, [19], based on several personal characteristics, [20].

Influencers are considered special individuals who can create valuable content, have high reputations in specific areas, [21], [22], and are followed by a large number of users in online social networks, [23].

The authors, [19], state that influencers are perceived as credible and trustworthy people, with a strong capacity to interact with their communities and trigger instantaneous electronic word of mouth. They play a key role in the marketing strategy of companies, creating varied content and generating engagement with brands.

Thus, we retain the definition of the authors, [24], who gives a rather global definition of influencers: « Social network influencers are third-party actors who have established a significant

number of relevant relationships and who exert influence on their community through content production, content distribution, interaction and their appearance on the Web ».

Indeed, influencers have several criteria that push their community to follow them and trust their recommendations. Among these criteria of influence that we find primordial, is the physical appearance of the influencer, which is the first point of relay between the influencer and the consumer. The main object of our research work is inspired by several theories that explain the theoretical functioning of physical attractiveness in its entirety.

## 2.3 Physical Attractiveness

### 2.3.1 Physical Attractiveness and Moroccan Culture

In Morocco, the definition of physical beauty is relative to each one, in the sense that Moroccans are torn between Islamism and ultra-connected modernity, a rather unlikely cocktail especially concerning the exposure of the body of individuals in public, particularly that of the woman, who must wear the Hijab according to the Islamic religion.

Reconciling the Islamic religion and the desire to assume one's own body in the eyes of all, remains a subject of discord in Moroccan society. However, today's Moroccan generation is more inclined to respect each other's choices regarding the way of dressing or for example to expose themselves on social networks. So defining physical attractiveness from a cultural and social point of view in Morocco remains divergent and subjective.

Moreover, physical beauty has an important place in Moroccan society and culture, the Greek philosopher, [25], believes that « Beauty is a better recommendation than any letter », Moroccan culture shares the same opinion, and names physical attractiveness by the notion of "Qoboul" which means social acceptance.

«Moroccan culture recognizes a certain gratitude towards physical beauty, defining it as a social key. The power of beauty acts without our knowledge and reaches a particularly receptive target », [26].

### 2.3.2 Physical Attractiveness: Theoretical Anchoring

Physical attractiveness has always been of interest to social scientists, particularly in the field of endorsement. Indeed, in persuasive communication research, [27], were the first authors to advance and

prove the hypothesis that the influence of a persuasive message is considerably stronger when it is issued by an attractive person than by a less attractive person. The author, [28], through his model of source attractiveness, supports this hypothesis and states that physical attractiveness is a driving force in persuasion and thus states that the effectiveness of a message depends on the characteristics of the source, in this case, its physical attractiveness.

In addition, the theory of interpersonal attraction, [29], which is the tendency of an individual to positively evaluate another person, states that physical attractiveness positively impacts interpersonal attraction. The theory of social exchange, [30], suggests that physical attractiveness contributes to the overall value of the exchange and offsets some of the costs associated with the exchange. The implicit personality theory of, [31], conceptualizes the effect of the stereotype of physical attractiveness, in the sense that if a person is judged physically attractive, a set of positive personal attributes is automatically attributed to him or her, and these attributes have a positive impact on the perceptions of consumers towards the influencer.

In the same sense, the theory of social adaptation suggests that comparison with an attractive person can be useful for self-evaluation and self-improvement, [32].

Indeed, the concept of physical attractiveness of the source has been the subject of several researches, [33], stating that in most research, attractiveness is defined as « the degree to which a person's facial features are pleasing to the eye ». The author, [34], considers an individual's physical attractiveness to be a social advantage and states that attractive people are people who have strong personalities while people who are not attractive are weak in personality and more likely to be influenced by others or environmental conditions.

In sum, several social science researches, stipulate that physically attractive people are more sociable, more popular, and less lonely compared to less physically attractive people, [35], have more choices of sexual partners, [36], are also more likely to get jobs, [37], and may even live longer, [38]. So many appreciations explain the positive behavior towards physically attractive people, possibly related to the fact that external attractiveness reflects positive internal qualities, furthermore, attractive individuals gain popularity quickly, [39].

According to authors, [40], individuals who are associated with an attractive person are evaluated

more favorably by others, thus this positive evaluation by others may cause followers to want to create an association with attractive influencers and therefore adhere more readily to their message. Indeed, Several researchers have focused on this criterion, and stipulate that the physical attractiveness of the source positively influences consumers' attitudes and purchase intention, [33], [41], [42], [43], [44], [45], [46], [47], [48], [49], [50], [51], [52], [53], [54], [55].

On the other hand, the effectiveness of the physical attractiveness of the source remains vague in the sense that it is effective in all product categories. Indeed, among the authors who affirm its effectiveness, we find, [51], who carried out a study that shows that the attitude towards the product and the purchase intentions of the participants were significantly elevated when they were exposed to attractive celebrities, but the product tested in this experiment is a product related to physical attractiveness, however, the authors did not address the case of a product not related to physical attractiveness. While a study conducted by, [53], shed light on this grey area by addressing the concept of physical attractiveness of an attractive source and a non-attractive source, associating them with two products, one related to physical beauty and the other not. Therefore, the results present the irrelevance of physical attractiveness in the process of endorsing a product not related to physical beauty and show the importance of source attractiveness in endorsing a product related to physical beauty.

Similarly, several authors have shown a relationship between source attractiveness effectiveness and product type, for example in the context of colognes, [55], men's clothing, [56], luxury fashion, [57], and beauty-related influencer videos on YouTube, [58].

Despite all of the previously cited research on the positive effect of the source's physical attractiveness on consumer behavior, the literature also highlights its negative effect on the consumer. Referring to the theory of social comparison, [59], the individual tends to compare himself frequently to his fellow human beings to evaluate his abilities, in relation to a particular theme, in a voluntary way, yet this theory was soon rectified, to integrate also automatic and unconscious comparisons, without having a voluntary control of the situation on the part of the individual, [60]. In the context of advertising, the authors, [61], [62], state that young girls automatically compare themselves to advertising models. According to, [63], individuals use advertising models as a reference for

comparison to determine their own perceived attractiveness. This comparison to attractive models often causes a strong decrease in satisfaction with one's own body, [64], [65], a reduction in self-esteem, [32]. It also has negative effects on self-perception, [62], so a comparison in this sense is devastating for the individual, [66].

The literature shows the negative impact of physical attractiveness on the mental and physical health of individuals. Being dissatisfied with one's physical appearance has a negative effect on self-esteem, leading to eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia and psychological disorders such as depression and isolation, [67], [68].

Therefore, in light of the theory, physical attractiveness has a positive effect on the consumer's attitude and purchase intention towards the product but has a negative effect on the consumer's psychology, self-esteem, self-perception, and body acceptance. Accordance with a study conducted by, [69], which stipulates that indeed physical attractiveness in an advertising context has a positive effect on the evaluation of the product and the purchase intention of consumers but is negative on their self-esteem and self-perception.

Given the theoretical findings, we attempt, through our study, to explore this phenomenon of influence in the Moroccan context, to understand the effect of the physical attractiveness of the influencer on the behavior of the Moroccan consumer and thus confirm, deny, or complete the theoretical facts cited earlier.

### 3 Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Epistemological and Methodological Choices

We aim, through this article, to understand the phenomenon of influence marketing, by exploring the influence of the physical attractiveness of influencers on consumer behavior in the Moroccan context. Our priority is therefore to focus on the experiences of the dominant actors in influence marketing, namely the influencers and the consumers, to understand their subjective perceptions of this criterion of influence while trying to interpret them objectively. Consequently, we find ourselves in the interpretivist paradigm, which is perfectly in line with our research vision, since interpretivists try to understand human behavior, [70], and seek to interpret meanings related to this behavior, the motivations and

subjective experiences of its actors in a specific context, [71].

Then, we turned to the qualitative approach since we are not trying to quantify or measure its effect but to explore, through the phenomenon of marketing influence, the importance of the physical appearance of the influencers in the perception and the behavior of the consumer, by going through its multiple facets, as well as its behavioral and psychological consequences on the individual, in a context and a cultural environment lived by the individuals concerned by the study, i.e. the influencers and the consumers in the Moroccan context. In view of the literature review developed earlier, the complexity of the phenomenon leads us to explore it further.

Indeed, we have used the method of methodological triangulation, which favors the validation of results, [72]. Two types of triangulation have been developed for our study: the triangulation of sources and the theoretical triangulation.

In a logic of triangulation, the fact of obtaining different angles of approach to a single phenomenon leads to a more global vision and a more refined analysis of the object of study, [73], and allows us to reach the complexity of human behavior, [74]. Therefore, in our study, we opted for a double unit of analysis, the Moroccan influencers, and consumers, in accordance with the triangulation of sources. Then, we confronted each other, in the light of the corresponding theories, with the aim of feeding the discussion of the results of our research, referring to the method of theoretical triangulation which will appear in the part "discussion of the results in the light of the theory" of this article.

### **3.2 Sampling Techniques: Multiple Cases**

Sampling is as important a step as data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The originality of qualitative research lies in « the approach of human or social phenomena through sensitive experience, in particular that of the social actors involved », [75]. In this respect, as we mentioned earlier, we opted, in accordance with our research objective, for a double unit of analysis, including the two social actors involved: the influencers and the Moroccan consumers, thus using the technique of multiple case sampling. The sample of influencers covers different themes and specialties, and the sample of consumers covers different profiles as well. Having a representative sample is by no means the objective of qualitative research, but rather to have a sample that reflects the

characteristics and richness of the context studied. Therefore, the multiple-case sampling technique is the most appropriate.

Our two samples consist of 10 people each, the number of 10 in each sample was decided by referring to the words of authors, [76], who identify, for phenomenological research « up to a maximum of 10 personal interviews ».

Or the author, [77], quotes: « Although there is no ideal number of cases, a number of 4 to 10 cases gives good results. With fewer than four cases, it is often difficult to generate a complex theory and its empirical basis is likely to be unconvincing ». On the other hand, this number was likely to be modified over time, based on a progressive analysis of the data, with the aim of testing the state of saturation of the information, in accordance with the theoretical saturation studies developed by the authors, [78]. Therefore, the addition of a new source in both samples was no longer necessary, since we reached a kind of saturation in the interviews, that is, no original information was brought by the participants in comparison with that already collected.

### **3.3 Selection Method: Selection Criteria for the Two Samples**

Carefully choosing a qualitative sample is essential, « To extract a sample is to choose, according to criteria defined in advance », [79], whose people to be interviewed are « privileged witnesses, people who, by their position, action, responsibilities, have a good knowledge of the problem », [80].

#### **3.3.1 Influencer sample: Netnographic Analysis**

We chose the social network Instagram as our field of investigation, and since it has become the most used social network by influencers worldwide and best addresses the phenomenon of influence, we therefore based ourselves on it, in the choice of the influencer sample for our study.

For the construction of the sample of influencers, we conducted a netnographic analysis of 465 Moroccan influencers' accounts on Instagram, based on several aspects :

- Their collaborations with recognized brands,
- The quality of the content published on their Instagram account,
- The frequency and relevance of the publications,
- The feedback and interactions of consumers towards their respective content, based on comments, the number of views, and likes to ensure that there is a real interaction between these influencers and their communities.

This is how we defined the sample of influencers composed of ten public personalities, very well known in Morocco, with powerful resonance, followed by hundreds of thousands of subscribers and with different themes (Table 1).

### 3.3.2 Moroccan Consumer Sample: The Directive Interview

It is necessary that «the sample presents individuals with characteristics that are highly related to the phenomena being studied», [81]. Therefore, for the development of the consumer sample, we conducted direct interviews, including closed questions regarding a set of criteria. These criteria were developed beforehand to draw up a profile of the consumers we were looking for, to optimize our understanding of the influence marketing phenomenon.

The goal of qualitative research «is not to have an average representation of the population but rather to obtain a sample of people who have a particular experience, characteristic or background to analyze. The goal is to obtain a sample that allows for the understanding of social processes. The sample is intended to include as many individuals as possible who carry criteria that can affect the variability of behaviors», [82].

Indeed, to obtain relevant results, we opted for Moroccan consumers with specific criteria (Table 2). The choice of the criteria of relevance of the interviewees was based on :

- The use of Instagram, as the most used social network,
- Its daily frequency of use,
- The number of influencers followed (more than 10),
- The number of purchases of products or brands following a recommendation from influencers,
- And finally that they are aged from 20 years old to 65 years old to achieve a certain socially significant diversification between generations.

### 3.4 Data Collection Tools

We opted for the collection of data through semi-structured interviews, which allows us to «explore in depth the different facets of the interviewee's experience», [83], and to understand the perceptions and the universe of the other person, [84].

### 3.5 Data Analysis Tools

It should be noted that all the interviews were recorded, with the permission of the interviewees, and then transcribed following the sociological transcription method. We then explored the results

of our study using two methods of analysis: lexical analysis and content analysis.

We conducted lexical analysis via Iramuteq software, R's Interface for Multidimensional Text and Questionnaire Analysis that allows its users «a set of processing and tools for aiding the description and analysis of text corpora and individual/character matrices», [85]. Our goal is to maintain the neutrality of interview treatments and their results which are often countered in qualitative research. The lexical analysis thus makes it possible to statistically process the interviewees' words while preserving the richness of the answers. We opted for the "word cloud" technique, as it allows us to highlight the most recurrent terms according to each category of the interview guide, represented according to different sizes (font size), highlighting their visibility on the word clouds, their frequency of appearance and their importance in the content of the interviewed consumers' and influencers' speeches, in a dyadic perspective.

The content analysis focuses on the meaning of the text and the content of the discourse. This analysis was done manually to retain all the information requested by the interviewees. These two analyses are complementary, which will allow us to come out with complete and constructive results.

Table 1. Summary of our methodological approach

<b>Epistemological positioning</b>	Interpretativism
<b>Nature of Reality</b>	Multiple and relative
<b>The scientific status of knowledge</b>	La compréhension
<b>Approach adopted</b>	Qualitative
<b>Fields of investigation</b>	The social network Instagram
<b>Analysis unit</b>	Double unit of analysis according to the principle of triangulation of sources: Influencer and Moroccan consumer
<b>Sampling Technique</b>	Multiple cases
<b>Selection method of the two samples</b>	Influencer sample: netnographic analysis Consumer sample: direct interview
<b>Data collection tool</b>	Semi-structured interview
<b>Data Analysis Tools</b>	Lexical analysis using Iramuteq software version 0.7 alpha 2 Manual content analysis

Source: Personal elaboration

## 4 Results

This part aims at exposing the various results obtained during our qualitative study. First, we will present the results of the lexical analysis using the Iramuteq software. This analysis aims at giving a first sketch to the readers on the perceptions of two actors of the study on the effect of the physical attractiveness of the influencer on consumer behavior.

In the second step, we will present the content analysis, which is intended to be rich in meaning and interpretation of the interviewees' discourses. We will then proceed to a more researched and advanced analysis of all the interviewees' answers, in order to extract significant and constructive conclusions.

### 4.1 Lexical Analysis

For the sake of understanding and exploration, we decided to present this lexical analysis in the form of a confrontation between the consumer and influencer corpora. We chose to process the data collected in the form of word clouds (Table 2) to understand the perception of the actors in each sample and to compare them to each other to extract common and distinct concepts.

Table 2. Consumer word Cloud VS Influencer word cloud

Consumers	Influencers

Source: Iramuteq output

The consumers' word cloud highlights two families of contradictory concepts: « blemish », « pimple » and « beautiful », « model », which suggests a divergence in the Moroccan consumers' words. Moreover, this illustration shows that the importance of physical attractiveness (« physical attractiveness ») of the influencer depends

(« depend ») on the « product » to be promoted, for example, products related to « skin » and « cosmetics ».

The formulation of the couplets « blemish » / « pimple » and « beautiful » / « model », on the part of the consumers, suggests a certain divergence in their discourses concerning the effect of the physical attractiveness of the influencer on their behavior.

The influencer word cloud also illustrates several conflicting concepts such as:

- « retouch » ≠ « natural » and « obese »
- « ugly » ≠ « beautiful »
- « fake » and « wrong » ≠ « true » and « reality »

We also find the words: « skin » and « form » that illustrate the influencer's physical appearance. However, the concept of likeability (« sympathy ») does not correspond to the influencer's physique but rather to his or her person.

We also find the word « fit » which can suggest that the physical attractiveness of the influencer must match the endorsed product.

The word « identify yourself » appeared on the word cloud and may suggest the consumer's need to be able to identify with the influencer; this will be detailed in the content analysis.

In sum, the word cloud of the influencers implies the same reasoning as that of the consumers in the sense that we also find several discrepancies in the apparent concepts, which implies that there were discrepancies in the effect of the physical attractiveness of the influencer on the consumer's behavior in the discourses of the interviewed influencers.

### 4.2 Content Analysis

We analyzed the content of the testimonies of the two samples with reference to the dyadic approach. Indeed, we confronted the returns and opinions of the two groups of interviewees, one to the other, to extract clear and constructive conclusions. We noticed, during our interviews, that the criterion of the physical attractiveness of the influencer aroused the interest of our two interviewed groups. Nevertheless, they are mixed, some of them consider that the physical attractiveness of the influencer does not have a real influence on the attitude and the purchase intention of the consumers, and others insist on the importance of this criterion.

To facilitate the reading of the content analysis of the two samples, we will use a naming code for the influencers and consumers interviewed: for example, I-1 designates the influencer number 1 illustrated in appendix n°1 and so on, the same for



the consumers; C-1 designates the consumer number 1 illustrated in appendix n°2.

We found that the interviewed influencers approached this issue from different angles. On the one hand, influencers stipulate that there are specialized techniques, such as Photoshop and filters, in retouching and adjusting imperfections in photos posted by influencers: « *Many people who use Photoshop retouch photos with filters or other* » (I-2), and make them so perfect that people don't find themselves in them and get lost in them « *having an advantageous physique, on the contrary, it can have a negative effect and push people to have less confidence in them* » (I-1), However, appearing natural with physical imperfections pushes consumers to identify themselves in them, reassuring themselves that they can resemble this kind of so-called public personalities: « *so there is nothing better than the naturalness of showing ourselves as we are with our imperfections, that's what is going to push people to believe in us and to identify with us* » (I-2). Thus they estimate that Internet users are rather interested in people who resemble them, « *people rather want to follow people who resemble them more so they are less access platonic beauty and surrealist physical and all that* » (I-1), adding that the credibility of the influencer is the criterion of influence that should be kept in mind in spite of his physical appearance « *Honestly the physical appearance doesn't matter as long as you are credible as long as you are real, whether you are handsome, not handsome, not tall, for me, it is not a criterion* » (I-6), and that there are several types of influencers, different from one another, having criteria that are not necessarily relative to physical beauty « *The truth I don't think that the physical it has a report because finally the influencers there are of all the sizes of all the styles of all the ages of all the social or cultural levels in short therefore finally each person finds his happiness with another person.* » (I-8).

On the other hand, influencers proclaim that the physical attractiveness is very important and approach it differently, they believe that women need models and references that can inspire them and encourage them to take care of themselves: « *Well on the physical attractiveness or the physical aspect plays a very very important role because the Moroccan woman today is looking to be freer or if not she is looking to excel where she sees herself in the influencer, for example, she looks at her way of dressing, she tries to more like her so if I take care of myself I put on makeup I dress etc so that woman there or the community*

*that follows me will try to do the same thing to stay in the image* » (I-3), affirm that it is necessary to have a certain concordance between the endorsed product and the physical appearance of the influencer « *Bah yes, it is not necessary to be obese and to present organic or healthy products* » (I-5), that the influencers cannot promote a product without having the physical appearance that will emphasize the advantages of this product, thus, it will encourage the consumers to project themselves hoping to have the same advantageous physical appearance of the influencer: « *...when an influencer has a physique a flawless skin for example and he sells the merits of a cream systematically girls or women who want to have the same nature of skin the same skin they will systematically he will sell them the dream they will want to buy in the hope of having the same skin or the same physique* » (I-4) And others mention the link between physical attractiveness and the nature of the endorsed product, in the sense that the physical appearance can be an essential criterion in certain types of products: « *A person who is going to talk about creams or this kind of thing, if she doesn't already have beautiful skin, she won't be able to do so. It will be difficult if you talk about toothpaste that makes your teeth white because you have yellow teeth* » (I-7), so they insist on the importance of physical attractiveness by giving examples of products that require its adoption.

As for the consumers, they were in the same frame of mind as the influencers, in the sense that they were also heterogeneous in their comments. On the one hand, consumers consider that the physical attractiveness of the influencer is essential and affirm that the influencer cannot succeed in promoting a product without having the necessary physical assets to highlight it and make it more credible, which would incite them to adopt it, to obtain the same result. Thus, they confirm an interesting point, already illustrated in the literature review, including attractive influencers in advertising is an effective way to reach consumers, Thus allowing them a certain projection in relation to the results obtained, as long as an identification has the attractive aspect of the influencer, actor of the promotion: « *Of course I think that an influencer must have a minimum of physical attractiveness if they promote a cosmetic product, for example, it is normal that they must have more or less a fresh skin so that they can be credible after that it also allows to emphasize the product and to incite the consumer to adopt it with the aim of having the same result* » (C-1), they also compare influencers to models on magazines and

stipulate that it is instinctive and obvious that influencers must be physically attractive to attract their attention as consumers: « *In my eyes all influencers are physically attractive, it's like for models in magazines that is to say we will never put an unattractive model to sell a t-shirt or sell jewelry* » (C-3).

However, on the other hand, consumers emphasize an important point: the fact of identifying with the physical imperfections of the influencer, and therefore the capacity that this product has to correct these imperfections, that is to say, by adapting the product to their needs, they specify that they prefer not an influencer with a flawless physique, but rather to show the advantages of the product over the apparent defects that the influencer has, thus facilitating the projection of the consumer and his incentive to adopt the product, with the sole purpose of restoring an existing and common defect between him and the influencer « *... if it's someone who says to me listen, I suffer from the same thing as you, look, I have pimples, he's showing me his pimples, here I am using this product, it's starting to have effects, I'll be more apt to follow his recommendations because he's like me, in that he's looking for It's better than someone who has perfect skin promoting a cream for pimples, you don't have any pimples. I've been following you for years, you don't have any pimples, how do you know that this cream works* » (C-4), they consider themselves unable to identify with an influencer whose physique is not similar to their own and who does not share the same imperfections as they do « *what will push me to follow an influencer in relation to this type of recommendation is that I identify with him or her, if it is an influencer who has the same morphology as me, or the same skin texture or hair as me, I will necessarily follow his or her recommendations in relation to such and such a product that is related to my own. If an influencer has the same morphology as me for example or the same skin texture or hair as me, I will necessarily follow her recommendations for such and such a product that are related to this physical feature. I will know that it is something that will be made for me* » (C-5), which means that this can be perceived as inappropriate targeting on the part of the brand. Others support the importance of physical attractiveness only in relation to the nature of the product being endorsed, « *...it depends on the product* » (C-7), « *to sell a t-shirt or sell jewelry* » (C-9) and argue with examples of products that require a certain physical attractiveness of the influencer, such as sports and

cosmetics « *...if he talks about sports so there it is mandatory to have a good physique or for clothes so it depends on the brand and the products if it is cosmetics he must have an advantageous physique so it depends* » (C-8), proving that physical attractiveness cannot be used in the approval of all types of products in the market.

And finally, other consumers break the link between the physical attractiveness of the influencer and their attitude and purchase intention, stating that it has no impact on their behaviors: « *...it doesn't matter if she's tall, beautiful or not for me, it's the same, it doesn't change a thing* » (C-2), « *No, no, the physical appearance is not a criterion for me, it's not because the influencer is beautiful that I will buy a product or not* » (C-6).

Following an in-depth analysis of the content of the testimonials from the two samples, the effect of the influencer's physical attractiveness on consumer behavior in the Moroccan context raises several divergences. On the one hand, some influencers and consumers interviewed address its positive effect, proclaiming that having an attractive physique highlights the advantages of the endorsed brand and encourages consumer projection, leading to the adoption of the product in question.

On the other hand, some point to the breakdown in the process of identifying consumers with physically attractive influencers, explaining that consumers are unable to identify with an influencer whose physique doesn't show imperfections and flaws they can relate to, thus discouraging them from projecting themselves and adopting the endorsed product. In addition, they add that exposure to highly attractive influencer photos and videos, due to filters and photo shops, leads consumers to psychological frustrations, loss of self-confidence, and a lack of self-esteem. And finally, they point out that the importance of physical attractiveness is highly relative to the nature of the product endorsed.

## 5 Discussion of the Results in Light of the Theory

We used the method of theoretical triangulation mentioned earlier in the methodology section, drawing on several disciplinary points of view, to confront, analyze and interpret our research results.

Let us recall that the influencers and consumers interviewed were mixed on the effect of the physical attractiveness of the influencer on the attitude and purchase intention of Moroccan

consumers, thus, we found that the influencers and consumers who refute its effect, express the same arguments and converge towards the same goals, and the other influencers and consumers who proclaim its importance, also come together in a common reasoning.

Therefore, in the light of the theory, on the one hand, the negative testimonies about the effect of physical attractiveness incorporate several points, which confirm the literature review, already presented previously. The first point, is the negative effect of physical attractiveness on the behavior of consumers, their mental health, and their self-esteem, which corroborates with the statements of several authors, [32], [62], [64], [65], [66]. Indeed, physically attractive people tend to rub off on the people around them, [40].

Another point that we find in their testimonies is the attraction of the consumers towards the influencers who resemble them, indeed, discovering similarities with the other, brings a feeling of benevolence, [86]. Therefore, the theory of social identity, [87], finds all its sense in this angle of vision, it stipulates, that through the process of social categorization, people classify and organize their social universe, according to criteria of resemblance or group membership, and thus motivated by the need to give meaning to the social and physical world that surrounds them, to strengthen their self-esteem. One of the hypotheses that, [59], demonstrated in his theory of social comparison, is that human beings have more tendency to compare themselves to people who resemble them, similar people, and therefore the degree of influence will be more significant in this case. Therefore, for the influencers, appearing with a natural appearance and close to reality with imperfections can lead to a strong influence on Moroccan consumers, on the other hand, appearing with a perfect and retouched appearance leads to a reluctance on their part.

On the other hand, positive accounts of the effect of physical attractiveness also address several points, such as that consumers need role models to inspire and encourage them to take care of themselves, which is consistent with social adaptation theory, [32], which suggests that comparison with an attractive person can be useful for self-evaluation and self-improvement. Other authors suggest that individuals use advertising models as a reference for comparison to determine their own perceived attractiveness, [63].

Influencers and consumers also mention the importance of the match between the influencer's physique and the endorsed product, according to

the congruence theory, [88], which states that the suitability of models to the product is an important variable in advertising, showing that the existence of congruence between the product and its endorser has a favorable influence on the consumer's attitude towards the product. Indeed, authors, [89], [90], believe that physical attractiveness can be a considerable asset for influencers because according to congruence theory, a positive attitude towards a communicator leads to a more positive evaluation of the message.

And finally, they proclaim that the importance of physical attractiveness is relative to the nature of the endorsed product, a question asked in the literature review concerning this point: is physical attractiveness effective in the promotion of all types of products? Indeed, the testimonies of influencers and consumers answer this question, confirming its theoretical answer quoted previously, [53], [55], [56], [57], [58]. Indeed, they proclaim the importance of physical attractiveness only in products related to physical appearances, such as creams, kinds of toothpaste, clothes, jewels, cosmetic products, and products related to sports.

## 6 Conclusion

The present study made us discover testimonies that stipulate that the physical attractiveness of the influencer has a positive effect on the attitude and the purchase intention of Moroccan consumers, thus confirming the existing literature on this subject. On the other hand, if we consult in depth the testimonies that reject this positive effect, we retain that the physical attractiveness of the influencer is perceived as being a break in the process of identification of the consumers in the influencer and harmful to their mental and psychological health. Nevertheless, the effect of physical attractiveness is limited depending on the nature of the endorsed product.

Thus, in the era of the humanization of marketing, influence marketing is taking its toll. Today's consumers need human references, opinions from real people, real feedback, and proximity to the product, based on tangible examples, hence the integration of all the elements specific to humans, while also considering their imperfections and flaws, which is certainly complex, but remains crucial in the world of influence marketing, making it close, real and accessible.

Given the social desirability bias, individuals tend to want to project a positive and rewarding image of themselves and thus give socially

desirable and pleasant answers. Or, touching on the social facade bias or the present reaction, which implies that the respondent adopts a facade behavior that corresponds to the fear of being badly judged through his answers. The respondent wants to impress and gives a rewarding answer that would help to give him a certain prestige, to avoid being badly judged. These two biases can, therefore, distort the intimate beliefs of the actors interviewed, limit their testimonies, and reduce the validity of the conclusions drawn.

We believe that this study will bring an important contribution to researchers and marketers working on the exploitation of influence marketing related to endorsement via influencers, based on their physical attributes, to better understand consumer buying behavior.

Looking forward, it will be wise to explore other avenues of research to complement this study by further exploring the link between the physical attractiveness of influencers and the culture of Internet users and also to examine the degree of influence of the physical attractiveness of influencers on the gender of Internet users on Instagram.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Influencer sample

Influencer	Age	Gender	Marital status	Level of education	Thematic on Instagram	Most used social network	Number of followers	Number of collaborations with brands
I-1	30	female	married	Bac+5	Sport and healthy nutrition	Instagram	445 000	several
I-2	36	female	married	Bac+5	Life style	Instagram and tik tok	485 000	several
I-3	39	female	married	Bac+2	Fashion and clothing	Instagram	210 000	several
I-4	37	female	Divorced	Bac+3	Life style	Instagram	547 000	several
I-5	Non précisé	male	married	Bac+5	Sport and Entrepreneurship	Instagram et twitter	212 000	several
I-6	34	female	married	Bac+3	Healthy diet	Instagram	27 600	several
I-7	Non précisé	female	married	Bac+5	Fashion	Instagram	151 000	several
I-8	31	female	married	Bac+3	Life style	Instagram	202 000	several
I-9	Non précisé	Couple (one man and one woman)	married	Bac +5	Storytellers and tavel	Instagram	108 000	several
I-10	30	female	married	Bac+5	Fashion and music in festival	Instagram	73 400	several

Source: Personal elaboration



## Appendix 2: Consumer sample

Source: Personal elaboration

Consumer	Gender	Age	Marital status	Level of education	profession	Number of influencers followed on Instagram	Number of purchases recommended by influencers on Instagram
C-1	female	34	married	Bac+5	Manager of an international sports franchise	50	20
C-2	male	39	married	Bac+5	Executive in computer science	20	5
C-3	female	35	married	Bac+5	Customer Service Manager	20	3
C-4	female	32	married	Bac+5	Responsible for monitoring strategic projects in the banking sector	12	1/mouth
C-5	female	26	single	Bac+5	Quality Engineer	18	10
C-6	female	36	married	Bac+5	Director of project management	100	3
C-7	male	64	married	Bac+4	retired	23	5
C-8	female	27	single	Bac+2	salesperson	300	5
C-9	female	24	single	Bac+2	salesperson	500	3
C-10	female	61	married	Bac+3	retired	20	3

### Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

The authors equally contributed to the present research, at all stages from the formulation of the problem to the final findings and solution.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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