

# **The Persuasive Efficacy of Advertising Appeals in Social Media Influencer Marketing**

## **ABSTRACT**

Influencer marketing has emerged as a crucial persuasion mechanism. Marketers look forward to the best possible strategies to increase customer engagement. Advertising appeals are pertinent tools and which social media influencer advertising appeals are most suitable as per the product category for effective consumer response remains unclear. There are studies addressing the issue as per traditional marketing settings, however the advent of influencers' marketing remain out of the scope of these studies. The present study aims to highlight various appeals available in the literature and their context (product category, online/offline settings) in literature. The findings suggest that as the results in literature are not consistent, the future studies need to empirically validate the results in influencers marketing context to find out the best advertising appeal (guilt/sensual, rational/emotional, utilitarian/value expressive) as per different product categories (slow fashion, beauty, food).

## **INTRODUCTION**

The internet has provided new modes of sharing, consuming, and marketing. Initially, Web 1.0 offered unidirectional provision of information to people where content generation was in fewer hands; Web 2.0 facilitates two-way communication by allowing user content creation for self-expression, lifestyle documentation, and promotions. Whereas, Web 3.0 introduced mobile devices and applications that resulted in the popularity of social media (Leung et al., 2022). The digital revolution affected various aspects of our lives e.g., from checking news updates on social media through mobile to booking a cab to ordering groceries

25 online; people have a presence in a virtual world (Chopra et al., 2021). There had been 6  
26 billion internet users worldwide as of October 2025 (Kemp, 2025), with 5.66 billion social  
27 media users accounting for 69 percent of the global population (Tamblé, 2026). Social media  
28 has gained tremendous popularity and is preferred by marketers due to its cost-effectiveness  
29 and interactive nature (Huang, 2015; Naz et al., 2022). Among various multimedia platforms  
30 such as print, and television, the highly interactive nature, multimedia format, and potential  
31 for dynamic communication make social media a great medium of advertising with elements  
32 like user-generated content, influencers, and feed algorithms (Pittman et al., 2022).

33 Vrontis et al. (2021) stated that “given the internet's scalability and speed of diffusion,  
34 such contributors attract a mass audience, build a fan base, and become a source of advice for  
35 their followers thus, developing into social media influencers (SMIs)” (pp. 618). SMIs are  
36 opinion-centric consumers who share their views regarding products and services on various  
37 social media platforms further affecting the purchase decisions of the masses. This new type  
38 of independent third-party endorser shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the  
39 use of other social media platforms (Freberg et al., 2011).

40 The overall style of SMIs' communication is identified as their advertising appeal and  
41 is considered a powerful mechanism to build a connection with the audience. Some examples  
42 of such appeals include sensual vs. guilt appeal, product-focused vs. benefit-focused appeal,  
43 and emotional vs. rational appeal (Kapoor et al., 2023). The suitability of such appeals varies  
44 as per the context and product in question. For instance, explicit appeals are found to be  
45 effective for gentleness-related products (body lotion) and implicit appeals are relevant for  
46 strength-related products (detergent) (Gong & Wang, 2022). However, the effectiveness of  
47 advertising appeals differs with regard to culture, product category, and media type (Okazaki  
48 et al., 2010). The present study aims to identify various advertising appeals prevalent in the  
49 marketing domain and to analyse their effectiveness from SMIs' point of view.

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## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 52 SOCIAL MEDIA

53 Social media facilitate online means of communication, collaboration, and cultivation among  
54 interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations  
55 enhanced by technological capabilities (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Social media is understood  
56 as the different forms of online communication used by people to create networks,  
57 communities, and collectives to share information, ideas, messages, and other content, such  
58 as videos. Social media has turned into an online medium of communication, conveyance,  
59 and collaboration among interconnected and interdependent groups of people. Whereas, the  
60 utilization of social media (technologies and channels) for the creation, and exchange of  
61 offerings among marketers and consumers makes it social media marketing. It encompasses  
62 social networks, online communities, blogs, wikis, or any other online collaborative media  
63 for marketing, sales, public relations, and customer service (Jacobson et al., 2019; Tuten and  
64 Solomon, 2019). Social media serve as interaction platform among people and enable them to  
65 create, share, and exchange information and ideas within virtual communities and networks.  
66 Mobile and web-based technologies facilitate social media to create highly interactive  
67 platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, embrace, and modify  
68 user-generated content. The social media's audience structure features- profiles where users  
69 tell others about themselves (i.e., their age, personality and interests); friends who are trusted  
70 members of the social network used (they are allowed to make comments that designated  
71 members of the network can read); groups within social networks help users find people with  
72 similar interests; social networks promote interactions among group members via "discussion

73 groups” and by allowing members to post pictures, music, video clips and other tidbits for the  
74 groups’ members to view (Schiffman, 2019).

75

## 76 **SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS**

77 Consumers are generating information and sharing experiences on social media via  
78 posts, tweets, comments, and likes with friends, family, and the masses. Many social media  
79 users create content (blogs and vlogs) and get acknowledgment for their expertise in specific  
80 areas. Because of their content creativity, knowledge, and uniqueness, these users build huge  
81 followers base on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube). With  
82 evident social media presence and their sizable network, such users can influence and shape  
83 the purchase decisions of their audience. These micro-celebrities are of great significance to  
84 brands and companies for marketing purposes and are termed social media influencers (SMI)  
85 (Delbaere et al., 2021; Farrell et al., 2022; Hudders et al., 2021; Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal,  
86 2022). The characteristics of social media influencers like perceived credibility,  
87 trustworthiness, and attractiveness along with caliber to satisfy the needs of relatedness,  
88 idealism, and competence impact the follower’s engagement (Tanrikulu, 2021).

89 SMI can shape the decision-making of their audience which depends upon the  
90 perceived expertise, authentic identity, and unique selling point that separates them from  
91 others (Hudders et al., 2021). SMIs deal with various subjects namely- food, travel, beauty,  
92 and fashion. Due to their impactful position, companies create brand awareness by endorsing  
93 their products through influencers. SMI makes money from paid sponsorships and brand  
94 partnerships on various platforms including but not limited to Instagram, Facebook, YouTube,  
95 and TikTok (Farrell et al., 2022; Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2022; Vrontis et al., 2021).

96 Many brands are collaborating with such influencers for brand promotions and compensate  
97 them to endorse their products making it influencer marketing.

## 98 **ADVERTISING APPEALS**

99 The employment of persuasive tactics to attract attention, generate relevance, raise  
100 awareness, and encourage execution on the part of the target audience is referred to as  
101 advertising appeal (Armstrong & Lukeman, 2010). The advertising appeals help to connect a  
102 brand with the consumer's requirements and induce purchase intention (Dix and  
103 Marchegiani, 2013). These can be categorized into hard appeal (also referred to as rational  
104 informational or utilitarian appeal) and soft appeal (also referred to as emotional affective or  
105 transformational appeal) (Dolan et al., 2015; Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Zhu et al., 2021).

106

107 **Soft and hard appeal:** Soft message appeal includes triggering human emotions to get an  
108 effective consumer response. Human emotions can be induced with the illustration of an  
109 emotional story that results in positive (happiness, security, pride) or negative (guilt, fear)  
110 consumer response. The soft message appeal is further categorized into feeling (affect),  
111 implicitness (subtle suggestion), and image (user product image). Whereas, hard message  
112 appeal emphasizes rational thinking by providing consumers with facts and logic behind the  
113 product claims and is processed intellectually. It usually exhibits health, performance,  
114 economy, and durability aspects emphasizing the utilitarian value of consumer offering. Hard  
115 sell appeal has been categorized into thinking (utilizing cognitive thoughts), fact (product  
116 information), and explicitness (direct suggestions) (Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Mueller, 1987;  
117 Okazaki et al., 2010).

118

119 **Individualist and collectivist appeal:** Originating from cultural comparison, individualist  
120 and collectivist appeal depict the prevailing trend in society. The individualistic appeal is

121 characterized by attributes such as independence, achievement, freedom, and a highly  
122 competitive spirit. Whereas, the collectivistic appeal includes harmony, family security, and  
123 interdependence (Han & Shavitt, 1994). The literature claims that the boomer generation is  
124 persuaded by collectivist appeal and Gen X is affected by individualistic appeal (Zhang,  
125 2010).

126

127 **Value expressive (symbolic) and utilitarian appeal:** The value expressive or symbolic  
128 approach includes building the personality of a product/brand thereby exhibiting the user  
129 identity in congruence with brand personality. The appeal aims to create an image of the user  
130 of the advertised product/brand. The utilitarian appeal exhibits the key perceived advantages  
131 that are expected of the product in terms of its functionality (Johar & Joseph Sirgy, 1991).

132

133 **Self-benefit and other-benefit appeal:**The appeal is based upon two motivational aspects  
134 i.e., egoistic (self-benefits appeal) and altruistic (others'-benefit appeal). The former exhibits  
135 individualistic benefits generally pertaining to the user for instance discounts; whereas, the  
136 latter exhibit benefits of other as a collective good for instance low carbon emission(White et  
137 al., 2009).

138

139 **Abstract vs concrete appeal:**Abstract appeal can be described through the use of vague  
140 terms where product features are described unspecific manner. Concrete appeal refers to the  
141 detailed and information-rich description of the product features. Literature claims concrete  
142 appeal to be more effective in consumer decision-making (Yang et al., 2015).

143

144 Jäger and Weber (2020) investigated the effectiveness of self-benefit (health) and  
145 others' benefit (environmental effect)advertising appeal in the context of organic food.And

146 results revealed that others' benefit acts as persuasive power rather than self-benefit.  
147 Emotional and rational appeals were tested in the sports products context and emotional  
148 advertising was found to be more effective in building the purchase intention of sports  
149 products (Ghasemi Siani et al., 2021). Kapoor et al., (2023) analyzed the effectiveness of  
150 abstract and concrete appeals with regard to sustainable consumption of utilitarian/hedonic  
151 product types. The findings revealed concrete appeal to be effective consumer purchase  
152 intention. While discussing about utilitarian and value expressive appeals, Johar and Joseph  
153 Sirgy (1991) claimed value expressive appeal is related to the self-congruity of the consumers  
154 whereas, utilitarian appeals depend upon the functional congruity of the products. The  
155 literature provides inconsistent findings as the variation in product category and suitability of  
156 advertising appeal also differs.

## 158 **DISCUSSION**

159 As of 2025, the global influencer marketing industry was valued at 23.59  
160 billion US dollars with projected growth to USD 27.54 billion in 2026 (*Influencer Marketing*  
161 *Platform Market Report [2026-2034]*, n.d.). This growing trend makes the influencer  
162 consideration vital from a research viewpoint. SMIs' have the capacity to engage mass  
163 audiences and influence their decision-making. To leverage this power, industry experts are  
164 utilizing influencers for their product/brand promotions. However, there is no single  
165 advertising appeal that is applicable to all the scenarios. From the viewpoint of SMIs, it is  
166 necessary to understand the effectiveness of appeals (guilt/sensual, utilitarian/value  
167 expressive) on the basis of a product under consideration and, the cultural values of the target  
168 group.

169 The present study suggests empirical investigation of the applicability of various  
170 advertising appeals used by SMI in beauty, slow fashion, organic food, and e-tourism

171 contexts. This will help the practitioners to utilize the utmost suitable appeals for maximum  
172 results.

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