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# **Trust as the Primarily Factor of the Three-Component-Model of Source Credibility of a Beauty Influencer on YouTube**

*Completed Research*

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## **Abstract**

Due to the increasing complexity of everyday life customers do not inform themselves in all consumption related areas anymore and therefore tend to rely more on the advice of influencers, e.g. on YouTube, in their decision-making process. At first glance, the videos facilitated by YouTube appear to be private and trustworthy testimonials. However, the products presented in a YouTube tutorial are no longer mere props for the YouTuber, but are part of a specific communication format with an advertising character – also known as product placements. Since the followers consider the influencer as a friend-like expert in the relevant product category, the special advertising effectiveness of influencers is traditionally located in the trustworthiness and credibility/ authenticity of their communication. Using the Source Credibility Theory, this study examines how trust and the awareness of a commercial purpose of a YouTube tutorial influences the individual attitude and purchase intention. The hypotheses are tested using structural equation modeling. Trust is identified as the dominant and significant factor influencing the follower's behavior and the propensity to buy.

## **Keywords**

Product placement, YouTube, consumer behavior, source credibility model.

## **Introduction**

The online video platform YouTube provides user-generated clips on various topics. Tutorials, also known as “how to videos”, represent a special sub-type of these clips in which private individuals share their own test experiences, application tips or opinions on a branded product (Lange, 2019; Schueller, 2020). Since the communication of the product experience comes from a source, the YouTuber, also known as the influencer, who is not ostensibly controlled by the product provider, the information presented may be of special value to the consumer. Social media influencers are said to have the ability to use their communication activities to impact their followers in their behavior, e.g. brand knowledge, brand attitude, brand image or the propensity to buy (De Veirman et al., 2017). Due to this marketing relevance, companies integrate influencers into their own branding and communication strategies and enter into long-term (contractual) cooperation's (Wille, 2018). The products presented in the tutorial are no longer mere props for the YouTuber, but are part of a specific communication format with an advertising character – also known as product placements (Xiao et al., 2018). The special advertising effectiveness of influencers is traditionally located in the trustworthiness and credibility/ authenticity of their communication messages (Lou & Yuan, 2019), since the followers consider the influencer as a friend-like expert in the relevant product category. The most widely accepted and used method to measure the impact of trust towards an influencer is via the three-component-model of the source credibility (Lai et al., 2017). The present study aims to prove the assumption that of the tree components of the source credibility model, trust holds the biggest impact on the buying decision of the recipient. Furthermore, the effect of trust on the consumers perception of the tutorial as an advertisement or a testimonial and the resulting purchase decision is analyzed by conducting an empirical survey with structural equation modelling (SEM) on the main target group of YouTube-students.

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***YouTube Beauty Tutorial***

YouTube was founded in the USA in 2005 and bought by Google in 2006 (Daeumler & Hotze, 2015). Since then, YouTube has been an independent subsidiary that can be accessed in 88 countries and 76 languages (YouTube, 2016). The platform was originally designed for the free exchange of amateur videos. It has developed into one of the world's most influential social media platform for moving image content (Fischer et al., 2022). In accordance with the trademarked slogan "broadcast yourself", the company offers an information channel for recipients through which video sequences can be consumed with a wide variety of topics and free of charge. The present study focuses on German beauty tutorials, also known as self-learning units or how-to-videos. An analysis of 201 randomly selected German beauty tutorials revealed that they can be characterized by six distinctive features: 1) a duration of about six minutes, 2) verbally and visually presented product evaluation – predominantly positive, 3) the gender of the presenter – mostly female, 4) presentation arrangements, 5) positive-cute linguistic usage, and finally 6) a resemblance to TV series (Schueller, 2020).

### ***Influencers***

Advertising has been using celebrities, testimonials and opinion former for decades in order to increase sales. By shifting the gathering of information away from offline channels towards social media, the importance of digital testimonials is growing (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018). Conventional advertising efforts are increasingly perceived as annoying and implausible while the influencer marketing is ascending. Due to the increasing complexity of everyday life customers do not inform themselves in all consumption related areas anymore and therefore tend to rely more on the advice of influencers in their decision making. The increasing impact of influencers is additionally conditioned by a higher trust in and value of personal recommendations compared to any other form of advertising (Wenzel, 2016). Social influence is no longer a privilege of classic celebrities such as film stars, musicians or athletes, but can also develop in society at large (Kost & Seeger, 2020). Additionally, social media stars have as much influence on their fans/ followers as other celebrities, if not more.

An influencer is a person who is ascribed social authority and/ or expertise on a specific topic by their followers. Concerning this topic, the influencer shares contents in social media – e.g. beauty tutorials on YouTube, with his/ her network of followers. By doing so, influence is exerted onto the followers, which can lead to a purchase intention (Kost & Seeger, 2020). Another important characteristic of influencers is their trendsetting behavior. New products are tested by them on a regular basis and as role models they give advice and guidance. Therefore, in accordance with the established theory of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations (DOI), influencers can be assigned to the group of innovators and early adopters (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Other typology approaches use the terminology of opinion leaders, advocates or evangelists. Although an opinion leader combines many characteristics of an influencer, such as expert knowledge, strong networking and early testing of new products, it should be noted that an opinion leader must be very similar to the people he or she influences. Several studies have shown that only approximately ten percent of people are opinion leaders (Marsden, 2010; Nyilasy, 2010; Cakim, 2010). If an influencer has a large follower base, it can be assumed that a big proportion probably corresponds to the influencer in terms of age, values and social status, but also that a non-negligible proportion has little or no similarities. Another type of influencers is represented by the category of advocates or evangelists. These fans of a brand or a product have a special position among the influencers. Fans often feel the need to convince others of their opinion, hence the denomination (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). The Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) differentiates five types of influencers to which the aforementioned distinctions can be assigned: "advocates" are loyal fans of a brand, who also include the prior mentioned evangelists. An "ambassador" is a company or brand accredited. With the category "citizen influencer" WOMMA groups people who have gained influence offline or online due to their strong networking. The class of "professional/ occupational influencers" embraces people who have a strong impact due to their job or career. And finally, the classic stars of film, music or sports are subordinated to "celebrity influencers" (Grabs & Sudhoff, 2014). The various grouping approaches have all in common, that influencers are opinion leaders who impact their recipients.

## **The Construct of Trust**

With the help of the Internet, it is possible to obtain product information in the form of reports from consumers in numerous ways. The statements of the personal opinion of the influencers regarding the product advantages and disadvantages are used by the recipient for the assessment and decision-making. The construct of trustworthiness is defined as the level of trust in and the acceptance of the communicator and the message placed by the recipient (Hovland et al., 1953). Numerous studies prove the influence of trust on the attitude of the recipient: Miller and Baseheart document that an especially trusted communicator can significantly change the attitude of the recipient (Miller & Baseheart, 1969). Also, McGinnies and Ward have detected that a trusted source produces the most profound change in opinion (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). Friedman and others conclude that when celebrities are liked, they are automatically trusted (Friedman & Friedman, 1976; Friedman et al., 1979). In addition, a survey by Nielsen of 28,000 Internet users in 56 countries revealed that around 70% of consumers trust product advertisements on the Internet, such as those spoken by a YouTuber (Nielsen, 2012). Other studies have also concluded that marketing communication measures in social networks, and YouTube in particular, are considered to be more trustworthy and informative than classic advertising on television or in magazines (Dehghani et al., 2016; Van-Tien Dao et al., 2014).

## **Hypotheses Development**

Based on the perspective of influencer marketing, according to which a YouTube tutorial has a hybrid character, a tutorial may be perceived both as an advertising campaign and as a YouTuber's experience report. However, recipients of a YouTube tutorial may perceive the mixing ration (advertising versus field report) differently. If one interprets advertising as provider-focused communication and the sharing of an experience report in the sense of personal communication, then a negative correlation in the perception of both communication formats can be postulated. Based on the aforementioned theoretical framework, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: The more the YouTube tutorial is seen as a testimonial, the less it is perceived as an advertising campaign (vice versa).

The Source-Credibility-Models postulate that – among other things – the competence, trust and attractiveness of a broadcaster, such as a YouTuber, have an effect on the influencer's credibility (Stanaland, 2011). As part of the concept of competence, recipients ascribe the YouTuber appropriate knowledge and qualifications in the product area. Trust implies that the recipients assess the YouTuber as a sincere and honest person. Attractiveness reflects whether the recipients perceive the YouTuber as physically attractive or as "just nice". Credibility then implies that recipients believe the sender's information to be true (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consequently, it is assumed that a credible YouTuber creates a high degree of follow-up to the presented recommendation, while less credible presenters have little influence (Pornpitakpan, 2004). For reasons of research economy, the mediator of credibility is negligible. Although the three determinants of competence, trust and attractiveness ascertain the credibility of the source, but a separate survey of the factor credibility does not provide any additional explanatory contribution, so that the influence of the three determinants is measured directly. In a YouTube tutorial, the YouTuber presents his/ her own experiences and opinions about a brand or a product. Consequently, the higher the YouTuber's credibility is assessed, the more pronounced the perception of the tutorial as a field report should be. If the recipient only certifies a low credibility to the YouTuber, the tutorial should be seen as a covert advertising campaign. In relation to the determinants of credibility, the following hypotheses arise:

H2: The stronger the YouTuber's perception of competence is, the stronger (weaker) the perception of the tutorials is as an experience report (advertising campaign of the brand).

H3: The stronger the trust in the YouTuber is, the stronger (weaker) is the perception of the tutorial as a testimonial (promotion campaign).

H4: The more attractive the YouTuber is, the stronger (weaker) the perception of the tutorial is as a testimonial (advertising campaign).

Already in 1986 Wiener and Mowen performed a study that manipulated source expertise and trustworthiness independently while the source attractiveness was hold constant. The results revealed that

increasing levels of trust resulted in increasing persuasion (Wienar & Mowen, 1986). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Trust has the highest impact, compared to the constructs of competence and attractiveness.

The research literature on advertising effectiveness ascribes a stronger impact to personal field reports than to advertising campaigns (Belanche et al., 2017). One reason for this can be seen in the greater credibility of the experience report compared to an advertisement. Many advertising models consider the credibility of the broadcaster as a determinant of the propensity to buy (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This also applies to the credibility of information that YouTubers pass on (Xiao et al., 2018). Therefore, the following two hypotheses are:

H6: If the tutorial is perceived as an experience report, the attitude towards the tutorial is better and the propensity to buy the placed product is higher compared to the constellation that the tutorial is not perceived as an experience report.

H7: If the tutorial is perceived as an advertising campaign, the attitude towards the tutorial is inferior, and the propensity to buy the placed product is lower compared to the constellation that the tutorial is not perceived as an advertising campaign.

## **Methodology**

The variables used in the research hypotheses represent hypothetical constructs that were operationalized in a written questionnaire using statements with a five-point rating scale. The statements used are based on literature research on existing item-formulations and scales. For example: the source credibility constructs were operationalized by the established validated scales of Wang et al. 2017, Lee and Watkins 2016 and Ohanian 1990, and the items of the tutorial attitude were provided by the scale of Rathmann 2014. A two-stage structural equation model was executed to test the proposed model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The construct validity was evaluated by a confirmatory factor analysis, while a path analysis of the hypotheses was conducted as an empirical test.

A popular category of products for YouTube tutorials is cosmetic products. The subject of this study is a YouTube tutorial by the YouTuber Snukieful, in which the YouTuber inspects the L'Oréal Lumi Magique Foundation in a daily test. Snukieful has been running a YouTube lifestyle channel under her nickname since 2012 and has more than 550,000 followers on her channel. The featured tutorial lasts 6.54 minutes and, like the majority of the previously analyzed tutorials (Schueller, 2020), features primarily a product benefits presentation by a female presenter. In terms of content, the tutorial can be divided into nine subject areas: A short, introductory illustration of the Snukieful brand is followed by the product presentation. On the display level, it is particularly important to mention that the placed product is not only focused, but also presented full screen. The third part of the tutorial contains the performance of two product application scenarios, namely applying the makeup by using a brush or the fingers. The product advantages presented here are striking and at the same time characteristic of beauty tutorials. The only indirect criticism of the eight advantages mentioned is the high product consumption when applying with a brush. The product application, which was recorded at 10.30 a.m. on the day of the shooting, is followed by a total of eight product ratings in the form of interim conclusions and one final rating. Finally, at around 6:30 p.m. on the day to the shooting, Snukieful concludes that the make-up is to be rated with German school grades of two to three. The tutorial ends with credits, in addition to the farewell, links to the last video, the vlog channel and a Snukieful channel subscription. It has to be mentioned, that the tutorial is only marked as a product placement on the third slide, with a little "P" in the left corner for a few seconds.

For the present research project, the basic population is defined as "all German YouTube users interested in beauty". However, for economic reasons such as time and costs, a full census should be avoided (Busch, 2016). In order to ensure that the sample is representative, the sample drawn should be similar to the population in its essential characteristics (Steiauf, 2017). The following empirical study is based on data from 287 students between den ages of 18 and 46 (60.3% women, 39.7% men) who – after showing the YouTube tutorial in a lecture hall in June 2017 at the University of Greifswald (Germany) – were asked about this in writing. Originally 294 students participated in the study, but due to missing values and

deliberate false statements in form of systematic answers, the usable total sample was reduced to 287 proper conducted questionnaires. Most YouTube users are of the age of 20 to 39 years (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This age group also forms a focus group of the beauty industry. In addition, people in this age segment often have the idea that they and their social status are determined by clothing and brands, which makes them very receptive to advertising measures (Bullen, 2009). The importance of a student sample is also underlined by the Social Comparison Theory: individuals have an innate need to compare themselves with other individuals in order to make personal evaluations and the individual of the comparison has been itemized to someone who is “at about the same level” (Jones & Gerad, 1967).

## Results

Table 1 shows the Cronbach’s Alpha for the hypothetical constructs and the Item-to-Total-Correlation (ITTC) for the corresponding items. The recommended value ranges are given in brackets (Zimmermann, 2017).

Factor	Cronbach’s Alpha (> .7)	ITTC (> .3)	Factor	Cronbach’s Alpha (> .7)	ITTC (> .3)
<b>Trust</b>	.882		<b>Attitude tutorial</b>	.878	
Item 3		.450	Item 4		.636
Item 4		.501	Item 2		.611
Item 2		.451	Item 1		.637
Item 1		.425	Item 3		.587
<b>Competence</b>	.883		<b>Propensity to buy</b>	.883	
Item 3		.394	Item 3		.343
Item 4		.345	Item 2		.296
Item 2		.359	Item 1		.425
Item 1		.367			
<b>Attractiveness</b>	.882				
Item 3		.348			
Item 1		.419			
Item 4		.502			

**Table 1. Values of Cronbach’s Alpha and ITTC**

Based on the values of Cronbach’s Alpha and the ITTC, the measurement model of the hypothetical constructs can be classified as acceptable. For further evaluation of the values the mean value of the relevant items was used.

Hypothesis H1 postulates an opposite specification structure of both variables, which is confirmed by a negative Pearson correlation coefficient with  $r = -.24$  that is significant to  $p < .001$ . However, the absolute level of the correlation coefficient indicates that this opposite perceptual connection is only weakly pronounced. In fact, a more differentiated comparison of both perception variables of the YouTube tutorial indicates a surprising heterogeneity. For this purpose, both variables were dichotomized to determine whether a recipient classified the beauty tutorial as an experience report or perceived it as advertising: 32.5 % of the recipients categorized the presented tutorial as a testimonial and no advertisement. 29.6% considered the tutorial as an advertisement by the brand and no field report, which is consistent with H1. 16.3 % of the recipients classified the beauty tutorial both as an experience report and as an advertisement. These people assign a hybrid character to the tutorial – advertising in the guise of recommendations. For

21.6 % of the subjects, the beauty tutorial represented neither an advertising campaign nor a report on experiences. For these recipients, the tutorial obviously contained only “cheap talk”.

H2, H3 and H4 postulate that competence, trust and attractiveness have influence whether the YouTube tutorial is perceived as an experience report or as an advertising campaign. A linear regression analysis was used for statistical verification. Test indicators did not signalize any noteworthy multicollinearity of the predictors. The variance inflation factors of all determinants are below 1.4. Table 2 lists the estimation results.

Determinant	Field report	Advertisement
	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .289	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .165
<b>competence</b>	H2: .16 **	H2: n. s.
<b>trust</b>	H3: .56 **	H3: -.56***
<b>attractiveness</b>	H4: n. s.	H4: n. s.

**n. s. = non-significant; \*) p<.1; \*\*) p<.05; \*\*\*) p<.01.**

**Table 2. Determinants of the perception of the YouTube tutorials**

Although no results are contradicting the hypotheses H2 to H4, only the perceived trustworthiness of the YouTuber is shown to be an influencing factor for the perception of the YouTube tutorial as an experience report or an advertisement: The more trustworthy the YouTuber is judged to be, the more an experience report an no advertising campaign is seen, which confirms H3. Finally – corresponding to H2 – the perception as a field report is stronger, the more competent the YouTuber is considered to be. The YouTuber’s perceived attractiveness turns out to be an insignificant determinant, H4 is vitiated. In addition, the values of Table 2 confirm H5’s assumption that trust has the greatest influence as part of the source credibility model.

The basic directional statement of H6 and H7 postulates that the perception as a field report (advertising) has a higher (lower) impact compared to the situation in which the YouTube tutorial is not perceived as a field report (advertising). The attitude towards the tutorial and the propensity to buy are considered as effect variables. A multiple variance analysis is used for the statistical evaluation. The dichotomization of the variable of the perception of the tutorial as an experience report/ advertisement has already been discussed. Table 3 lists the results. If a test for at least  $p < .1$  proves to be significant, the mean values are given. The number to the left of “vs.” indicates that the tutorial was perceived as an field report, the right number the reverse situation.

	Attitude towards the tutorial	Propensity to buy
	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .16	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .27
<b>Experience report</b>	H6: *** -.75 vs. -1.27	H6: ** -.16 vs. -1.38
<b>advertisement</b>	H7: * -.91 vs. -1.11	H7: n. s.

**n. s. = non-significant; \*) p<.1; \*\*) p<.05; \*\*\*) p<.01.**

**Table 3. Impact values of the YouTube tutorial**

Overall, the degree of explanation – measured by the corrected coefficient of determination (adjusted R<sup>2</sup>) – has to be classified as low for both examined impact variables. This implies that the advertising effectiveness of YouTube tutorials is largely unaffected by these two determinants. Based on the two

research hypotheses H6 and H7, the attitude towards the tutorial is better (worse) if the tutorial is assessed as a field report (advertising campaign) compared to the situation where the recipients do not categorize the tutorial as such. Furthermore, the propensity to buy is higher when the tutorial appears as a field report. Therefore, the numbers confirm the hypotheses H6 and H7. Accordingly, the perception of the YouTube tutorial as a field report achieves positive impact effects.

## Conclusion

The starting point for this study is the paradigm that products or brands are inevitably presented in communication formats such as YouTube tutorials. This may result in a possible deception of the recipients, if the audience trusts the YouTuber to depict honest product evaluations instead of advertisements. The results of this study provide an ambivalent picture in relation to this paradigm. While the perception of the presented tutorial as a field report has positive advertising impacts, no effects on the attitude towards the tutorial or the propensity to buy could be shown when the tutorial was perceived as advertisement. In the study design, recipients were interviewed, most of whom did not know the YouTuber. The results are therefore only meaningful for situations in which a customer has a consumption problem and is looking for a solution via YouTube tutorials. However, the study results also provide indirect statements for the influencer marketing: Above all, followers trust their influencers, followed by competence and a certified attractiveness. The analysis of the determinants of the perception of the YouTube tutorial as a field report or an advertisement shows that trust and competence promote the classification of the tutorial as a field report and thereby have a positive impact on the propensity to buy. This creates a stronger advertising effect on the followers, which corresponds to the principles of influencer marketing. As a limitation of the meaningfulness of the results, it should be noted that the recipients did not find the beauty tutorial beneficial: the average attitude towards the tutorial was negative, and the propensity to buy was low.

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