

An Exploration of Multimodal Intertextuality and Persuasion Based on Beauty Influencer Advertising in Social Media

Satu Eksplorasi tentang Intertekstualiti Multimodal dan Pujukan Berdasarkan Pengiklanan Pempengaruh Kecantikan di Media Sosial

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ABSTRACT

Social media is becoming a major marketing tool in the digital age. As a new advertising genre, beauty influencer advertising brings significant commercial value to promoting beauty brands. Beauty influencers often utilise complex discursive identity and persuasive strategies to promote products and brand images. However, only a few studies have investigated this new advertising discourse from an intertextual and interdiscursive perspective. This study selected 15 beauty advertising videos from three prominent beauty influencers on Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) as its corpus. Drawing on Bazerman's (2004) intertextuality framework and Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar theory, the study investigates how beauty influencers realize persuasive intent through intertextual strategies and multimodal resources. The results showed that the influencers heavily used evaluative strategies in intertextuality. The study also indicated that the interdiscursivity of such influencer advertisements manifested in three activities: product endorsements, product reviews, and makeup tutorials, with different activities having their discursive mixes. Additionally, visual elements such as gaze, distance, colour, and movement in multimodal resources play a crucial role in reinforcing the presentation of linguistic information, evoking audience emotions, and enhancing persuasive effects. This study not only reveals how beauty influencers achieve persuasive goals through rhetorical devices but also provides practical insights for professionals to enhance product communication efficiency by employing effective discourse patterns and multimodal strategies.

Keywords: Intertextual; Interdiscursive; Multimodal strategies; social media; Beauty influencer advertising

ABSTRAK

Media sosial semakin menjadi alat pemasaran utama dalam era digital. Sebagai satu genre pengiklanan baharu, pengiklanan pempengaruh kecantikan membawa nilai komersial yang signifikan dalam mempromosikan jenama kecantikan. Pempengaruh kecantikan lazimnya menggunakan identiti wacana yang kompleks serta strategi pujukan untuk mempromosikan produk dan imej jenama. Walau bagaimanapun, hanya sedikit kajian yang meneliti wacana pengiklanan baharu ini dari perspektif intertekstual dan interdiskursif. Kajian ini memilih 15 video pengiklanan kecantikan daripada tiga pempengaruh kecantikan terkemuka di Douyin (versi TikTok di China) sebagai korpusnya. Berasaskan kerangka intertekstual Bazerman (2004) serta teori tatabahasa visual Kress dan Van Leeuwen (2006), kajian ini meneliti bagaimana pempengaruh kecantikan merealisasikan niat pujukan melalui strategi intertekstual dan sumber multimodal. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pempengaruh banyak menggunakan strategi penilaian dalam intertekstualiti. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa interdiskursiviti dalam pengiklanan pempengaruh tersebut terzahir melalui tiga aktiviti, iaitu pengesahan produk, ulasan produk, dan tutorial solekan, dengan setiap aktiviti menampilkan campuran wacana yang berbeza. Selain itu, elemen visual seperti pandangan, jarak, warna, dan pergerakan dalam sumber multimodal memainkan peranan penting dalam memperkukuh penyampaian maklumat linguistik, membangkitkan emosi khalayak, serta meningkatkan keberkesanan pujukan. Kajian ini bukan sahaja mendedahkan cara pempengaruh kecantikan mencapai matlamat pujukan melalui peranti retorik, tetapi juga memberikan implikasi praktikal kepada pengamal industri untuk meningkatkan keberkesanan komunikasi produk dengan memanfaatkan corak wacana dan strategi multimodal yang berkesan.

Kata kunci: Intertekstual; Interdiskursif; Strategi multimodal; media sosial; Pengiklanan pempengaruh kecantikan

INTRODUCTION

In the age of social media and online shopping, the use of ‘traditional’ celebrities such as actors, athletes, singers, and supermodels seem to be fading away, with advertisers and businesses increasingly favouring social media influencers (Schouten et al., 2021). Lou and Yuan (2019) define social media influencers (SMI) as ‘one of the first and most important content generators: people who have expertise in a specific field and have cultivated many loyal followers.’ These influencers, including bloggers or users of different social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, and TikTok, who passionately share self-produced content on different products or topics (including beauty, health, fashion, investing, and food), can have a significant impact on the purchasing behaviour of their followers, becoming an influential marketing tool (Janssen et al., 2022).

In this context, a culture of digital beauty gurus has emerged and overshadowed all forms of mainstream advertising. These influencers use their makeup skills to work with cosmetics brands, earning substantial remuneration by raising brand awareness among social media audiences (Hassan et al., 2021). In the case of Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), the platform’s beauty brands have become one of the most popular content types for collaborating with influencers in recent years (Niu & Li, 2021). Currently, beauty content on this platform reaches more than 80 million users, and there are more than 1 million beauty influencers with millions of followers, making it an important sales channel for the beauty industry (Bao & Ran, 2022).

SMI has gained a reputation by successfully branding themselves as experts on social media platforms. Bhatia (2023) notes that beauty influencers serve as content creators, brand promoters, and friends, sisters, or teachers. They leverage their multifaceted roles and persuasion techniques to create content aimed at generating profit. Especially for beauty influencers with commercial attributes, they embed brand messages into edited media content and re-contextualise brands through entertaining narratives and contextualised stories, immersing users unconsciously in a consumption context and stimulating purchasing motivation (Vrontis et al., 2021). Interestingly, in the visual presentation of media technology, influencers' persuasion strategies can also be achieved through symbolic resources such as social distance (Choi et al., 2023), clothing, and accessories (Xie et al., 2023). Thus, this type of beauty advertising is in itself a complex and multidimensional communication. Although a great deal of research work has been conducted on beauty influencer advertising (BIA) in professional settings, such as business or marketing, current research needs a specialised study that addresses the intertextual analysis of influencer discourse.

In advertising, intertextuality is deemed a fundamental rhetorical device, or ‘persuasive metatextuality’ for advertising, which enhances the persuasive effect of ads while reducing the appearance of commercial nature. Digital advertising is a multimodal artefact that exhibits a more complex hybrid nature through the multiple identities and symbolic resources constructed by influencers. In addition, multimodality is a typical feature of the digital genre (Li et al., 2022), which utilises the interaction of various semiotic resources to make the interdiscursivity nature of video advertisements more complex and dynamic. Therefore, this study combined symbolic features to jointly explain the hybrid character of this advertising discourse.

This study aimed to explore how beauty influencers utilise rhetorical devices to attract young audiences for commercial purposes. More specifically, this paper focused on the intertextuality and interdiscursivity performance of independent and successful influencers. To achieve this goal, Bazerman's (2004) framework of intertextuality and interdiscursivity was employed, along with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal discourse analysis, to reveal the multimodal features in intertextual performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media advertising, as a complex form of advertising, not only disrupt traditional advertising discourses but also embody intricate semiotic and persuasive strategies. Against this backdrop, this study examined the body of research related to BIA, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity. This facilitated the identification of research gaps as well as theoretical and analytical approaches for this study.

BEAUTY INFLUENCER ADVERTISEMENTS

The ubiquitous connectivity brought about by the surge of social media has fundamentally altered the position of consumers within traditional power structures (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Ja'afar et al., 2024) and revolutionised the relationship between consumers and brands. SMI are online celebrities who influence their followers through one or more social media platforms. These influencers are increasingly used for engagement, promoting product information, and communicating regularly with their online followers about the latest promotions and updates through live video streaming and blogging (Hughes et al., 2019). In beauty advertising, influencers' credibility positively affects advertisements' effectiveness (Chekima et al., 2020), making it a new and effective advertising tool. These video contents, which help users select beauty products effectively, are highly popular among young groups, accelerating the professionalisation and commercialisation of beauty influencers (Schouten et al., 2021). However, this type of advertising may be more complex and confusing than we think. The confusion lies more in their close relationship with the editorial and entertainment sphere than in the advertisements themselves.

According to Maria and Yao (2023), beauty influencers often use a series of intimate words in their videos, such as 'baby,' 'princess,' and 'wife,' to create a strong psychological identification with consumers. This is a subtle way to make consumers accept the promotion of the products naturally. Since this approach is less likely to promote something directly, it can be considered more informative and credible (Fong, 2020). According to Bhatia (2018), beauty video bloggers serve as a new type of professional identity that breaks the boundaries between experts and amateurs. They shape different professional identities to promote commercial interests through 'hybrid forms of conversation.'

The emergence of this professional identity has further advanced the field of marketing and communication. However, there has not been enough research on the discursive means of influencers. Specifically, as a new genre of advertising, not much attention has been paid to how beauty influencers utilise complex discursive practices to promote products and services on platforms that achieve profitability goals. To fill the gap, this study examined intertextual and interdiscursive representations of BIA to reveal how advertising discourses are shaped digitally.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERDISCURSIVITY

The earlier traces of intertextuality and interdiscursivity can be followed in the works of Kristeva (1980). As Kristeva (1980) put it in her widely quoted definition of intertextuality, ‘any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another’. Therefore, intertextuality can be described as an activity in which a text seems to make references to another text.

Fairclough (2003) introduces the term intertextuality into critical discourse analysis and places it at the discursive practice level. In his model, a distinction was made between ‘manifest intertextuality’ and ‘constitutive intertextuality’. The textual manifestation of intertextuality is categorised into three types of intertextual relation, namely (i) sequential intertextuality, (ii) mixed intertextuality, and (iii) embedded intertextuality. In contrast, constitutive intertextuality is interdiscursivity that highlights the focus on the rules of discourse (i.e., genre). According to Fairclough (2003), the analysis of interdiscursivity combines the linguistic analysis of a text with the analysis of social events and practices. In general, intertextuality and interdiscursivity provide an interface with the social context in which texts are produced, enabling researchers to understand the interconnections between texts and their different meanings. On the other hand, Bhatia (2010) understands intertextuality as the borrowing, mixing, and embedding of resources across texts. He proposes that interdiscursivity refers to ‘various forms of hybrid and relatively novel constructs by appropriating or exploiting established conventions or resources associated with other genres and professional practice’. This sort of appropriation can occur in professional or promotional discourse through blurring generic values or semiotic resources such as ‘textual, semantic, socio-pragmatic, generic, and professional’ resources in a given context (Bhatia, 2010).

Theories of intertextuality (and interdiscursivity) were developed to analyse linguistic discourse. Currently, scholars have begun to focus on intertextuality in advertising discourse. Deng et al. (2021) analysed 80 advertorials and revealed the diverse persuasion strategies employed by advertisers in intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Yu (2023) identified two types of intertextual strategies in television beauty advertisements: discursive and character voices. These voices were designed to reinforce the media’s ideology. Based on this, Xing and Feng (2023) incorporate modal resources into the intertextual analysis framework, proposing that advertising’s intertextual practices are multifunctional. This framework offers a new perspective for understanding the creation of resources and communicative functions in the complex meanings of advertising discourse. Other studies have also explored the research of texts in intertextuality (e.g. Periasamy et al., 2017; Van Elk, 2023). Overall, these studies reveal intertextuality as a crucial discursive practice, essential for understanding the persuasive strategies of advertising discourse. However existing research has primarily focused on traditional television or online advertisements, with limited in-depth exploration of intertextual strategies in social media advertisements.

BIA is not only promotional but also manifests in the complexity and multifaceted nature of influencers’ persuasive power. Shen (2021) further emphasises that influencers achieve a high degree of intertextuality by recontextualising discourse practices to meet diverse consumer needs. Additionally, with the incorporation of symbolic elements, beauty influencers often utilise multimodal resources to construct meaning (Bhatia, 2023). Al-Subhi (2022) further highlights the rhetorical importance of visual elements in advertising and calls for broader application of multimodal theory. Given the situation, this study aims to explore the intertextuality and interdiscursivity of influencer advertising discourse and further examine the performance of multimodal symbols in intertextual characteristics. The analysis is conducted using Bazerman’s (2004) intertextuality framework. This framework provides clear criteria for capturing the key

dimensions of intertextuality (Bazerman, 2004) and, more importantly, plays a crucial role in revealing the persuasive strategies employed in advertisements. Besides language resources, this study adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar theory. This theory is well-suited for research focusing on the interaction between text and images (Machin & Mayr, 2023), particularly providing a powerful tool for analysing how influencers utilise visual resources to construct meaning.

METHODOLOGY

In the research methodology, the present study details the chosen social media platform and the criteria for data selection under that platform. Next, the researchers describe the data selection process. Finally, the analytical procedures used in this study are described.

DATA COLLECTION

This paper focused on beauty influencer advertisements posted on social media, specifically Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok). Douyin is a short video platform launched in September 2016 by a Chinese internet technology company, ByteDance. As China's second-largest online advertising platform (Liang, 2022), Douyin has become a key site for marketers to reach vast audiences (Guarda et al., 2020). According to official statistics, over 80 million users follow beauty-related content, with an average of 220,000 beauty videos uploaded and more than 600 million daily views (Xiang, 2020), making it a major consumption platform for the beauty industry. Therefore, it is essential to study the BIA uploaded on Douyin.

To investigate the intertextuality of BIA, this study had a specified set of data selection criteria, namely: (i) the time range of the video advertisements was between January 2023 and December 2023 to ensure timeliness and data stability, (ii) the influencers were mega-influencers (more than one million followers), as they embody brand value and exert strong influence on consumer behavior in the fashion and beauty sectors (Conde & Casais, 2023). (iii) these influencers were required to be professionals in the beauty field, since expert influencers enhance audience trust, making their recommendations more persuasive and increasing purchase intent (Hassan et al., 2021). (iv) the topics of the content posted were all beauty products, and (v) the videos contained commercial features such as direct sponsorships, discount codes, affiliate links, or product links. (vi) the influencers' economic performance was considered, as marketing effectiveness is achieved when purchase intention converts into actual buying behavior (Peña-García et al., 2020). Based on the above criteria, three mega beauty influencers who stood out in terms of influence, professionalism, and commercial revenue were ultimately selected, as shown in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1. The profiles of three of the most successful beauty influencers on Douyin

Douyin channel	Influencer Name	Age	Subscribers	Start date of the channel	Number of videos
Cheng Shian	Cheng Shian	29	26.29 million	2020	158
Luo Wangyu	Luo Wangyu	29	19.04 million	2019	347
Shenye Xulaoshi	Xu Yan	33	10 million	2018	926

Then, the researchers analysed the five most-viewed beauty advertising videos for each of the three influencers. It turned out that the videos watched more frequently by viewers are more meaningful and instructive in terms of their promotional approach than videos with less attention (Chen et al., 2023). Finally, a total of 15 videos were identified for transcription and analysed in this study. During the transcription process, each video was viewed three times: the first time to get an overall impression of the content; the second time, a broad, manual transcription of the monologue content was performed. Third, multimodal features are typical of digital media. Therefore, attention also needs to be paid to the intertextual representation of more specific non-verbal cues (modal resources) in the construction of advertising discourse.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Based on the selected data samples, we analysed the performance of intertextuality and interdiscursivity in beauty influencers' advertisements. This study employed Bazerman's framework (2004), which includes six techniques of intertextual representation. TABLE 2 shows the techniques of intertextual representation and illustrates how each technique is implemented.

TABLE 2. Techniques of intertextual representation by Bazerman (2004: pp. 88–89)

Techniques of intertextual representation by Bazerman (2004)	Realisation in each technique
Direct quotation	Direct quotation is usually identified by quotation marks, block indentation, italics, or other typographic settings apart from the other words of the text. In the video text, direct quotations can be presented as the original narration of the first author. Examples can be found in Extract 1 and 2.
Indirect quotation	Indirect quotation resembles a direct quotation in that it usually specifies a source by replacing original words and discusses what the influencers of beauty advertising think about the original words. Examples can be found in Extract 4 and 5.
Mentioning a person, document, or statement	This intertextual technique reflected in the text through references to celebrities, personal experiences, the medical field, and company backgrounds. Example shown in Extract 6.
Comment or evaluation of a statement, text or voice	In this intertextual reference, the second writer comments and evaluates the original statement or text positively or negatively. In the video text, this is reflected in the influencers' attitudes towards beauty products. Examples can be found in Extract 11 and 12.
Recognizable phrasing, terminology or 'voice' of a group of people or document	This intertextual technique refers to using terms, expressions or tones familiar to a particular group, institution or academic tradition in a text so that the text is seen as part of that group or discourse community. This is reflected in the video text as different types of discourse used by influencers. Example is shown in Extract 18.
Echoing certain ways of communicating, discussions or types of document	Genre, kinds of vocabulary (or register), stock phrases, and patterns of expression may be of this sort. In the video text, this is manifested in the different activity themes constructed by influencers in beauty advertisements.

The first four techniques (see TABLE 2) were described in correspondence with intertextual references, and the last two were treated as instances of interdiscursivity. The reason for this was that the first four intertextual techniques focus on obvious, superficial, or specific intertextual relations and identify specific sources. The last two techniques were more concerned with semantic associations such as implicit ideas, themes, genres, or registers and thus belong to the category of interdiscursive analysis.

Within this framework, researchers first discuss the intertextual characteristics of BIA, revealing how certain recurrent features of the advertising texts are utilized by the discourse community. Secondly, interdiscursivity can explore to what extent generic resources of a certain genre are appropriated to realize the influencer's marketing intention. Additionally, the researchers investigated the effect of multimodal symbols in interdiscursivity to explain the complex meaning-generating resources in advertising discourse. Given that BIA is a professional genre, its discursive practices heavily rely on diverse intertextual resources. This framework provides a more comprehensive explanation for the persuasive strategies and communicative functions in beauty advertisements.

RESULTS

The results of this study are specifically divided into two parts. The first part underlines the results of the intertextual analysis of the influencer ads. The second part explores the results of the interdiscursive analysis. In the exploration of interdiscursivity, the study found a complex mix of discourses and genres as well as multimodal semiotic features in this type of advertisement.

INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS RESULT

Intertextuality refers to a connection between texts. In this type of intertextuality, other texts are explicitly presented in the text under analysis and marked or cued by features on the surface of the text, such as quotation marks (Bazerman, 2004). In the video corpus of this study, direct quotations were recognised as the first author's original statement, with 7 instances found in the data. As illustrated in Extract 1, 2, and 3.

Extract 1 "If you feel like your skin is going to be a little bit flaky and you want it to look younger and firmer, you can go with a very mild peptide."

Extract 2 "When acne-prone skin is very bad, you need to get rid of the inflammation first. You can start with an acne serum with some medication to take it down. Then you only have some acne marks in this case, you can properly add some that can lighten the pigmentation, such as with this product[...]"

Extract 3 "Currently, it is generally suitable for people aged 25 to 30 who want to try anti-aging."

The three extracts were original words taken from an interview by a professional skincare expert, a medical doctor, and the founder of a beauty brand. In Extract 1, the influencer interviewed Ken, a blogger who had been practising professional skincare for 17 years. The video describes him as not only a medical student but also the author of many best-selling skincare books. The skincare expert mentioned the effects of 'peptides,' and the author, with the help of his quotes, tried to highlight beauty products that were relevant to her business interests. Even in direct quotations, these original words were still managed by the author's authority, reflecting the author's absolute control. In Extract 2 and Extract 3, the influencer invited two experts, Dr Qianqian Wang, a dermatologist, and Du Lei, the founder of the beauty brand. The use of expert identity can show the authority of the influencer, and the medical doctor status symbolises

professionalism and rigour and appears to be more independent of commercial interests. Therefore, it can reflect more authentic and credible information about the product, which can positively impact viewers' minds.

In our data, indirect quotation reflected the meaning of the source, but it was reused by the speaker by circling original words or providing its interpretation in beauty advertisements. With the help of the influencer's words in the beauty ads, indirect quotations filtered and reinvented the meaning without the need to use quotation marks, and such a narrative allows the meaning to be more thoroughly integrated into the author's purpose. This technical strategy appeared 3 instances in the data, as shown by the Extract 4 and 5 below:

Extract 4 "Uniskin is actually a very important member of the Chinese Anti-Aging Society. It has found that a very important feature of our Asian aging is that the upper eyelids tend to droop."

Extract 5 "Two very professional skin care experts around me both recommended this S5 generation. After I saw their recommendation, I started to use it, and the effect is really very obvious."

Without the use of quotation marks and the source's original text in Extract 4, the influencer reproduced the meaning of what the source said and transformed it into a word that reflected the original word interpretation. With the help of 'found,' the influencer tried to maintain the idea that the word was recreated, which merely delivered the information about what was uttered by the source. Unlike Extract 4, Extract 5 filtered the content of the source message further by referring to the original speakers and directly created the word 'recommend' with positive behaviours that bring the original writer's attitudes in line with the author's and help her convey promotional meaning. For advertising writers, using quotations (direct and indirect) generates a claim of authenticity that helps influencers realise their marketing intentions.

The mention of important persons or celebrities, relevant documents, and statements was the second most common intertextual technique used in this type of advertising, with a total of 15 instances found in the data. The persuasive character of these beauty advertisements was reinforced by the references to persons, statements, and related areas. Such intertextual references help to reveal the significance of the social practices in which beauty advertisements participate. This can be illustrated in Extract 6, 7, and 8:

Extract 6 "The combined use of Acid C was clinically proven before I taught this class, and it can make the skin better. If you doubt it because of what I said, I hope this clinic can give you some confidence, okay?"

Extract 7 "We did some tests on its efficacy, and published two papers on these tests respectively. It is relatively more friendly to sensitive skin."

Extract 8 "Starting from the age of 25, your collagen is lost at a rate of 1% per year. That's right, it's based on science[...]"

In Extract 6, Extract 7, and Extract 8, influencers referenced medical and academic concepts to prove the effectiveness of beauty products. These two fields' experimental and scientific nature can provide a solid endorsement of the product. Usually, these two fields are not involved in commercial purposes but rather produce scientific knowledge from a more severe and professional point of view, which can increase the audience's recognition of the product, as shown by the Extract 9 and 10:

Extract 9 "I have seen many girls with less acne recently, but the acne scars have not gone away. I have to tell you, I had the same problem back then, and I even felt inferior when people stared at my face."

Extract 10 "Many people have problems with whitehead to a certain extent, so do I. I used to have whitehead all over my face."

Based on Extract 9 and Extract 10, the beauty advertisements referred to public FIGURES (celebrities) but more often to the influencers themselves, unlike traditional types of advertisements. Relatedness is an essential characteristic of influencers (Hassan et al., 2021), and by using personal experiences as references, they become part of the audience and increase the favourability of their followers. More importantly, this approach brings higher value and trust to their recommendations, leading followers to interact with the product.

As for the fourth technique of intertextual representation, namely, 'comment or evaluation on a statement, text, or otherwise invoked voice,' this technique was the most used in the studied video samples, with a total of 27 instances found. In our corpus, influencers mostly used an appreciative, positive tone when evaluating texts. This appreciation can be achieved by qualitative adjectives and adverbs. As shown by the Extract 11 to 15:

Extract 11 "The second one used a **very stable** soothing serum that was paid for on the livestream[...]"

Extract 12 "You have never felt that a sunscreen can be **so easy** to apply."

Extract 13 "It's **very** spreadable, which means it gets on smooth and watery, and smells **really good**."

Extract 14 "The vitamin C in this Eucerin is **really excellent**."

Extract 15 "The oil-muscle ratio is **very careful and accurate**."

Extract 11 to Extract 15 reveal that product influencers positively evaluated products with adverbs and adjectives, such as 'very stable', 'so easy', 'really excellent', 'very careful', and 'accurate'. Describing and evaluating a product or service positively is the most popular promotional strategy in advertising (Bhatia, 2018). By commenting on the services or products in the advertisement text, the influencers tend to influence the reader's mind positively.

INTERDISCURSIVE ANALYSIS RESULT

Interdiscursivity refers to ‘various forms of hybrid and relatively novel constructs by appropriating or exploiting established conventions or resources associated with other genres and professional practices’ (Bhatia, 2010). Influencer advertising, a typical representative of genre mixing with typical communication purposes and constraints, is likely to be exploited by advertisers for commercial purposes. They may direct consumers through sophisticated rhetorical techniques and discourse strategies that a product or service will only improve the purchaser’s life if that product or service is purchased. Therefore, persuasion can always be considered the main task of advertising. Similar features of positive evaluation and use of persuasive strategies were observed in the video texts of this study.

DISCOURSE MIXING

The current study utilised Bazerman’s (2004) category of ‘using recognisable phrasing, the terminology associated with specific people or groups of people or particular documents’ to identify interdiscursive characterisation in the advertisement video. As shown by the Extract 16 and 17:

Extract 16 “This sunscreen **not only provides** adequate daily protection with *SPF30*, **but also** has a soothing *ceramide* system. When you use these *efficacious skin care* period, it can **not only help** you to **protect** against *UV* damage during the day, **but also** can **soothe** the *efficacious skin care* on your skin may cause some *intolerance*. You can **use** it during *sensitivity*, and **also can use** it during *intolerance*. It is **completely** sufficient for daily routine, and the price is less than 100 yuan.”

In Extract 16, the italicised phrase belongs to a specific term related to the genre of beauty knowledge. The only reason using specific terminologies was that the text of the video recommended this sunscreen and the efficacy of the product. The bolded text indicates the promotional strategy in which adverbs and verbs that users used to illustrate the inclusiveness of the product and its wide range of applicability and to persuade potential consumers to respond positively to the product. These features are considered typical of the type of advertisement.

Extract 17 “The Lamer Essential Oils are **truly top** quality and the ingredients can be **very luxurious**. This is a *two-way ratio of water and oil*, with *vegetable oils* like sunflower seed oil, which is high in *linoleic acid*, and sea-buckthorn oil which is high in *brass and vitamin* to give *antioxidant and anti-ageing effects* and has a **particularly good** repair ability.”

Extract 17 included a large number of medical terms with chemical components to highlight the influencer’s expertise. With this strategy, the influencer tried to give the impression that she had some specialised knowledge and was very familiar with the product’s ingredients to provide information as a skincare expert to gain the trust of her followers.

Other instances of recognisable phrases that reveal interdiscursivity performance were found in the corpus. Specifically, in Luo Wangyu’s videos, which mainly focused on professional knowledge and skincare tips, most of the terminology was related to product ingredients, usage

steps, and methods. Meanwhile, Cheng Shian’s videos covered topics such as sharing goodies as well as makeup teaching. In these texts, many professional nouns of product ingredients appeared, as well as words like adjectives and adverbs that express positive evaluation and effects, highlighting feelings and suggestions after use. Finally, Xu mainly focused on recommending products, and most of her video advertisements were related to company background, product efficacy, and the applicable population.

GENRE MIXING AND MULTIMODAL CHARACTERISTICS

According to Bazerman’s (2004) last category, ‘using language and forms that seem to echo certain ways of communicating, discussions among other people, types of documents,’ there was a wide range of genres, vocabularies (or registers), and modes of expression in the texts of the beauty influencers’ advertisements. Based on the analysis, we found that all influencers adopted different activity themes in their video advertisements, mainly by reflecting on product endorsements, product reviews, and makeup tutorials to promote their products. Different discourse mixes and modal features exist in these different activities, as shown in TABLE 3.

TABLE 3. Beauty influencer advertising activity types and interdiscursive performance

Activities	Frequency of appearance (%)	Interdiscursive mix situation	Multimodal strategies
Product endorsements	53%	Informational discourse and promotional discourse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The centre of the visual composition indicates the importance and salient features of the product. 2. Bright font colours help to activate positive emotions.
Makeup tutorials	34%	Pedagogical discourse and personal style of speaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Body movements complement the visualisation of language and play a dominant role. 2. The gaze forms a ‘demand’ behaviour that attempts to establish a connection with the viewer(s).
Product reviews	13%	Informative and commentary discourse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Close-up distances can build intimate interpersonal relationships with the viewer. 2. The combination of the visual and verbal can create effective and consistent content, providing more realistic and objective information.

Among the three types of activities, product endorsements, which accounted for 53 percent of the entire video, was the most frequent activity. Influencers mainly used their expertise and corporate background to increase the credibility of their audience. As shown by Extract 18:

Extract 18 “ANESSA, why is it so popular every summer[...]Because it is made by SHISEIDO. SHISEIDO started making sunscreen 100 years ago, 1923 to this year exactly 100 years. Even we now see the sunscreen on the label SPF value, PA value, this standard is Shiseido set[...]This one is more for daily work, more suitable for dry skin, better coated, better removed[...]Physical and chemical combined SP50+, PA++++, it doesn’t make it look fake or leave white.”

The influencer in Extract 18 recommended ANESSA sunscreen. As shown in the content, the author introduced the company background of the product, aiming to let the audience know the company's main business by stating that the company 'started making sunscreen 100 years ago'. The phrase '100 years ago' showed the level of the company's expertise in the field and helped increase the plausibility and credibility of the product in question. Next, the influencer pointed to potential consumers and persuaded them to use the product by positively commenting that it was 'more for daily work,' 'more suitable for dry skin', and 'doesn't make it look fake or leave white'. The combination of informational discourse and promotional discourse helped to improve consumers' understanding of the product's background information, and the inclusion of promotional discourse further triggered positive attitudes. In addition to the verbal style, endorsements can also be expressed through a combination of different visual resources. For example, when mentioning the product, the influencer images transformed into a scene with only the product, without any character attributes appearing. The product was placed in the centre of the frame in the composition, indicating the importance and salient features of the product (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), as shown in FIGURE 1.



FIGURE 1. Screenshot from a video advertisement for ANESSA sunscreen

When mentioning key terms, such as 'physical and chemical combined,' 'SPF50+', and 'PA++++', different font colours were utilised to emphasise them. In addition, placing these words on the top half of the screen to visualise the promise of the product helps to increase the message's idealisation and intensify the reader's visual stimulation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), as shown in FIGURE 2. In these endorsement videos, the influencers tried out the products with a plain face, visually allowing consumers to visualise the real effects of use, helping to make their evaluations more believable and less subjective.



FIGURE 2. Screenshot from a video advertisement for ANESSA sunscreen

Makeup tutorials, the second most common example, accounted for 34 percent of the video sample. This genre focuses on demonstrating the process and techniques of product use through hands-on instruction by influencers. As shown in the Extract 19:

Extract 19 “Lancôme Lotion was made for you, and here's the bottle. How to use it? The first step after washing your faces, shake it up like this and pour it onto this cotton pad[...]I use a lot of skincare products every day, but this one, see, this is really one of my empty bottles[...] I just pour it into my palm, a little bit every day, and then slowly use it up, and it just keeps my skin in a very stable and tender condition.”

In this activity, the nature of the tutorial was informal and manifested in the interplay of pedagogical discourse and personal speaking style. The pedagogical discourse was mainly reflected in nouns and verbs, such as ‘first step’, ‘shake it up’, and ‘pour it into my palm’. The influencers in the tutorials also attempted to establish their professional credentials through informal dialogue and conversation. For example, Cheng Shian ensured that her skills and methods were more valuable and informative by directly emphasising her experience (i.e., ‘I used a lot of skincare products every day’) as well as her qualifications (i.e., ‘This is really one of my empty bottles’) to make her more persuasive and authoritative. The mixture of these discourses not only expresses ideas in a way that is easy for the target audience to understand and persuade but also conveys the influencer’s personality, reliability, and relationship to the message.

Regarding the representation of modal resources, body movements (i.e., make-up techniques, postures) greatly complemented the visualisation of language and played a dominant role. In contrast, elaborated language complemented the detailed descriptions of the movements, making the discourse message more complete, as shown in FIGURE 3. We also found that the camera angles were all frontal to the off-camera participant, and their gaze or expression formed a ‘demand’ behaviour as if they were speaking of some kind of ‘demand’. When images demand, they demand, one could say the ‘goods-and-services’ that realise a particular social relation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). As these types of themed campaigns are mostly centred around makeup tutorials and techniques, it makes this type of advertising video seem less likely to promote something directly and is considered to be more informative and believable in a way that is more persuasive to consumer groups (Fong, 2020).



FIGURE 3. Screenshot from a video advertisement for Lancôme Clarifique

Product reviews made up 13 percent of the overall video sample. Although it was less in number than endorsements and tutorial activities, it showed its uniqueness in terms of persuasive strategies, as shown by the Extract 20:

Extract 20 “I've used this new product for a while and I'm satisfied every time[...]Actually, I reviewed the Armani foundation two years ago and this bottle is a huge upgrade over the old version[...]It's 7:25[...] It's 12pm, 4 hours past, look at the makeup[...]It's 6.14pm, nose is a bit oily, others are ok[...]It's 11.37pm, this foundation still looks decent after 16 hours[...]This foundation is suitable for a wider skin type, and then the error rate will be a little lower, more suitable for mixed oil to oily skin type[...]

Extract 20 presented a commercial review video for an Armani foundation. Unlike the previous two types, the influencer in this campaign did not appear as a merchant or an advertiser but rather as seemingly objective and neutral testers mixing informative and commentary discourse. It is worth noting that even with some objectivity, the author justified and credited the product by establishing her professional credentials (i.e., ‘I reviewed the Armani foundation two years ago’) and her past experience (i.e., ‘I’ve used this new product for a while’). To make the review more realistic, the influencer provided information about the foundation status at different times, such as ‘It’s 12.00 pm,’ ‘It’s 6.14 pm,’ ‘It’s 11.37 pm’, and ‘After 16 hours’, treating the audience as a participant and a witness. Doing so brought higher value and trust to her suggestions and evaluations.

In terms of visual resources, the state of the makeup was presented in very close shots, which clearly presented skin imperfections. A ‘close-up’ shot, showing the head and shoulders of the subject and the product tested, allows for a more precise visualisation of how the product is applied and helps establish an intimate interpersonal relationship with the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This shot was utilised in FIGURE 4. The study found that the images in this activity interacted with the language modality. Where the verbal serves as the primary resource to comment on the effectiveness of the product’s application, the image is visual evidence of the verbal. This combination of visual and verbal communication provides effective and consistent content that can be perceived as trustworthy, authentic, and honest by their followers (Hassan et al., 2021). This activity can be found to increase consumer trust and support for the product by perceiving influencers as authentic and reliable.

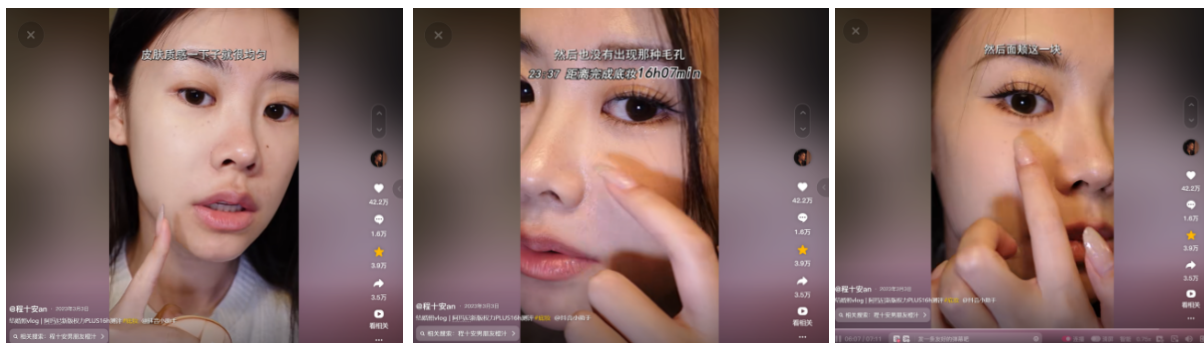


FIGURE 4. Screenshot from a video advertisement for an Armani foundation

Besides the interdiscursivity within a single activity, we also found that these three types of activities did not exist independently in the advertisement video but rather a pattern of hybridisation of different activities. In the case of Wangyu Luo's video, for example, the main activity of this video was expressed as a makeup tutorial. As the primary narrative mode, the video tutorial began with a simple introduction: 'Today, I will teach you a set of more advanced ideas for removing acne marks; learn and follow them.' Then, the influencer started embedding different discourse strategies in the teaching. Informational strategies were used to describe the ingredients, company background, and efficacy of the product. More specialised terms, such as 'exfoliation', 'oil/water separation technology', and 'ultraviolet light', were also used. In addition, promotional strategies were mixed with informational strategies or embedded throughout the teaching activity. After presenting the product, the influencer used multiple adjectives and adverbs to portray a positive image of the product, such as 'particularly good', 'excellent', and 'really good match'

Also, a personal style of speaking was included in the teaching activity. The style was present in abundance, such as 'I must say, the skin is really much better' and 'Just using the VC is like finding out your boyfriend is Luo Wangyu'. He emphasised his past experiences when teaching, demonstrating the ability to shift between informal teaching and spoken conversation. This also made the role he played more flexible. In addition, he made himself part of the audience by sharing his own experiences (i.e., 'I'm telling you, I'm having the same trouble') to bring higher value to his advice and evaluation. The reason for this was that by establishing a non-sympathetic relationship with the followers, the 'social identity' can be increased, thus increasing the favourability and trust of the followers.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the intertextuality and interdiscursivity of 15 advertising videos posted by three mega beauty influencers on Douyin. This study found that the most common technique used by beauty influencers in manifest intertextuality was 'comment or evaluation on a statement or otherwise invoked voice.' The other two commonly used techniques were 'the mention of important persons or celebrities and statements' and 'direct quotation'. Indirect quotation was the least used, with only three instances in all texts. From the perspective of interdiscursivity, examples of recognisable phrases and terminology from various disciplines, such as medical, corporate, and beauty expertise, were found in our corpus. This study also found that genre mixing was manifested in three types of activities in such video texts, namely, product endorsements, product reviews, and makeup tutorials. The product endorsements activity was the most commonly used

type of activity in BIA, which was manifested as a combination of informational and promotional discourses. Makeup tutorials, the second most common example of interdiscursivity performance, mix instructional discourse and personal style of speaking. Product review activity was less common than the first two types. It was characterised by a mixture of commentary and informational discourse. In addition, multimodality was a typical feature of digital genres. In particular, influencers constructed a creative and flexible discursive space through body movements, close-ups, screen layouts, and font colours so that the intertextual representations no longer follow a linear structure.

Based on the results, BIA discourse demonstrates two key features: de-authorisation and entertainment. De-authorisation refers to the shift of persuasive authority from celebrities or brand institutions to informal discursive patterns grounded in personal experience and everyday communication. Research has found that such influencers strategically construct themselves as ‘beauty experts’ by invoking medical concepts or professional terminology, thereby enhancing credibility and persuasive appeal through a discourse of professionalism. This phenomenon is closely related to the cultural context. Han and Balabanis (2024) points out that in the collectivist-oriented Chinese context, professional knowledge and credibility are important criteria for gaining group recognition. In contrast, in individualistic Western societies, influencers are valued more for their unique perspectives and personal connections with their followers (Semrush, 2022). Additionally, compared to traditional advertising, BIA is packaged as functional, entertaining, and educational content, thereby reducing the negative experience of hard-sell advertising for audiences. This result aligns with the findings of Xie and Lou (2020), which indicate that informational or entertainment value helps improve consumer experience and brand acceptance. It is worth noting that as commercial intent becomes increasingly concealed in videos, BIA has gradually evolved into a ‘native advertising’ format, blurring the lines between advertising and authentic content. While this blurring enhances immersion and persuasiveness, it may also raise consumer doubts about authenticity, thereby exerting complex influences on decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Influencer advertising has played an important role as an effective marketing tool in the beauty industry. Theoretically, this study can help us understand how SMI utilises intertextual and interdiscursive strategies to achieve their private intentions and marketing objectives. From the practical perspective, potential consumers can recognise influencers’ discourse strategies and techniques by understanding video advertisements’ genre mix and activity characteristics to make rational, objective decisions about the products being promoted. However, the current study still has some limitations. First, this study examined 15 beauty advertising videos. Future research could enlarge the sample to provide a more comprehensive and systematic account of the discursive features of beauty advertising, thereby enhancing the generalizability and robustness of the findings. Second, cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., between Chinese and Western contexts) could further illuminate how socio-cultural conditions shape persuasive strategies and discursive constructions in influencer advertising. Finally, future research could be expanded to other advertising domains, such as corporate, gaming, and emerging forms of digital communication, to deepen public understanding of discourse styles across different industries and provide guidance for professionals in developing effective discourse strategies.

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