



Influencer marketing on TikTok: The effectiveness of humor and followers' hedonic experience

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the determinants of the success of influencer marketing on the youth-focused TikTok, the fastest growing social network. It analyses the effects of influencers' account characteristics (originality, quality, quantity and humor) on their followers' hedonic experience and perceived opinion leadership, and how these impact on their intentions to follow influencers' accounts and advice. A survey of followers of a popular Spanish TikTok influencer showed that originality and opinion leadership play important roles and that, because TikTok is distinctive, humor increased the effectiveness of messages (through hedonic experience). Suggestions are made to advance the understanding of this novel phenomenon.

1. Introduction

Consumers increasingly use social media, particularly to gather information on which to base decisions. Thus, the figure of the influencer has emerged, that is, prominent social network users who other users consider to be role models. These other users follow influencers' advice and trust their opinions on topics such as fashion, lifestyle, photography and travel (Casaló et al., 2020; Audrezet et al., 2020). Influencers are increasingly seen as tools through which to communicate with consumers (Bu et al., 2022). It has been shown that influencers develop closer bonds with followers than do celebrities, and create more trusting and credible relationships (Johnstone and Lindh, 2022). Influencer marketing has been examined on platforms such as Instagram (Tafesse and Wood, 2021; Casaló et al., 2020; Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021), Facebook (Arora et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2019), Twitter (Lahuerta-Otero and Cordero-Gutiérrez, 2016) and YouTube (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), but not yet on TikTok.

TikTok is the fastest growing social network in the post-pandemic era. It was the most downloaded application globally in 2020 and 2021, achieving 1506 million downloads in these years, much more than Instagram, with 1048 million downloads (Forbes, 2020, 2021). Fig. 1 depicts these statistics. In 2020, 36.0% of US marketers employed TikTok for influencer marketing; in 2021, this percentage raised to 42% (eMarketer, 2022). However, despite the boom that TikTok is enjoying, followers' responses to influencer marketers (TikTokers) remain unanalyzed.

Table 1 summarizes previous studies undertaken into influencer marketing (by social media), and indicates the theoretical models employed and their findings. Previous literature on influencer marketing has focused on the features that publications should include to increase influencers' levels of credibility and opinion leadership (Casaló et al., 2020; Akdevelioglu and Kara, 2020). In their explorations of these features, these studies focused on content originality or authenticity as factors crucial for increasing influencing capacity (Audrezet et al., 2020; Casaló et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022), although other authors have analyzed the quantity and quality of posts (Tafesse and Wood, 2021; Casaló et al., 2020) and visual and verbal factors (Ki and Kim, 2019; Lee and Theokary, 2021). Nevertheless, recent research has found that followers' favorable responses toward influencers' publications depend also on affective factors such as influencer-follower closeness, homophily and emotional contagion (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Lee and Theokary, 2021) or positive emotions and hedonic experiences (Casaló et al., 2021; Yang and Ha, 2021). This stream of research suggests that traditional peripheral cues for persuasion discussed in the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) may play an increasingly important role in persuading followers (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Lee and Theokary, 2021).

Indeed, followers' responses to influencer marketing on TikTok may differ to responses made on other social networks because it differs from them in terms of publication format, content and target audience, as we go on to explain. The use of short informal videos as the main publication format, the use of humor to entertain followers and the focus on a

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very young audience suggest that the peripheral route of persuasion based on affective cues could be particularly effective in TikTok.

Format. TikTok is a dynamic audiovisual format, which allows users to post only short videos; these can be edited with tools provided on the platform (Haenlein et al., 2020). These short videos provide great interaction, can easily be skipped and are interspersed with similar content posted by friends (Belanche et al., 2019), thus users find the platform engaging (Forbes, 2022). TikTok is a more natural and spontaneous platform than YouTube, with its longer videos, and Instagram, that features more static formats with a carefully constructed aesthetic (e.g., high-quality, filtered photographs of restaurants). TikTokers generally appear performing daily activities, or parodies of them, in normal contexts (e.g., in videos in their own homes), which encourages closer and more informal connections with followers.

Content. TikTok content is characterized by its ludic nature (Wang, 2020), that is, its focus on entertainment and fun. Thus, TikTok is more oriented to entertainment and passing time than are Twitter and Facebook, which focus more on information, news and contacts with acquaintances/relatives (Haenlein et al., 2020). Due to TikTok's visual, fun focus, TikTokers can present products/services in an engaging and entertaining way. In fact, TikTok's advice to achieve brand success is "Don't Make Ads. Make TikToks" (Forbes, 2022), as viewers enjoy the experience of watching one TikTok after another. In addition, as shown in previous literature (Belanche et al., 2021a), this type of content resembles that created by friends, thus influencers might be perceived as close to the viewer, and their capacity to influence will increase.

Audience. TikTok is particularly popular among teenagers and the young (Haenlein et al., 2020), being the network par excellence for this target audience. Facebook and Twitter users are on average around 40 years old, and Instagram attracts people in their 30s, while TikTok attracts a younger segment, around 20 years old, with 40% of users being between 10 and 19 years (Haenlein et al., 2020). This age difference is important as younger people have different patterns of media consumption, being more resistant to traditional advertising in conventional media, that have essentially been abandoned by this audience (e.g., television; Xu et al., 2021). Therefore, given its huge growth, its format and content characteristics, and its great ability to directly reach younger users with important potential as consumers, a real opportunity exists to exploit TikTok as a channel for influencer marketing campaigns.

This research aims to analyze and understand the determinants of the success of influencer marketing on TikTok, a leading social media

platform among the young, and to provide practical guidelines to influencers and companies that want to take advantage of this opportunity. Consequently, our research posits the following research questions: RQ1. Are the determinants of influencer marketing effectiveness the same in TikTok as in other social media, such as Instagram? RQ2. What is the role of humor in the persuasion of followers on TikTok? To identify the relevant characteristics of the content posted by influencers on TikTok we analyze the extent to which key variables analyzed on other social networks (i.e., originality of content, quality, quantity), and their followers' beliefs that the influencer provides opinion leadership (perceived opinion leadership) (Casaló et al., 2020), are important on TikTok. In doing so, our research draws on the stimuli-organism-response theoretical model (SOR) (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974), a well-established framework in influencer marketing literature (Casaló et al., 2021; Belanche et al., 2021b). However, given the ludic nature of TikTok, and based on the theoretical approach of the peripheral information processing route described in the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), our study analyzes the roles that humor and followers' hedonic experience might play in users' intentions to follow accounts and their advice.

In a theoretical contribution this research integrates the SOR model (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974) and the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), a combination rarely proposed in studies in other fields (Sreejesh et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2021). Both models have been employed in isolation by scholars in the influencer marketing discipline, but not formally integrated despite their clear match and suitability. In particular, we argue that whereas the SOR model describes the sequential influence of stimuli on the organism (i.e., the consumer) and his/her subsequent response (e.g., behavioral intentions, Casaló et al., 2021), the ELM helps explain how the organism evaluates these stimuli cognitively (i.e., central route) or affectively (i.e., peripheral route) (Lee and Theokary, 2021). In a second theoretical contribution we analyze the role of humor, a key feature of TikTok content (Wang, 2020), and an affective peripheral cue for persuasion well-established by classic research (Batra and Stayman, 1990; Weinberger and Gulas, 1992), but surprisingly ignored by researchers in the influencer marketing field.

To test empirically the relationships between the variables, data were collected through a survey of followers of a popular TikTok account. It should be noted that the study should be considered exploratory because it is an initial investigation into, and analysis of, an issue as yet in its early stages, and that remains unaddressed in previous research (Brown, 2006). Thus, this work addresses a research gap in a

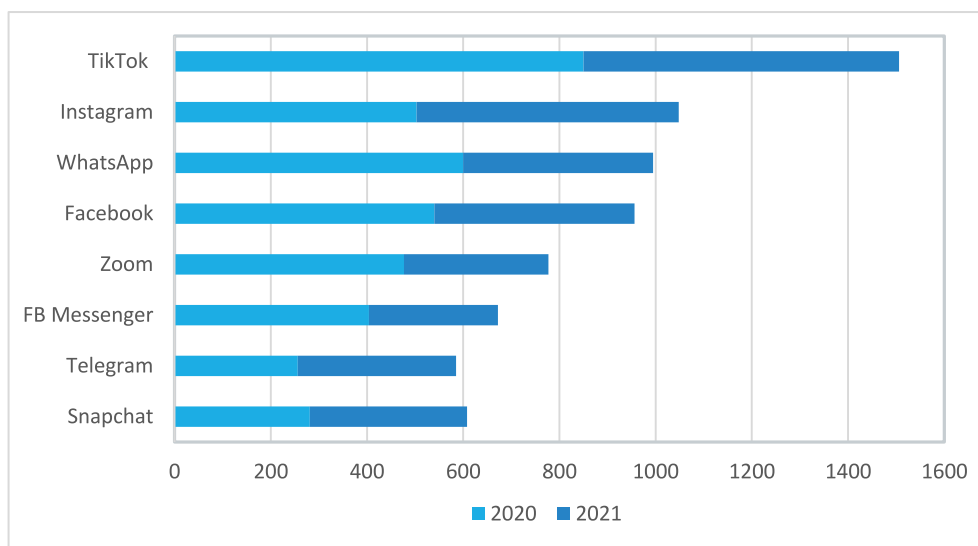


Fig. 1. Top 8 downloaded apps 2020 and 2021, in millions. Source: Own design, based on Forbes (2020, 2021).

Table 1
Literature review of theoretical models analyzing social media influencers.

Article	Social Media	Proposed Theory	Principal Findings
Lahuerta-Otero and Cordero-Gutiérrez (2016)	Twitter	Graph theory and Social Influence theory	Successful influencers tweet shorter and more straightforward messages, and add more hashtags and mentions, than those with less clout. They use the network to influence either positively or negatively, and follow many people. Visual factors affect taste leadership, whereas verbal factors affect opinion leadership. Expertise affects both, which in turn influence WOM and purchase intentions. These latter effects are mediated by followers' desire to mimic influencers. Influencer-follower homophily is positively related to parasocial interaction; however, physical attractiveness is not. Both influencer credibility and parasocial interaction increase purchase intentions. Product-influencer congruence increases (whereas ad recognition reduces) influencer credibility and followers' attitude toward influencers. Both perceived credibility and attitude reinforce followers' behaviors toward influencers.
Ki and Kim (2019)	Instagram	Influence framework, megaphone and doppelganger effects	Perceptions of influencers' creativity are essential on Instagram. Positive emotions and affective commitment partially mediate the influence of creativity on followers' interaction intentions.
Sokolova and Kefi (2020)	Instagram and YouTube	Elaboration Likelihood Model	When influencers have interactive linguistic styles, and/or styles closer to their followers, this increases their number of views/subscribers. Closeness and
Belanche et al. (2021b)	Instagram	Stimuli-Organism-Response theory	
Casaló et al. (2021)	Instagram	Stimuli-Organism-Response theory	
Lee and Theokary (2021)	YouTube	Elaboration Likelihood Model, Emotional Contagion and Language Expectancy	

Table 1 (continued)

Article	Social Media	Proposed Theory	Principal Findings
Tafesse and Wood (2021)	Instagram	Social Influence theory	emotional contagion positively influence followers' perceptions of the influencer's expertise, suggesting that traditional peripheral cues play a central role. Quantity of followers and volume of content reduce follower engagement, whereas quantity of users followed by the influencer (as a kind of connectedness) increases follower engagement. The influencers' specific domains of interest moderate these effects.
Yang and Ha (2021)	Douyin (similar to TikTok)	Uses and Gratification theory	Entertainment gratification is the most common motivation for using Douyin. Nevertheless, users motivated by socialization gratification are more aware they are being persuaded, have more intense parasocial relationships with the influencers and develop greater purchase intentions for the recommended products.
Lee et al. (2022)	Instagram	Uses and Gratifications theory	Authenticity, consumerism, creative inspiration and envy motivate users to follow Instagram influencers. Materialism (as an individual trait) is an antecedent of these factors, that in turn influence followers' trust and purchase behaviors.
Current Study	TikTok	Stimuli-Organism-Response theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model	Originality and humor affect followers' hedonic experiences and perceptions of influencer opinion leadership which, in turn, affect intention to follow the influencer's account and advice, respectively. Content quantity and quality play a less important role in TikTok than in other social media. Humor and the peripheral route of

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Table 1 (continued)

Article	Social Media	Proposed Theory	Principal Findings
			persuasion are important in TikTok.

topic of great interest and potential growth that remains ignored from the scientific viewpoint, influencer marketing on TikTok, and the factors that contribute to its success.

1.1. Influencer marketing on social networks

Influencers are prominent users of social media and are seen as role models by their followers (Johnstone and Lindh, 2022). Their followers feel close to them, as they believe they know a lot about, and are in touch with, them. This closeness allows influencers to influence others (Bu et al., 2022). Influencers gain very many followers, in particular, because they are seen as having specific knowledge/skills (Belanche et al., 2021b). Influencers create identities by communicating personal experiences that combine photos, videos and activities (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Similarly, it should be noted that followers actively participate in the construction and legitimization of the identities of the influencers (Lou et al., 2019) given they follow, interact with, defend and support them (Tafesse and Wood, 2021).

Moreover, influencer marketing has become a means of customer persuasion. In 2021, investment in influencer marketing was 13 million dollars; growth in this market is exponential, and it is expected that by 2028 it will reach 84.89 million dollars (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). In addition, in 2021 two-thirds of companies increased their influencer marketing budgets, and 80% of companies surveyed plan to allocate at least 10% of their marketing budgets to this approach (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021). It has been shown that almost 60% of brands use influencer marketing to achieve their communication objectives on social networks (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). All this demonstrates that influencer marketing has become fundamental for companies/brands in consumer engagement.

1.2. Theoretical foundations

The SOR model (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974) identifies three sequential stages that explain how stimuli (S) influence the organism (O) to evoke responses (R) (Choi and Kandampully, 2019). The research model proposes that TikTok influencers post videos with characteristics, that is, originality, quality, quantity and humor, that act as stimuli that are subjectively, cognitively and affectively processed by followers to generate perceived opinion leadership and hedonic experience (organism), which leads them to respond, for example, to perform behaviors such as following the account and the advice of the influencer (response).

In the present study, in an extension of the SOR model, we propose that information (stimuli) is processed by the individual (organism) in accordance with the theoretical basis of the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), that is, the most popular and used persuasion model in consumer research and social psychology. The ELM proposes that information is processed through two persuasion routes, a central route and a peripheral route. In the central route the individual thinks carefully about any arguments deployed before making a decision (Petty et al., 2002). In the online communication context, the central route is associated with the usefulness, quality, importance and reliability of the information and its source (Ki et al., 2020). The peripheral route involves less cognitive effort; the individual relies on simple signals to make quick decisions (Cialdini, 2009). Classic advertising/persuasion-based studies have shown that humor and affectivity lead consumers to process information peripherally; it seems that this form of communication is effective because it is pleasant, and bypasses any requirement to consider sales

arguments (Meyers-Levy and Malaviya, 1999; Batra and Stayman, 1990).

We propose to integrate the SOR framework and the ELM, both highly suitable analytical approaches in this context, because, in combination, they can increase our understanding of the effectiveness of influencer marketing. In particular, the ELM helps explain how the relationship between the two initial stages of the SOR model operates in the context of influencer marketing. In other words, the ELM explains the psychological mechanism through which the organism (i.e., the customer) evaluates the stimuli (i.e., features of the influencer's account), that is, how informational cues are processed cognitively (i.e., the central route) or affectively (i.e., the peripheral route) (Lee and Theokary, 2021). Despite their importance, very few recent studies have attempted to integrate the theories, and none have done so in the influencer marketing domain. These studies suggested that the organism evaluates stimuli via the peripheral route rather than the central when the affective cues are more important than the cognitive cues (Sreejesh et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2021). Thus, in the SOR sequence, the peripheral route is followed in contexts such as charities, where donors show empathy after an emotional appeal (Chen et al., 2021), with low-involved tourists reading reviews about destinations (Yadav et al., 2021) and with M-banking with serious privacy concerns (Sreejesh et al., 2016).

2. Hypotheses development

The present study seeks to explain two behavioral intentions of followers (intention to follow an account and its advice) prompted by influencers' actions. Following an account involves the follower in voluntarily viewing information and content produced by the influencer (Chu and Kim, 2011) and keeping abreast of his/her publications (Casaló et al., 2017). Intention to follow an influencer's advice is the extent to which followers intend to take this information into account and put into practice the influencer's suggestions (Casaló et al., 2020). Fig. 2 depicts the proposed theoretical model.

2.1. Perceived originality

Perceived originality could be defined as the degree of novelty and differentiation that some individuals manage to achieve by taking certain actions. Originality has been defined as the extent to which these actions are perceived as unusual, innovative and/or original (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003; Casaló et al., 2017).

The variable originality has been widely examined, in different contexts, in the literature. It has been identified as a direct antecedent of intention to buy products (Demsar et al., 2022) and intention to promote them through WOM (Moldovan et al., 2011). Followers on TikTok want to be aware of the latest trends, to view original and innovative content so they miss nothing, to be fashionable and to give a good impression: thus, original content promotes their intention to follow the influencer's account and advice. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. The perceived originality of influencers' posts has a positive effect on users' intentions to follow their accounts (H1a) and advice (H1b).

Within the framework of the SOR model, the degree of originality of an influencer's TikTok posts could also influence the organism, that is, his/her followers. The hedonic dimension of an experience reflects its emotional value and represents the benefits received in terms of pleasure, enjoyment or delight (Grappi and Montanari, 2011; Okada, 2005). Opinion leadership relates to the extent to which followers perceive that an influencer is a reference, or opinion leader, who provides useful and interesting information (Casaló et al., 2020).

On Instagram it has been shown that more original publications bring users enjoyment and provide better experiences (Casaló et al., 2017). Similarly, it has been found that more original posts generate greater popularity and reputation, and help influencers become opinion

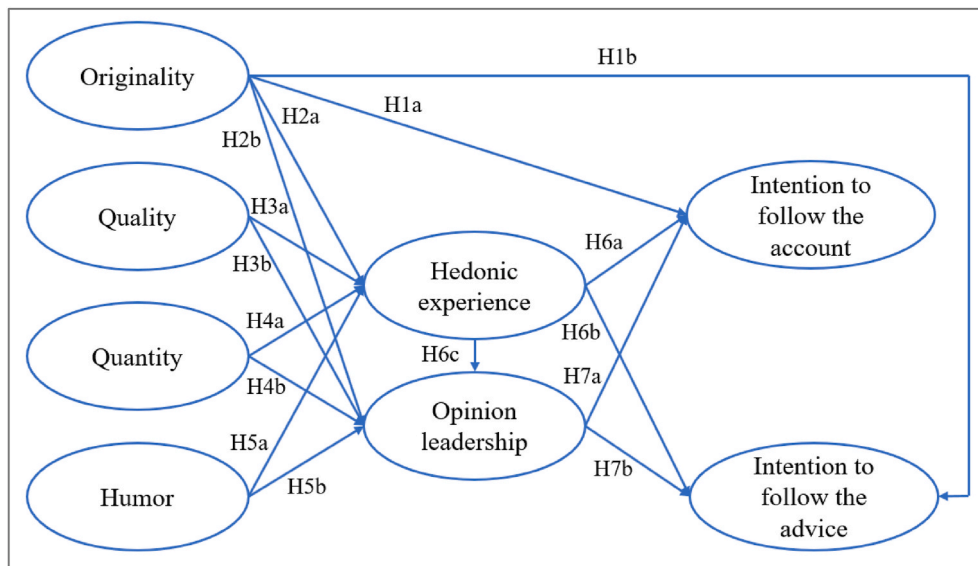


Fig. 2. Proposed research model.

leaders (Mendola, 2014; Casaló et al., 2020). The following hypothesis proposes that these effects may be replicated in the TikTok context:

H2. The perceived originality of an influencer's posts has a positive effect on followers' hedonic experience (H2a) and perceived opinion leadership (H2b).

2.2. Perceived quality

Quality content is information that approaches excellence, adds value, is considered important, meaningful and meets the audience's needs (Arif et al., 2020; Gummerus et al., 2012). High-quality publications affect both consumers' perceptions and evaluations (Casaló et al., 2015) and, through their symbolic meanings, provide more rewarding and pleasurable experiences (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). More specifically, in the Instagram context, it has been shown that high-quality content provides followers with a pleasanter hedonic experience (Casaló et al., 2017).

Moreover, the quality of publications has been shown to be equally important for building reputation in online communities. Specifically, Leal et al. (2014) found that when community members perceive that opinion leaders provide high-quality contributions, the opinion leaders' reputations increase. In addition, Mendola (2014) showed that when bloggers produce high-quality publications their blogs are perceived as professional and successful. Consequently:

H3. The perceived quality of an influencer's posts has a positive effect on followers' hedonic experience (H3a) and perceived opinion leadership (H3b).

2.3. Perceived quantity

Posting many publications on accounts has been shown to be associated with rewarding and pleasurable experiences (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). Casaló et al. (2017) found that when users view frequent publications they are less bored and enjoy new, and better, experiences. Moreover, frequent publications create active community participation (Audrezet et al., 2020), which can lead their members to maintain their interest, and attract others to the account, thus providing pleasant experiences that continue over time. Thus, the previous literature shows that publication quantity positively affects the user's hedonic experience on Instagram (Casaló et al., 2017).

Moreover, previous studies have shown that a relationship exists

between quantity of communications and users' perceptions of the influencer's opinion leadership (Huffaker, 2010). Specifically, Tsang and Zhou (2005) showed that, on Twitter, opinion leaders publish more material than other users. More specifically, they showed that a high level of online publications/responses is related to the ability to influence other users (Leal et al., 2014). For these reasons, and on the assumption that a higher quantity of publications means that viewers will have more content to enjoy, it is proposed that the frequency of publications will positively influence hedonic experience and perceived opinion leadership. Thus:

H4. Perceived quantity of posts has a positive effect on followers' hedonic experience (H4a) and perceived opinion leadership (H4b).

2.4. Perceived humor

Humor has been widely considered to be an important factor in persuasion (English and Sweetser, 2011). The ELM proposes that humor is associated with peripheral information processing, as humor-based messages are easier to process and understand on a superficial level (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992). Likewise, humor can generate affective responses (Zhang, 1996). Eisend (2009) found that, in an advertising context, humor increased affection and provided positive experiences.

In addition, humor has been shown to increase the attention audiences pay to advertisements, to enhance attitude toward brands (Eisend et al., 2014; Yoon and Tinkham, 2013) and to promote the acceptance of messages in simple and direct ways (Strick et al., 2013). The influencer's humor is also important for capturing the user's attention and creating communities of followers with ever closer ties, which enhances the effect that the influencer has on his/her followers (Al-Emadi and Yahia, 2020). Humor, in the TikTok context, may be particularly effective in creating opinion leaders (Wang, 2020), as entertainment and fun play a central role on the network. Emotions are contagious (Li et al., 2017). TikTok influencers in their short and funny videos convey their emotions through verbal and non-verbal language or by making the viewer laugh. When followers watch these videos, their emotions are automatically synchronized with those of the influencer (Lee and Theokary, 2021), resulting in a hedonic experience and a stronger perception that the influencer is friendly.

Moreover, due to emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002), viewers are more predisposed to listen to, and respect, a person they like, and they think is funny. Previous research has found that influencers' transmission of their positive emotions to their followers positively influences

their followers' perceptions of their degree of expertise in the topic (Lee and Theokary, 2021). For all these reasons, it is proposed that:

H5. The perceived humor of publications has a positive effect on followers' hedonic experience (H5a) and perceived opinion leadership (H5b).

2.5. Hedonic experience

TikTok is noted for providing creativity and enjoyment to its users, and it has been suggested that hedonic experience is important in the social media context, specifically for networks with a marked visual component, such as Instagram (Casaló et al., 2017). Facebook users have been shown to enjoy a pleasant and hedonic experience while visiting accounts, and to develop greater future intentions to follow them (Pöyry et al., 2013). It has been shown that Instagram followers' hedonic motivations are linked to their intentions to continue following, and interacting with, specific accounts (Casaló et al., 2017), and to follow the advice of influencers in order to resemble them (Mainolfi et al., 2022).

On the other hand, previous fashion and social network-focused literature has established that hedonism, and the satisfaction linked to it, are also related to perceived opinion leadership (Akdevelioglu and Kara, 2020). Lin et al. (2018) suggested that opinion leaders try to increase their followers' hedonic value to strengthen their perceived opinion leadership. Therefore, it is proposed that, in the TikTok context, a pleasant hedonic experience will positively affect perceived opinion leadership, intention to follow the account (to keep up to date with its content) and intention to follow its advice. Thus, it is proposed:

H6. The follower's hedonic experience has a positive effect on his/her intention to follow an account (H6a), intention to follow the influencer's advice (H6b) and perceived opinion leadership (H6c).

2.6. Opinion leadership

Opinion leadership has been said to be essential in marketing communications (Tsang and Zhou, 2005), and found to be positively related to intentions to follow social media accounts and their advice (Casaló et al., 2020). Social media users will follow the accounts and advice of influencers who exercise leadership because they provide interesting, valuable and useful information (Audrezet et al., 2020). For example, in the Instagram context, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) showed that followers' self-esteem increased when they bought products that had been recommended by celebrities. In addition, followers want to be like influencers and, to be so, they must keep up with the latest trends the influencers present (Belanche et al., 2021b). It is proposed that, if users perceive the influencer has opinion leadership, this will positively influence the intention of the follower to interact with him/her. Thus:

H7. Perceived opinion leadership has a positive effect on users' intention to follow an account (H7a) and intention to follow its advice (H7b).

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

The research was undertaken through a questionnaire-based, quantitative empirical study. The questionnaire addressed the research model's variables and requested basic sociodemographic information. The data were collected July–September 2021. The questionnaire was completed by 217 TikTok followers of a popular young Spanish influencer. This TikToker publishes entertainment-based videos featuring themes common among young audiences (fashion, jokes, how to flirt, etc.). The account has more than 125,000 followers and its videos have received more than four million views and one million “likes”.

The questionnaire was disseminated among this TikToker's followers through TikTok, Instagram and WhatsApp. When the questionnaires were received a verification process established that the respondents were, indeed, followers of this TikToker and that they had read and understood the questions. Once the database was cleaned, the final sample consisted of 160 valid questionnaires. An Amazon purchase voucher was raffled among the respondents. The sample was composed of 66.25% women and 33.75% men, 19.4% under 18, 53.75% between 18 and 20, 21.25% between 21 and 24 and 5.6% above 25. The age and gender distributions were similar to the generality of TikTok users, that is, people between 16 and 25, and more women than men (Statista Global Consumer Survey, 2021).

The sample size is comparable to previous TikTok-based research (e.g., Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz, 2020) that highlighted the difficulties in collecting responses on TikTok given its format, content and audience. It should be noted that TikTok is a social media focused on people around 20 years old (Haenlein et al., 2020) who watch short videos for entertainment purposes. Thanks to our collaboration with a popular influencer, we were able to approach participants directly. However, young TikTok users are reluctant to complete formal scientific questionnaires (Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz, 2020). In addition, TikTok posts do not permit the inclusion of external links, thus, the survey link had to be presented on the influencer's TikTok bio and in messages on the influencer's Instagram account.

From an analytical perspective, studies examining more than 150 cases are considered as having sufficiently large sample size according to the standards of exploratory research (Daniel, 2012). Although exploratory research tends to be qualitative, other techniques, such as observation and survey-based approaches, using limited sample sizes, can also be used to carry it out (Jain, 2021; Rachão et al., 2021). Our sample size also exceeds the minimum sample size requirements for using PLS as the estimation procedure (10 observations multiplied by the largest number between either the number of indicators of the construct with the largest number of indicators, or the number of exogenous constructs of the endogenous construct affected by the largest number of exogenous constructs; Davcik, 2014). Nonetheless, to ensure that the sample was sufficiently large, a G*Power analysis was conducted (Mayr et al., 2007). Assuming an effect size of 0.15, a significance level of 5%, a statistical power of 80% and on the basis that seven constructs were analyzed, the statistical software indicated that the minimum number of participants necessary to test the proposed model was 109. Thus, the sample is sufficiently large.

3.2. Measurement

Measurement scales adapted from the previous literature were used to analyze the constructs of the proposed research model. The variables were measured using 7-point Likert scales, from 1, “Strongly disagree”, to 7, “Strongly agree”. The Annex details the scale items and the studies from which they were adapted.

Face validity was tested through a variation of the Zaichkowsky method (1985). Specifically, nine experts in sociology, marketing and social media evaluated to what extent the items were “not representative”, “somewhat representative” or “clearly representative” of the constructs measured. Items were retained if the experts reached a high level of consensus about their appropriateness for measuring the targeted constructs.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Measurement model assessment

Table 2 summarizes the tests of the convergent validity of the reflective constructs.

First, it was found that the loading factor of the scale items exceeded the recommended 0.70 value (Hair et al., 2011), that the Cronbach's

Table 2
Reliability of the research model's constructs.

CONSTRUCT	ITEM	FACTOR LOADING	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	COMPOSITE RELIABILITY	AVE
Originality	ORI1	0.922	0.917	0.942	0.803
	ORI2	0.910			
	ORI3	0.947			
	ORI4	0.798			
Humor	HUM1	0.727	0.738	0.852	0.658
	HUM2	0.857			
	HUM3	0.843			
Hedonic experience	HED1	0.940	0.945	0.960	0.858
	HED2	0.926			
	HED3	0.912			
	HED4	0.925			
Opinion leadership	OLEA1	0.903	0.908	0.931	0.731
	OLEA2	0.885			
	OLEA3	0.818			
	OLEA4	0.852			
	OLEA5	0.813			
Intention to follow the account	IFAC1	0.963	0.961	0.975	0.928
	IFAC2	0.975			
	IFAC3	0.951			
Intention to follow the advice	IFAD1	0.905	0.937	0.960	0.889
	IFAD2	0.961			
	IFAD3	0.961			

alpha values exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) and that composite reliability exceeded the minimum value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The convergent validity of the reflective constructs was confirmed based on an analysis of the average variance extracted (AVE) values, all above 0.50 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

The discriminant validity (see Table 3) of each construct was verified using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and through an analysis of their heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT), which returned values below 0.85 for all variables (Kline, 2011).

4.2. Structural model assessment

Smart PLS 3.0 was used to analyze the data and to test the hypotheses. PLS-SEM was employed because it is a particularly suitable estimation procedure for exploratory studies or which include novel relationships unexamined in previous empirical research (e.g., humor in this field) (Roldán and Sánchez-Franco, 2012; Akdim et al., 2022). PLS modeling is especially useful for identifying the main drivers of a construct when the sample is relatively small (Roldán and Sánchez-Franco, 2012), in particular when testing exploratory models formed by numerous variables under normality and non-normality data distribution assumptions (Flavián et al., 2022), as in our study. In addition, PLS is an analytical method widely employed in well-established journals (Akdim et al., 2022; Flavián et al., 2022; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Consequently, Smart PLS, and bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples (Chin et al., 2003), were used to assess the structural model.

The goodness-of-fit analysis of the structural model reported a normalized fit index (NFI) value of 0.823, lower than the recommended

0.90 threshold (Hu and Bentler, 1998). Similarly, the standardized residual mean square root (SRMR) value of the research model was 0.072, less than the maximum threshold of 0.080 recommended in the previous literature (Hu and Bentler, 1998). Thus, the research model has adequate goodness-of-fit.

After confirming the model's fit, the hypotheses were tested. The results are at Table 4.

The results showed the following. Originality has a direct effect on intention to follow the account ($\beta = 0.312; p < 0.05$) and on intention to follow its advice ($\beta = 0.530; p < 0.01$), supporting H1a and H1b. Originality has a positive, significant influence on hedonic experience ($\beta = 0.221; p < 0.10$) and on opinion leadership ($\beta = 0.170; p < 0.05$), supporting H2a and H2b. Quality has a positive, significant influence on hedonic experience ($\beta = 0.209; p < 0.10$), but not on opinion leadership ($\beta = 0.105; p > 0.10$), supporting H3a, but rejecting H3b. Surprisingly, and contrary to the prediction in H4a, quantity significantly, negatively affects hedonic experience ($\beta = -0.158; p < 0.10$); in addition, it does not affect opinion leadership ($\beta = -0.011; p > 0.10$). Therefore, H4a and H4b are not supported. Finally, as to the account's characteristics, perceived humor positively and significantly affects hedonic experience ($\beta = 0.243; p < 0.01$), supporting H5a, but it does not significantly influence perceived opinion leadership ($\beta = 0.096; p > 0.10$), rejecting H5b.

Hedonic experience significantly, positively affected both intention to follow the account ($\beta = 0.246; p < 0.10$), supporting H6a, and opinion leadership ($\beta = 0.516; p < 0.01$), supporting H6c. However, it does not affect intention to follow advice ($\beta = -0.012; p > 0.10$), rejecting H6b. Finally, opinion leadership does not influence intention to follow the account ($\beta = 0.146; p > 0.10$), rejecting H7a; however, it does influence

Table 3
Discriminant validity.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(1) Originality	0.896	0.640	0.460	0.736	0.461	0.553	0.520	0.702
(2) Quality	0.616	NA	0.583	0.749	0.423	0.495	0.527	0.481
(3) Quantity	0.442	0.583	NA	0.549	0.181	0.274	0.287	0.365
(4) Humor	0.611	0.660	0.476	0.811	0.519	0.587	0.552	0.546
(5) Hedonic experience	0.428	0.411	0.177	0.442	0.926	0.717	0.501	0.420
(6) Opinion leadership	0.509	0.478	0.262	0.489	0.672	0.855	0.495	0.552
(7) Intention to follow the account	0.492	0.517	0.282	0.477	0.478	0.470	0.963	0.549
(8) Intention to follow the advice	0.652	0.465	0.354	0.453	0.394	0.508	0.518	0.943

Notes: The diagonal elements (in bold) are the square roots of the AVEs (variance shared between constructs and their measures). Values above the diagonal indicate the HTMT ratios. Values below the diagonal are the inter-construct correlations. NA, not available, as measured through single items.

Table 4
Results of the estimated parameters, and significance levels.

HYPOTHESIS	β	RELATIONSHIP	RESULT
H1a	0.221*	Originality → Intention to follow account	Supported
H1b	0.170**	Originality → Intention to follow advice	Supported
H2a	0.312**	Originality → Hedonic experience	Supported
H2b	0.530***	Originality → Opinion leadership	Supported
H3a	0.209*	Quality → Hedonic experience	Supported
H3b	0.105n.s	Quality → Opinion leadership	Not supported
H4a	-0.158*	Quantity → Hedonic experience	Not supported†
H4b	-0.011n.s	Quantity → Opinion leadership	Not supported
H5a	0.243***	Humor → Hedonic experience	Supported
H5b	0.096n.s	Humor → Opinion leadership	Supported
H6a	0.246*	Hedonic experience → Intention to follow account	Supported
H6b	0.012n.s	Hedonic experience → Intention to follow advice	Not supported
H6c	0.516***	Hedonic experience → Opinion leadership	Supported
H7a	0.146 ^{n.s}	Opinion leadership → Intention to follow account	Not supported
H7b	0.230**	Opinion leadership → Intention to follow advice	Supported

Notes: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; n.s = not significant; †marginally significant negative effect, contrary to expectations.

intention to follow the advice ($\beta = 0.230$; $p < 0.05$), supporting H7b. The model's R^2 and Q^2 values are indicators of its predictive validity (see Table 5). In terms of variance explained (R^2), hedonic experience, intention to follow the account and intention to follow its advice have moderate explanatory power, whereas opinion leadership has substantial explanatory power (Chin, 1998). The Q^2 values, all above 0, show that all variables have acceptable predictive value (Chin, 1998).

4.3. Indirect effects

Table 6 details the direct, indirect and total effects of the relationships of the proposed research model. As to the significant indirect effects identified, it was observed that originality had a significant, positive effect on intention to follow the advice through hedonic experience and opinion leadership (this being a partial mediation), and that humor had a positive effect on opinion leadership through hedonic experience. Because perceived humor does not have a direct effect on opinion leadership, it can be concluded that hedonic experience exerts total mediation in this relationship. Finally, humor also affected intention to follow the account through hedonic experience and opinion leadership.

5. Discussion

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first work to analyze the keys to the success of influencer marketing on TikTok, and the behavioral responses of followers. The study also examines the extent to which the relationships established in other social networks are valid for TikTok (Arif et al., 2020; Aslam and Luna, 2021; Casaló et al., 2020) and proposes an integration of the SOR model and ELM to better explain

Table 5
 R^2 and Q^2 values of the structural model.

	R^2	Q^2
Hedonic experience	0.240	0.216
Opinion leadership	0.512	0.364
Intention to follow account	0.327	0.296
Intention to follow advice	0.467	0.402

Table 6
Direct, indirect and total effects.

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Originality → Intention to follow the account	0.312**	0.096*	0.408***
Originality → Intention to follow the advice	0.530***	0.068**	0.598***
Originality → Hedonic experience	0.221*	-	0.221*
Originality → Opinion leadership	0.170**	0.114*	0.284***
Quality → Hedonic experience	0.209*	-	0.209*
Quality → Opinion leadership	0.105	0.108*	0.213**
Quality → Intention to follow the account	-	0.082	0.082
Quality → Intention to follow the advice	-	0.052	0.052
Quantity → Hedonic experience	-0.158*	-	-0.158*
Quantity → Opinion leadership	-0.011	-0.082	-0.093
Quantity → Intention to follow the account	-	-0.052	-0.052
Quantity → Intention to follow the advice	-	-0.023	-0.023
Humor → Hedonic experience	0.243***	-	0.243***
Humor → Opinion leadership	0.096	0.126**	0.222**
Humor → Intention to follow account	-	0.092**	0.092**
Humor → Intention to follow advice	-	0.054	0.054
Hedonic experience → Opinion leadership	0.516***	-	0.516***
Hedonic experience → Intention to follow account	0.246*	0.075	0.321**
Hedonic experience → Intention to follow advice	0.012	0.119*	0.131
Opinion leadership → Intention to follow account	0.146	-	0.146
Opinion leadership → Intention to follow advice	0.230**	-	0.230**

Notes: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

followers' reactions toward influencer marketing on this new channel. In particular, it reveals that the peripheral route (via humor and hedonic experience) plays an important role in the persuasion of followers on TikTok. This exploratory study draws the following conclusions.

First, perceived originality is an essential driver of intention to follow TikTok influencers' accounts and advice. In addition, original posts cause followers to enjoy a hedonic experience, and to develop perceptions that influencers are opinion leaders. Therefore, originality is decisive for achieving success as a TikTok influencer. This result is consistent with the findings of previous studies into Instagram (Casaló et al., 2020). Consequently, TikTokers should create original material to attract followers' attention and awaken their interest. In line with recent research which has highlighted the value of authenticity (Lee et al., 2022), TikTok influencers should satisfy their followers' needs for entertainment by being creative and developing new and genuine content in these short video sequences.

Second, quality and quantity of publications also influence hedonic experience and opinion leadership, albeit to a lesser extent. The results of previous research into the effect of quantity on opinion leadership in other social networks are inconclusive; some confirm the effect (Fakhreddin and Foroudi, 2021), and some do not (Casaló et al., 2020). The present study found that, in the TikTok context, quantity of publications did not influence perceptions of opinion leadership; this suggests that this aspect may be less important for more visuals-based social networks, which are more focused on posts' originality and aesthetics (Kusumasondjaja, 2020). The results showed that quality helps followers enjoy a more hedonic experience and suggest that TikTok users watch contents also for hedonic purposes. That is, the essential role played by content quality on Instagram (Casaló et al., 2017) is replicated when creating hedonic experiences on TikTok, although the hedonism of TikTok users could be based on its entertainment value, or the flow state they enter by watching informal, but well-edited videos; Instagram

users, however, are more attracted by glamor in their hedonism (Ki et al., 2020; Kusumasondjaja, 2020).

On the other hand, the results showed that a high quantity of posts diminishes hedonic experience. This finding is particularly interesting and is consistent with recent Instagram-based research that indicated that high volumes of content reduces follower engagement (Tafesse and Wood, 2021). Mimicking the advertising clutter effect, a high quantity of publications can be intrusive, thus causing users to feel overwhelmed by an overload of information (Belanche, 2019).

Third, a key contribution of this work is that humor was found to be an alternative persuasion route in the TikTok context. Thus, this work goes beyond previous studies that have examined the role of humor on TikTok by finding that it promotes hedonic experience, and that other social networks, featuring less dynamic content, are more valued for their informativeness (Casaló et al., 2017). Specifically, the humor displayed by TikTok influencers creates a more positive hedonic experience that translates into higher influencing capacity. The effect of hedonic experience on intention to follow the account means that, if followers have enjoyable experiences, they will develop greater intention to follow the TikTok account and will want to be aware of its content to continue enjoying the experiences. It should be noted that, although hedonic experience does not directly influence intention to follow advice, it does through opinion leadership, a key variable in this study, and in influencer marketing in general (Farivar et al., 2021). This finding suggests that humor, a frequent resource in classic advertising, should not be neglected as a persuasive communication tool in modern social media. The need to combine humor and promotional content in a short video represents a challenge for clever TikTokers, who should clearly employ peripheral affective cues rather than informative reasoned communication arguments in their messages.

In turn, opinion leadership does not influence intention to follow the account, but it positively influences intention to follow the advice, which supports commercial purposes. This finding reveals a dichotomy between the behavioral responses of TikTok users. That is, TikTok followers continue following an account because it helps them have pleasurable (fun) hedonic experiences, and not for the leadership of the influencers on this social network. Therefore, influencers on TikTok should combine both factors to increase their effectiveness: humor and hedonic experiences for the growth and maintenance of followers, and opinion leadership for increasing their influencing capacity.

5.1. Managerial implications

Companies need to be aware of TikTok's characteristics (i.e., short, entertaining videos targeted at people around 20 years old) to achieve the objectives of their influencer marketing campaigns. Our study suggests that TikTok-based, in contrast to more informative and static social networks, influencer marketing should follow the peripheral path of information processing, through using humorous and dynamic content. Thus, to attract a larger viewership and increase their influencing capacity influencers should upload content that their followers perceive as original and fun. It should be remembered that TikTok users frequently watch videos on accounts they do not follow. Therefore, to attract more followers and establish themselves as opinion leaders, influencers should focus on the originality and entertainment value of their posts, rather than on their quality (De Veirman et al., 2017). Indeed, the results of the present study suggest that, in contrast to findings based on other social networks (Casaló et al., 2021), posting a great number of publications on TikTok may backfire.

Originality and fun create benefits for influencers as they help them monetize their activities (Audrezet et al., 2020; Ki et al., 2020; Ladhari et al., 2020), and can help companies in their efforts to harness TikTok's potential to reach young audiences (Forbes, 2022). TikTok influencers

use communication forms closer and more aligned to today's young people/adolescents. TikTokers, thus, create a real opportunity for companies to establish fluid communications with a sector that has abandoned more conventional media and social networks. Thus, when targeting younger people practitioners should switch to TikTok to carry out their communication campaigns (Forbes, 2022), and allocate resources to TikTok influencers. In contrast to the Instagram scenario where well-established influencers demand large sums of money to publish brand content, most TikTokers demand less money because TikTok is a new market where they are only just building their personal brands. Thus, companies should establish medium and long-term relationships with TikTok influencers to take advantage of the economic opportunities of this expanding market.

Finally, when collaborating with influencers, companies should pay attention to the distinctive features of the influencers on each social media and the type of content they publish (De Veirman et al., 2017). To find influencers suitable for supporting the goals of their communication campaigns, companies might use influencer platforms (e.g., inBeat) and agencies (e.g., The Influencer Marketing Factory) that offer valuable methods for identifying TikTok influencers, and that can design, create, execute and manage campaigns.

5.2. Limitations and future research lines

The present study has limitations that suggest interesting future lines of research. First, this exploratory research used a limited sample of TikTok users based in Spain; thus, although it has identified explanations of the persuasive process, generalization of the results should be undertaken with caution. Future studies should find alternative means to avoid the lack of response to surveys by TikTok users (Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz, 2020) in order to replicate the study in other contexts with a broader sample size. In addition, the study examines TikTok and its generally young audience; future studies might compare the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns on different social networks, and their effectiveness with other target audiences. In this sense, it would be interesting to analyze to what extent TikTok's target audience will increase in age terms with the passage of time.

Another limitation relates to the measurement of the variables perceived quality and perceived quantity. They were measured through a single item; nonetheless, this type of measurement of account characteristics is widespread in the previous literature (Casaló et al., 2020). Finally, future studies might examine emerging platforms, and their differential characteristics, so that full advantage might be taken of the potential of influencer marketing in these new contexts (e.g., meta-verse), hitherto little used.

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Declarations of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Annex

Measurement scales

ORIGINALITY (Moldovan et al. 2011; Franke and Schreier, 2008)	
	The posts on this account ...
ORI1	... are novel
ORI2	... are special and different
ORI3	... are innovative
ORI4	... are sophisticated
QUALITY (Sanchez-Franco and Roldán, 2010; Casalo et al., 2020)	
QUAL1	The posts on this account are high quality
QUANTITY (Sanchez-Franco and Roldán, 2010; Casalo et al., 2020)	
QUAN1	This account publishes many posts
HUMOR (Phua and Kim, 2018; Zhang, 1996)	
	The posts on this account ...
HUM1	... are fun
HUM2	... are humorous
HUM3	... are amusing
HEDONIC EXPERIENCE (Nambisan and Baron, 2007)	
	This TikTok account ...
HED1	... allows me to enjoy a pleasant and relaxing time
HED2	... is nice
HED3	... entertains me and stimulates my mind
HED4	... provides me with enjoyment
OPINION LEADERSHIP (Casalo et al., 2020)	
	This TikTok account ...
OLEA1	... is a role model
OLEA2	... is one step ahead of the others
OLEA3	... shows interesting videos
OLEA4	... influences others
OLEA5	... is a valuable source of information
INTENTION TO FOLLOW ACCOUNT (Belanche et al., 2021b; Casalo et al. 2017)	
IFAC1	I intend to follow this TikTok account in the near future
IFAC2	I sense that I will follow this TikTok account
IFAC3	I will probably view new content posted on this TikTok account
INTENTION TO FOLLOW ADVICE (Belanche et al., 2021a)	
	If this account gives advice ...
IFADV1	... I will take into account its suggestions
IFADV2	... I will feel safe following its suggestions
IFADV3	... I will follow its recommendations

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