Female social media influencers in the Arab Gulf: shaping marketing and advertising on Instagram

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This study examines the growing influence of female social media influencers in the Arab Gulf, particularly focusing on how they shape marketing strategies through Instagram. These influencers leverage a blend of emotional and rational marketing, effectively engaging audiences by emphasizing three core elements: authenticity, confidence, and interactivity. By building trust, projecting authority, and fostering two-way communication, these influencers connect with followers both on a personal level and through practical product endorsements. This dual approach not only enhances brand perceptions but also drives consumer behavior. Using a qualitative analysis of five prominent female influencers, the study highlights how emotional appeals like storytelling and self-expression are complemented by rational strategies emphasizing product attributes and benefits. The findings contribute to understanding how these integrated marketing tactics influence consumer attitudes, brand loyalty, and purchasing decisions in the digital era.

KEYWORDS

female social media influencers, social media consumers, influencer marketing, digital marketing, advertisement, Instagram, branding

Introduction

In recent years, industries such as fashion, beauty, food, electronics, and travel have increasingly turned to digital marketing to manage their reputation, promote products, and attract new customers. Influencer marketing, a strategy that leverages individuals with large social media followings, has become an essential tool for brands to engage their target audiences. This method allows companies to bypass traditional marketing channels and connect directly with consumers through trusted influencers who have cultivated personal relationships with their followers (Brown and Hayes, 2008).

A key demographic driving the growth of digital marketing is Generation Z. Defined as individuals who entered adulthood after 1995, this group represents a cohort whose oldest members are entering their professional careers, while the youngest are still in school (Lanier, 2017). Gen Z dominates online shopping, with the internet transforming how they engage with brands. Unlike older generations, Gen Z consumers rely heavily on digital channels for information about products and services, which they can easily access. Their media consumption habits are also distinct; they favor OTT streaming platforms like Netflix over traditional television, Reddit over magazines, and Spotify over radio (Haenlein et al., 2020). As social media networks increasingly serve as spaces for connection, interaction, and engagement, Generation Z has reshaped how individuals form relationships and consume information in the digital era (De Castro et al., 2021).

While influencers have long played a role in marketing, especially in fashion and beauty, the rise of social media has magnified their impact. Celebrities and models once dominated these campaigns, but now social media influencers, who engage their audiences authentically and personally, have taken center stage. The trust influencers build with their followers makes their endorsements seem more credible than traditional advertising, particularly in industries where emotional connections play a critical role in consumer decisions (Lim et al., 2017). Research indicates that 57% of fashion and beauty firms now have an influencer marketing strategy, and nearly 70% of brands recognize the importance of influencers in product launches (see Fashion and Beauty Monitor, 2015). However, identifying influencers who align with a brand's values and target audience remains a challenge, particularly on platforms like Instagram that lack advanced targeting tools (Swathi and Sujatha, 2022). Nonetheless, incorporating Instagram influencers into branding is an essential component of successful social media marketing strategies (Jin et al., 2019).

Today's consumers, especially in the Arab Gulf, are influenced by a "new breed" of social media personalities who can sway purchasing decisions through emotional and rational marketing strategies. These influencers do more than promote products; they connect with consumers on a deeper level, shaping opinions and behavior through carefully crafted content that combines emotional appeals with rational benefits (Deshwal, 2015). The integration of both emotional and rational appeals has become essential in crafting effective marketing strategies, as both play distinct roles in influencing consumer behavior (Kim et al., 2020).

This study focuses on female social media influencers in the Arab Gulf, examining their role in shaping consumer behavior and brand perception through emotional and rational marketing. In particular, it explores how Instagram facilitates social engagement and personal storytelling, making it an ideal platform for influencer marketing (Abidin, 2016a). The findings highlight three key elements—authenticity, confidence, and interactivity—as well as the use of both emotional and rational strategies to build consumer trust. By analyzing the Instagram posts of five prominent Arab female influencers, this research investigates how these elements contribute to the success of influencer marketing and reshapes the dynamics between companies and consumers.

Literature review and theory development

What are influencers and why do they matter?

Social media platforms have evolved into powerful spaces for marketing and consumer engagement, driven largely by the presence and influence of social media influencers (SMIs). A social influencer is an individual who has established a devoted following through their consistent creation of content (Bailis, 2021). These influencers have become essential actors in digital marketing, leveraging their rapport with followers to affect consumer decisions. As companies increasingly turn to digital marketing strategies, the role of influencers has become indispensable in industries such as fashion, food, beauty, and travel (Kadekova and Holienčinova, 2018).

The rise of female influencers in the Arab Gulf

The Arab Gulf has undergone rapid economic development fueled by oil wealth, all while maintaining traditional cultural values (Malachova, 2012). In this context, women are increasingly seen as agents of social and economic change, particularly through education and activism [Bouvier, 2016, as cited in Hurley (2019, pp. 2–3)] Social media has provided Gulf Arab women with a powerful tool to express their identities and advocate for causes, such as women's right to drive in Saudi Arabia (Agarwal et al., 2012).

Gulf female influencers, unlike traditional celebrities, gain prominence not just for their identity but for their actions and the aspirational lifestyles they present. Their content is meticulously planned and staged, often creating a fantasy world that resonates with followers (Hurley, 2019). Through techniques like framing, gaze, and interaction, these influencers cultivate parasocial relationships—perceived bonds of closeness and intimacy with their audience. This engagement helps reinforce cultural norms while offering followers a sense of belonging and fulfillment (Abidin, 2016b; Hurley, 2019).

Brand's digital marketing strategy

Companies across these industries are actively running marketing campaigns on social media by engaging influencers to target specific segments of the audience. For instance, Gucci, the Italian fashion brand, employed influencer marketing in 2019 by collaborating with 23 artists on Instagram to promote the fragrance 'Gucci Bloom.' These influencers were given the creative freedom to interpret the floral theme of the scent, resulting in a campaign that reached 750,000 followers (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 6). This strategy underscores the importance of selecting influencers who align well with the brand, as achieving a harmonious match between an endorser and a product significantly enhances advertising effectiveness (Lim et al., 2017, p. 23). Lim emphasizes that this seamless fit between influencer and brand is crucial for influencing consumer purchasing decisions, as consumers are more likely to act on recommendations from influencers they admire (Lim et al., 2017, pp. 20–22). Ultimately, the strong influence of social media influencers in shaping opinions, increasing brand awareness, and driving purchasing decisions is evident across industries (De Castro et al., 2021).

Digital marketing continues to spread rapidly, as digital platforms become integral to marketing strategies. Consumers increasingly use digital devices to explore products and services rather than visiting physical retail stores (Sudha and Sheena, 2017). Bognar et al. (2019) observe that the internet has emerged as a vital platform for businesses of all sizes, with e-marketing becoming a core component of modern marketing. Social media platforms not only introduce new markets for companies but also humanize campaigns, adding personal touches that make brands more relatable and trustworthy (Bognar et al., 2019). This is largely due to the appeal of influencers, who are perceived as credible figures capable of affecting consumer behavior. Bognar et al. (2019) also notes that influencers' recommendations are often seen as more trustworthy than traditional advertisements, which makes them powerful agents in shaping consumer opinions and driving purchase intentions.

The rise of influencer marketing: transforming business strategies and consumer behavior

The emergence of social media influencers has transformed how businesses approach marketing, prompting a shift toward platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 6). The growing presence of influencers has given rise to an entire industry centered around influencer marketing, with agencies dedicated to pairing brands with the right influencers. According to Erlangga (2021), the internet not only connects people but also serves as a platform for marketing goods and services, allowing businesses to engage with consumers, promote products, and facilitate purchases. De Castro et al. (2021) emphasize that social networks like Instagram and Facebook have become powerful tools for marketing and communication, offering numerous ways to influence consumer behavior through influencer endorsements. Rachmad (2024) also highlights that advancements in technology, particularly the internet and smartphones, have enabled more personalized and interactive marketing. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube allow consumers to engage with brands and influence others through reviews. This shift reflects a preference for personal, trusted recommendations over traditional advertising.

Influencer marketing involves companies partnering with influencers to enhance brand visibility or drive conversions within a specific target audience (Bailis, 2021). While this approach shares similarities with traditional endorsements by television celebrities, it focuses on "micro-celebrities" who have gained popularity on social media platforms (Sammis et al., 2015). Bognar et al. (2019) highlights that many influencers earn revenue through platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, each catering to specific industries. These platforms allow companies to strategically shape consumer decisions, leveraging influencers' reach to engage specific demographics (Haenlein et al., 2020). In 2020 alone, the influencer marketing sector accounted for $10 billion and has become increasingly vital for businesses engaged in direct-to-consumer activities (Haenlein et al., 2020). Nowadays, companies in sectors like travel, food, fashion, and beauty rarely run campaigns without collaborating with popular influencers on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. According to Bailis (2021), 69% of companies prioritize their social media advertising budget for Instagram influencers, recognizing their persuasive power to convert viewers into customers.

One of the critical reasons influencer marketing has been so successful is because of the authenticity that influencers portray. Unlike celebrities, most influencers will show unfiltered glimpses into their lives, making them seem more relatable and trustworthy to their followers. According to Cabeza-Ramírez et al. (2022), this perceived authenticity leads to higher levels of engagement since followers feel more connected to the recommendations provided. Ebulueme and Vijayakumar (2024) explain that micro-influencers exert a greater influence because of their niche appeal and closer interaction with their audience, thus allowing brands to reach very targeted segments more effectively.

The rise of social media influencers in marketing demonstrates broader moves in consumer behaviors toward interactivity, co-creation, and personalization. Anjorin et al. (2024) outline that social media blurred the lines between consumers and content creators, allowing a far more collaborative participatory approach toward brand communication today. Unlike mere passive recipients in traditional advertising, today's consumers go all the way in actively molding brand stories by leaving reviews, sharing posts, and creating user-generated content (Heng Wei et al., 2023). Besides being engaging and interactive, this model increases brand visibility and provides ownership and loyalty among its consumers.

According to Somerfield (2023), user-generated content increases the amplitude of an influencer campaign by adding several layers of credibility and relatability. Furthermore, the shift toward experiential marketing has seen brands and influencers collaborating on live events, challenges, and behind-the-scenes content that provides consumers with immersive experiences (Somerfield, 2023; Xue, 2024). Besides, Reddy et al. (2024) indicate that platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels are particularly influential in this development, enabling videos in short formats to go viral and build large-scale hype over products. For example, influencer-led trends in the form of challenges or reviews are typically joined by a big wave of consumers, multiplying the reach and impact of the campaign.

The term "influence" itself refers to individuals who have a significant impact on others, often using their credibility and expertise to foster trust among consumers (Bognar et al., 2019, p. 304; Lim et al., 2017). As highlighted by Lim et al. (2017), social media influencers can alter public opinion, change attitudes, transform behavior, and foster brand awareness. Their ability to communicate effectively, combined with their perceived expertise, makes them central to driving consumer purchase intentions. Consumers are more likely to trust and act on recommendations from influencers they admire, underscoring the significant role influencers play in shaping beliefs, behaviors, and purchasing decisions (Lim et al., 2017, pp. 20–22; De Castro et al., 2021).

Identifying digital influencers and understanding their characteristics is facilitated by established criteria. For example, Row's (2006) study, "Influencing the Influencers: How Online Advertising and Media Impact Word of Mouth," emphasizes attributes like expertise in specific fields, frequent product recommendations, and active online engagement. Keller and Berry (2003) describe influencers as individuals with broad social networks who provide credible insights, predicting that word-of-mouth communication will continue to rise alongside digital technologies (Keller and Berry, 2003, pp. 21–25). As influencer marketing grows, companies are increasingly focused on selecting the right influencers to enhance brand engagement and drive conversions.

The real influencers: authenticity, confidence, and interactivity

The literature as described here indicates that female influencers leverage *authenticity*, *confidence*, and *interactivity* as core strategies to build trust and engagement with their audiences (Lim et al., 2017; Verbeet and van der Zanden, 2022). Influencers' authenticity involves sincerity, transparency, and relatable messaging, which fosters a stronger connection between influencers and followers (Ahmadi et al., 2022). This authenticity has been found to be directly linked to increased brand trust, which in turn enhances engagement and emotional attachment to the brand (Jun and Yi, 2020). Confidence, exhibited through clear, assertive messaging and expertise, also strengthens the credibility of endorsements, driving

consumer interest and loyalty (Su et al., 2021). Furthermore, interactivity—encouraging two-way communication through comments, direct messaging, and live interactions—plays a crucial role in maintaining close relationships between influencers and their followers (Hudders and De Jans, 2022). These strategies are aligned with Burke's theory of identification, which emphasizes the importance of common ground and shared experiences in achieving persuasion (Griffin, 2006). By combining these three elements, influencers not only promote products but also cultivate parasocial relationships, making their endorsements more compelling and effective.

Moreover, influencer marketing in the Arab Gulf is particularly successful when it incorporates both emotional and rational marketing strategies. Emotional marketing helps influencers create parasocial relationships with followers, making endorsements feel personal and trustworthy (Deshwal, 2015; Bognar et al., 2019). Rational marketing, which emphasizes logical product attributes such as quality, price, and functionality, complements emotional appeals by providing followers with practical reasons to purchase (Kim et al., 2020). This combination of strategies allows influencers to address both the emotional and logical needs of consumers, enhancing overall marketing effectiveness (Hurley, 2019; Lim et al., 2017).

Connecting authenticity, confidence, and interactivity to emotional and rational marketing

Authenticity serves as the foundation of emotional marketing. It facilitates genuine, trust-based relationships with followers, allowing influencers to establish deeper emotional connections. This trust is often built through transparent communication, personal storytelling, and sincerity. For instance, influencers who share personal stories or use relatable messaging cultivate a sense of identification with followers, aligning with Burke's theory of identification, which emphasizes the creation of common ground (Griffin, 2006). By aligning with the values and emotions of their audiences, authentic influencers create lasting emotional bonds that drive loyalty and brand affinity (Deshwal, 2015; Mandina et al., 2014). This emotional resonance is essential, as it not only stimulates faster decision-making but also strengthens long-term loyalty by making the brand feel more personal and meaningful to the consumer (Deshwal, 2015; Hurley, 2019).

Confidence complements rational marketing by reinforcing the credibility of an influencer's product recommendations. When influencers present clear, assertive messaging or demonstrate expertise in product features, they enhance the logical appeal of the product, making it easier for consumers to justify their purchasing decisions. This confident approach is particularly effective when discussing functional benefits such as quality, affordability, or efficiency (Lim et al., 2017). Rational marketing relies on concrete information and logical reasoning to appeal to consumers' cognitive evaluations, making it essential for influencers to project authority and knowledge about the products they endorse (Kim et al., 2020). As such, confidence not only helps in persuading followers of a product's practical value but also ensures that endorsements appear trustworthy and informed, which is critical for effective rational marketing (Brown and Hayes, 2008).

Interactivity serves as a vital mechanism that bridges emotional and rational marketing by fostering direct communication and engagement. Through interactivity, influencers can initiate two-way dialogs with their followers, providing personalized responses that can appeal to both emotional and rational needs. For example, engaging with followers through comments or live sessions helps solidify emotional bonds by creating a sense of intimacy and community (Mandina et al., 2014). Simultaneously, interactive features like Q&A sessions allow influencers to clarify product benefits, address concerns, and provide additional information, thereby strengthening rational marketing by facilitating informed decision-making (Kim et al., 2020). This dual function makes interactivity a powerful tool that enhances the overall impact of influencer marketing strategies (Deshwal, 2015; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

The combined use of authenticity, confidence, and interactivity with both emotional and rational marketing enables female influencers in the Arab Gulf to create well-rounded campaigns that effectively shape consumer perceptions and behaviors. Emotional marketing is particularly effective for building long-term brand loyalty through personal connections, while rational marketing ensures that followers see the practical benefits of the endorsed products. By blending both strategies, influencers can engage consumers holistically, addressing both their emotional and logical needs (Hurley, 2019).

This study aims to explore how these integrated strategies contribute to the success of female influencers in the Arab Gulf, examining how authenticity, confidence, and interactivity enhance both emotional and rational marketing efforts. The findings will provide insights into how these elements reshape influencer marketing, ultimately transforming the way companies engage with consumers and build brand loyalty in the digital era (Deshwal, 2015; Kim et al., 2020).

Data and methodology

This research gathered examples of influencer marketing content from Instagram, focusing on five Arab female social media influencers. Two qualitative methods were applied to analyze the influencers' content: pentadic analysis and content analysis. These methodological approaches are informed by Glucksman's (2017) study, which examined how social media influencer marketing in public relations has altered the way consumers interact with brands. Similar to Glucksman's approach, this research applies both pentadic and content analysis to explore the marketing techniques and strategies used by influencers on Instagram.

The first technique employed is pentadic analysis, which was applied to the content of five Arab female influencers on Instagram. This method allows for an in-depth examination of the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies used in Instagram reels to influence consumer buying behaviors. Pentadic analysis, based on Kenneth Burke's dramatism theory, is a tool for interpreting symbolic actions by breaking down the "drama" of communication into five key elements: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose (Griffin, 2006). Burke's dramatism pentadic analysis enables rhetorical scholars to dig beneath the surface to identify a speaker's motives by labeling the five key elements of the drama (Griffin, 2006, p. 293).

In this analysis, the act refers to the influencer's promotional activities, the agent is the influencer herself, the agency refers to the

techniques used in the post, the scene is the context in which the post occurs, and the purpose reveals the motivation behind the post. This analysis provides an opportunity for many researchers to understand the mindset of social media influencers as they create content for their posts through social media platforms. This approach further discloses the motive behind the posts of influencer marketers.

In this investigation, we draw on Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentadic analysis to explore how influencers persuade their audiences through identification. According to Burke (cited in Griffin, 2006, pp. 287–295), persuasion hinges on identification, which refers to the shared values, beliefs, lifestyles, personalities, attitudes, and experiences between the speaker and the audience. Burke also emphasized the centrality of the act in communication, asserting that without action, there is no drama. Therefore, this paper seeks to uncover the motivations behind influencers' actions, examining how they create common ground with their followers. Effective persuasion, as per Burke's framework, occurs when the influencer aligns their values and experiences with those of the audience. Additionally, Burke claimed that a successful communicator demonstrates consubstantiality by using language and delivery to show that their characteristics are aligned with those of their audience. By using pentadic analysis, this work aims to uncover how influencers create this identification with their audience and explores how influencer persuasion influences followers' purchasing decisions regarding the products they endorse, ultimately shaping consumer behavior.

The second technique used in this study is a straightforward, theoretically and deductively guided content analysis that assesses three essential elements of influencer marketing: confidence, authenticity, and interactivity. This method was used to analyze the influencers' Instagram reels, focusing on how they promote products and engage with their audience. According to Krippendorff (2018, p. 92), this technique is used to identify the existence of specific words, concepts, or topics in a given set of qualitative data and search for various readings of the texts by considering a variety of viewpoints (readers), opposing readings (critiques), opposing ideologies, and/or distinct uses (by different groups). In his book *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Krippendorff describes the process of coding qualitative data, and deductive coding is a common approach in content analysis. This approach involves starting with predefined categories or themes based on theoretical concepts, existing literature, or prior research, and then applying these categories to analyze the data. We rely on the basic framework laid out in the theoretical section above to examine each post in our sample, identifying the extent to which these concepts are effectively employed by the influencers (see Krippendorff, 2018, for a description of qualitative content interpretation).

Based on the literature discussed earlier, these three concepts not only shape the influencers' marketing tactics but are also instrumental in enhancing emotional and rational appeals within the content:

- **Confidence**: In the context of rational marketing, confidence refers to influencers' self-assurance in presenting product attributes, benefits, and other logical arguments, helping audiences perceive the practicality and value of the product (Kim et al., 2020). This rational appeal is complemented by emotional marketing when confidence is used to evoke feelings of inspiration and empowerment among followers, further building trust and loyalty (Lim et al., 2017).

- **Authenticity**: Authenticity plays a dual role by fostering emotional connections through sincere, transparent, and relatable interactions (Deshwal, 2015). At the same time, it enhances rational marketing by increasing the credibility of product claims, as consumers are more likely to trust product details presented by influencers perceived as genuine (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Authentic narratives allow influencers to present both emotional stories and logical product information, creating a holistic appeal.

- **Interactivity**: Interactivity enhances emotional marketing by building a sense of community and personal connection through real-time engagement, comments, and feedback (Mandina et al., 2014). Simultaneously, it supports rational marketing by providing followers with opportunities to ask questions, seek clarifications, and receive detailed product information, which aids in informed decision-making (Hurley, 2019; Kim et al., 2020).

This content analysis, therefore, evaluates how these three elements contribute to the influencers' overall marketing effectiveness by integrating both emotional and rational strategies in their Instagram reels. The findings will provide insights into the role of these elements in shaping consumer behavior and brand perceptions in the Arab Gulf.

Selection of influencers for analysis

The five Arab female social media influencers selected for this study—Mthayel Al Ali, Mina Al Sheikhly, Fatma Husam, Dima Al Sheikhly, and Hala Abdallah—were chosen for their prominence in the Arab Gulf region and their distinct approaches to influencer marketing. Each has successfully built large, engaged followings on Instagram and is widely recognized for their ability to connect with audiences through both emotional and rational marketing strategies.

Mthayel Al Ali, for example, was ranked among the top 50 Dubai influencers in 2024 by the marketing agency Amra and Elma (2024). Mina Al Sheikhly, according to *Forbes*, has recently ventured into entrepreneurship with her own mascara brand, which has generated over $1 million in revenue since its launch, becoming a top-seller in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the United States (Forbes Middle East, 2022). Fatma Husam is well-known for her strong advocacy for women's empowerment, focusing on their ability to drive positive change worldwide (Melki, 2020).

Dima Al Sheikhly was selected for this study due to her unique perspective as a representative of Middle Eastern women. In an interview with *Vogue Arabia*, she discussed her ongoing reflection on her position as a Middle Eastern woman and her advocacy for women's empowerment. Her prominence and alignment with the themes of identity, empowerment, and influencer marketing made her an ideal subject for analysis in this study (Vogue Arabia, 2023).

Finally, Hala Abdallah was chosen for her strong representation of independence and empowerment in the Arab world. In an interview with Anas Bukhash on ABtalks (2020), she emphasized that women in 2020 are "unstoppable," rejecting the notion that women should be confined to domestic roles. Her belief in women's autonomy and her influential role as a Saudi influencer make her a relevant figure for exploring the intersection of empowerment and influencer marketing.

Each of these influencers brings a unique perspective to the study, making them valuable subjects for understanding the role of social media influencers in promoting empowerment, shaping consumer behavior, and advancing influencer marketing strategies in the Arab Gulf region. By examining their content, this study aims to uncover the techniques they use to influence consumer behavior and promote brand loyalty. Each influencer was selected for their unique qualities, backgrounds, and marketing approaches, offering important insights into how influencer marketing operates in this region.

Mthayel Al Ali is a leading Emirati social media influencer, entrepreneur, and public figure with over 792,000 Instagram followers. She has created a brand centered around women's empowerment and is known for her innovative, unfiltered approach to content creation. Mthayel's ventures include a content creation agency (Takhyyal), a conversational podcast (Ara), and a socially conscious jewelry line (Ce). Her ability to combine personal authenticity with business acumen makes her a key subject for analyzing how influencers build trust and authority in their interactions with audiences. Mthayel's collaborations with prestigious brands like Christian Dior, Cartier, and Burberry further emphasize her significance in influencer marketing, particularly in connecting consumers with high-end products.

Mina Al Sheikhly, an Iraqi influencer based in Dubai, boasts over 4 million Instagram followers and has successfully expanded her reach through both social media and traditional media. As the host of MBC Iraq's *Beit Beauty* and the founder of her own mascara brand, Mina exemplifies the entrepreneurial spirit and business success that many influencers aspire to achieve. Her influence extends beyond social media into direct product development, where her brand has generated over $1 million in revenue. Mina's collaborations with major brands like Dior, Lancôme, and Samsung highlight her effectiveness in utilizing both emotional and rational marketing techniques to engage her audience and promote products.

Fatma Husam is a Dubai-born influencer and stylist who has carved out a niche in modest fashion, a growing global industry. With over 727,000 Instagram followers, Fatma promotes a style that resonates with both regional and international audiences. Her brand, MAS Jewels, reflects her commitment to supporting local businesses and empowering women. Fatma's advocacy for modest fashion aligns with her collaborations with well-known brands like Estee Lauder and Dolce & Gabbana. Her ability to influence a diverse range of followers, combined with her emphasis on women's empowerment, makes her a key figure for understanding the emotional and cultural dimensions of influencer marketing in the Arab Gulf.

Dima Al Sheikhly, Mina's younger sister, is another Iraqi influencer based in Dubai, known for her glamorous fashion sense. With over 850,000 Instagram followers, Dima has become a sought-after figure in luxury fashion, working with brands like Dior, YSL, and Fendi. Her emphasis on high-end fashion and beauty positions her as a significant subject for studying the interplay of emotional appeal (glamor, beauty) and rational marketing (high-quality, luxury branding). Dima's reflections on her role as a Middle Eastern woman in the global fashion industry further highlight the cultural context of her influence.

Hala Abdallah, a Saudi influencer and entrepreneur based in Dubai, has built a following of over 2.5 million and a strong presence on Instagram. Known for her beauty tutorials and fashion tips, Hala has developed a loyal audience through her content, which frequently emphasizes independence and women's empowerment. She collaborates with renowned brands like Tiffany and Christian Dior,

making her a key figure in the luxury brand space. Hala's advocacy for women's empowerment and her independent approach to business provide a rich context for exploring how influencers connect with audiences on both emotional and practical levels.

These influencers were selected not only for their substantial followings but also for their demonstrated ability to engage with consumers through both *emotional* and *rational marketing* approaches. Emotional marketing, often referred to as storytelling, allows these influencers to create narratives that resonate deeply with their audiences, while rational marketing provides logical appeals that persuade followers to act, whether by purchasing a product or adopting a lifestyle. By focusing on influencers who utilize both strategies, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how influencer marketing shapes consumer behavior in the Arab Gulf.

Selection of Instagram posts

To begin, we selected on the independent variables for the Instagram posts in the analysis that follows. While doing so limits the external validity of our study, this is a common approach when the aim is to gain deeper insights into a specific phenomenon or to examine specific mechanisms, which is the case in our study. Specifically, we selected posts based on the fundamental characteristics that we argue above define successful and effective influencer communication: authenticity, confidence, and interactivity with followers. These elements are crucial, as they reflect how influencers foster genuine connections with their audiences and enhance brand engagement, ultimately bridging the gap between brands and consumers.

To maintain relevance and capture contemporary practices, we began by examining the most recent Instagram reel posts that feature advertisements from each selected influencer. This approach allows us to focus on current trends and strategies that influencers employ in their social media marketing when promoting advertisements. Additionally, we identified a recent Instagram reel post showcasing three of the selected social media influencers together, each endorsing the same advertisement. This method not only ensures consistency across the selected sample but also allows for a clearer comparison of how different influencers utilize these critical elements. By prioritizing posts that embody authenticity, confidence, and interactivity, the aim was to capture the essence of influencer-brand dynamics that resonate with today's audiences. Furthermore, the systematic approach reduces selection bias, as it relies on a predefined and clear set of criteria rather than subjective judgment. This careful sampling process enhances the credibility of the findings and allows for more meaningful insights into the role of social media influencers in shaping brand perceptions and consumer relationships.

Data collection process

The data collection process followed a systematic approach:

1. **Selection of Posts**: Posts were selected from the influencers' recent Instagram reels that included advertisements. We prioritized posts that embodied the core themes of authenticity, confidence, and interactivity.

2 **Coding and Analysis**: Posts were independently coded into four primary themes, which were identified based on the analysis of the influencers' Instagram reels:

o **Influencer Authenticity and Confidence:**
This theme focuses on how influencers present themselves in a genuine, transparent, and self-assured manner. It examines how influencers use personal narratives, self-presentation, and confidence to connect with their audience emotionally while building trust.

o **Interactivity and Emotional Engagement:**
This theme captures how influencers engage with their followers through comments, direct interactions. It highlights the emotional bond that is fostered between the influencer and their audience through real-time engagement.

o **Collaborations and Brand Engagement:**
This theme analyzes how influencers collaborate with brands, particularly in sponsored content, and the impact these collaborations have on brand perception and engagement. It investigates how collaborations are strategically used to align the influencer's personal brand with the values of the brands they promote.

o **Enhancing Relationships and Connectedness**
The last theme focuses on how influencers create direct connections between brands and consumers, particularly through features like comments and tagging. It highlights how influencers facilitate brand engagement by tagging brands in their posts, encouraging followers to interact through comments, and ultimately fostering a more personal and direct relationship between the brand and the consumer. This mechanism helps strengthen the bond between the brand and its audience, turning the influencer's platform into a shared space where consumer-brand dialog can occur.

These themes were derived from a combination of theoretical concepts and the content examined in the posts. By coding these themes, we aimed to capture how the influencers integrated emotional and rational appeals into their marketing strategies.

Posts were coded according to these four themes, with each theme reflecting different dimensions of the influencer's strategy in building emotional and rational connections with their audience. These four themes represent how influencers blend authenticity, confidence, and interactivity to influence consumer behavior and enhance brand engagement.

3 **Pentadic and Content Analysis**: The analysis was conducted in two phases: first, the posts were examined using pentadic analysis to uncover the rhetorical strategies employed by the influencers. Second, content analysis was applied to measure the extent to which the posts exhibited authenticity, confidence, and interactivity, and to evaluate how these elements contributed to the overall marketing effectiveness. Together, these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of how the influencers

shape consumer behavior and brand engagement, blending both rhetorical strategies and content features to drive marketing effectiveness.

Pentadic analysis process

Pentadic analysis, based on Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism, was employed to dissect and understand the rhetorical strategies used by influencers in their Instagram posts. This analysis focuses on five key elements: **act**, **agent**, **agency**, **scene**, and **purpose**. Below is a step-by-step breakdown of the process applied in this study.

Identification of key elements

The first stage of pentadic analysis involved identifying the five core elements in each influencer's Instagram reel posts:

1 **Act**: The central action or behavior in the post. This is typically the act of posting an advertisement or promoting a brand.
2 **Agent**: The influencer responsible for carrying out the act of promoting the brand.
3 **Agency**: The specific techniques or strategies employed by the influencer to execute the promotion. This includes the use of personal narratives, emotional appeals, visual storytelling, and product demonstrations.
4 **Scene**: The context or environment in which the act occurs. This includes the influencer's Instagram profile, the product being marketed, and the target audience.
5 **Purpose**: The overarching goal of the post. For influencer marketing, the purpose is often to engage followers, create a personal connection with the brand, and encourage consumer behavior.

Content analysis process

Content Analysis involves systematically coding and categorizing qualitative data into themes.

1 **Four Themes Identified**: Authenticity and Confidence, Interactivity and Emotional Engagement, Collaborations and Brand Engagement, Enhancing Relationships and Connectedness.
2 **Deductive Coding** was used to identify these themes based on theoretical concepts and the data from the influencers' posts.
3 After **coding the posts**, we analyzed the data to understand how each theme contributes to influencer marketing.

By integrating both pentadic analysis and content analysis, this study provides a thorough examination of how influencers in the Arab Gulf region influence consumer behavior and brand engagement through their Instagram content. The combination of these two methods enables a deep exploration of both the rhetorical strategies and content characteristics that shape influencer marketing. Pentadic analysis delves into the underlying persuasive tactics, while content analysis highlights the emotional and rational elements that drive audience interaction and brand connection.

Results: pentadic and content analysis of influencer marketing

Consistent with Glucksman's (2017) findings, the pentadic analysis of the influencers' posts focuses on five key elements: act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. Across all influencers, the act involves posting advertisements on Instagram, with the agent being the influencer promoting the product. The purpose is to capture followers' attention and encourage them to engage with the brand. However, what sets each post apart is the agency—the specific techniques used by the influencer to promote the product. The content analysis further examined the three key attributes of successful influencer marketing: authenticity, confidence, and interactivity.

The results of the pentadic and content analysis confirm that influencers in the Arab Gulf region employ a mix of emotional and rational strategies to engage their audience and enhance brand perception. This analysis reveals how influencers strategically align with key theoretical frameworks, such as Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad and the emotional-rational appeal dichotomy (Kim et al., 2020; Hurley, 2019), to create compelling narratives that connect with their followers both emotionally and rationally.

Influencer authenticity and confidence

We begin by analyzing an Instagram reel posted by Mthayel (agent) - (see Post 1).[1] The advertisement post (act) promotes the haircare brand Kerastase. Using a combination of authenticity and confidence (agency), her task was to introduce Kerastase products to a younger clientele, particularly those familiar with the brand's widespread use in salons worldwide (purpose). Mthayel's content effectively exposes the brand to her followers, reaching Kerastase's target audience (scene). Her approach aligns with Burke's pentadic framework, where the act of promoting a product is conveyed through her personal experience with the product. By sharing a deeply personal narrative about her hair journey, Mthayel positions herself as an agent of transformation, which builds trust and emotional resonance with her audience.

By focusing on her personal hair journey and the themes of self-love and acceptance, Mthayel seamlessly blends emotional appeal into the post, making it relatable and persuasive. This approach aligns with emotional marketing strategies, as it emphasizes personal growth and well-being, encouraging followers to associate the product with positive feelings of self-worth and transformation (Deshwal, 2015; Mandina et al., 2014).

According to Burke's pentadic analysis, the act drives the "drama" of communication, centering on Mthayel's discussion about her personal hair care journey. This reinforces the idea that confidence and personal care are intertwined, which is a crucial element of emotional marketing. Her statement, 'The brand is beyond haircare; it's about what you feel from the inside and how that reflects on the outside,' exemplifies this approach by using emotional narratives to enhance

product appeal. At the same time, rational marketing elements are subtly implied; the discussion of how the brand reflects inner feelings suggests its efficacy, even without her explicitly weaving Kerastase's effectiveness—such as quality ingredients and visible results—into her messaging. This demonstrates how emotional marketing can coexist with rational appeals, as followers are encouraged to see the product not only as part of their self-care routine but also as a reliable and effective hair solution (Kim et al., 2020). Burke's concept of purpose in the pentad reminds us that the underlying goal is to drive engagement with the brand, which also includes rational appeals to the product's efficacy. This dual approach—emotional connection and implicit rational claims—strengthens the influencer's role in creating a holistic brand experience (Kim et al., 2020).

In her promotional Instagram reel, Mthayel articulates her connection with confidence while praising Kerastase for supporting women's lived experiences. By sharing her personal struggles, including her decision to shave her hair, she creates a sense of vulnerability that cultivates trust—essential for successful influencer marketing. She asserts, "Confidence comes from within, and the support system you build around yourself helps maintain confidence," highlighting the relationship between self-acceptance and emotional well-being.

Mthayel's strategic use of emotionally charged language, including terms like "confidence," "acceptance," and "self-love," complements her visual storytelling to build a layered message. This blend of emotional and rational marketing fosters a holistic connection with her followers, appealing to their feelings while also emphasizing practical benefits. By presenting Kerastase products as tools for personal development, she not only strengthens their emotional appeal but also establishes credibility as an expert in hair care. This dual approach is vital for influencer marketing success, as it allows influencers to connect with followers both emotionally and logically, reinforcing brand trust and driving consumer behavior (Brown and Hayes, 2008; Hurley, 2019). Moreover, her strategic use of brand-specific hashtags like #SYMBIOSE and #kerastaseME bridges the gap between her followers and the brand, encouraging direct engagement and increasing brand recognition.

However, while Mthayel's approach emphasizes authenticity, the nature of her role as a paid influencer complicates this perception. Followers might question how genuine her endorsement is, particularly if it appears motivated more by financial gain than personal experience. This potential conflict between emotional connection and commercial intent highlights the delicate balance influencers must maintain when combining emotional and rational marketing elements (Lim et al., 2017).

Interactivity and emotional engagement

Interactivity plays a significant role in influencer marketing, particularly in fostering emotional attachment to a brand. In the case of Mthayel, her followers actively engage with her content, commenting and reflecting on the personal narrative she shares (see the comments section in Post 1). This direct engagement amplifies the emotional connection between the influencer, the product, and the audience, demonstrating how emotional marketing encourages interactive responses. Interactivity not only enhances emotional bonds but also enables followers to perceive the product's practical benefits through personal stories and experiences, thus integrating rational marketing elements into the conversation.

The importance of interactivity and engagement is further reinforced by Burke's pentadic analysis, particularly in the scene element. The scene

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1 Mthayel. (2023). *Thank you @kerastase_official for creating a safe platform for me to express my relationship with confidence, and for always being allies to women and their lived experiences.* https://www.instagram.com/reel/CpuZruXgIKP/.

here is not just the setting of the post but the ongoing interaction between the influencer and the followers in the comment section. This continuous interaction shifts the purpose of the post, from just promoting a product to fostering a community where followers feel personally involved in the product's story. The engagement allows followers to build an emotional connection with the product while also receiving rational information through direct exchanges with the influencer.

Similarly, in (Post 2),[2] Mina Al Sheikhly (agent) collaborates with Samsung Electronics to promote the Galaxy S21 smartphone (act). Her technique (agency) blends confidence and honesty to effectively target youthful consumers in the Arab region (purpose). By showcasing the brand to her followers, she aims to engage Samsung's desired audience in areas such as the Middle East and Iraq (scene). Through a mix of personal daily use and storytelling, Mina effectively balances emotional marketing (by sharing her personal experiences) and rational marketing (by emphasizing features like camera quality and user-friendliness). This strategic blend allows followers to connect emotionally while also considering the product's functional advantages (Kim et al., 2020). Her confident and authentic content resonates with her followers, driving engagement and sparking interest in the Galaxy S21, as evidenced by the high level of interaction in the comments section.

As shown in this Instagram reel post (see Post 2), Mina's posts have gained 135,039 views, 18,100 likes, and 336 comments from her followers. This indicates that her approach is successful in marketing the brand. Interactivity plays a pivotal role in enhancing emotional engagement with her followers. By encouraging dialog in the comments section, Mina strengthens the emotional bond between her and her audience, as followers share their personal experiences and seek recommendations. This aligns with Burke's concept of the 'scene' in the pentadic model, where the interaction between the influencer, the brand, and the audience creates a dynamic setting for engagement (Hurley, 2019).

Furthermore, interactivity is a core element of social media marketing, where direct engagement enables influencers to deepen their relationship with followers. As Kim et al. (2020) suggest, emotional engagement is amplified when followers perceive influencers as approachable and responsive. The high volume of comments in Mina's post serves as a testament to this dynamic, with notable examples such as, "I'm going to buy this one," "What is the cost of the smartphone in Iraqi dinar?" and "Sophisticated smartphone, I just bought it," illustrating the strong intent to purchase. These comments highlight the active role followers play in the decision-making process, moving from emotional connection to practical considerations. In the comments section, where interactivity plays a pivotal role, the purpose of the campaign—to drive consumer behavior—becomes evident. Comments like "I'm going to buy this one" and "How much is it in Iraqi dinar?" reveal a shift from emotional engagement, rooted in personal connection, to rational decision-making, which is a key component of influencer marketing (Kim et al., 2020). This transition showcases how emotional bonds, established through storytelling and authenticity, are reinforced by the rational appeals embedded in the product's quality and value. Ultimately,

this combination encourages followers to take action, effectively bridging the gap between emotional resonance and rational purchase intent.

These comments underscore her marketing effectiveness and illustrate how interactivity drives consumer behavior by fostering a sense of involvement and influence over the purchasing decision. And also, demonstrates how emotional narratives and rational information together stimulate consumer purchasing.

Mina's blend of emotional storytelling and rational product information creates a holistic marketing strategy that resonates with her audience on multiple levels. As the comments suggest, followers move from an emotional connection with Mina to practical decision-making about the product, reinforcing the idea that both emotional and rational appeals must work in tandem to achieve successful influencer marketing outcomes (Kim et al., 2020).

Moreover, Mina's commitment to authenticity—which she emphasized in a podcast interview, stating, "My content always reflects my true self" (HikmatWehbiPodcast, 2020)—also plays a key role in building trust with her audience. Authenticity enhances the emotional appeal of her posts, fostering deeper connections and brand loyalty. Authenticity, in combination with interactivity, not only amplifies emotional engagement but also strengthens brand perception, making Mina an effective influencer.

However, the overwhelming emphasis on product promotion might dilute the emotional appeal, as followers could perceive the content as overly commercial. This underscores the need for influencers to maintain an authentic emotional narrative while also addressing the rational aspects of the product to sustain meaningful engagement (Deshwal, 2015). If followers feel the primary purpose of the content is simply to promote a product, rather than to foster a deeper emotional connection, it could limit their willingness to engage on a personal level.

In this context, integrating Burke's dramatistic pentad analysis into Mina's post provides a deeper theoretical perspective, demonstrating how the emotional and rational marketing tactics are aligned and executed. This approach not only highlights the balance between emotional engagement and rational promotion but also emphasizes the strategic use of interactivity and credibility, which are key to maintaining that authentic connection with followers in influencer marketing.

Collaborations and brand engagement

In this analysis, we included three versions of the same post, each shared by influencers Hala Abdalla, Dima Al Sheikhly, and Fatma Husam (see Posts 3, 4 and 5).[3] Each feature the same content, but are

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2 Mina. (2021, December 2). *TipsForSuccess Have a vision, find your voice, be unapologetically yourself then bring it all together and capture the magic.* https://www.instagram.com/p/CLMrBWgBDcp/.

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3 Dima. (2020). @marieclairearabia and @dolcegabbana beauty backstage video. Check out the April Issue for the full shoot! Thank you for this amazing opportunity ✦˚ #BEAQUEEN #DGBeauty. https://www.instagram.com/reel/B-7du2PFQyf/.

Fatma. (2020). Backstage video for the @dolcegabbana x @marieclairearabia shoot 🖤 Check out the April issue for the full shoot. #BEAQUEEN #DGBeauty. https://www.instagram.com/reel/B_ATytGAGhK/.

Hala. (2020). Here is the video of the shoot I did with Marie Claire Arabia and Dolce & Gabbana 🐝 Check out the April issue for the full shoot. Thank you for this amazing opportunity! #BEAQUEEN #DGBeauty @dolcegabbana @marieclairearabia. https://www.instagram.com/reel/B-7fnfcnnn_/.

tailored to the distinct audiences of these three influencers. By examining these posts, we can assess how the collaboration influences overall reach and interaction. In this advertisement, influencers Hala Abdalla, Dima Al Sheikhly, and Fatma Husam (agents) collaborated on an Instagram reel for Dolce & Gabbana (act), using authenticity and confidence (agency) to introduce luxury fashion and beauty products to their followers through Instagram reel posts (scene). Their (purpose) is to engage new, potential customers in the Middle East and the Arab region, effectively broadening the brand's reach and appeal. Their personal connections to the brand, reflected in their definitions of beauty—ranging from self-confidence to self-care—serve to humanize the brand and connect it to their individual personas. Each influencer's engagement with the concept of beauty aligns with authenticity and confidence, reinforcing their bond with their audience and the brand.

The campaign strategically blends emotional and rational marketing, with both elements complementing each other. The emotional component is evident in how each influencer emphasizes the personal significance of the brand's products, invoking feelings of empowerment and self-expression. By integrating themes of self-confidence and self-care, they create a personal and relatable narrative that resonates with followers, tapping into the desire for self-improvement and aspirational beauty. This emotional appeal fosters trust and builds a sense of intimacy, making the brand's offerings feel like a part of the followers' personal journeys (Deshwal, 2015; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Simultaneously, rational marketing is incorporated through clear demonstrations of product benefits and quality, such as the durability of fabrics or the distinctive qualities of makeup. By emphasizing product attributes and highlighting their practical value—like the luxurious feel of materials or the longevity of makeup—the influencers provide followers with logical reasons to consider these products. The use of descriptive language around quality and craftsmanship helps to strengthen the product's credibility, making it more persuasive to potential customers seeking both elegance and value (Kim et al., 2020; Hurley, 2019).

These posts highlight a key aspect of brand engagement, where the influencers use their authenticity and confidence 'agency' to create a personal narrative around the luxury brand, aligning with the theoretical concept of identification proposed by Burke. Through personal definitions of beauty and empowerment, each influencer creates a shared space where followers feel personally connected to the brand (Hurley, 2019; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). When influencers express confidence and authenticity in their messaging, they not only create emotional bonds but also enhance the credibility of their product endorsements. This combination of emotional and rational elements ensures a more holistic connection with followers. Burke's theory of identification suggests that persuasion occurs when influencers and audiences find common ground, which is precisely what Hala, Dima, and Fatma achieve in their Dolce & Gabbana collaboration. According to Burke's theory of identification, the influencers' authentic engagement with the brand and their audience helps foster a sense of shared identity, which is crucial for persuasion in influencer marketing (Hurley, 2019).

The campaign also underscores the potential of influencer partnerships to increase brand visibility, broaden appeal, and foster deeper engagement. By leveraging their combined followings, influencers can effectively reach a diverse audience across the Middle East and Arab region, thereby enhancing both the reach and impact of the brand. While emotional appeals strengthen identification and trust, rational appeals emphasize the product's value and quality, making the campaign more persuasive (Hurley, 2019; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). However, challenges such as identity dilution and superficial engagement can arise. To address these issues, influencers must ensure that emotional and rational elements are consistently aligned, balancing personal connection with product credibility.

Burke's dramatistic pentad provides a robust framework for analyzing how emotional and rational appeals are integrated into influencer strategies. The collaboration of Hala Abdalla, Dima Al Sheikhly, and Fatma Husam with Dolce and Gabbana illustrates how these appeals align with both the influencers' identities and the campaign's overarching purpose. By balancing emotional connection and rational persuasion, these influencers resonate deeply with their audience while encouraging informed purchasing decisions. This alignment between emotional engagement and rational clarity is key to effective influencer marketing, fostering trust, credibility, and ultimately driving consumer behavior (Hurley, 2019; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Kim et al., 2020). Burke's pentadic analysis further reinforces the significance of maintaining this balance, ensuring a compelling and persuasive marketing strategy (Burke, 1969).

Enhancing relationships and connectedness

In (Post 6),[4] Fatma's promotion of Estee Lauder's skincare products illustrates the integration of emotional and rational marketing. Her approachable style and personal testimonials not only build emotional connections but also create trust and authenticity. This aligns with Deshwal's (2015) assertion that personal endorsements foster emotional bonds, which are critical in converting followers into consumers.

Meanwhile, product attributes such as the benefits they offer and efficacy emphasize rational benefits. This combination strengthens consumer relationships, as followers perceive the product as both relatable and practical. Additionally, the use of brand-specific hashtags enhances interactivity, while her comments in the post position Estee Lauder as an essential part of her daily routine, making the promotion feel organic. Additionally, interactive elements such as comments and direct communication in Instagram posts enhance the sense of community and connectedness between influencers and their followers. This aligns with Burke's 'act' and 'purpose', where the primary objective is to engage the audience in meaningful ways that foster trust and, ultimately, brand loyalty (Hurley, 2019).

Platforms like Instagram have empowered social media influencers to maintain ongoing, real-time connections with their followers. This trait is evident in the influencers' approach, marked by their consistent availability and direct engagement with their audience. This dynamic allows followers to communicate with their influencers, who, in turn, can respond and interact with their followers. For instance, followers engaged with Fatma's endorsed advertisement by leaving comments, as shown in (Post 6). Fatma's engagement with her

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4   Fatma. (2022). *My day & night routine for radiant skin and brighter under eyes in just 2 weeks. Cannot live without these two products from @EsteeLauderMe.* https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cic5_7kjzgw/.

followers in the comments section, adds a new dimension to the advertisement that was absent before. The involvement of social media influencers and the two-way dialog between influencer and follower enhances the advertisement's effectiveness. Such interaction may prompt a follower to become a brand consumer, as it provides the influencer with another opportunity to personally endorse the product.

Interactive elements, like comments and direct communication, enhance emotional engagement, allowing followers to feel involved and valued (Rachmad, 2024). In Fatma's case, the engagement with her followers through the comments section creates a dialog that strengthens the personal relationship between influencer and follower. Although Fatma interacts with her followers in the comments section, the nature of these interactions may lack depth. If responses from influencers like Fatma remain generic or fail to address followers' specific concerns, the emotional bond may weaken, reducing overall marketing effectiveness. Successful integration of emotional and rational marketing requires not only personal connection but also meaningful engagement that builds trust and loyalty over time to maintain genuine, personalized engagement to preserve their credibility (Kim et al., 2020; Mandina et al., 2014).

In addition to the emotional and rational marketing strategies discussed, Burke's dramatistic pentad further enhances the understanding of Fatma's promotional approach. While she does not directly speak in the advertisement, her actions—applying the Estee Lauder products and emphasizing their benefits—serve as the (act) in Burke's framework, where her authentic experience with the product aligns with the emotional and practical narratives presented. The (agent) in this case is Fatma, whose personal style and credibility act as the central force driving the advertisement. Her subtle display of authenticity through the use of the product and her written endorsement taps into Burke's (agency), where her personal identity connects with the audience's aspirations. The (scene) is the Instagram platform, which provides an accessible, interactive space where followers can engage with Fatma and the brand, making the advertisement feel part of their daily social media experiences. Finally, the (purpose) is to engage followers in a relatable and persuasive manner, bridging both emotional appeal—through empowerment and self-care—and rational appeal—through the product's practical benefits. By creating this seamless integration of emotional and rational marketing, Fatma strengthens her bond with her audience while providing logical reasons to trust and purchase the product, enhancing brand loyalty and consumer engagement in line with Burke's theory of identification (Burke, 1969) and the principles of Deshwal's (2015) emotional endorsement.

In the case of Dima's collaboration with TRESemme Arabia (see Post 7),[5] and despite some product safety concerns, Dima shares Instagram content with her followers, who represent the target market the brand aims to reach, to promote specific hair products. Emotional marketing is evident in her personal stories about product use to achieve beautiful hair, while rational marketing is reflected in product claims like improved hair texture, smoothness, volume and heat protection.

Burke's pentadic framework illuminates Dima's role as the 'agent' who connects the 'act' of promoting a product to her audience through an authentic, relatable experience. This is especially crucial given the concerns some followers have raised about the safety of the products, which Dima directly addresses through comments and further engagement, showcasing transparency and responsiveness.

Interactivity in this post allows Dima to build trust, turning potential vulnerabilities (e.g., product safety concerns) into opportunities for dialog. For instance, when followers question the brand's safety, Dima's open communication reaffirms her authenticity and commitment to addressing her followers' concerns. As the brand's representative, Dima becomes more than just a promotional figure— she becomes an agent of trust, playing a critical role in managing the rational transparency of the brand's claims while reinforcing the emotional connection with her followers (Mandina et al., 2014).

This interaction showcases how influencer marketing goes beyond mere promotion by offering a space for dialog between the brand and the consumer. This feature of interactivity on Instagram encourages followers to engage in discussions among themselves, prompting them to seek responses from influencer Dima regarding their comments (see the comments section in Post 7).

The brand advertisements now incorporate this interactive element, which was previously lacking. This two-way conversation not only enables TRESemme to communicate directly with Dima's followers but also addresses their concerns and answers their questions, thereby raising brand awareness, forging connections with customers, correcting any distorted brand image, and encouraging followers to purchase products. Such engagement can help convert followers into brand consumers.

However, the interactive aspect of the post, which encourages dialog, also exposes vulnerabilities in the brand's reputation. If followers feel compelled to caution Dima about promoting TRESemme, it indicates a lack of trust in her endorsements; therefore, Dima's engagement becomes crucial for maintaining this trust. For influencer marketing to be successful, influencers must not only engage with their audience but also ensure they promote products that align with their followers' well-being and values. Without this alignment, the intended enhancement of relationships and connectedness may fall flat, leaving followers feeling more like passive consumers than engaged community members. This scenario illustrates the challenges of balancing emotional appeal with rational transparency, highlighting the importance of addressing both dimensions in influencer marketing.

In (Post 8),[6] Mina's collaboration with Ounass UAE illustrates the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating a seamless shopping experience that blends emotional and rational appeals. Using Burke's dramatistic pentad, we can analyze how Mina (the agent) promotes Gucci Beauty products (act) by using a visually compelling Instagram reel. Through her (agency), she creates an aspirational narrative of luxury, self-expression, and transformation, emotionally connecting with her audience. The (scene)—Instagram—serves as an interactive platform where followers can instantly engage with the content and

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5 Dima. (2021). Products Used: - 24H volume and body shampoo & conditioner—Keratin smooth heat spray—Keratin shine oil #TresNYFW #IStyleTo. https://www.instagram.com/reel/CLjsQ2-l0QB/.

6 This post has been removed from Instagram and there is no active link.

make purchases, facilitated by embedded product links. The (purpose) of the post is not only to promote the product but to create a seamless journey from discovery to purchase, enhancing both emotional and rational connections.

The post's interactivity plays a central role in facilitating the rational appeal, as followers can easily browse and purchase products from the Ounass website. This aligns with recent research on the growing importance of e-commerce integration in influencer marketing (Haenlein et al., 2020). The embedded shopping links enhance the user experience by providing a direct path to purchase, making it convenient for followers to act on their emotional engagement with the post. This aligns with studies that emphasize the pivotal role social media platforms like Instagram play in shaping consumer decisions and driving conversions (De Castro et al., 2021).

However, the lack of Mina's direct engagement in the comments section weakens the emotional connection. The absence of her responses may cause followers to feel less personally connected to the brand. This observation mirrors the findings of Deshwal (2015), who highlights that authentic interaction between influencers and followers increases trust and engagement. Influencer engagement is especially important on platforms like Instagram, where personal connections can directly impact follower loyalty and purchasing behavior (Bailis, 2021).

Nevertheless, the integration of rational tools like direct shopping links helps create a convenient and efficient consumer experience. Social commerce features, such as embedded shopping links, play a critical role in driving conversions and sales, according to Rachmad (2024), who notes that these features help bridge the gap between consumers and brands. Mina's post exemplifies how influencers can drive both emotional engagement and rational decision-making by combining personal storytelling with functional product details and offering an accessible shopping experience. This strategic integration of emotional and rational appeals mirrors the growing trend of e-commerce and influencer marketing convergence, as discussed by Bailis (2021), who asserts that platforms like Instagram are essential for converting engagement into measurable consumer behavior.

In addition, this post highlights how Ounass engaged directly with Mina's audience in the comments section, reinforcing the relationship between the brand and the consumer. Ounass's active responses to comments show a commitment to customer engagement and brand loyalty, but without Mina's input, the conversation may feel one-sided. Influencer engagement in the comments section is critical for building a community and enhancing customer loyalty (Kim et al., 2020). Followers often look for influencers to provide insights, answer questions, and share personal experiences related to the products they promote. Mina's absence in the comments may leave her audience feeling less connected and more like passive observers rather than valued participants in the conversation.

However, despite Mina's lack of engagement in the comments, influencer marketing remains successful as it facilitates brand engagement with followers, allowing brands like Ounass to foster relationships and enhance their connection with consumers. The brand-influencer relationship is increasingly seen as a key driver of trust and consumer loyalty (Hurley, 2019). This underscores the importance of authenticity and direct engagement for influencer success in driving purchasing decisions, as Kim et al. (2020) emphasize that authenticity in brand partnerships is crucial for maximizing long-term consumer loyalty and brand perception.

Influencer marketing, as exemplified by Mina's collaboration, aligns with the increasing trend toward more direct-to-consumer strategies and the growing influence of social media platforms on purchasing behavior (Haenlein et al., 2020). By leveraging these platforms and maintaining a balance between emotional storytelling and rational persuasion, influencers like Mina can foster deeper connections with their audiences while driving meaningful consumer behavior (Bailis, 2021).

In conclusion, the data analysis supports the theoretical frameworks discussed throughout this study, particularly the use of pentadic analysis to uncover rhetorical strategies and the integration of both emotional and rational appeals in influencer marketing. Through authenticity, confidence, and interactivity, influencers create meaningful connections with their audiences, driving both emotional engagement and rational decision-making.

The results of this analysis demonstrate that influencers in the Arab Gulf region successfully combine emotional and rational appeals to create marketing campaigns that resonate deeply with their audience. By applying Burke's dramatistic pentadic model, it is evident that influencers like Mthayel, Mina, Fatma, Dima, and Hala strategically navigate the emotional-rational dichotomy, using their authenticity, confidence, and interactivity to create compelling content. Each post highlights a different aspect of influencer marketing: from authentic storytelling and personal experiences to rational product claims and interactive engagement. However, the success of these strategies hinges on maintaining a balance between emotional resonance and the rational presentation of product benefits, ensuring that influencers' endorsements remain credible and effective in shaping consumer behavior.

Limitations of the study

Although this paper provides valuable findings that can help brands and influencers achieve successful influencer marketing, it is important to acknowledge its limitations before making recommendations for future research. First, the scope of this study is limited, as it focuses on defining the qualities and elements of effective influencer marketing, specifically by examining Arab female social media influencers. These influencers are explored in terms of how they employ emotional and rational marketing strategies, using the three key characteristics—authenticity, confidence, and interactivity—to connect with their audiences. One of the biggest limitations of this study is its small sample size. As a result, the degree of certainty regarding the significance of these three characteristics in successful influencer branding strategies—identified in the literature and confirmed through pentadic analysis—remains uncertain. We cannot conclusively assert that a larger sample, encompassing a broader range of Arab social media influencers, would not reveal successful influencers who do not exhibit all three characteristics. Similarly, we cannot determine whether there are influencers who demonstrate these traits but do not achieve success. A larger sample would help address these uncertainties and should be considered in future research. Nonetheless, the results of this study align with existing literature, suggesting that authenticity, confidence, and interactivity remain crucial components of effective influencer marketing within the Arab context, particularly when combined with emotional and rational marketing approaches.

Conclusion

This study employed pentadic and content analyses to uncover the strategic marketing approaches used by Arab female social media influencers like Mthayel, Mina, Fatma, Dima, and Hala. By integrating personal experiences into their product promotions, these influencers skillfully crafted various elements—including product placement, narrative structure, and interaction techniques—to enhance brand visibility and engagement. While each influencer's approach varied, all five managed to present their brands positively, positioning products as solutions to meet consumer needs. Though some influencers showed limited engagement with user comments, they maintained a consistent focus on building trust through authenticity, confidence, and interactivity.

The study found that influencers who exemplify interactivity, authenticity, and confidence are more likely to establish successful brand partnerships. These traits enable them to craft messages that resonate personally with followers, fostering trust, loyalty, and consumer conversion. Effective influencer marketing hinges on blending emotional and rational strategies: emotional marketing fosters deeper connections, while rational marketing highlights practical benefits and logical product attributes. The ability to merge these strategies is central to shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchases, reflecting a nuanced understanding of modern marketing dynamics.

The evolving nature of influencer marketing underscores the importance of this dual approach. By integrating emotional connections with logical persuasion, influencers create stronger relationships with followers and deliver measurable outcomes for brands, reshaping brand-audience interactions. As digital marketing evolves, combining emotional and rational marketing becomes vital to maintaining a competitive edge.

However, the study's small sample size focused exclusively on Arab female influencers, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample to include influencers of different genders, regions, and industries could offer broader insights into marketing strategies and the adaptability of emotional and rational approaches across diverse contexts.

Future research should include a more varied range of influencers to explore whether identified strategies are universally effective or context-specific. Studies could also examine how influencers tailor emotional and rational marketing within specific industries, offering insights into long-term brand engagement and customer loyalty.

In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of Arab female influencers in contemporary marketing. By combining emotional and rational marketing with authenticity, confidence, and interactivity, they bridge the gap between brands and consumers, fostering trust and engagement. As digital marketing evolves, a strategy that connects emotionally and logically will be crucial for sustained brand success in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human data in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not required, for either participation in the study or for the publication of potentially/ indirectly identifying information, in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The social media data was accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations.

Author contributions

AA: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JG: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that Generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript. Generative AI was used to assist with writing, intepretation, and theorizing.

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