Small influencers should inform, brands can persuade: When rational content works

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Abstract

In today's age of influencers and growing interest in rational (i.e. informative or persuasive) content on social media, marketers need to understand what type of content is most effective. However, it is often unclear what kind of content should be promoted by brands and influencers, especially small influencers (under 100,000 followers). Across two experiments, we found that when small influencers generate persuasive (vs. informative) content, consumers are less likely to engage and purchase. Persuasion knowledge theory suggests consumers perceive persuasive intent, creating scepticism that negatively impacts brand trust and marketing outcomes. This pattern was not observed for brands, where we found no difference between rational content types. This research highlights the importance of adapting content to channels and contributes to content and influencer marketing literature.

Keywords: brand engagement; content marketing; persuasion knowledge; influencers; scepticism

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Introduction

The ongoing Fourth Industrial Revolution involves a digital transformation that many companies are embracing to remain competitive and adapt to a changing business environment (Lee & Cho, 2019). This has led to a more complex media landscape and a growing attention-grabbing challenge (Breuer & Brettel, 2012). In this context, brand activation relies heavily on digital content published on social media platforms to capture the attention of audiences (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). To expand their presence on social media, brands constantly need new content to feed their platforms. An illustration of this is that in 2024 global content marketing (including blogging, social media, videos, online articles, research reports and others) was valued at USD 526.54 billion; market value is forecast to grow to USD 598.68 billion in 2025, and to reach USD 1672.17 billion by 2033 (Business Research Insights, 2025).

The Content Marketing Institute (n.d.) defines content marketing as ‘a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience – and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action’. Brand-related digital content can be generated by brands or influencers. Brand-generated content (BGC) is created intentionally by firms and their representatives; it can include content such as e-newsletters, e-books, quizzes, blogs, videos and podcasts (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Commercial BGC and infotainment have been proven to be the most effective types of content for creating positive brand attitudes (Gavilanes et al., 2018).

Influencer-generated content (IGC) is created by influencers, defined as people who have built up a network of followers and who are considered trusted tastemakers in

one or more niches (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers build relationships with their followers on social media by sharing authentic content, which helps them develop a distinctive personal brand (Kozinets et al., 2023). This results in a high level of trust that can lead to higher perceived utility of the content (Cheung et al., 2008). Influencers tend to have expertise in specific fields such as health, travel, food, lifestyle, beauty and fashion (Lou & Yuan, 2019), and generate content (texts, images, videos) on these topics. They can also create content on behalf of a brand.

Brands can collaborate with a number of different types of influencers, from nano- and micro- to macro- and mega-influencers. Nano-influencers are early-stage influencers with fewer than 10,000 followers, who are valued for their accessibility and authenticity (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Micro-influencers, with up to 100,000 followers, have evolved into more professionalism in their content (Nascimento et al., 2020). Macro- and mega-influencers exceed 100,000 followers, sometimes reaching audiences of millions (Kay et al., 2020).

Many consumers today consider influencers as a reliable source of information (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), useful in problem-solving and decision-making (Chen & Chua, 2020; Leung et al., 2022). Influencers with fewer followers in particular can be considered as a sort of ‘friend’ or ‘acquaintance’ by their followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020), and this feeling of proximity can lead to more engagement from their community. As followers can feel closer to nano- and micro-influencers that share the same beliefs, educational background, social status and related attributes (McPherson et al., 2001; Eyal & Rubin, 2003), it can be relevant for brands to work with such small influencers to engage their audience. A body of research has concluded that collaborating with nano- and micro-influencers can be more effective for brands than collaborating with macro-influencers (Park et al., 2021). Influencers with fewer

followers can be perceived as more authentic, which can benefit brands (Kay et al., 2020). Their credibility, trustworthiness and perceived expertise can be main factors that influence consumer attitudes (Han & Balabanis, 2024).

In particular, Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers, more prone to be cynical about traditional marketing, have greater trust in micro-influencers, who can exert significant influence on them (Sinha, 2024). To explore this growing area, this study sought to expand knowledge about the effect on consumers of nano- and micro-influencers. Given the granularity of the profiles of influencers as they develop their careers (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018), we have grouped these different subcategories into the broader 'small influencers'.

After several decades in which emotion-based content was the pinnacle of brand communication, especially with TV advertising, the Internet seems to have allowed more space for a rational appeal, as can be seen in the rise of video-oriented social media platforms (e.g. YouTube and TikTok). A survey by the Content Marketing Institute and Vidyard (2021) found that of the five most effective content marketing video categories, at least two could be considered rational: 'how-to' videos and product demonstrations. An even more recent survey found that younger consumers now consider video ads on social media to have the greatest influence on their purchases (Civic Science, 2023).

A number of studies have looked at the effects of content marketing on consumers while considering the source and type of content. In these, the effectiveness of both BGC (Colicev et al., 2019; Meire et al., 2019; Poulis et al., 2019) and IGC (Delbaere et al., 2021; Holiday et al., 2023; Sardar et al., 2024) on consumer responses has been shown. Certain studies have investigated the effects of rational BGC (Dolan et al., 2019), including informative BGC (Meire et al., 2019), on engagement and purchase

likelihood (Akpinar & Berger, 2017). However, fewer studies have focused on the comparative effects of the two types of rational content (i.e. informative or persuasive; Goh et al., 2013) when produced by influencers, especially small ones, and even fewer have examined how these effects might differ between IGC and BGC.

Yet these distinctions matter: the options of content source and type have considerably diversified, and given that they can coexist on the same platforms, marketers need guidelines on whether to push IGC (and which type of influencer) rather than BGC, and what kind of content to choose (and why). It is crucial to understand not only the isolated effects of each content type and source, but how they compare and interact. Due to the prevalence of rational content in digital marketing today, the question of the effectiveness of informative, compared to persuasive content, on consumer responses is essential to make strategic decisions.

Clarifying how these different message types perform depending on who delivers them could help marketers allocate resources more effectively and tailor content strategies to maximise consumer engagement and conversion. Moreover, more insights on the effectiveness of small-influencer-generated content (SIGC) are needed, considering the potential of return on investment it represents for brands, particularly when targeting Gen Z. To shed light on this, this study investigated the effect of rational content type (informative vs persuasive) and source (brand vs small influencer) on important marketing outcomes (brand engagement and purchase intent).

It aims to answer the following questions: Does the effect of rational content on consumer responses vary depending on both content type and source? What mechanisms explain this effect? When encouraging small influencers to create content, should marketers ask them to promote informative or persuasive content? Our conceptual development and hypotheses are based on persuasion knowledge theory,

which explains how consumers perceive and respond to marketers' attempts to persuade them (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Because of the way persuasion knowledge theory highlights the interplay between content type and source, we assume that persuasive content would lead to more negative consequences of persuasion knowledge activation than informative content, and that this effect would be more pronounced for small influencers than for brands.

To test the relevance of our theoretical framework, we conducted two online experiments, finding an interaction effect between content type and content source. Persuasive content was found to be less effective than informative content on brand engagement and purchase intention when it was small-influencer generated, while the difference between these two types of content was not significant when it was brand generated. In line with our conceptual model, we suggest that the explanation for this is a serial mediation effect of scepticism and brand trust.

These results have practical applications for those running content marketing campaigns, while also providing a theoretical contribution to research on content and small-influencer marketing.

The effects of rational brand- and small-influencer-generated content

Content sources: brands vs small influencers

BGC is created intentionally by firms, and includes ads, e-newsletters, e-books, quizzes, blogs, videos and podcasts (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Gavilanes et al. (2018) proposed a typology of the different kinds of BGC that can be produced: (1) product advertising, (2) new product launch or announcement, (3) contests, (4) commercial content, (5) consumer posts (feedback), (6) information and entertainment content (infotainment), and (7) corporate advertising. In those authors' study, commercial

content and infotainment were most successful at creating a positive brand attitude.

IGC is produced by people who are considered trusted tastemakers in one or more niches (De Veirman et al., 2017), and who build relationships with their followers through authentic content shared on social media (Kozinets et al., 2023). Influencers are seen as experts in their fields by their followers, resulting in a high level of trust that can lead to higher perceived utility of the content (Cheung et al., 2008). Expertise, authenticity and trust are key aspects of an influencer's credibility, which is an important antecedent of the impact their content has on attitudes and behaviours (Han & Balabanis, 2024).

The content can be motivated by the influencer's desire for self-expression, life curation, to make a comment, participate in a forum, or provide information (Huang et al., 2007). IGC can be differentiated from user-generated content (UGC) in that the users generating the content can be assimilated to consumers with no apparent commercial intent (Smith et al., 2012). UGC includes content such as reviews, recommendations and personal experiences shared by users with their peers (Savale et al., 2024).

Nano-influencers (which we have included in our 'small influencer' category) count less than 10,000 followers. They are considered newcomers in influencer-marketing practice, as they are at the beginning of their careers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Micro-influencers (also included in our 'small influencer' category) are larger than nano-influencers but smaller than macro-influencers both in scale and scope; they tend to be more local and have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Differences in the way influencers produce content can be observed depending on their career stage and follower base. For instance, those with smaller followings tend to create a greater variety and volume of content, subtly integrating

products into their lifestyles. In contrast, those with larger followings produce fewer, more direct promotional content (Hogsnes et al., 2024). Meanwhile, some existing research has highlighted that micro-influencers appear to be more effective than macro-influencers in improving marketing outcomes (Kay et al, 2020).

Rational content types: informative vs persuasive

In marketing literature, content is often split into two categories: rational and emotional (Dolan et al., 2019). For this study, we decided to focus on rational content, given the importance of such strategies in digital brand communication, and given that emotional content has been widely studied (e.g. Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Dolan et al., 2019; Meire, 2019).

Rational content can refer to informative or persuasive appeals (Goh et al., 2013). Taking Dolan et al. (2019) as a starting point, we define informative content as content that aims to provide objective information and knowledge about a product, its usage or its technical specifications (e.g. for food products, the ingredients they contain), or about topics in the scope of the brand's expertise (e.g. tutorials on how to use a product, educational website or blog on a specific topic, etc.). Based on Tellis et al. (2019) and Goh et al. (2013), we define persuasive content as an appealing presentation of a product with the intention to please or inspire the target consumer, delivered in a convincing way. Persuasive content aims to influence and convince the audience of the benefits of a product/brand (e.g. traditional advertising that promotes a product's advantages). Both informative and persuasive content can be included in content marketing initiatives by brands or by influencers.

Exploring combinations of content source and type

In existing research on content sources (Table 1), both BGC (e.g. Akpinar & Berger,

2017) and IGC (e.g. Delbaere et al., 2021) have been shown to have a positive effect on consumer responses. More specifically, BGC and IGC have positive effects on consumer engagement (Dolan et al., 2019; Gavilanes et al., 2018) and purchase intent (Mayrhofer et al., 2020; Sardar et al., 2024). Consumer purchase intention has also been shown to be impacted by the growing use of social media and content marketing by firms (Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Poulis et al., 2019).

To some extent, the joint effect of BGC and IGC has been investigated. For example, an influencer's endorsement of a brand may mitigate a negative reaction to the manipulative intent of an ad (Kim et al., 2021). Another study has shown how IGC can reinforce the positive effects of BGC on consumer engagement (Odoom, 2025). However, these studies do not compare the effects of IGC vs BGC on consumer responses. With the exception of the two latter studies, the content sources (brands or influencers) have typically been considered independently, without any comparative approach of their effects on consumers. Moreover, existing research on IGC often does not specify whether it considered macro- or nano/micro-influencers; when it does, the focus is mainly on macro-influencers.

In terms of content type, a number of studies have investigated the effects of different approaches. Rational content, and especially informative content, has been compared to emotional content on many occasions (e.g. Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Dolan et al., 2019, Lou & Yuan, 2019; Meire et al., 2019). However, research is scarce on the comparative effect of the two aspects of rational content, i.e. informative or persuasive. Yet there is a growing trend of users considering informative content a reliable source in their purchasing decisions (Leung et al., 2022). As the aim of content marketing is to bring value to the audience by offering relevant content (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), informative content might be seen to bring more value than persuasive content.

Table 1: Overview of related research studying rational content type and/or source

Reference	Content source	Content type	Main findings	Gap addressed in our study
Akpinar & Berger (2017)	Brands	Informative	Informative content boosts brand evaluation and purchase likelihood	Comparing informative to persuasive brand content
Delbaere et al. (2021)	Macro-influencers	N/A	IGC has positive effects on the three dimensions of brand engagement (cognitive processing, affection, activation)	Effects of different types of content; study of content from small influencers
Dolan et al. (2019)	Brands	Rational	Rational (vs emotional) social media content better stimulates active engagement	Differences within rational brand content
Kim et al. (2021)	Corporate brands and influencers	N/A	Preceding an ad with an influencer's endorsement can reduce reactance to the ad's manipulative intent	Comparing brand and influencer content (not the two combined); details on influencer type
Lou & Xie (2021)	Brands	Informative	Putting more cognitive emphasis on BGC for high-involvement products and more affective emphasis for low-involvement products is more effective	Comparing informative to persuasive brand content

Lou & Yuan (2019)	Macro-influencers	Informative	Informative value, influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness and similarity positively affect followers' trust in IGC, brand awareness and purchase intention	Comparing informative to persuasive influencer content; effect of small influencer content
Meire et al. (2019)	Brands	Informative	For unfavourable experiences, informational (vs emotional) content can enhance customer engagement	Comparing informative to persuasive brand content
Odoom (2025)	Brands and influencers	Informative and commercial	BGC has a positive effect on engagement; IGC reinforces these effects, except when IGC includes negative emotions	Comparing brand and influencer content (not the two combined); details on influencer types
Sardar et al. (2024)	Influencers	N/A	Source credibility and content characteristics in fashion IGC positively influence consumer engagement, which mediates the effects on purchase intent	Differences within rational content; effect of small influencers
Tellis et al. (2019)	Brands	Informative	Informational content has a negative effect on sharing, except when product purchase risk is high	Comparing informative to persuasive brand content
Our study	Brands vs small influencers	Informative vs persuasive	Informative (vs persuasive) SIGC drives more engagement and purchase intent, while there is no difference between these two types of content for BGC	

Given the rising interest in small influencers and informative content, we considered that it would be of value to investigate the effects of both. While BGC has been proven to have positive effects on consumer behaviour and attitudes, small influencers can be considered by consumers as more authentic and potentially trustworthy, letting brands gain in marketing effectiveness when collaborating with them (Kay et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021). It has been found that macro-influencer's content is considered more engaging when it is informative rather than commercial (Cascio et al., 2024), but this evidence is lacking for content created by small influencers. Yet these are important questions for marketers who must allocate budgets most effectively and need to know if they should favour one source or another (brand or small influencer), or to produce informative or persuasive content.

Informative and persuasive BGC

Rational content produced by brands has been shown to stimulate more active engagement than emotional content (Dolan et al., 2019). However, some differences have been highlighted within rational content. Informative BGC is effective in driving brand engagement, especially in the context of unfavourable experiences (Meire et al., 2019). It has also been shown to matter more for high-involvement products, as consumers need more information before making a purchase decision (Lou & Xie, 2021). Informative BGC can also boost brand evaluation and purchase likelihood (Akpinar & Berger, 2017). Persuasive BGC, for its part, appears effective at generating positive brand attitude (Gavilanes et al., 2018).

While there is a larger body of research on persuasive BGC, as it is widely used in marketing and advertising, digital communications have expanded the use of informative content: for example, through formats such as infotainment and tutorials. Given these evolving practices, it is increasingly relevant to compare the effectiveness

of informative and persuasive brand content on the same variables, and especially on key outcomes such as engagement and purchase intent.

Informative and persuasive IGC

Rational content is a common form in influencer marketing. For instance, beauty bloggers and YouTubers publish informative IGC such as product descriptions, reviews of recently launched products, and advice on applying make-up (Gannon & Prothero, 2018). Informative content has a positive impact on the trust of an influencer's followers, which in turn increases purchase intent (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

If consumers consider influencers to be a reliable source of information (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), it is likely that they perceive informative content posted by influencers as authentic and unbiased. Authenticity is a successful influencer strategy (Audrezet et al., 2020). In a similar way, consumer-to-consumer social media interactions have been shown to have a positive impact on purchase intention and engagement (Onofrei et al., 2022).

While influencers make extensive use of informative content, brands working with them may push influencers to create content that attempts to persuade consumers more directly, as IGC can have a persuasive role in decision-making (Chen & Chua, 2020; Leung et al., 2022). However, multiple exposures to persuasive IGC have negative short-term effects for brands due to an increase in scepticism (Evans et al., 2022).

While these findings are useful, limited research has investigated the comparative impact of informative vs persuasive SIGC on the same variable, particularly purchase intent – a key metric for marketing research and practice. More insight is needed into their relative effectiveness and into the mechanisms that could explain different consumer responses. In a context where content created by small

influencers is particularly reaching Gen Z, and it is known that there is often an interaction effect between content and source – notably in influencer marketing (Sardar et al., 2024) – it is valuable to investigate the extent to which the magnitude and/or direction of the effect of rational content varies depending on whether the source is a brand or an influencer. This research explores this using an approach based on persuasion knowledge theory.

Conceptual model and hypotheses

Persuasion knowledge activation from brand-related digital content

Persuasion knowledge refers to the accumulation of knowledge by a consumer about the persuasive aims of marketing (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Depending on this level of awareness, as well as on contextual variables such as topic knowledge, consumers may respond more or less positively to marketers' persuasive efforts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). We use the definition of Hossain and Saini (2014) of persuasion knowledge as 'consumer's vigilance against manipulative persuasion by marketers' (p. 110). Persuasion knowledge has critical implications for marketers; a high level of persuasion knowledge may potentially reduce the impact of persuasive marketing attempts by up to 50% (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022).

While much of the literature equates persuasion knowledge activation with negative consequences, Isaac and Grayson (2017) argue that persuasion knowledge operates along a continuum ranging from scepticism to credibility. Tactics associated with manipulative intent are more likely to elicit scepticism (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007), while 'certain marketing tactics are believed and trusted by consumers' (Isaac & Grayson, 2017, p. 897) and can positively influence evaluations.

In today's age of influencer marketing, it is critical to consider how small influencers, not only brands, activate persuasion knowledge. According to Eisend and Tarrahi (2022), variables such as content type and source transparency, which are particularly relevant to influencer practice and research, can mitigate the potentially negative effect of persuasion knowledge.

Persuasion knowledge theory acknowledges the importance of content type on how consumers use their awareness of persuasion tactics and agent motives to evaluate marketing attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Importantly, different types of content will elicit different types of persuasion knowledge activation. Informative content typically provides plain, objective information and knowledge about products or topics (Dolan et al., 2019). By aligning with consumers' informational needs (Katz & Foulkes, 1962), informative content is likely to positively activate persuasion knowledge. Such content is perceived as transparent and relevant, a marketing tactic that can enhance message credibility rather than induce scepticism (Isaac & Grayson, 2017).

In contrast, when the manipulative intent is salient, persuasion knowledge is more likely to elicit scepticism (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007), with negative downstream effects on marketing outcomes. This would be the case for obviously persuasive techniques, where it is clear that the brand wants consumers to act in a specific way. In short, informative content is more likely to activate persuasion knowledge positively, while persuasive content is more likely to activate it negatively, with negative downstream consequences for consumer response.

A number of studies have demonstrated the effect of brand-related content on brand engagement (e.g. Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Delbaere et al., 2021). Engagement is a psychological process by which customers move towards brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009) and is characterized by emotional, cognitive and behavioural activation states

during brand interaction (Brodie et al., 2011). Recently, brand engagement has been viewed more as a behavioural construct, encompassing content engagement, co-creation, advocacy and negative engagement, reflecting the shift of consumers from passive recipients to active participants in the social media era (Obilo et al., 2021). Research has also demonstrated the effect of content on purchase intent (e.g. Mayrhofer et al., 2020; You & Joshi, 2020). As consumer engagement and purchase intention have been proven to be sensitive to the effects of content type (Sardar et al., 2024), we chose to focus on the comparative effect of informative and persuasive content on these variables. Based on differences in persuasion knowledge activation, we formally posit the following:

> **H1**: Persuasive (vs informative) digital content has a negative effect on (a) brand engagement and (b) purchase intention.

Persuasion knowledge and the interaction effect of content source and type

In addition to content type, content source is at play in persuasion knowledge theory. Brands, as commercial entities with clear profit-driven motives, typically evoke a baseline level of scepticism, regardless of the content they produce (Berthelot-Guiet, 2020). Thus, while persuasive content from brands may foster more scepticism than informative content, the relative difference between the respective types of content should remain moderate because consumers inherently expect persuasive intent from brands.

In contrast, Audrezet et al. (2020) underscore the importance of authenticity in influencer–brand collaborations in order to maximise consumer engagement. Of the content that influencers provide to their followers, informative content is especially well aligned with the goal of transparency, as influencers are seen as reliable sources of information (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Small influencers are perceived as even

more ethical and more accessible (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). As source transparency can help mitigate the negative consequences of persuasion knowledge (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022), we might assume that informative SIGC activates persuasion knowledge positively. Conversely, when small influencers deliver persuasive content, these expectations would be disrupted, leading to persuasion knowledge that elicits a more negative response than informative content.

In summary, based on persuasion knowledge theory and previous research on the effect of content type and content source, we posit that the contrast between the high initial credibility associated with informative SIGC and the potential perceived violation of this credibility by persuasive SIGC will amplify the negative effect of persuasive content on consumer responses. For brands, the difference should be less pronounced, as their persuasive intent is already normalised (Berthelot-Guiet, 2020). Thus, we postulate an interaction effect of content type and source:

> **H2**: The negative effect of persuasive (vs informative) content on (a) brand engagement and (b) purchase intention is more pronounced when small influencers (vs brands) generate the content.

Brand trust and consumer scepticism

Brand trust can be defined as a consumer's willingness to rely on the brand's ability to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Moorman et al., 1992). A fundamental concept in relationship marketing, brand trust can facilitate the establishment of consistent long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gurviez & Korchia, 2003). There is evidence that trust also positively influences consumers' purchase decisions (Suhaily & Darmoyo, 2017), especially online (Kim et al., 2012). Thus, brand trust is likely to have a positive impact on other correlated marketing variables, such as brand engagement. As Hollebeek and Macky (2019) argue, brand

trust involves the consumer's belief that the firm is acting in his or her best interest (i.e. benevolence; Ganesan & Hess, 1997). Furthermore, trust has been shown to play a mediating role in the relationship between brand signals (e.g. source credibility) and consumer responses such as loyalty and purchase intention (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

Influencers are considered highly credible sources, which may elicit greater trust and self-validation in recipients (Clark & Evans, 2014). Informative IGC has a positive effect on followers' trust and purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Such a positive effect seems to be well aligned with our hypotheses on the superiority of informative over persuasive content in terms of engagement and purchase. Moreover, we predicted a more pronounced negative effect of persuasive content in the case of small influencers. This could be explained by an increased sentiment of betrayal towards a well-trusted source – small influencers – believed to provide authentic and credible informative content. Thus, we posit that brand trust is a second-order consequence of digital content marketing:

> **H3**: Brand trust mediates the interaction effect of content type (informative vs persuasive) and source (small influencers vs brands) on (a) brand engagement and (b) purchase intention.

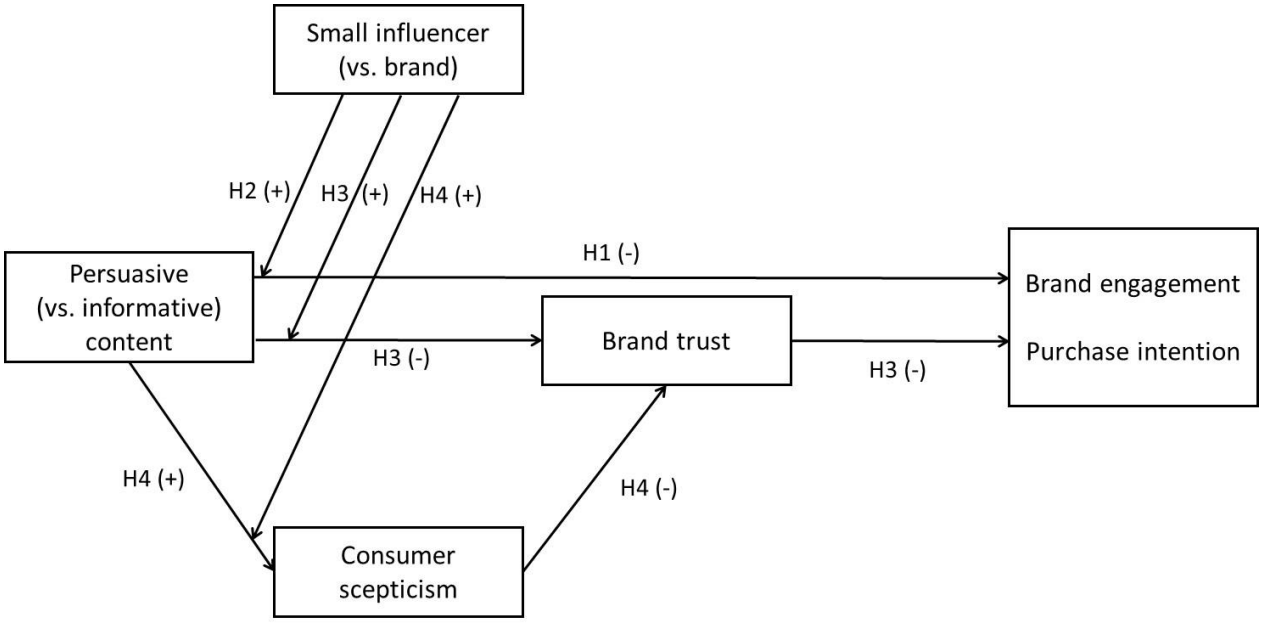
According to persuasion knowledge theory, some marketing tactics increase scepticism (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007) while, on the other side of the same continuum, others increase credibility (Isaac & Grayson, 2017) or, in other words, reduce scepticism. Thus, we could assume that scepticism is the first variable impacted by the interaction effect of content type and source, either positively or negatively, according to the perception of a more or less credible marketing tactic (Isaac & Grayson, 2017). This would be congruent with the use of persuasion knowledge as our theoretical framework, as a certain level of scepticism is directly dependent on persuasion

knowledge activation (Hossain & Saini, 2014; Kirmani & Zhu, 2007), leading to the following postulation:

H4: Consumer scepticism mediates the interaction effect of content type (informative vs persuasive) and source (small influencers vs brands) on brand trust.

To explore these hypotheses, we conducted two online studies, based on the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual model



Study 1 – The interaction effect of content type and source and the role of brand trust

Study 1 aimed to test the direct effect of content type on brand engagement and purchase intention, the interaction effect of content type and source, and the mediating role of brand trust. The design was a 2 (content type: informative vs persuasive) x 2 (content source: small influencer vs brand) between-subjects experiment. The study focused on the perception of brand-related videos on YouTube, a platform relevant to the study of branded content marketing (Lou & Xie, 2021) and social media influencers

(Delbaere et al., 2021; Gannon & Prothero, 2018). YouTube is the second most popular website in the world (following Google), with 5.66 billion monthly visitors (DataReportal et al., 2024), making it a familiar place for many consumers.

Participants and procedure

We recruited 232 participants from a consumer panel[1] (M_{age} = 41.39, SD = 12.10; 51.3% female, 48.7% male), with market-rate financial compensation. Participants received an email with a link to a self-assessed screening survey to confirm that they were active YouTube users[2] and were then randomly assigned to the different experimental cells. We asked the participants to imagine that they were browsing YouTube and presented with a video. Depending on the scenario (see Web appendix 1), the video either featured a person explaining how to use a video camera from the (fictitious) brand Filmy (content type: informative), or a person praising the advantages of the Filmy camera and asserting that it was the best model on the market (content type: persuasive). The description stated that the video was hosted either on a user's account (content source: small influencer) or on the brand's account (content source: brand).

Presenting respondents with a 'user' who produces video content about a brand's product in an informative or persuasive way allowed us to better control the source variable. First, it helped to differentiate from BGC by clearly presenting a source

[1] Data were collected in France from the online consumer panel Panelabs, which is managed by the market research company MIS Group. It complies with the European General Data Protection Regulation (https://en.panelabs.com/our-consumer-panel). Participants gave MIS Group informed consent for their anonymised responses to be used for scientific research and published. Due to the nature of the research and the institutional rules of Université Jean Monnet and IESEG, this work was exempt from ethics approval.

[2] Selected participants indicated that they browsed YouTube at least once a month.

other than the brand, while the description of highly brand-related content on such a platform is well suited to typical influencer content. Second, not specifying the name of the small influencer allowed us to control for factors such as congruence between influencer and participant (Venciute et al., 2023) and the effect of influencer fame (Piehler et al., 2022). The small influencer we presented corresponded to an individual at the early stages of an influencer's trajectory, specifically the 'turning point' when the influencer starts to show expertise and give advice, producing original, quality content (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018), even if they receive no or little incentive from brands (Nascimento et al., 2020). The situation also fits well with the 'passionate topic enthusiasm' (Ouvrein et al., 2021) of nano-influencers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020), who produce valuable content with high interest in the topic, although for a limited audience. After being exposed to the stimuli, participants answered several questions about their perceptions of the content and the brand, as well as demographics, before being debriefed.

Measures

All responses were rated using 7-point Likert scales. Following exposure to the scenario, participants answered two questions to indicate how they perceived the content by evaluating the extent to which they found it informative ('The video provides relevant information about the Filmy camera') and persuasive ('The video is intended to make me buy the Filmy camera'). Then, following Obilo et al. (2021), we measured brand engagement according to four dimensions ($\alpha = .83$): content engagement (nine items, e.g. 'I would post something related to Filmy on social network sites'; $\alpha = .97$), co-creation (three items, e.g. 'I would make constructive suggestions to Filmy about how to improve its products'; $\alpha = .92$), advocacy (six items, e.g. 'I would encourage friends and relatives to use Filmy'; $\alpha = .96$), and negative engagement (three items, e.g.

'I would boycott Filmy products if they performed below expectations'; α = .90).

We also measured purchase intention using a single-item 7-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'If you needed to buy a video camera within the next six months, you might buy a Filmy camera', using a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The question asked paraphrases Juster's (1966), whose probability scale is recognized as best suited for measuring purchase intention (Morwitz, 2001; Morwitz & Munz, 2021). We included the experiment's brand name in the question, as purchase intentions are more correlated with actual purchases when respondents are asked about a specific brand rather than a broad product category (Morwitz et al., 2007). However, we transformed Juster's 11-point scale into a 7-point scale for consistency across our questionnaire and for respondent ease, as well as to avoid statistical misestimates that could appear because of mixing scales (Weijters et al., 2010).

Finally, we measured the four dimensions of brand trust following Gurviez and Korchia (2003; α = .95): credibility (three items, e.g. 'Buying Filmy products is a guarantee'; α = .95), integrity (three items, e.g. 'Filmy is honest with its consumers'; α = .92), benevolence (two items, e.g. 'I believe that Filmy is continually seeking to improve to meet consumer needs'; α = .90), and trust engagement (four items, e.g. 'I would tend to compliment and defend Filmy'; α = .94).

Results

Based on the collected data, we conducted a one-way ANOVA to check our content type manipulation. The findings revealed significant differences in the perception of informativeness ($F(1,230) = 8.53$, $p < .01$): the informative content was perceived as more informative ($M_{info} = 5.64$, SD =.96) than the persuasive content ($M_{pers} = 5.21$, SD = 1.28). The findings also revealed significant differences in the perception of

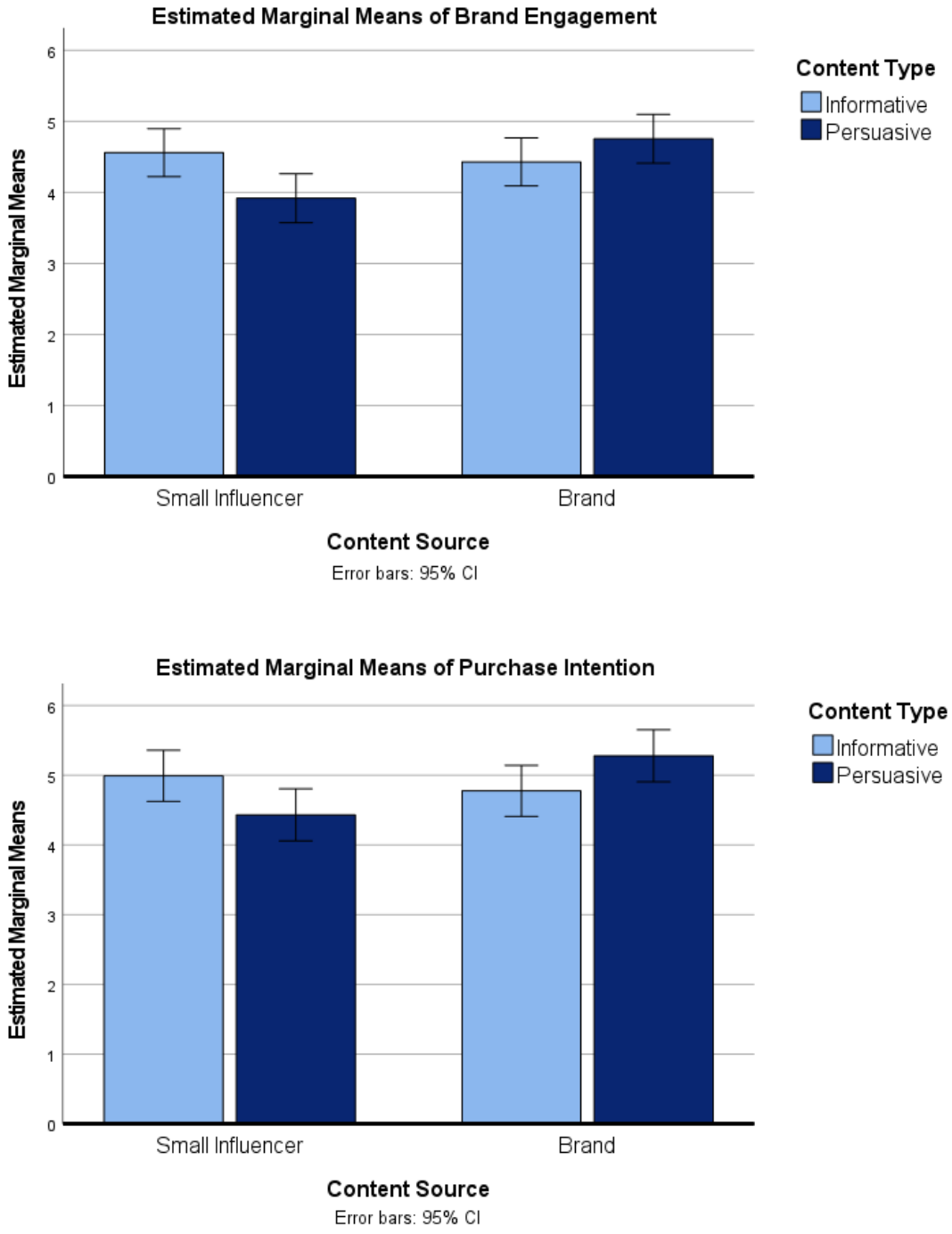
persuasiveness (F(1,230) = 6.83, p <.05): the persuasive content was perceived as more persuasive (M_{pers} = 5.76, SD = 1.35) than the informative content (M_{info} = 5.29, SD = 1.41). To examine the relationship between the source of content and its perception, we performed a chi-square test of independence, and the relationship between variables was significant (X^2 (2, N = 232) = 41.24, p <.001). These results proved that the manipulations were successful.

We then conducted a two-way MANOVA with content source and content type as independent variables, and brand engagement and purchase intention as dependent variables, with age as a covariate. The findings showed a significant main effect of content source on brand engagement (F(1, 227) = 4.17, p <.05, partial η^2 = .02) and a marginally significant main effect of source on purchase intention (F(1, 227) = 2.82, p =.09, partial η^2 = .01). Brand engagement and purchase intention were slightly higher (.35 and .31 points higher, respectively) when the content came from the brand compared to when it came from the small influencer. No other direct effects were found.

The findings additionally showed a significant interaction effect of content source and content type on brand engagement (F(1, 227) = 7.81, p <.01, partial η^2 = .03) and on purchase intention (F(1, 227) = 7.98, p <.01, partial η^2 = .03; see Figure 2). Bonferroni-adjusted comparisons indicated that, for SIGC, brand engagement (M_{info} = 4.56; SE =.16, p < .01) and purchase intention (M_{info} = 4.99; SE =.16, p < .01) were higher when the content was informative, compared with when it was persuasive (M_{pers} = 3.92; SE =.17, M_{pers} = 4.43, SE =.19, respectively). When the content was generated by the brand, we found no significant difference between informative and persuasive conditions for brand engagement (p = .18) or purchase intention (p = .06). These results partially support H1(a) and H1(b): persuasive content has a negative effect on (a) brand engagement and (b) purchase intention compared with informative content, but only in

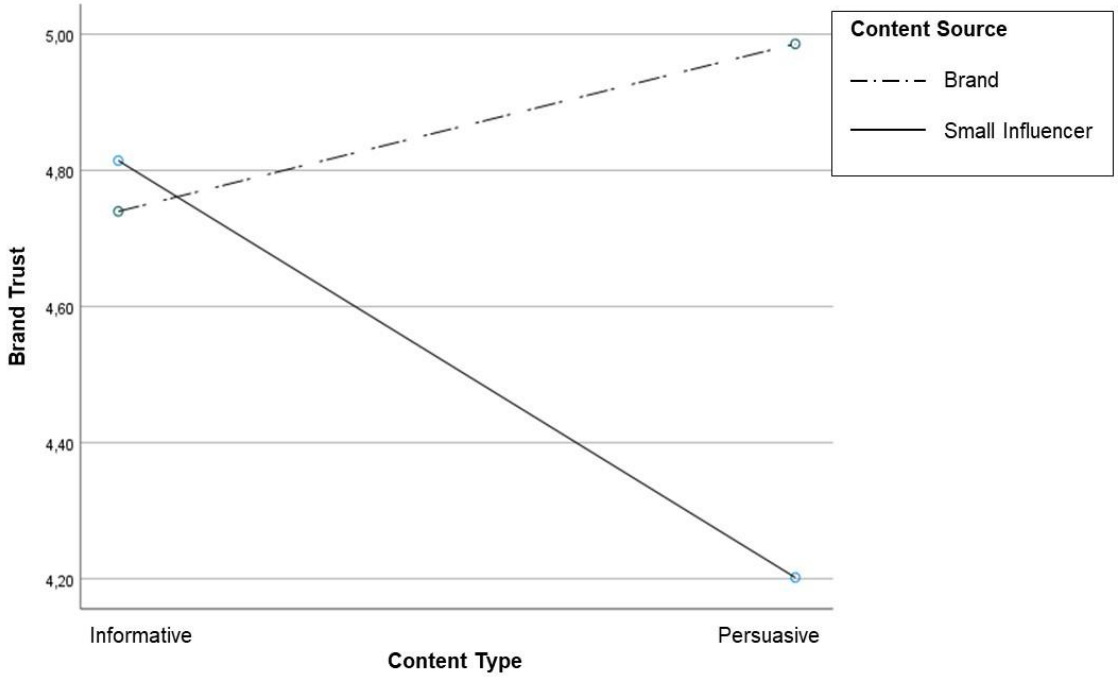
the case of small-influencer content. Furthermore, these results support H2 in that the negative effect of persuasive (vs informative) content is stronger when the content is generated by small influencers (vs brands) – the difference between the two types of BGC being even non-significant.

Figure 2: Interaction effect of content type and source on brand engagement and purchase intention



To test the mediating effect of brand trust, we first conducted a bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (model 7; Hayes, 2017) with 5000 bootstrap samples, with brand engagement as a dependent variable, content type as an independent variable, content source as a moderator, brand trust as a mediator, and age as a covariate. The analysis showed a significant interaction effect of content type and content source on brand trust (b = .86, 95% CI [.22, 1.49], t = 2.66, $p < .01$; see Figure 3). Conditional effects analyses showed that SIGC resulted in lower brand trust when the content shifted from informative to persuasive (b_{influ} = -.61, 95% CI [-1.06, -.16], t = -2.69, $p < .01$), but indicated no significant effect for BGC (p = .28).

Figure 3: Interaction effect of content type and source on brand trust



The results also showed an overall moderated mediation model supported by the index of moderated mediation (index = 0.70, 95% CI [.19; 1.22]). The confidence interval (CI) did not include zero, indicating a significant interaction effect of content source and content type on brand engagement via brand trust. The conditional indirect effect was negative and significant for SIGC (b_{influ} = -.50, 95% CI [-.86, -.12]), with a

detrimental effect on engagement mediated by brand trust when the content shifted from informative to persuasive. No significant effect was found for BGC (b_{brand} = .20, 95% CI [-.16, .56]). When content source and brand trust were included in the model, the direct effect of content type on brand engagement was not significant (b = - .01, t = -.07, p = .94, 95% CI [-.24, .22]). These results support H3(a), finding a moderated mediation effect of content type and content source on brand engagement through brand trust.

We then conducted a similar bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis, with purchase intention as a dependent variable (instead of brand engagement). In line with the previous analysis, we found a significant interaction effect of content type and content source on brand trust (b = .86, 95% CI [.22, 1.49], t = 2.66, p < .01). Conditional effects analyses showed that SIGC resulted in lower brand trust when the content shifted from informative to persuasive (b_{influ} = -.61, 95% CI [-1.06, -.16], t = -2.68, p < .01), but no significant effect was found for BGC (p = .28).

The results also showed an overall moderated mediation model supported by the index of moderated mediation (index = 0.76, 95% CI [.20; 1.33]). The CI did not include zero, indicating a significant moderating effect of content source and content type on purchase intention via brand trust. The conditional indirect effect was negative and significant for SIGC (b_{influ} = -.54, 95% CI [-.93, -.13]), with a detrimental effect on purchase intention mediated by brand trust when the content shifted from informative to persuasive. No significant effect was found for BGC (b_{brand} =.22, 95% CI [-.17, .63]). Finally, when content source and brand trust were included in the model, the direct effect of content type on purchase intention was not significant (b =.13, t = 1.07, p = .28, 95% CI [-.11, .38]). These results support H3(b), finding a moderated mediation effect of content type and content source on purchase intention through brand trust.

Discussion

Our findings showed an interaction effect between content source and content type on brand engagement and purchase intention. When exposed to SIGC, consumers engage more with the brand and have a higher intention to buy when the content is informative than when it is persuasive. This may be explained by the mediated path of the interaction effect of content source and content type on brand engagement and on purchase intention through brand trust. We found that SIGC builds more trust towards the brand when the content is informative than when it is persuasive, which leads to higher levels of brand engagement and purchase intention. In contrast, for BGC, we did not find any difference when comparing the effects of informative and persuasive content.

These results are consistent with our hypotheses and suggest that persuasive SIGC is considered by consumers a marketing tactic with little credibility, as this is the condition for the negative activation of persuasion knowledge (Isaac & Grayson, 2017). The results are also in line with the positive effects of IGC on brand engagement found in the case of beauty product videos (Delbaere et al., 2021), which can be considered informative content. We also found positive effects of informative IGC on purchase intent, in line with Lou and Yuan (2019). In addition, the experiments provided insights into the mediating role of brand trust, a variable that explains the interaction effects of content source and type on consumer response.

Nevertheless, we wanted to better explore the mechanisms at play and provide more evidence of the relevance of persuasion knowledge as our theoretical framework. We thus conducted a complementary study introducing consumer scepticism, which is typically a relevant variable when studying the activation of persuasion knowledge (Hossain & Saini, 2014). To extend the robustness of our findings and improve external validity, we tested a different sector and chose real brands rather than fictitious ones.

This added realism to our scenarios; realism and credibility are crucial for the success of vignette experiments (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

Study 2 – The mediating role of consumer scepticism

Study 2 aimed to further investigate the interaction between content source and content type, this time testing two well-known brands for each of two product categories within the food industry. While Study 1 focused on a high-involvement, hedonic, expensive product (cameras), Study 2 focused on low-involvement, utilitarian, inexpensive products (bottled water and crisps). The aim was to see if the observed effects were consistent across a range of consumer products.

In this different context, we replicated the test of the interaction between content source and content type on brand trust done in Study 1, additionally testing the extent to which consumer scepticism may explain differences in brand trust. As in Study 1, the design was a 2 (content type: informative vs persuasive) x 2 (content source: small influencer vs brand) between-subjects experiment.

Participants and procedure

We recruited 94 participants (M_{age} = 41.82, SD = 11.38; 58.5% female, 41.5% male) from the same consumer panel as in Study 1; they received market-rate financial compensation. As the studied platform was also YouTube, for the same reasons as in Study 1, participants were screened by confirming they were active YouTube users and then randomly assigned to different experimental cells. Participants were also randomly assigned to one of two different product categories in the food industry (bottled water or crisps) and to one of two different brands for each category. In a design similar to the one explained in Study 1, we asked participants to imagine they were browsing YouTube and were presented with a video. Depending on the scenario (see Web

appendix 2), the video either featured a person explaining how the product is made (content type: informative) or asserting that the brand is the best on the market (content type: persuasive). The description explained that the video was hosted either on a user's account (content source: small influencer) or on the brand's account (content source: brand). We informed participants that the user had 50 followers, to make it clear that this was a small influencer (in this case, a nano-influencer: Campbell & Farrell, 2020) and not a macro-influencer or a celebrity. As in Study 1, we did not vary the content description across source conditions. After being exposed to the stimuli, participants answered several questions about their perceptions of the content and brand, as well as demographics, before being debriefed.

Measures

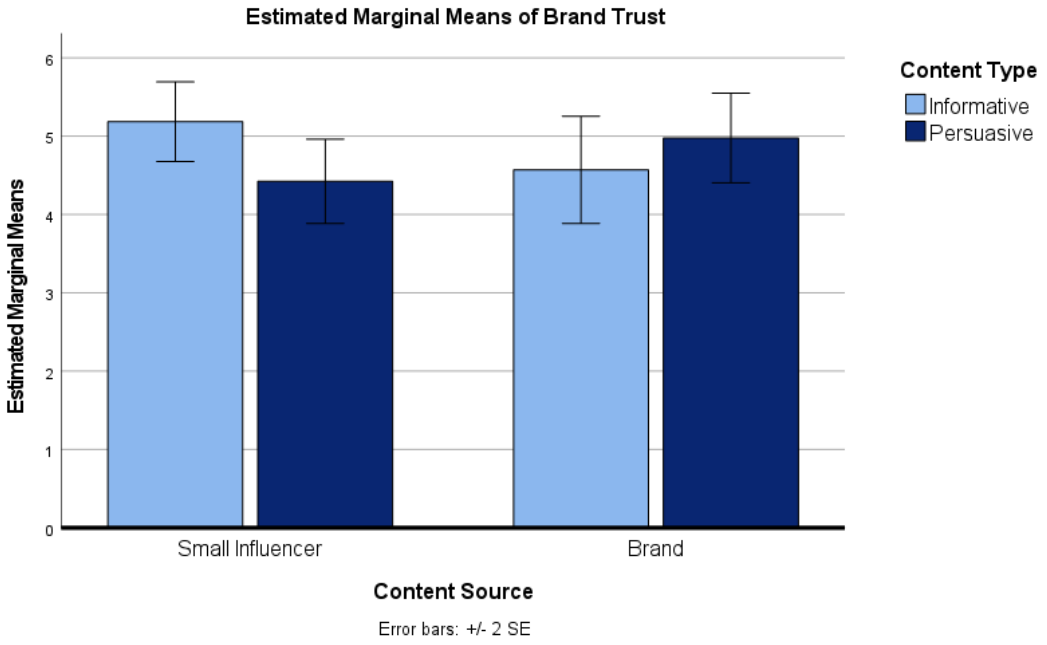
As in Study 1, all responses employed 7-point Likert scales. After reading the scenario, participants answered two sets of items indicating how they perceived the content by assessing the extent to which they perceived the video as informative (four items, e.g. 'The video provides relevant information', 'This video is a good source of information'; Ducoffe, 1996, $\alpha = .93$) or persuasive (three items, e.g. 'The video is intended to make me buy [brand] products', 'This video was made to persuade me'; Chan & Sengupta, 2010; van Noort et al., 2012; Koch & Zerback, 2013; $\alpha = .90$). We then measured the four dimensions of brand trust ($\alpha = .94$) following Gurviez and Korchia (2003), as in Study 1: credibility ($\alpha = .95$), integrity ($\alpha = .98$), benevolence ($\alpha = .90$), and trust engagement ($\alpha = 89$). Finally, we measured consumer scepticism through four differential semantic scales ('This video content is sincere/not sincere, honest/not honest, not manipulative/manipulative, not insistent/insistent'; Hossain & Saini, 2014, $\alpha = .89$).

Results

As an attention check, we first screened participants by verifying that they spent at least 20 seconds reading the scenario and that they correctly understood who posted the video. As all screened participants understood who posted the content, we can consider that our content source manipulation was successful. We then conducted a one-way ANOVA to check our content type manipulation. The findings revealed significant differences in the perception of informativeness ($F(1,92) = 6.42$, $p < .05$): the informative content was perceived as more informative ($M_{info} = 5.13$, SD = 1.39) than the persuasive content ($M_{pers} = 4.36$, SD = 1.56). The findings also revealed significant differences in the perception of persuasiveness ($F(1,92) = 21.35$, $p < .001$): the persuasive content was perceived as more persuasive ($M_{pers} = 6.02$, SD =.92) than the informative content ($M_{info} = 4.77$, SD = 1.61). These results prove that the manipulations were successful.

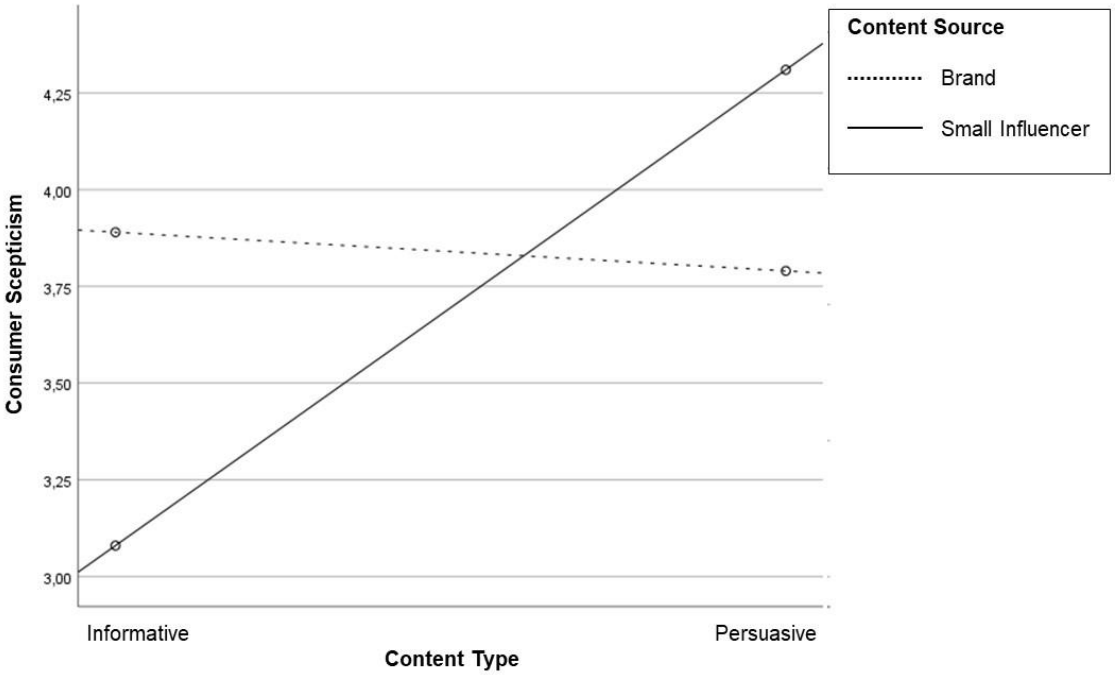
To replicate the interaction effect of content source and content type that we found in Study 1, we conducted a two-way ANOVA with content source and content type as independent variables, brand trust as a dependent variable, and age as a covariate. The findings revealed a significant interaction effect of content source and content type on brand trust ($F(1,89) = 4.07$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$; see Figure 4). No direct effects were reported. Bonferroni-adjusted comparisons indicated that participants reported more brand trust in small-influencer content (.76 point higher, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.27, 1.50]) when the content was informative ($M_{info} = 5.19$; SE = .25) compared with when it was persuasive ($M_{pers} = 4.42$; SE = .27). In contrast, with BGC, no significant difference in brand trust was found ($p = .36$). These results are consistent with the interaction effect on brand trust that we found in Study 1 and thus provide additional support for H3.

Figure 4: Interaction effect of content type and source on brand trust



To test the mediating effect of consumer scepticism, we conducted a bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (model 7; Hayes, 2017) with 5000 bootstrap samples, with brand trust as a dependent variable, content type as an independent variable, content source as a moderator, consumer scepticism as a mediator, and age as a covariate. The analysis showed a significant interaction effect of content type and content source on consumer scepticism (b = -.66, 95% CI [-1.30, -.03], t = -2.09, $p < 0.05$; see Figure 5). The SIGC resulted in higher consumer scepticism when the content was persuasive (b_{influ} = 1.23, 95% CI [.42, 2.04], t = 3.03, $p < .01$) than when it was informative, but no significant effect was found for BGC (b_{brand} = -.10, 95% CI [-1.07, .87], t = -.21, p = .84).

Figure 5: Interaction effect of content type and source on consumer scepticism



Results also showed that an overall moderated mediation model was supported by the index of moderated mediation (index = 0.62, 95% CI [0.01; 1.36]). The CI did not include zero, indicating a significant interaction effect of content source and content type on brand trust via consumer scepticism. The conditional indirect effect on brand trust was negative and significant for SIGC (b_{influ} = -.57, 95% CI [.-1.04, -.19]), with a detrimental effect on brand trust mediated by consumer scepticism when the content shifted from informative to persuasive. No significant effect was reported for BGC (b_{brand} = .05, 95% CI [-.44, 0.58]). Finally, when content source and consumer scepticism were included in the model, the direct effect of content type on brand trust was not significant (b = .04, t = 1.16, p =.87, 95% CI [.87, -.46]). These results support H4, finding a moderated mediation effect of content type and content source on brand trust through consumer scepticism.

Discussion

In Study 2, we found additional evidence that when exposed to SIGC, consumers trust a brand less when the content is persuasive than when it is informative. This could be explained by the role of consumer scepticism in mediating the interaction effect of content type and content source on brand trust. When the content is persuasive, SIGC generates more scepticism and consequently less brand trust than when it is informative. This result is in line with the work of Evans et al. (2022), who demonstrated that frequent exposure to promotional IGC, such as brand endorsement, results in an increase in scepticism. Conversely, informative SIGC appears to generate less scepticism and more brand trust. This is consistent with consumers valuing IGC as a source of information (Chen & Chua, 2020) and aligns with persuasion knowledge theory, which shows that credible marketing tactics can lead to positive outcomes instead of increasing scepticism (Isaac & Grayson, 2017). In the case of BGC, we did not find any differences between informative and persuasive content in terms of scepticism or brand trust, which is consistent with the findings of Study 1.

General discussion

In this investigation of the comparative effects of content type (informative vs persuasive) depending on content source (brand vs small influencer), the two experiments revealed the negative impact of persuasive SIGC on brand engagement and on purchase intent, via the two mediating variables of brand trust and scepticism. The first experiment supported our assumptions that there is an interaction effect of content source and content type on brand engagement and purchase intention: persuasive (vs informative) content has a more pronounced detrimental effect when small influencers (vs brands) generate the content. As predicted, we found that brand trust mediates these effects. The second experiment extended this by investigating the role of consumer

scepticism, finding that scepticism mediates the interaction of content source and type on brand trust.

Interestingly, the interaction effect found in both experiments indicates a 'hybrid effect' (Cadario et al., 2017) instead of an 'amplifying effect': the effect of content type is significant for small influencers, but not for brands. While these results are in line with our hypotheses, the relative indifference of consumers to content type in the case of BGC was even more marked than expected.

The results confirm that influencers – at least small influencers – can deliver useful information and therefore play a role in helping consumers make decisions (Chen & Chua, 2020; Leung et al., 2022). A sense of closeness between small influencers and their followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020) can encourage greater community engagement. Brands can leverage this sense of proximity by encouraging small influencers to create informative content to generate engagement and stimulate purchase intent. The findings also provide further insights into research demonstrating the effectiveness of micro-influencer marketing on consumer outcomes (Kay et al. 2020), clarifying the type of content (informative) that can be most effective. This extends the work of Cascio et al. (2024), which demonstrates that informative content is more engaging than commercial content in the case of macro-influencers. Our experiments shed light on the underlying mechanisms by showing that consumers are more sceptical and less trusting when exposed to persuasive compared to informative SIGC. This corroborates a study finding that exposure to persuasive IGC increases scepticism, with negative short-term effects for the brand (Evans et al., 2022).

Theoretical implications

This research contributes to content marketing and influencer marketing literature through its comparative approach of brand vs small influencer content and the effects of

persuasive content (i.e. with an intent to sell or convince) vs non-persuasive content (i.e. with an intent to bring value to the audience). Most research tends to focus on BGC, comparing different kinds of emotional content (e.g. Akpinar & Berger, 2017) or comparing emotional and informational content (e.g. Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Dolan et al., 2019; Lou & Xie, 2021). This comparative and multidimensional approach to the field is necessary, as it helps build a better understanding of the effects of content marketing on consumers.

While Odoom's research (2025) considered the moderating role of IGC on the effects of BGC, our study considered the two separately to compare their effects on consumer responses. Other studies have shown a positive impact of IGC on consumer engagement (e.g. Delbaere et al., 2021), purchase intent or sales (e.g. Lou & Yuan, 2019), but to the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to examine the effects of content source and type on brand engagement and purchase intention with the mediating role of consumer scepticism and brand trust. This allows a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play, demonstrating the role of scepticism and brand trust in the attitudes consumers adopt towards the content they receive about brands.

Our empirical work provides findings of particular interest regarding SIGC, showing that informative SIGC can lead to higher brand engagement and purchase intent by decreasing consumer scepticism and thus increasing brand trust. Recent studies have shown that micro-influencer marketing is more effective than macro-influencer marketing on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Park et al., 2021). In the case of brand–influencer collaborations, consumers do not respond positively (e.g. show a low level of trust in the source and in the message) when the message suggests a commercial orientation (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Our results also indicate that informative SIGC can achieve better performance, in line with a study on

influencer marketing in general (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Managerial implications

The results of our study are an argument for IGC to be seen as complementary to BGC and as an opportunity for brand executives to strengthen their marketing efforts by collaborating with social media influencers (Odoom, 2025). When allocating budgets to influencer marketing, marketers often hesitate between working with well-known influencers or associating the brand with less famous, smaller influencers. Our findings suggest they should be considering small influencers and finding new ways to deliver content (Santiago et al., 2022).

It is also important to consider the content type to promote when collaborating with influencers, depending on the form of endorsement and where the influencer is in their trajectory (Nascimento et al., 2020). Our findings indicate that SIGC generates more trust when it is informative, so we would advise marketing teams to ask small influencers to produce content that is interesting and valuable to consumers, rather than simply promoting the brand and trying to persuade their audience. Encouraging small influencers to produce informative content as brand partners appears to be an effective way to increase brand engagement and purchase intent. This is also beneficial for the brand's image, increasing brand trust, and potentially making the brand appear more authentic and benevolent by providing its audience with informative content of value.

When partnering with an influencer, we would thus recommend that marketers not be overly directive with content creators so that their informative content is as factual and authentic as possible, i.e. without any trace of persuasive arguments. This strategy is more likely to result in increased brand trust and consequently in higher brand engagement and purchase intent.

Conversely, our results highlight that marketers have greater flexibility when creating rational content distributed directly by their brand. In BGC, rather than deciding between an informative or persuasive approach, they can focus on other key message characteristics such as copy and design.

Limitations and avenues for future research

While YouTube was a good fit for our research objectives, future research could investigate whether the observed effects extend to other social media platforms that host videos, such as TikTok or Instagram. Indeed, some types of content may be better adapted to certain social media platforms, with implications for consumer engagement (Coelho et al., 2016; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Other types of brand-related content than video (e.g. photos, text or audio) could also be considered.

Other avenues of interest include extending the focus beyond rational content (informative and persuasive) – a choice we made to reflect its growing use in influencer and brand strategies – as emotional cues may still be present, particularly in influencer content. Future research could build on our findings by examining how emotional and rational appeals interact to shape consumer responses (Holiday et al., 2023; Kay et al., 2022; Weinlich & Semerádová, 2022). Additionally, further research using real-world observations or field experiments could be of interest, particularly in capturing actual purchases instead of intentions as was the case in our online experimental design. Testing very different brand positioning and accounting for brand usage preference would be of value, as these factors may result in different consumer responses (Barwise & Ehrenberg; 1985; East et al., 2017).

The effects of new regulations on influencers and the rising use of new technology in influencer marketing could also be explored. For example, do the effects we found for informative content hold when influencers comply with the strict

disclosure of brand partnerships required by recent regulations in several countries? In such cases, is informative content still considered more informative than persuasive? Do differences in content perception hold for other types of influencers (e.g. macro-influencers, celebrities) or even virtual influencers created by artificial intelligence? Is content promoted by a virtual influencer considered BGC or IGC, or does it belong to a new category? In the context of an accelerating pace of change and rising ethical and technological issues in content and influencer marketing, such questions are important for both marketing practice and research.

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Disclosure statement

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

Notes

The authors contributed equally to this research.

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