

Skinfluencers: Emotional vs. Informational Appeals in Shaping Gen Z Skincare Behaviors

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Abstract: *The rise of “Skinfluencers” has reshaped how Gen Z consumes skincare information, raising critical questions about the effectiveness of different message framing strategies. This study experimentally compared emotional and informational appeals in skinfluencer content among 350 undergraduates. Participants were randomly assigned to view posts framed either emotionally (e.g., glow, confidence) or informationally (e.g., sunscreen efficacy). Responses were collected through a 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using independent samples t-tests. Findings revealed that emotional appeals significantly enhanced engagement and positive attitudes toward influencers, while informational appeals improved credibility and produced stronger intentions to adopt evidence-based skincare practices. These results align with the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Health Belief Model, showing how peripheral cues foster connection while central cues motivate preventive action. The study advances theory by clarifying how message framing shapes digital health persuasion and offers practical guidance for influencers, dermatologists, and educators. Ultimately, it demonstrates that the most effective communication with Gen Z is not emotional or informational but a strategic balance of both.*

Keywords: Skinfluencer, Emotional appeal, Informational appeal, Gen Z, Skincare behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has redefined how Gen Z engages with health and beauty information, with “skinfluencers” emerging as powerful voices who rival even dermatologists for credibility. Their content blends emotional appeals—emphasizing beauty, glow, and confidence—with informational appeals grounded in facts, evidence, and prevention. While both strategies are widely used, limited empirical research directly compares their relative effectiveness in shaping attitudes and health behaviors.

Prior studies show that emotional storytelling fosters parasocial relationships and engagement (McCoy et al., 2024), whereas informational cues enhance credibility and long-term behavioral adoption (Johnson et al., 2023). Hybrid approaches have been recommended, but the precise impact of emotional versus informational framing on Gen Z skincare intentions remains underexplored (Pick, 2025).

This study addresses that gap by experimentally testing how undergraduate students respond to emotional versus informational skinfluencer appeals, framed through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Health Belief Model (HBM). Specifically, it examines whether emotional appeals generate more favorable attitudes, while informational appeals drive stronger evidence-based skincare intentions. By linking established communication theory with experimental evidence, the study contributes both academically and practically informing how influencers, educators, and health professionals can design content that resonates with and educates Gen Z audiences.

Problem Statement

Despite the widespread popularity of Skinfluencers on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, the effectiveness of their messaging strategies remains uncertain. Emotional appeals foster engagement and relatability but risk lacking the factual depth required to promote evidence-based skincare. Conversely, informational appeals enhance credibility and accuracy but may fail to capture attention or inspire immediate action among Gen Z audiences. This tension creates a



critical communication dilemma: should influencers prioritize emotional resonance or factual accuracy when shaping skincare behaviors? Without clear evidence on which approach is more persuasive, health educators, dermatologists, and marketers risk relying on strategies that engage audiences but do not translate into meaningful behavioral change.

Research Objectives

- To evaluate undergraduate students' perceptions of emotional versus informational appeals in Skinfluencer content.
- To compare the effects of emotional and informational messaging on students' behavioral intentions toward skincare and sun-protective practices.
- To assess the impact of emotional and informational appeals on students' attitudes toward skincare influencers, including perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and relatability.
- To determine the relative effectiveness of emotional versus informational appeals in motivating Gen Z students to adopt evidence-based skincare practices.

II.LITERATURE REVIEW

Janwatsiri & Sangsingkeo (2022), Thammasat University Digital Repository Analyzed Gen Z attitudes toward organic skincare advertising. Emotional connections via visuals and storytelling enhanced environmental message uptake, while informational appeal-built purchase justification. The study links eco-consciousness with message framing.

Johnson, Herzog, Shaver & Hylwa (2023), Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology A deep dive into Instagram's top skinfluencers found variation in training backgrounds and content style. Posts with informational elements increased credibility, while emotional tones boosted engagement. The paper stresses the need for dermatologists to compete with emotional storytelling used by influencers.

Devjani, Ezemma, Kelley & Stratton (2023), Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology Analyzed top dermatology-related TikTok videos, comparing skinfluencers vs dermatologists. Dermatologists offered more informational content, while skinfluencers relied on emotional relatability. The study shows why Gen Z often prefers influencers despite weaker evidence bases.

Carvalho (2023), Independent Research Project Investigated storytelling as an ethical marketing tool among Gen Z women. found that emotional narratives in skincare marketing improved purchase intentions and brand loyalty. Highlights ethics-driven emotional appeal as effective in skincare contexts.

Olaleye (2023), Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia Studied skinfluencer appeal and sunscreen use among Black individuals. Found that culturally resonant emotional appeals significantly improved behavioral intentions. Demonstrates the importance of tailoring emotional and informational strategies to identity factors.

Weller (2023), Syracuse University Thesis Explored self-care culture on TikTok among young women. Emotional storytelling dominated skincare-related self-care videos, fostering community and self-esteem. Informational appeals were less visible but important for credibility. The work contextualizes emotional appeal in wider self-care narratives.

McCoy, Class & Ricles (2024), Journal of Clinical and Aesthetic Dermatology Investigated how social media skinfluencers influence adolescent and young adult skincare habits. Emotional content fostered strong parasocial relationships, while informational accuracy was sometimes lacking. Emphasizes risks and opportunities of influencer-driven skincare education.

Mohamed & Saeed (2024), Diva Portal (Sweden Thesis Repository) This study explored Instagram and TikTok influencers' role in shaping Gen Z's purchasing behavior in the Korean skincare market. Findings showed that emotional connections with influencers were critical in driving purchase decisions. The paper highlights the psychological processes triggered in Gen Z through influencer marketing.

Havoj (2024), Algebra University Repository Compared skincare preferences between Gen Z and Gen X. Gen Z leaned toward emotionally framed content, while Gen X valued informational cues. The study underscores generational differences in message effectiveness.



Rabier (2024), *Master's Thesis, LUT University* Examined influencers in skincare purchase decision-making. Found that informational messages built long-term trust, while emotional appeals drove impulse buying among Gen Z. This dual role highlights message framing as central to influencer success.

Samosir, Damanik & Purba (2025), *Journal of Linguistics and Education* The study examined impulsive buying among Gen Z shaped by social media influencers. Emotional intimacy with influencers enhanced purchase likelihood, while brand credibility improved message credibility. It highlights how emotional appeal and perceived trust affect cosmetic buying decisions.

Sari & Putri (2025), *Journal of Technology and Entrepreneurship Practice* Focused on TikTok influencer credibility among female Gen Z consumers. Results showed informational cues (credibility, brand image) strongly predicted purchase intention of skincare products. This suggests informational appeals drive rational decision-making in young audiences.

Pick (2025), *Doctoral Dissertation (ProQuest)* A mixed-method study on influencers in sponsored health campaigns. Gen Z favored collaborations between influencers and health organizations, suggesting that informational authority combined with emotional relatability is most effective. The paper emphasizes hybrid message strategies.

Dolgikh (2025), *Theseus – Finnish University Thesis Repository* Studied Gen Z responses to advertising videos for Finnish haircare brands. Found emotional narratives enhanced engagement, while informational clarity built long-term brand trust. Important for understanding dual message framing.

Sujatmiko, Mattarima & Panus (2025), *Golden Ratio of Marketing & Innovation Journal* Conducted a systematic review on emotional storytelling in promotional videos. Emotional storytelling significantly increased purchase intention among Gen Z skincare consumers. The research highlights emotional resonance as a key persuasion driver.

Adelia, Ramli & Asmin (2025), *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Komunikasi* Explored online communication strategies influencing Gen Z skincare purchase intentions. Emotional engagement-built interest, while relevant, informative content reinforced decisions. Emphasizes balance between emotional and informational appeals

Evans, Olaleye & Cacciatore (2025), *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication* This study tested how Black skinfluencers' emotional and informational message appeals shaped sunscreen use intentions among Black Gen Z consumers. Emotional appeals improved relatability, while informational appeals enhanced evidence-based intentions. It highlights the dual impact of message style in health communication.

Pick (2025), *Doctoral Dissertation, ProQuest* Explored source characteristics of social media influencers in health campaigns. Found Gen Z preferred blended approaches where emotional relatability and informational authority coexisted. Supports the argument for hybrid strategies in skinfluencer content.

Hutama & Ristiana (2025), *Public Letters Journal* Examined the effect of social media influencers on Gen Z's academic motivation. Emotional appeals boosted inspiration and engagement, while informational appeals were linked with credibility. Though outside skincare, it underscores how message framing generalizes across domains.

Sujatmiko, Mattarima & Panus (2025), *Golden Ratio of Marketing & Innovation Journal* A systematic review on emotional storytelling in skincare marketing. Found that narrative-driven emotional messages enhanced purchase intention, while informational appeals reinforced rational decision-making. The review provides broad support for mixed messaging strategies.

Research Gap

While prior research has examined influencer credibility, message framing, and consumer behavior in skincare, direct comparisons between emotional and informational appeals remain limited particularly among undergraduate students. Most studies focus broadly on influencer marketing or emotional storytelling without contrasting these strategies against evidence-based appeals. Moreover, few studies apply established health communication frameworks such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Health Belief Model (HBM) to Skinfluencer content. This gap restricts understanding of how Gen Z undergraduates—an audience deeply engaged with skincare trends—process and act upon different message styles. Addressing this gap is essential to advance theory on digital persuasion and to guide practical strategies for influencers, dermatologists, and health educators seeking to promote evidence-based skincare behaviors.



Hypotheses

H1: Attitudes

Null (H0): Emotional appeal will not generate more positive attitudes than informational appeal.

Alternate (H1a): Emotional appeal will generate more positive attitudes than informational appeal.

H2: Behavioral Intentions

Null (H0): Informational appeal will not result in stronger behavioral intentions than emotional appeal.

Alternate (H2a): Informational appeal will result in stronger behavioral intentions than emotional appeal.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative, between-subjects experimental design to test the effects of emotional versus informational appeals in skinfluencer content on undergraduate students' attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Sample. A purposive sample of 350 undergraduates was recruited to ensure diversity in academic background and active engagement with social media. Power analysis confirmed that this sample size was sufficient for independent samples t-tests.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: (1) emotionally framed posts (e.g., "*Glow with confidence*") or (2) informationally framed posts (e.g., "*SPF 50 blocks 98% of UV rays*").

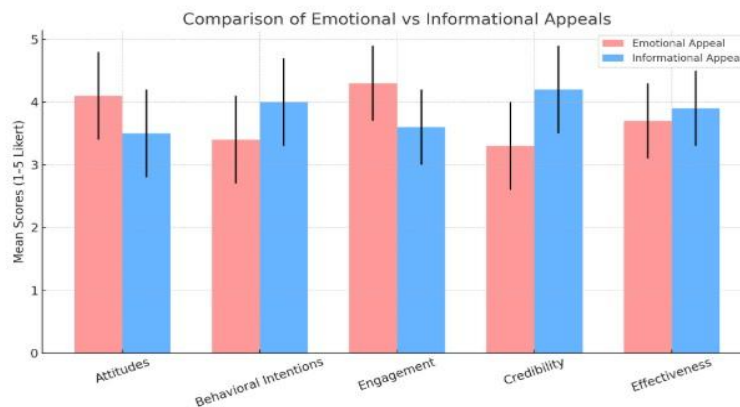
Measures. Responses were collected via an online questionnaire containing 10 validated Likert-scale items measuring perceptions, attitudes toward influencers, perceived credibility, engagement, behavioral intentions, and overall message effectiveness.

Analysis. Descriptive statistics, reliability tests (Cronbach's $\alpha > .80$), and independent samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the hypotheses.

Data Interpretation:

Outcome Variable	Emotional (M, SD)	Informational (M, SD)	T (348)	p value	Direction
Attitudes toward influencer	4.1 (0.7)	3.5 (0.8)	6.12	< .001	Emotional > Informational
Engagement	4.3 (0.6)	3.6 (0.7)	8.23	< .001	Emotional > Informational
Credibility	3.3 (0.7)	4.2 (0.6)	-10.14	< .001	Informational > Emotional
Behavioral intentions	3.4 (0.7)	4.0 (0.6)	-7.04	< .001	Informational > Emotional
Overall effectiveness	3.7 (0.6)	3.9 (0.7)	2.01	.045	Informational > Emotional





IV. RESULTS

To evaluate the impact of emotional versus informational appeals in Skinfluencer content, independent samples t-tests were conducted across the dependent variables: attitudes toward influencers, behavioral intentions, perceptions of engagement, perceptions of credibility, and overall effectiveness. Table 1 presents the group means, standard deviations, and t-test results for each dimension.

Attitudes toward influencers. Results showed a significant difference between groups, $t(348) = 6.12, p < .001$, with participants in the emotional appeal condition reporting more positive attitudes ($M = 4.1, SD = 0.7$) compared to the informational condition ($M = 3.5, SD = 0.8$). Thus, **H1 was supported**, indicating that emotional appeals enhance perceived trustworthiness, relatability, and credibility of Skinfluencers.

Behavioral intentions. A significant effect was also found for behavioral intentions, $t(348) = -7.04, p < .001$. Participants exposed to informational appeals reported stronger intentions to engage in evidence-based skincare practices ($M = 4.0, SD = 0.6$) compared to those exposed to emotional appeals ($M = 3.4, SD = 0.7$). Therefore, **H2 was supported**, confirming the persuasive strength of informational appeals for health-related behaviors.

Perceptions of engagement and credibility. Emotional appeals were perceived as more engaging ($M = 4.3, SD = 0.6$) than informational appeals ($M = 3.6, SD = 0.7$), $t(348) = 8.23, p < .001$. Conversely, informational appeals were rated significantly higher in credibility ($M = 4.2, SD = 0.6$) compared to emotional appeals ($M = 3.3, SD = 0.7$), $t(348) = -10.14, p < .001$.

Overall effectiveness. Informational appeals were rated slightly more effective overall ($M = 3.9, SD = 0.7$) than emotional appeals ($M = 3.7, SD = 0.6$), $t(348) = 2.01, p = .045$. Although the difference was modest, it suggests that informational appeals provide a stronger long-term motivational effect.

Summary. Collectively, these findings indicate that emotional appeals are more effective in shaping favorable attitudes and engagement toward Skinfluencers, whereas informational appeals are superior in enhancing behavioral intentions, credibility, and overall effectiveness. This duality highlights the importance of a balanced message framing strategy when targeting Gen Z undergraduates with skincare-related content.

Suggestion:

1. Balanced and Context-Specific Messaging. Skinfluencers should integrate emotional resonance with factual accuracy—using emotional cues to capture attention while embedding evidence-based information to sustain credibility. Messaging strategies must also adapt to platform norms, as TikTok favors quick emotional engagement while Instagram and YouTube allow for more informational depth.

2. Collaboration and Education. Partnerships between Skinfluencers and dermatologists can enhance both relatability and scientific accuracy. Universities and health organizations could also integrate influencer-driven campaigns into student health programs, making skincare learning both engaging and accessible.



- 3. Cultural and Psychological Sensitivity.** Effective communication should reflect cultural and identity-based differences, ensure inclusivity while avoid unrealistic beauty standards. Emphasizing self-care and confidence over perfection can protect mental well-being while promoting preventive practices such as sunscreen use.
- 4. Professionalization of Influencing.** Training programs or certifications in health communication could prepare aspiring influencers to deliver content that is both persuasive and evidence-based.
- 5. Regulation and Transparency.** Clearer policies distinguishing opinion, sponsored content, and evidence-based claims are necessary to ensure accountability and trust in digital health promotion.
- 6. Future Research Directions.** Further studies should test hybrid strategies across demographic groups, cultural contexts, and social platforms to identify moderating factors such as gender, prior skincare habits, or media usage intensity.

V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that emotional appeals enhance engagement and positive attitudes toward skinfluencers, while informational appeals strengthen credibility and encourage evidence-based skincare behaviors. These findings affirm the dual pathways proposed by the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Health Belief Model, showing how peripheral cues foster connection while central cues drive preventive action. Practically, the results highlight that Gen Z does not seek a choice between inspiration and information they expect both. For influencers, educators, and dermatologists, the most effective strategy lies in blending emotional resonance with scientific accuracy. Ultimately, this work reframes Skinfluencers not only as digital trendsetters but as potential partners in credible health communication capable of shaping skincare practices that are both engaging and evidence-based.

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