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Value Alignment and Freedom of Creation in Influencer Marketing Strengthen Brand Perception and Brand Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing is considered an essential strategy for business success. They help firms reach their potential customers, strengthen customer engagement, and enhance brand performance. Despite the widespread and popular adoption of influencer marketing, there remains limited conceptual comprehension of how brands should strategically select influencers. Additionally, when firms select influencers, they usually focus on influencers' popularity, followers, and trends rather than a value-based approach. Therefore, the objective of this study is to answer how to successfully create effective influencer marketing to attract prospective customers while gaining potential long-term brand loyalty using a value-based influencer selection approach. The proposed conceptual framework is based on a conceptual analysis of successful brands and current literature. Subsequently, the firm should select influencers based on the alignment of both the brand's identity and the values of their target customers as well as influencers' values. Influencers then communicate the brand's value through content supported by cultural coordination and freedom of creation to gain authenticity of the content and trustworthiness. Additionally, the authenticity and trustworthiness of the content influence positive brand perception, increasing long-term brand loyalty. This study contributes to the influencer marketing literature, which can serve as a conceptual framework for further empirical research. Additionally, this study provides implications for businesses to shift their attention from popularity-based to value-based influencer marketing. This allows firms, particularly small- to medium-sized firms, to manage their marketing resources more efficiently while improving the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Brand perception, Brand loyalty, Freedom of creation, Cultural coordination.

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Introduction

Influencer marketing has become an essential part of marketing strategies for businesses that aim to increase brand awareness, engagement, and influence purchasing decisions. The arrival of digital media platforms has allowed businesses of all sizes to collaborate with influencers more efficiently than before through direct communication with potential customers. The influencers promote products and services by creating engaging content, interacting with audiences through comments and feedback, and

introducing new arrivals, opening opportunities for businesses to strengthen relationships with their audiences.

As the accessibility of influencer marketing is thriving, businesses have adopted similar promotional strategies across digital platforms. Consequently, consumers are more exposed to marketing content, creating intense competition on how to differentiate themselves from other brands' content, maintain customer trust, and generate potential long-term brand loyalty. Although companies develop influencer marketing to promote their products and services, only a limited number have achieved strong customer engagement, positive brand perception, as well as loyalty. Additionally, the existing framework for influencer selection mentions influencer tiers rather than how to choose influencers based on their values. This raises the question: what distinguishes successful influencer marketing, and how can business leverage their influencer marketing to attract potential customers, build trust, and cultivate long-term brand loyalty?

To address these questions, the paper analyzes and examines literature reviews and results before integrating those results into an innovative conceptual framework. Before mapping out the strategic pathways of successful business use to leverage their influencer marketing. Real-world case studies are then analyzed through the conceptual framework to demonstrate practical application and validate its efficiency.

Objectives

This study aims to:

- Introduce an innovative framework for future empirical research.
- Introduce an innovative framework that businesses can use to improve their influencer selection process and content creation components by prioritizing value alignment to improve prospective customer attraction, positive brand perception, as well as long-term brand loyalty.

Literature review

Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing refers to a third party who has a dramatic impact on customers' purchasing choices (Brown & Hayes, 2008). In other words, it refers to people who influence targets' purchasing decisions. It can also refer to the strategy that a firm chooses influencers to encourage consumer buying behaviors by promoting the business goods and services, aiming to leverage business performance (Johnasen et al., 2017). For example, La Roche-Posay invited "JaeGuley" to try a new skincare machine that evaluates sun damage. Influencer marketing can also be understood as examining how individuals affect the decisions, attitudes, and behaviors of others through sharing information, providing social support, and ideas (Jain, 2021). In other words, an influencer is a person who presents product qualities or services supported by the influencer's personality, such as expertise and fame, to convince customers to buy products or services (Nadanyiova et al., 2020).

Brand

Brand refers to components that demonstrate the business to be distinct from other companies. For instance, components include logo, name, or slogan (Maurya & Mishra, 2012; Wood, 2000). Furthermore, a brand can also be understood as the perspectives of customers, which include emotion, feeling, and thought process about business events or conditional, legal assets, and intangible assets for the firm. A brand is about loyalty that customers give and are willing to suggest to people around them to use the products or services (King, 1970). The brand also gives value, which can be described based on individuals depending on society, economic, technological, etc. In other words, the brand is dynamic, which is caused by external factors (Maurya & Mishra, 2012).

For instance, Starbucks coffee in the past may be perceived as luxury, while some people perceive it as affordable due to various perceptions. Brands allow firms to distinguish themselves from products. The distinction can be achieved by analyzing and categorizing into four factors, including the purpose of the product, existing time, and differentiation. The purpose of buying a product is to use it as it is, while the brand is about what it defines. For existing time, a product exists on the shelves, while a brand exists in customers' minds. A product can be outdated quickly, while a brand is timeless. Products can have various competitive features, while a brand is differentiated from others (Batey, 2008).

Brand Perception

Brand perception is also considered to be one of the factors that influence consumer buying behaviors and purchasing decisions. The term perception refers to the processing of information and experiences into understanding the situation through sensory information (Williams, 2019; Weinreb et al., 2022). When integrating the terms, brand perception can be understood as the ability of customers to process their views toward the brand using sensory information. For example, sensory information includes vision (Logo), touch (product), sound (WOM), smell, and taste. These factors lead to customers' minds before recreating perceptions toward the brand. Additionally, positive brand perception in terms of quality, trust, and image leads to brand loyalty (Alhaddad, 2015)

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to the bias toward the brand (Brown 1952 as cited in Mellens et al., 1996). This can not be measured by verbal statements about preference toward the brand. In terms of time, there is a process of expressed over time. This means the frequency of purchasing products from a specific brand does not ensure brand loyalty. Instead, using both time and frequency to track brand loyalty. For instance, distinguishing brand loyalty among products A and B. With consistent brand loyalty (AAAAAA), separated loyalty (ABABABAB), and inconsistent or unstable loyalty (AAAABBBB)(Brown 1952 as cited in Mellens et al., 1996). The previous statement demonstrates examples of brand loyalty from the level of stable to unstable behaviors toward brand purchasing.

Furthermore, the term brand loyalty consists of a decision-making unit, which refers to the purchasing decision by one of the members, household, or firm. This can happen even if it is not the actual purchaser. For instance, the CEO buys products for employees. Normally, people might have different purposes for the same products, leading to changes in behaviour rather than the lack of brand loyalty (Mellens et al., 1996). Another factor is selection in brands; before customers can be identified as brand loyal, alternatives have to be presented. Not only that, but also commitment among customers is required to achieve brand loyalty (Chestnut, 1978, p.82 as cited in Mellens et al., 1996). Customers might not research all the information about the brand, instead searching for some information about the brand, leading to some beliefs toward the brand. Additionally, brand loyalty as continuous purchases emerges from positive thoughts of customers toward the brand (Mellens et al., 1996).

Influencer Marketing Influences Brand Perception

Understanding the relationship between influencer marketing and brand perception is crucial for the establishment of a conceptual framework. This section establishes the relationship between those factors to prove that the relationship exists. Influencer marketing influences positive brand perception through cultural association and strategic marketing efforts among travel applications. Especially when an influencer is capable of presenting authentic local culture (Mohammad et al., 2024). The perception that respondents look for in influencers is mainly to inspire as well as their trustworthiness (Amalisa et al., 2022). Moreover, emotional influence and social connections created by influencers are essential for influencing customers' brand perception (Sukandi & Fazry, 2025). Also, when influencers are able to communicate with their community, it influences customers' perception (Jaitly & Gautam, 2021).

Influencer Marketing Influences Brand Loyalty

Influencer marketing not only affects brand perception but also brand loyalty. The study of the FMCG industry found that there is a positive relationship between influencer marketing and loyalty among customers (Kiarie, 2018). Another study stated that influencer marketing affects brand loyalty (Dogra, 2019; Pinto & Paramita, 2021). Another study indicates that millennial groups are influenced by influencer marketing. This is achieved through influencers' alignment of promotions, credibility, and trustworthiness from influencers' communication styles (Grafstrom et al, 2018). Furthermore, the authenticity and realism of the content influence customers' trust, increasing brand loyalty (Gökerik, 2024; Sankala, 2024).

Alignment of Business Value and Influencer Value

To achieve effective influencer marketing, it requires the alignment of the brand's values, influencers' values, and target audiences' values (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023; Agustian et al., 2023). Without the alignment of values among members, the authenticity of the content produced decreases. For instance, influencers may lose originality of their content (Duffek et al., 2025). The failure of alignment also damages brand credibility; therefore, influencers' characteristics such as attractiveness, expertise, and content relevance based on customers' values should be considered (Saad et al., 2025). However, in another paper, expertise can be seen as understanding the field and being able to convey the knowledge instead of having formal education in the industry (Duffek et al., 2025).

Influencer Contents Creation

Freedom of creation or creative freedom is required for creating authenticity; therefore, brands should encourage influencers to present their personalities to achieve authenticity in their content (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023; Zietek, 2016). Continuity of influencers' stories is needed to ensure the dynamic of authenticity (Dzreke & Drake, 2025). By allowing influencers to produce content with freedom of creation. It will promote not only authenticity but also trustworthiness of the content instead of forcing or systemizing their content (Elli, 2019).

Supporting the previous statement in terms of authenticity and trustworthiness, Influencer marketing can create change in customers' purchasing decisions, especially among younger customers, who value authenticity and trustworthiness when influencers provide information (Farivar & Wang, 2022). On the other hand, functional comparability and image comparability (Congruence) also influence brand perception (Che et al., 2024).

Self-congruence is a process in which consumers analyze their own perception of the brand personalities. For instance, if customers perceive KFC's users as easy grab-and-go and customers define themselves as easy grab-and-go, then congruence is comparable or low-congruity (Sirgy, 2018). High influencer-customer congruence demonstrates positive brand perception as well as purchase decisions (Folkvord et al., 2020). Furthermore, another study demonstrates that when influencer and consumer congruence are constant and decent influencing influencer-product comparability leads to consumer-product congruence. With decent consumer-product congruence, it influences brand perception (Belanche et al., 2021). Self-congruence not only influences brand perception but also trustworthiness and credibility (Zogaji et al., 2020).

On the brand's side, brand strict controls on influencer content can lead to avoidance behaviors among customers (Pradhan, 2023). Instead, providing clear guidelines for influencers and objectives for influencers is essential for creating authenticity of the content (Gracias et al., 2024). Authenticity can later encourage influencer marketing to boost brand loyalty (Kiarie, 2018). While authenticity and trustworthiness, follower size, and sponsor salience also improve effectiveness. However, businesses should balance influencer activity, follower-brand comparability, as well as post positivity, which can influence the effectiveness of influencer marketing (Farivar & Wang, 2022; Leung et al., 2022).

Conceptual Framework

This section provides readers with a framework by analyzing and integrating concepts from several literature sources, then uses it to qualitatively analyze the elements of successful influencer marketing based on successful business cases, as shown in Figure 1. This section also provides successful influencer marketing in a variety of industries to demonstrate and compare the differences between industries.

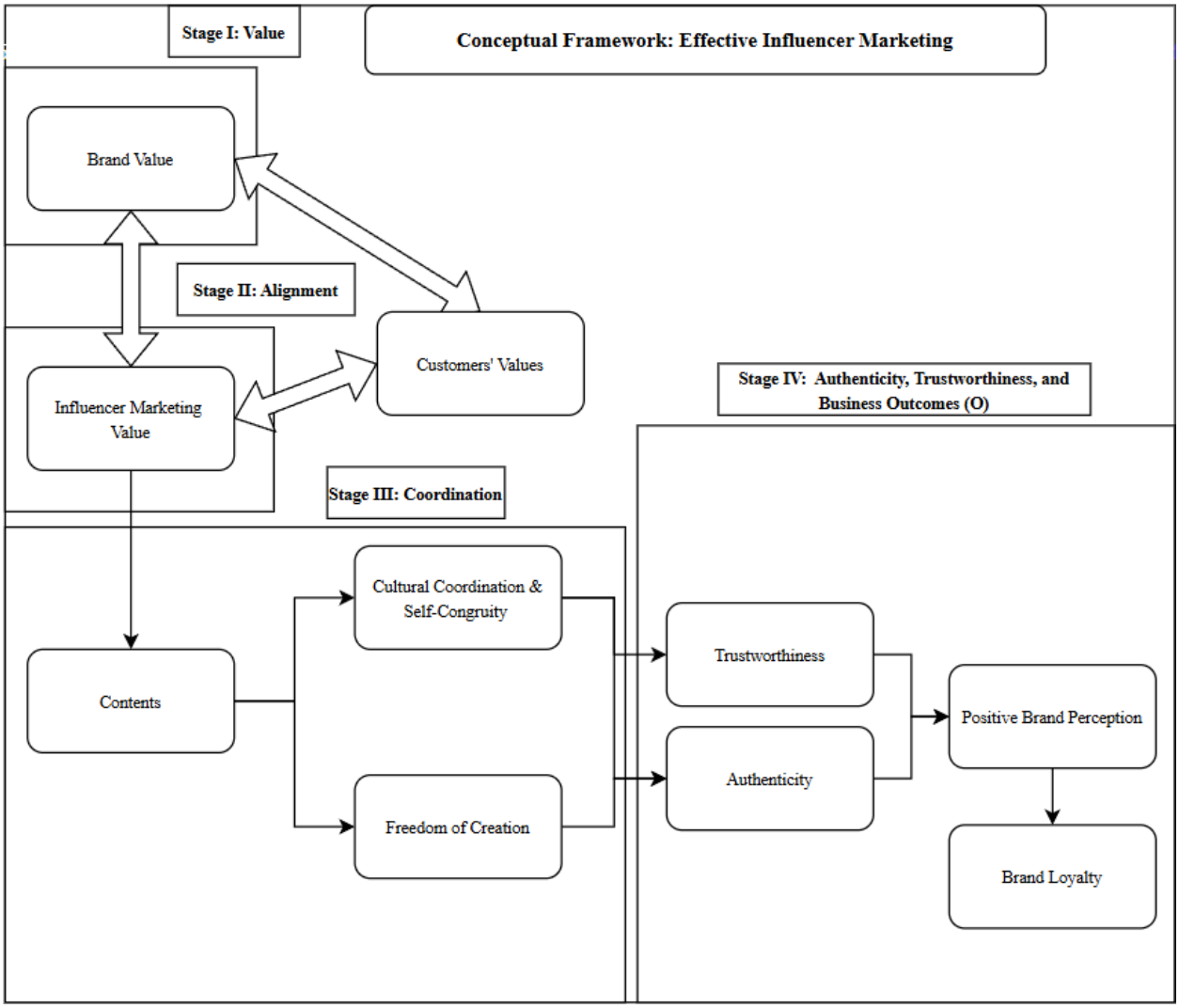


Figure 1. Effective Influencer Marketing (VACO)

Source: Author created based on (Mohammad et al., 2024)(Amalisa et al., 2022)(The impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Brand Perception of Travel Applications - ProQuest, 2022)(Forschung, n.d.)(Dogra, 2019)(Grafstrom et al, 2018)(Pinto & Paramita, 2021)(Kiarie, 2018)(Farivar & Wang, 2022)(Pradhan, 2023)(Farivar & Wang, 2022)(Sukandi & Fazry, 2025)(Jaitly & Gautam, 2021)(Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023; Agustian et al., 2023)(Duffek et al., 2025)(Saad et al., 2025)(Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023)(Zietek, 2016)(Dzreke & Drake, 2025)(Elli, 2019)(Gracias et al., 2024)(Farivar & Wang, 2022)(Leung et al., 2022)(Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023; Agustian et al., 2023)(Duffek et al., 2025)(Saad et al., 2025)(Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023)(Folkvord et al., 2020)(Belanche et al., 2021)(Zogaji et al., 2020)

Figure 1 demonstrates the flow of effective influencer marketing (VACO) through several literature stages, which are separated into several stages: Value (V), Alignment (A), Cultural Coordination and Freedom of Creation (C), and Business Outcomes of Brand Perception to Brand Loyalty (O). In the first stage (**V**alue), the brand should develop strong and clear brand value as well as identifying their target

audiences. Noticing that in stage two (Alignment), brand value should be equal to influencer marketing value as well as customers' values.

In other words, the brand should strategically select influencers based on their similarity of value, similar to applying to customers' values. In stage three (**C**ulture and Freedom Contents), this stage includes the process of influencers who produce content, which should include both cultural expression and freedom of creation should be given by the brand to improve authenticity. Noticing that, brand value should be correctly expressed by influencer marketing to be aligned with customers' cultures. For instance, Starbucks' value position is about providing a luxury experience; influencers should express that value using their content toward their target customers to gain effective influencer marketing. In stage four (**O**utcomes of Business Trustworthiness and Authenticity), freedom of creation and cultural coordination produce trustworthiness as well as authenticity of the content, making the content real and trustworthy, leading to potential positive brand perception among customers. Eventually, creating brand loyalty among customers. However, minimum guidelines for influencers should be placed to ensure brand value expression.

Discussions

Influencer Marketing in Successful Brand Cases

Business Case Interpretation Using The Conceptual Framework

First, analyzing from the brand value. L'Oréal focuses on these values: value diversity, long-term vision, act to shape the future of beauty, drive social innovation, strengthen a business with inclusivity at its heart, act to champion the cause of women, and protect the beauty of the planet (L'Oreal, 2018). When compared to its influencer value. In this case, NikkieTutorials's value is to create tutorial content about makeup. She also encourages respect for each other and experience, especially with no rules or boundaries to makeup. Her style of content is to demonstrate how to do makeup in different looks. The statement that she makes is "Encouraging respect for each other and experience, especially no rules or boundaries to do makeup".

This aligns with the brand concept of valuing diversity. This might indicate that this might be the factor that the brand chose her to promote their products and brand values. Also, she has contracted with the brand products daily. Another point can be she has a strong foundation of followers, around a million followers. This may lead to trustworthiness, combined with her presentation of fun and showing personal experience when using the products, leading to authenticity. In other words, the influencer knows how to connect with her target audiences and then present the brand value to them, coordinating with customers' self-congruence about diversity.

Furthermore, the influencer can be assumed not to have been forced by the brand to present the products, judging by her style of content that remains the same as before. For example, when she presented the brand products, she kept it a fun and exciting experience as in previous content. Brand perception can be seen through huge engagement, both comments and likes on YouTube platforms. On the other hand, the brand also contributes to cultural coordination through the connection with diverse influencers of different nationalities and genders. This group includes female, male, and non-binary individuals. This strategy allows the brand to create a cultural connection with their audiences by aligning their brand values to their customers' values. The brand uses collaboration figures such as Kaushal Beauty, Patricia Bright, Aja Naomi King, and Nikolaj Coster-Waldau. Each of them has loyal followers and the skill to focus on their audience segments. Also, the brand extends its strategy through partnerships with individuals from different geographical regions.

For instance, India and Finland. This content is used to create inclusivity and promote the representation of various cultures and ethnicities. Leading to the beginning of a connection with the global audience. Furthermore, the first campaign of the brand broke the age barrier as well as encouraging inclusivity and equality among all age groups. These strategies encourage brand loyalty

among customers toward the brand. Moreover, these campaigns allow the brand to become a leader in the beauty industry (Pricillia, 2024). This description can be seen in Figure 3.

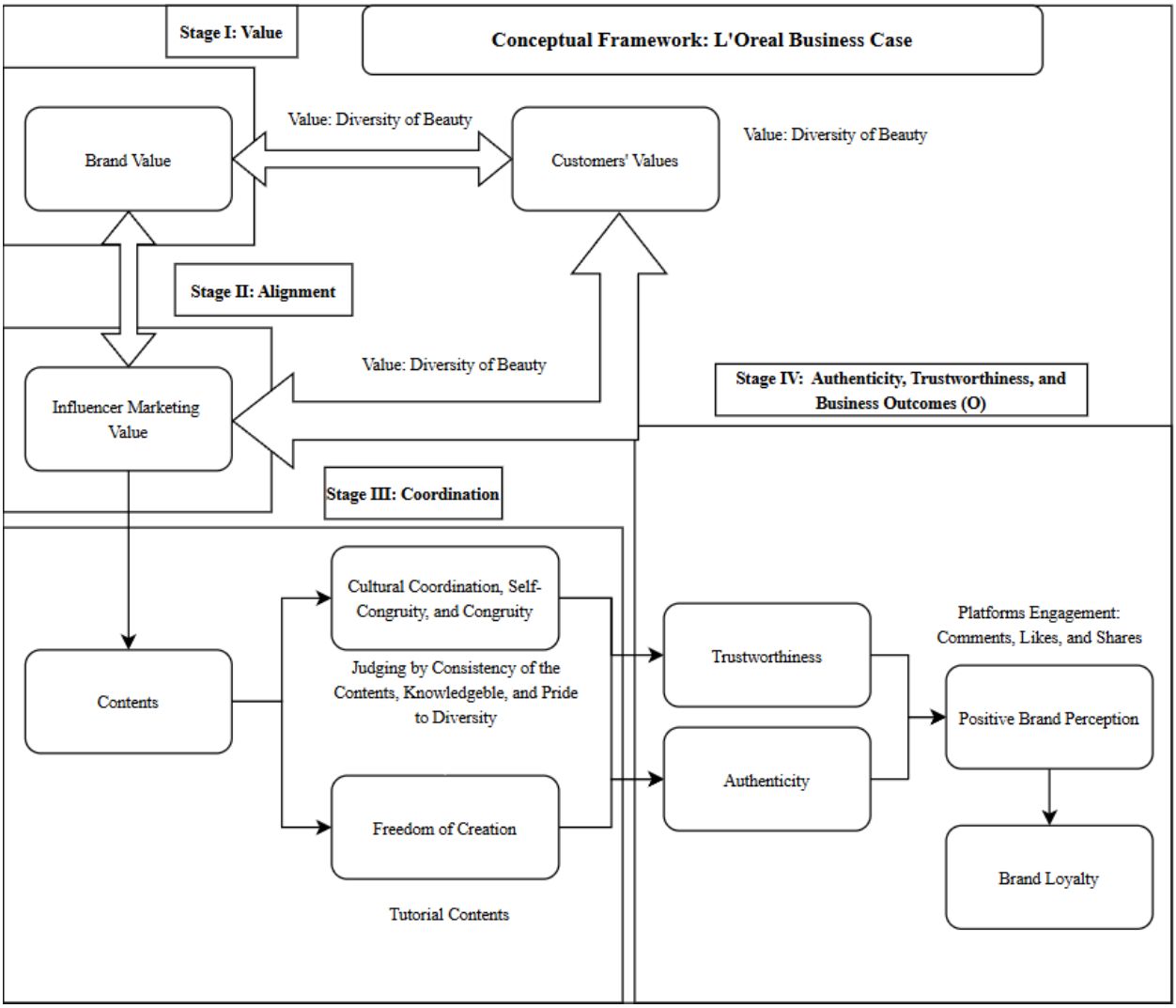


Figure 2. Interpretation of L'Oreal Business Case

Source: Author Creation Based on (L'Oreal, 2018)(Pricillia, 2024)

Another example is KFC, starting with the brand value, which includes quality ingredients, affordable, and convenient meals. These factors promote family experiences (KaroStartup & Karostartup, 2024). Furthermore, when we connect influencer marketing of KFC that has @beammywee, @moontono29, and @bambam_ice as collaborators. This marketing strategy is different from reviewing the product, instead showing the experience through dancing while dripping fried chicken over cheese. In other words, instead of promoting the products, the brand focuses on promoting the experiences of enjoying new products, sending the message of convenience to eat. While having an interaction challenge where people can send their videos of dancing while dripping fried chicken into cheese.

On the influencers' side, according to one source of information the brand did not force the influencers to review the products. This may result in creating authenticity in the content, as well as the number of followers of each influencers cause the trustworthiness to rise. This may create a positive brand perception and might lead to brand loyalty in the future. (How KFC Thailand Went Viral with TikTok Creators: A Real Case Study on Digital Marketing in Thailand, n.d.). The result of this campaign generated more followers in facebook page from 58000 to 210000 (How KFC Thailand Went Viral with TikTok Creators: A Real Case Study on Digital Marketing in Thailand, n.d.). This can be understood as the

brand chose influencers based on their value and influencer value to create effective influencer marketing in terms of authenticity to promote trustworthiness. This connection can be seen through Figure 3.

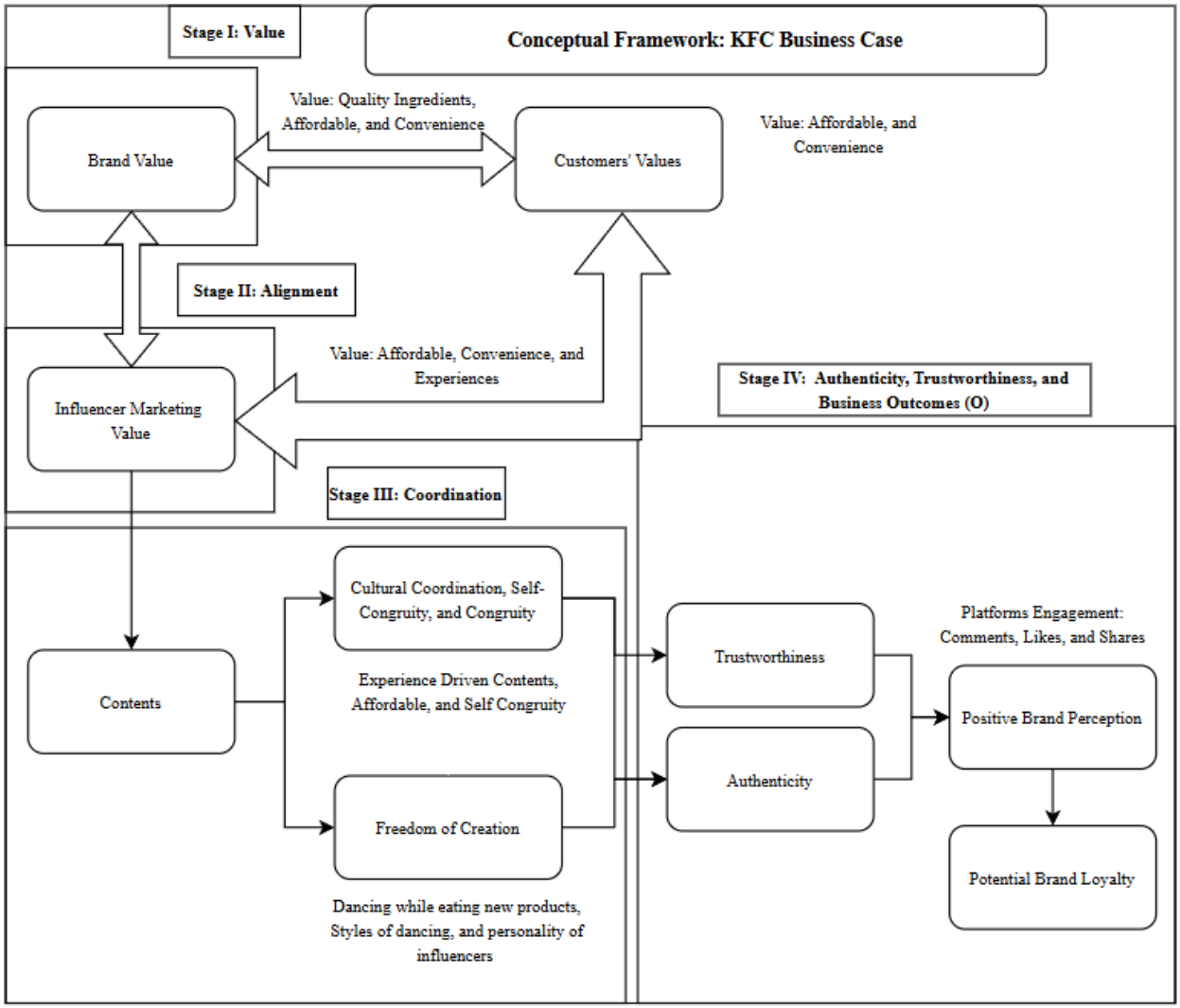


Figure 3. KFC brand value according to Figure 1

Source: Author Creation based on How KFC Thailand Went Viral with TikTok Creators: A Real Case Study on Digital Marketing in Thailand, n.d.

Honda brand also created effective influencer marketing similar to both cosmetic and food industries. The brand positioning of Honda is to promote the concept of value for money. Their products offer high quality, fuel efficiency, as well as strong performance. Also focusing on style and design. These two indicate the previous statement of "Value for Money". (Brand positioning strategies for Honda, n.d.). The brand desires to emphasize their products' qualities and car designs. Among all Influencers who are capable of delivering those values are LeJuan James and Faisal Khan, who team up with Kritika Khurana as a lifestyle creator (Shastri, 2025).

These lifestyle creators demonstrate self-congruence, especially in lifestyle, driving test in daily life use. James' passion for the brand products could increase authenticity and trustworthiness of the brand due to both freedom to create from the brand and coordinating culture between James and his followers as well as the brand. For instance, the brand desired to work with the influencer; this showed the willingness to work with no control. While culture coordination between James and his followers and the brand can be seen through his freestyle content when using just two iPhones to live-stream a new product showcase on his social media account. This is already connected to his previous content in

terms of communication styles, creating authenticity of the content, which leads to successful influencer marketing. Figure 4.

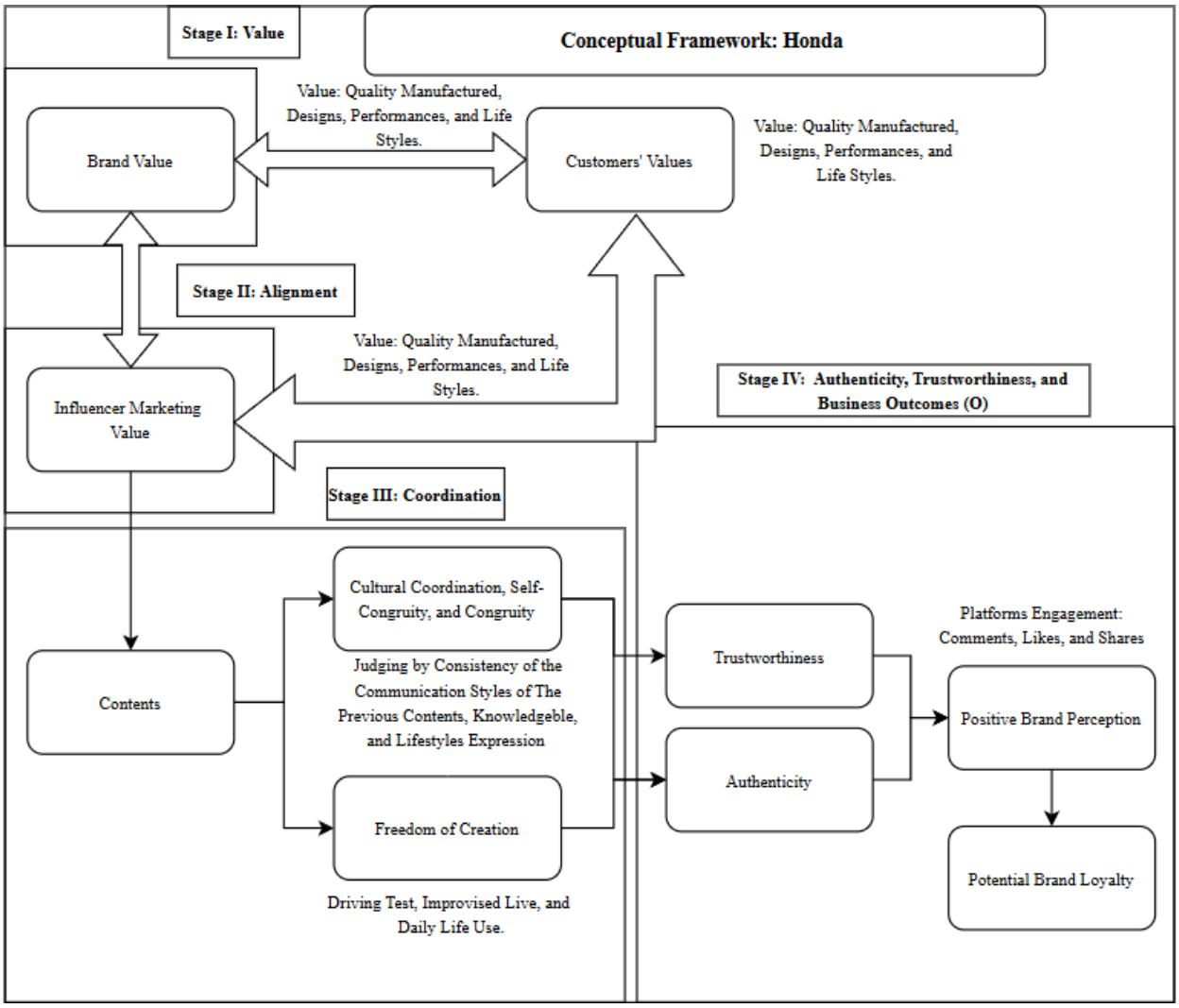


Figure 4: Honda brand according to Figure 1
Source: Author Creation based on Honda Business Case (Brand positioning strategies for Honda, n.d.)(Shastri, 2025)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed conceptual framework is based on a conceptual analysis of successful brands and current literature. Subsequently, the firm should select influencers based on the alignment of both the brand's identity and the values of their target customers as well as influencers' values to increase the authenticity of the content. Influencers then communicate the brand's value through content supported by cultural coordination and freedom of creation to gain authenticity of the content and trustworthiness. As a result, the authenticity and trustworthiness of the content influence positive brand perception, increasing long-term brand loyalty.

Limitations

This study has developed a general conceptual framework through the collection of several literature sources, which come with several limitations. First, the paper heavily relies on literature reviews and case studies rather than empirical data. Therefore, the results show conceptual analysis rather than test results. Second, the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity are not fully explored and explained.

Even though both concepts are essential for influencer marketing to generate reliable content, there are difficulties in measuring them. Third, this paper does not explore buying patterns of brand loyalty and measurable value for brand loyalty, as well as characteristics of positive brand perception, leading to a lack of a strong indicator for positive brand perception to ensure long-term brand loyalty. Lastly, factors inside the framework can be dynamic depending on industry type. Therefore, this framework serves as a generic model rather than universal applications.

Recommendations

This study proposes a conceptual framework for effective influencer marketing selection based on the previous literature, which serves as the foundation for influencer marketing and content contribution. The results of this paper show the conceptual framework can effectively influence influencer marketing as well as general content components. The content requires both freedom of creation and cultural association, self-congruence, and congruence to create authenticity and trustworthiness of the content. These factors lead to positive brand perception before continuing to potential long-term brand loyalty. Future studies could empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework through quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches.

Furthermore, the examination of insight factors is required to provide details so the brand and influencers know exactly what to create and how to measure the content quality. In other words, examine how to measure coordinating culture and authenticity of the contents. This is to ensure that influencers notice how to create their content accordingly and be consistent with the styles and their previous content. Second, measurements for positive brand perception and brand loyalty should be developed. These allow businesses and influencers to track customers' dynamics and react effectively with data-driven instead of subjective interpretation. Basically, further studies should try to answer what positive brand perception looks like and how customers behave if they have brand loyalty.

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