"Social Inclusion portrayal on TikTok and Instagram: The role of social media influencers in promoting mental health literacy, body image and self-esteem"

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Abstract:

Nowadays, the term "influencers" on social media is referred to popular online users with large audience bases who are often paid to promote different products, services, or ideas. By combining the prestige of celebrities and the relatability of peers, influencers have high impact on their followers and a huge reach. Thus, it is of great importance to examine how influencers play a role in promoting mental health and marketing the approved "social image". The objective of the study is to explore the role that social media influencers have in promoting mental health, social inclusion and a positive body image to their followers. This study employed a qualitative method by conducting a qualitative content analysis. the study consists of a purposive sample that all share the same characteristics of being social media influencers who are Egyptians, based in Egypt, and have an Egyptian audience. The researcher aim was to show the positive influence social media influencers have on their followers. Results showed that the majority of the influencers promote for healthy lifestyle, positive energy, and positive body image. Results also showed that most social media influencers share mental health struggles and coping mechanism with their followers.

Keywords: Social Inclusion portrayal, TikTok,Instagram, influencers, mental health literacy, body image, self-esteem.

ملخص الدراسة:

اليوم، يُطلق مصطلح "المؤثرون" على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على المستخدمين المشهورين عبر الإنترنت الذين لديهم قاعدة جماهيرية كبيرة والذين غالبًا ما يحصلون على أموال مقابل الترويج لمنتجات أو خدمات أو أفكار مختلفة. نظرًا لأن المؤثرين يتمتعون بشعبية كبيرة مثل المشاهير ويرتبطون بمتابعيهم، فإن المؤثرين لديهم تأثير كبير على متابعيهم ومدى وصولهم الكبير. لذلك، من المهم دراسة مدى دور المؤثرين في تعزيز الصحة النفسية وتسويق "الصورة الاجتماعية" المعتمدة. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف الدور الذي يلعبه المؤثرون على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعزيز الصحة العقلية والاندماج الاجتماعي وصورة الجسم الإيجابية لأتباعهم.

تنتمي هذه الدراسة إلى الدراسات الوصفية التي تهتم بدراسة دور تطبيقات الهواتف الذكية التلفزيونية وتأثيرها على شراهة مشاهدة لدي المستخدمين ورصد كثافة تعرض المستخدمين. تستخدم الدراسة أداة جمع البيانات، وهي أداة تحليل مضمون لجمع البيانات اللازمة للدراسة التحليلية. تتكون الدراسة من عينة عمدية تشترك جميعًا في نفس خصائص كونهم مؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، أن يكون مصريون مقيمون في مصر، ولهم جمهور مصري. وأظهرت النتائج أن غالبية المؤثرين يروجون لأسلوب حياة صحي، وطاقة إيجابية، وصورة إيجابية للجسم. وأظهرت النتائج أيضًا أن معظم المؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يشاركون مع متابعيهم صراعات الصحة العقلية وآلية التأقلم.

Introduction:

The usage of social media through the interaction with other users over online electronic forums such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, Threads, YouTube, etc. has become an essential tool for social interaction. Unlike traditional media, social media allows the user to play an active role in interacting, shaping and creating the experience. Furthermore, social media has become a key element in the developmental process for adolescents through their interaction with other users and forming their online identities (Berryman& Ferguson & Negy, 2018).

Recent studies have begun to shed a light on social media and its role in enhancing mental health, specifically focusing on Instagram as it is regarded as a platform that individuals can use to enhance their wellbeing and health. Where Instagram might inspire their users to follow the examples portrayed by influencers and allows users to connect with like-minded people. Scholars have then been studying the effects of social media on mental health and its impact on the active users. As a result of the growing presences of social media in adolescents' daily lives, scholars have grown concern of potential adverse effects. Results from past studies have been in fact mixed, where some showed positive effects. Some studies show the use of social media is being associated with negative social comparison, and depression. While on the other hand some studies have found that social media is related to positive effects such as selfpresentation and positive well-being in users (Grieve, & Watkinson, 2016). Social media influencers' disclosures of their personal experiences with mental health, bullying and body shamming have been argued to have a played a powerful role in helping their followers with overcoming the same experiences. Social media posts and videos contain immediate commentary that allows the users to actively interact with the problem at hand (Lind, & Wickström 2023).

Today, influencers have become an important example of the oneself. They constitute leading figures, were they help and guide their followers and they are perceived as individuals who symbolizes all what non-famous people desire. Richard Dyer described the celebrity figure as an image rather than a

real person, made out of numerous media elements with the aim to have financial gain. Therefore, celebrities are considered commodities that are produced for the purpose of consumption.

Social media influencers are considered mini-celebrities who have the ability to influence their followers' actions and decisions by sharing their opinion, information and values with them. Influencers are divided into two categories, those who have professional credentials, and does who do not. Some influencers have a high impact on their followers as they develop intimate relationships with their followers by share close and intimate details about their own lives, while other influencers gain credibility by being experts in their field such as journalists, politicians, nutritionist, etc.. past studies showed that today social media influencers are seen as more accessible, trustworthy, and credible than mainstream celebrities (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner, & De Ridder, 2011).

The emergences and development of the internet offered various opportunities for its expansion. Researchers argue that the internet to some extend reinvented the term mental health. As it produced various techniques of education and changed the way individuals teach, learn, research and collaborate (Zou, Zhang, & Tang, 2021).

Nowadays, youth and adolescents live in a complex hybrid world which constitutes of a mix of offline and online worlds. Social media platforms have become their main source of information regarding healthy lifestyles, mental health issues, body image and positive thinking. In a nutshell social media apps are seen by adolescents as easy to use, and impartial sources of mental health information. Thus, social media influencers who create content related to positivity, anti-bullying, mental health and social support became an important source for adolescents nowadays as they rely on them heavily for support and information.

Researchers has identified in many parts of the world, that the demography of the youth are the ones that make increasing use of the internet as a medium. They showed the youth seen spending considerable periods of time on a daily basis using the internet. As a result, young people are being exposed to a massive range of popular culture through the internet. According to Giles and Maltby, (2003) they have noted that one of the crucial effect of high exposure to the media by the youth is the increasing importance of which media and celebrity figures have on their social identity and behavior.

Online digital platforms provide a portal for health information access and sharing, they allow the users to actively change the relationship between publics and professional and they introduce the new outlook of peer-led support practices (McCosker, 2018).

Over the recent years the term "mental health" has evolved greatly. Were it moved away from being linked to the absence of mental illness to include such positive emotions and positive actions and functions.

Mental health illness became a major global problem, where around 264 million people around the world is affected by depression, 50 million people are affected by dementia, around 45 million people are affected by bipolar disease and 20 million are diagnosed as schizophrenic. According to the world health organization (2019), People with mental health conditions are more likely to be stigmatized, subjected to human rights violation or discriminated against, which results in them being less likely seeking help or advice about their mental health issues. Here social media play a very important role in providing a public platform for individuals to discuss openly difficult social issues concerning themselves.

Aim/Importance of the Study:

The objective of the study is to explore the role that social media influencers have in promoting mental health, social inclusion and a positive body image to their followers. The study consists of a purposive sample that all share the same characteristics of being social media influencers who are Egyptians, based in Egypt, and have an Egyptian audience. The researcher aim was to show the positive influence social media influencers have on their followers.

Research Questions:

The researcher was able to come up with the following research questions based on the role of social media influencers in promoting mental health and positive body image.

RQ1: What are the topics covered by top Egyptian social media influencers on Instagram and TikTok in terms of (a) mental health, (b) body shamming, (c) body image and positivity, and (d) health and fitness?

RQ2: Do social media influencers on TikTok and Instagram communicate to their followers information regarding mental health?

RQ3: Do Instagram and TikTok users learn and adopt social media influencers' positive messages regarding mental health and positivity?

Methodology:

This study used publicly available data. The study employed a descriptive content analysis that included videos with the hashtag #mentalhealth on TikTok and Instagram. Arabic and English-language videos were considered for this sample. Content analysis was chosen for its strengths in systematically categorizing and summarizing large volumes of text-based data, and the ability to assist in interpreting patterns occurring in the text, with attention given to the context from which sample data is drawn. Qualitative

content analysis was used in order to derive data that can be reported qualitatively without presenting full counts or statistical analysis.

Tools of the Study:

Krippendorff (2004) defined content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). In this definition the word "texts" is not only limited to written text, but also encompass images, sounds, magazines, television programs, social media, art works, and smartphone applications. Elo, et al (2014) stated that content analysis can be conducted in both qualitative and quantitative research in a deductive or inductive way. Explaining that an inductive content analysis, researchers create categories from raw data without a theory-based categorization environment, while in a deductive content analysis is based on a coding scheme.

Sample:

The study used a purposive sampling as purposive sampling technique is used when the respondents share certain characteristic that makes them eligible to participate in this study. "Researchers purposefully choose data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals and purposes" (Tracy, 2012, pg.107). Since this study's aim is to understand the role of social media influencers in promoting mental health and a positive body image, the researcher saw that a purposive sample is the most appropriate technique to be used in obtaining information, as the unit of analysis must meet the researcher's purposes of having content related to mental health and positive body image portrayal. Data was collected, analyzed, and categorized by a single reviewer. Data was analyzed from the top famous Egyptian social influencers with the most followers on Instagram and TikTok. Videos from TikTok were analyzed that were tagged with the hashtag mental health, body image, body shamming. Social media influencers were picked based on the premises that they tackled the issue of body image, mental health and self-esteem on their profile page before.

Social influencers and videos that were included in the qualitative content analysis have to have met the following criteria: (1) aimed at the sample – Egyptian Youth, (2) available in English and/or Arabic, (3) influencers that hold the Egyptian nationality.

Descriptive statistics were used to detail the following information. First, demographic information which included information coded related to account name, verification, number of posts, original post, number or reels/video, and number of followers, the date of posting and the number of views, comments, and likes were documented. Second, mental health and body image for this theme each post that was coded contained the following topics; general mental health, body shamming, bulling, positive energy, depression, stress, self-harm, interpersonal relationships and toxic relationships. Third, benefit factors where posts were analyzed based on benefits that followers can acquire from preforming certain behaviors. Such as posts promoting healthy diets and nutrition, exercise, positive emotional states, beauty and skincare, offering support or validation, mentioning experience with self-harm, and sharing coping strategies, experiences of healing, or ways to feel better.

Results:

The following influencers on both platforms Instagram and TikTok were chosen in the qualitative content analysis. They included 11 Female influencers and 9 male influencers (n=20). The sample was chosen from the top 20 social, and lifestyle influencers that are available in Egypt and have Egyptian followers. Influencers analyzed in TikTok were the following:

Michael Malek: a video blogger who creates clips in aim to educate his followers on issues of psychology and self-improvement. He aims to aid the people that are struggling with mental health through the explanation of basic terms related to psychology and the offer of advice on how to get better.

Mohamed El Shourbagy: having over half a million follower Mohamed's page on TikTok called "what is beyond the glasses" is considered one of the popular TikTok account tackling psychology issues in Egypt. He aims to explain in his posts information on psychological distress in addition to providing advice for dealing with problems.

Maya Shehata: is a student majoring in psychology and a content creator. Her profile on TikTok aims to assist others with their mental health and create a safe space for her followers to speak up on their mental struggles.

Karim Moheb: is a doctor who have worked in the field of mental health for years, he is also a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. His TikTok page "Minds Plus Hearts" aims to provide followers with professional advice about mental health.

Aya Shoaib: is a content and video created, whose aim is to help others achieve mental stability through the sharing of her own experience and guidance. She usually receives advice from experts in the psychology field and shares it with her followers.

Hassan Gabar: he is a leader in the fitness and health market in Egypt. He founded the first Egyptian fitness app "The Gorilla Life". He aims to help his followers live a better healthier life through sharing fitness exercise, coping mechanism and healthy recipes.

Sarah Hany: is a lifestyle content creator, known to be down-to-earth and humble. She is always known to be transparent and true to herself. Sarah aims

to spread awareness on several important topics such as mental health and body shamming.

Ahmed Sameh: is the founder of Egypt's leading social-emotional learning platform "Emmkan". It is a dedicated space to promote social change. He shares positive learning experiences and training workshops.

Fatma El Kady: is a content creator and has a TikTok page called "TamTam around the world" she aims to spread awareness on current issues in Egypt and promotes positivity and mental health.

Ahmed Abdelrehem: is a fitness and health content creator on TikTok. who aims to spread positive energy, through sharing information about fitness, healthy recipes, and a positive life style.

Instagram

Nourhan Kandil: known as "Doctor Baby" is a pharmacist and life health coach, who shares nutrition, and mental health issues. She usually shares information related to healthy lifestyle, positive energy and nutritious meals.

Hadia Ghaleb: is a marketing and brand influencer with over 2 million followers on Instagram. Hadia often posts strategies and stories to share positive vibes and energy. Hadia have detailed her mental health struggles and treatment through her Instagram page.

Farah Nofal: is a fitness and yogi instructor and content creator. Farah usually shares information about well beings and personal development. And shares coping strategies with her followers on how to get rid of negative vibes.

Farah Emara: is a content creator and influencers who share her experience as a Hijabi girl. She usually shares information on how to love your body, positive body image and anti-body shamming.

Monda Mekkawy: is a content creator, who most of her followers are the younger generation (Gen Z). Monda has a beauty challenge on her Instagram page that encourage followers to love, and accept their own body as it is. Monda is against bullying and body shamming and always share positive vibes.

Mirna El Helbawi: is a famous writer and content creator who aims to help her followers by sharing information regarding mental health symptoms and treatments. She promotes and advocates the world mental health day.

Fayrouz Eid: is the founder of the online blog daily crisp which is a wellness lifestyle digital publication in Egypt. Fayrouz shares her experience in being healthy and shares a reliable wellness advice.

Amira Adeeb: is an upcoming actress and content creator. She shares her experience with ADHA and mental health and shares positive ways to cope with mental health struggles.

Pola Salem: he is a content creator and lifestyle influencer. He aims to help his followers with toxic relationships and positive energy.

Ahmed Eid: is a content creator, who promotes healthy lifestyle and fitness workout. He always tries to support his followers and promotes for different fitness challenges to have a healthy mind.

Descriptive characteristics related to the following features were extracted and divided into four major themes: (1) Mental Health Awareness, (2) Health and Fitness, (3) Coping Mechanisms, and (4) Self-care and Well Being

Theme #1: Mental Health Awareness

The term "mental health" has significantly evolved over the course of the previous years; the definition has moved away from being linked to the absence of mental illness to positive emotions and positive functions such as the ability to work productively (Makita, 2021). Social media influencers have used this new definition to help their followers achieve a better mind through the promotion of positive emotions and positive functions. Out of 20 social media influencers analyzed, 16 were promoting for mental health and describing its meaning. where 10 of the social media influencers' profiles analyzed, had described their own mental health struggles. 7 social media influencers described their treatment methods and healing process. While, 17 social media influencers offered support and validation for their followers if they ever experienced any mental health issues or have experienced anxiety or in need of help and advice. In regards to the topics mentioned in the influencers' pages

the majority focused on issues related to personal development, self-care, well-being, body shamming and anti-bullying.

Theme #2: Health and Fitness

Since adolescents today depend mainly on social media as a source of healthrelated information (Carrotte, & et al, 2015) the researcher saw to analyze how social media influencers send positive information related to one's health and fitness status. An excess amount of information related to health and fitness can be found on social media and it is diverse, interactive, and popular. Moreover, social media influencers are sending out under-generated information such as posting exercises, fitness routines, healthy food recipes, and/or fitness challenges. 7 of the social media influencers' profiles analyzed contained information related to health, exercise, fitness, healthy food, etc. 17 social media influencers offered support, validation and tips on how to become healthier and live lighter, while 9 social media influencers tackled the issue of body shamming and how to cope with it for people who have being affected by it. The majority of the social media influencers shared interactive content, where they conducted a Questions and Answers session and allowed comments and likes on their posts and videos. Moreover, the majority of the social media influencers promoted a healthy daily lifestyle by providing their followers with daily tips on how to be healthier such as substituting brown sugar with white sugar.

Theme #3: Coping Mechanisms

Previous studies showed that there is evidence of an online community-based health and social support and peer networks that helps followers in ongoing recovery aspects of mental health (Campbell, 2005; Moorhead et al., 2013). Empowerment has been often found to have been associated with health benefits followers achieve through digital technologies. Today, empowerment plays an important role in challenging this stigma and providing hope. Individuals with mental health issues were found to benefit more from interaction with others online. They benefit from social media

influencers' shares of personal stories and coping mechanism, on how to deal with day-to-day challenges of living with mental illness. Today, empowerment plays an important role in challenging this stigma and providing hope. Results found that most social media influencers tackling the issue of mental health were able to promote for treatment engagement and reach a wider demographic. Social media influencers encourage interventions for mental and psychical wellbeing by sharing information on coping strategies and what to do when they start exhibiting symptoms. All of the 20 social media influencers' profiles analyzed shared either coping mechanisms on mental health and or/ self-care strategies. Some shared their own experience and how they were treated, while others provided various types of self-care for individuals to try. Such as establishing morning and evening ritual, planning ahead for the day, trying something for the first time, have a phone free morning or night, reading a book, cleaning out your closet, mediate, spending time outside in nature plant a garden or buy a planet, connecting with someone you miss and so many more coping suggestions.

Theme #4: Self-care and Well Being

The majority of the social media influencers on both platform, Instagram and TikTok, promoted the idea of taking care of oneself and how to make yourself feel better. Results showed that when social media influencers referred to well-being, they meant the following: purging or decluttering your belongings, ditching anything or anyone that brings you down, tidying up your home, organize and time block your schedule, and limit screen time. While self-care referred to journaling your everyday move, learning to say no, spend time in the nature, burn a candle, and shower and do a skin care routine. Moreover, Fayrouz Eid showed that you can work on personal development such as reading a book, declutter and organize your mind, organize your personal finances and write and review your personal goals. Farah Nofal, a yogi and content creator, made a self-care challenge to encourage her followers to always feel better and have a positive mental health status. She divided the challenge into three phases, first for your body, second for your mind and third

for your soul. Sarah Hany a social media influencer on TikTok, always promotes for better mind and better soul. In her page she chronicles to her followers techniques on how to take care of one-self and be a better person inside out.

Discussion:

The first research question tackled the issue of what topics are covered by Egyptian social media influencers on both Instagram and tiktok. RQ1: What are the topics covered by top Egyptian social media influencers on Instagram and TikTok in terms of (a) mental health, (b) body shamming, (c) body image and positivity, (d) health and fitness?

It was found that all of the influencers analyzed tackled one of the four issues presented in the RQ1. Hadia Ghaleb, a well-known lifestyle influencer and content creator, having more than two million followers was one of the first to deeply tackle the issue of mental health and chronicle her progress with battling it. Hadia always promotes that she shares every personal detail with her followers containing both good news and bad news, so when she had an issue with her mental health, she shared her experience very publicly. Hadia also aims to influence and impact her followers to get the right treatment and diagnosis. Through her Instagram page. Amira Adeeb, un upcoming actress and content creator, with over 1 million followers shared with her audience her journey with diagnosis and treating ADHD. Mirna El Helbawi, is a published writer and a content creator with over 700,000 followers. Mirna has dictated herself to help others through her Instagram profile, she frequently shares information about mental health and promoted for the mental health awareness day on her highlights. Fayrouz Eid, a nutritionist and an established writer, having more than 100,000 followers shares content related to mental health, body image and positivity and health and fitness. Fayrouz aims to help her followers with living a healthier life by simply substituting ingredients containing fats and sugar with health ingredients. Fayrouz describes her own process of going through mental health struggles and depression and how she overcame these struggles and now much happier and

healthier. Nourhan Kandil, a pharmacist, with over two million followers shares information on mental health and positive energy and positive body image. Nourhan, also known as Dr Baby, aims to help her followers through sharing coping techniques with mental health struggles and healthy ways of life. Farah Nofal, is a yogi instructor and content creator, and Farah Emara, is a lifestyle influencer and content creator, both of them aim to help their follows through sharing information about body shamming and what to do if anyone experienced this type of trauma. They also share information about how to attract positive energy only, how to self-care and self-heal and how to accept oneself. Eid Nassar, a gen z content creator, and Hassan Gabar, a fitness guru, share information about how to have a healthy life style and to be more active. They promote for a fitness life style by exercising either through going to the gym, cross fit, or engaging in fitness challenges. They also promote for a healthy life style by providing numerous and various of healthy food and recipes.

Concerning RQ2 is asked do social media influencers on TikTok and Instagram communicate to their followers information regarding mental health? The answer to this question is yes, social media influencers communicate information to their followers regarding mental health. Where, Hadia Ghalib was able to share reels, videos, and stories explaining in details what is mental health, how serious it is, what did she do in terms of recovery and treatment (coping mechanisms). In the meantime, Amira Adeeb deeply detailed her own experience and conducted a Q&A session with her followers to have them engage and help them with treatment and diagnosis. Mirna El Helbawi also shared content on how to get the help needed if you are experience any of the symptoms mentioned. Mirna also shared information about an awareness campaign called #breakthedepression, she encouraged her followers to seek help, diagnosis, and treatment. Michael Malek made various videos about mental health, where he clearly and deeply explains the various types of mental health and how to seek treatment and help. Sarah Hany, a content creator for the younger generation, shares her experience with mental health and how to self-care and self-heal. She explains in her videos on TikTok how stress and

toxic relations can affect your physical health and how to work on your personal development. Sarah has more than half a million followers on TikTok. Aya Shoaib is social media influencer on TikTok with half a million followers, through her page she shares information regarding mental health and coping strategies. Aya encourage her followers to stand up to bullying, to distinguish the difference between anxiety and fear, to self-heal and how to deal with panic attacks.

The third research question asked do Instagram and TikTok users learn and adopt social media influencers' positive messages regarding mental health and positivity? Since this paper is a qualitative study, it does not aim to study the influence or impact of the social media influencers' posts and videos on its reader. However, the researcher was able to code and analyze the followers' comments on the social media influencers' videos and posts regarding mental health, bullying, body shamming, positive vibes, and health and fitness. To answer research question number 3 the researcher looked at the comments of the followers. Results found that most of the followers were either influenced by the videos and posts or touched. Comments such as "I Know that you may not see this post, but I have learned from you and one time I heard you speaking about not apologizing for your past and since then I learned to stop saying sorry for things I have done before."

Another follower commented "You are amazing. All of us wish to become like such an amazing pretty brave and strong women like you."

While others commented "Brave soul. Thank you for sharing. You are powerful." "This might be the most positive thing you have ever done" telling the truth. It takes a lot of courage. You are powerful and beautiful. And I have learned from you to stand up and speak for myself."

This shows that most followers either learn and adopt positive lifestyles from social media influencers messages or that they are proud and feel emotionally proud of this social media influencer for sharing positive vibes and information regarding mental health. Comments such as "*This brought me to tears*" shows how followers deeply emotionally engage with the social media influencers' and are affected by their own personal experience. Others

comments "I save this video as a reminder for myself and my kids. Thank you, influencer," even when analyzing influencers that speak to the younger generation Z the researcher found followers commenting the following. "What a ray of sunshine, she makes me feel happy about our world." Others commented "what a positive young lady, she has the unique ability to read through the fines line of life."

Conclusion:

The qualitative analysis presented above about Mental health awareness, social inclusion, health and fitness and positivity offers a better understanding of the increasingly positive discourse around these issues and its reconceptualization on Instagram and TikTok. This study aimed to look at these two popular social media platforms from a positive perspective instead of the negative perspective that is bombarded in the research world. Results showed that the majority of the social media influencers aimed at promoting and encouraging their followers to live more positively, healthier and confidently. Moreover, results showed that Instagram and TikTok followers learn and learn and adopt from the social media influencers' positive messages regarding mental health and positivity. This was clearly found in the analysis of the comments the followers left on the social media influencers" posts and videos. Ultimately, the researcher acknowledge the vulnerability of the interpretation due to researcher bias; discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis recognizes that the researcher plays an active role on data analysis. Therefore, leading this to exemplifie only one of many ways in which the data could have been interpreted (Willig, 2013).

Recommendations:

The researcher would like to recommend further and future studies to research more information on digitally-mediated mental health by including more data from other social media websites such as Facebook and X (formerly known as twitter). Moreover, further recommendation would be using other forms of data collection such as in-depth interviews with social media influencers and focus groups with the followers of those social media influencers.

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