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Research Paper

YouTuber Credibility and Healthy Food Purchase

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ABSTRACT

In the healthy eating context, this paper focuses on those factors that allow YouTubers to persuade their followers to modify their purchasing attitudes toward a healthy lifestyle. This study investigates the relationship between the dimensions of credibility and the parasocial interaction in the popularity of content creators. Additionally, it investigates the existing relationship between the popularity of food YouTubers comparison with the audience's purchase intention of healthy food. With a sample of 500 healthy food YouTube content consumers and the use of structural equation modeling, the results show that the parasocial relationship between the YouTuber and the audience strongly influences the YouTuber's popularity and positively impacts the purchase intention of products related to healthy eating. The implications can focus on (1) companies in this industry would be recommended to put faith in handsome influencers with the ability to generate interactions through their videos, (2) a generalist mass marketing strategy would not be valid, but rather we would have to address the audiences in which the content creator shares a greater parasocial interaction, and (3) it would be recommended to use the most popular YouTubers, that is, with more followers and a greater number of reproductions in their videos, above experts, nutritionists, or other profiles that despite their abilities do not have this large number of followers. Because of the lack of studies concerning this topic, this research explores more in-depth the different factors that influence the popularity of a YouTuber to influence his or her audience and engage them to buy a specific type of product. We try to contribute to the existing literature about influencer marketing.

Keywords: Parasocial relationships; online popularity; purchase intention; YouTubers influencers; healthy eating.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The influencers' phenomenon on social networks gained impetus in 2004, marking a significant shift in digital marketing and social interaction (Rizzo, et al., 2024) because social networks have changed communication by allowing users to communicate multi-directionally and facilitating their relationships with brands regarding digital word of mouth (eWOM) (Lin & Wang, 2020). Within these platforms, users give their opinions about products, experiences, and thoughts, which can be read by other people on the platform; this content creation is also called *User Generated Content* (UGC) (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

The digital version of word of mouth (eWOM) allows users to share more detailed information about their opinion about a product, and it reaches a larger audience than traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2015; Alalwan et al., 2017; Kapoor et al., 2018).

When a content creator has many people following his posts on one or more social networks, he can become an opinion leader (Smith et al., 2007), known as an *influencer* (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014; Zhu et al., 2015; Susarla et al., 2016). Users of social networks log in to them to be informed, entertain themselves, or express their emotions (Shao, 2009). According to the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Caccioppo, 1986), the generated content is easy to assimilate since it follows a peripheral route.

An *influencer* in a specific sector can convey the message of a brand in that sector to many potential customers, but what factors allow the *influencer* to connect with their audience and be popular? Isolating different variables that influence a change of behavior in his followers can make the influence exerted stronger (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Aral, 2011) and, in turn, allows brands and advertising companies to select better the people in charge of advertising their products (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

In this sphere, the popularity of the *influencer* improves purchase intention (Ford, 2018; McCormick, 2016). This is because the message communicated by *influencers*, although the production quality is lower compared to an agency (Hautz et al., 2014), is better accepted by

potential consumers (de Vries et al, 2012). Despite all of that, there is still little research on other factors that allow content creators to influence their audience (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Investigating this gap is particularly interesting in the food industry. There is no doubt that many food companies are being pushed to participate in reducing obesity and promoting a healthy lifestyle (Young & Nestle, 2007) due to negatively relating certain products to people's health (Schrempf 2012). For this reason, there is, in social networks, an increase in the figure of the *foodie*, understood as a famous person within the food sector (Johnston & Goodman, 2015) who can influence the eating habits of his audience (Doyle, 2016; Barnes, 2017).

In this scenario, the aim of this research, in the healthy eating sphere, is to identify those factors that allow YouTube *influencers,* also known as YouTubers, to persuade their followers so they modify their purchasing attitudes toward a healthy lifestyle. YouTube has been chosen because it is the second most visited website in the world, after Google, and the second most used social network worldwide, after Facebook, according to the Digital 2021 report: Global Overview Report (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021).

More specifically, there are two main aims of this research: (i) to get to know how parasocial interaction and the three dimensions of credibility influence the popularity of an influencer on YouTube, in other words, the popularity of the YouTuber; (ii) to explain how such popularity and attitude towards healthy eating influence the disposition to eat healthily.

In this study, certain literature gaps will be addressed as well. First, and as mentioned before, there still is little research regarding such an important factor as the parasocial interaction between digital influencers and their audience, which allows content creators to influence their audience (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), so a more in-depth investigation about the role of influencers is necessary.

Secondly, there also is little research regarding the relationship between the popularity of an influencer in Social Networks and the purchase intention of their audience about the products (Jin and Phua, 2014; Ladhari, et al., 2020), so further investigation is required, especially when addressing healthy eating.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Parasocial relationships are psychological connections between audiences and celebrities (Horton & Wohl, 1956) that can affect consumers' brand evaluations and attitudes, purchase intentions, and word of mouth (Aw & Labrecque (2023). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) can be of help when studying the persuasion phenomenon. According to this model, information can be processed using the central route, where

information, facts, and arguments are more important, or through the peripheral route, where the message, its interlocutor, or the environment are more important. This research focuses on the interlocutor that gives the message, also called a YouTuber, and more specifically on improving his/her popularity by improving the three dimensions of credibility and parasocial interaction with the audience. Furthermore, the effects of popularity and the attitude towards purchasing healthy food are also analyzed. All these variables have been partially studied in the literature (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Ladhari, et al., 2020; Sokolova & Perez, 2021; Liu et al., 2023), but they have been scarcely analyzed in the same study, and even less in the food industry.

2.1 Effects of the 3 dimensions of the YouTuber's credibility on his popularity

As Rudisill et al. (2023), state, the YouTubers and other Internet sources of health information are becoming more prevalent, and ensuring patients/consumers are provided with accurate online information is becoming increasingly important. In this sense, credibility is a key factor that refers to the quality of reliable opinions (Amertadevi et al., 2023). Credibility is defined as a determinant of the social influence which is based on emotions (Gass, 2015). This comprises three dimensions: expertise, confidence, and physical attractiveness of the interlocutor (Ohanian, 1990). When the person communicating the message meets these three characteristics, the audience can be influenced (Ohanian, 1990), improving his popularity and, therefore, their intention to buy the promoted products (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015).

There are several studies in which the credibility of a person or brand is related to its popularity. Arabi and Wok (2012) confirmed a relationship between the media's credibility and the popularity of a ruling party within the same country. In addition, Du (2014) demonstrated a relationship between a website's credibility, measured through expertise and trustworthiness, and its popularity among readers.

In 2014, Jin and Phua warned of the absence of research examining the causal relationship between an influencer's number of followers and the three dimensions proposed by Ohanian (1990) to measure credibility on Twitter. This is also the case of YouTube, where, in 2021, the studies in which these variables are related are still practically non-existent.

Very recent publications explain that the effects of the dimensions of credibility on the popularity of digital influencers and their subsequent ability to influence the purchase intention of their followers remain unclear (Ladhari et al., 2020).

First, regarding the first dimension of credibility, *expertise* is defined as the knowledge, competence, or qualification that the person who communicates the message has on a topic (Goldsmith et al., 2000), although it is not important whether the communicator is an expert, but how the audience perceives the level of expertise of that person. (Hovland, et al. 1953; Ohanian 1991). In the few studies that connect expertise with popularity, we can find one that has been conducted by Ladhari (2020), who could not demonstrate that expertise was significant in the popularity of Beauty YouTubers but explained that this could be different in other fields. In the same vein, there are studies in which credibility is related to popularity in the digital field, such as the study conducted by Du (2014), who relates these two factors to website readers. Therefore, considering that expertise is a very important dimension of credibility (Ohanian, 1990), the relationship between these two variables (expertise-popularity) in the field of this study should be investigated.

The second dimension of credibility, trustworthiness, is defined as the degree of honesty, trust, and behavior of the speaker (Erdogan, 1999). Communicators who convey confidence are prioritized by advertisers as they consider them sincere and credible (Shimp, 1997). This credibility factor also influences popularity, as explained in the study conducted by Du (2014). In the same vein, Ladhari et al. (2020) propose the existence of such a relationship between trustworthiness and the popularity of a YouTuber in the cosmetic industry sector. Therefore, although there is little literature that relates both variables (Jin & Phua, 2014), it is possible to relate the influence of trustworthiness to the popularity of the YouTuber.

Likewise, the third dimension of credibility, physical attractiveness, is defined as how pleasant and aesthetic a person's physical features are (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This variable can also influence popularity. For example, Kiefer & Scharfenkamp (2012) explained that physical attractiveness significantly increases the popularity of tennis players on Facebook, Google, and specialized magazines. Likewise, Ladhari et al. (2020) demonstrated that physical appearance affects the popularity of video bloggers. Therefore, it is feasible to establish a relationship between the influence of the physical attractiveness of the YouTuber and his popularity. Also, the popularity of a YouTuber perceived by a certain person depends on the preference towards the YouTuber (compared to other creators), the number of followers, the perception that one has about the growth of his popularity, and the number of comments that he has in each published video (Lin & Kao, 2010).

For this reason, we state the following hypotheses:

H1: The expertise of a YouTuber positively affects the popularity perceived by his/her followers;

H2: The trustworthiness of a YouTuber positively affects the popularity perceived by his/her followers;

H3: The physical attractiveness of a YouTuber positively affects the popularity perceived by his/her followers.

2.2 Factors that influence Popularity

The Theory of Parasocial Interaction (PSI), explained by Horton & Wohl (1956), points out that parasocial interaction occurs in the relationship between a viewer and a speaker where there is the illusion of a sense of intimacy (Dibble et al. 2015). This relationship can exist even if the person-viewer has not noticed it (Kelman, 1958). The study by Welbourne & Grant (2016) showed that, on YouTube, channels with a single YouTuber are more popular and influential than those with several, perhaps because it is easier to focus on a single communicator. In this sense, and because viewers spend a lot of time in the vlog, parasocial interaction will occur between viewers and vloggers (Amertadevi et al., 2023).

One of the first factors regarding the configuration of this parasocial interaction would be the homophile attitude. For this reason, the homophile attitude means the resemblance between people who share beliefs, education, and social status (Prisbell & Andersen, 1980). The resemblance between the speaker and the receiver is a factor that boosts persuasion (Brock, 1965). This fact is much more relevant when this resemblance is important for the message conveyed (Berscheid, 1966). According to Brown & Basil (2010), the greater the number of interactions between the speaker and the receiver, the greater their relationship is. They are a speaker/influencer and a receiver/follower, so their relationship will be a parasocial interaction related to the identification process (Brown & Basil, 2010), so there is a relationship between the homophile attitude of the YouTuber and the parasocial interaction between the speaker and the receiver. For example, Lee & Watkins (2016) proved, in the luxury brands sphere, that the homophile attitude of a YouTuber is an important indicator of parasocial interaction. A similar result was reached by Lee et al. (2023) with a sample of 179 social media users. Due to the state above, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: The homophile attitude (empathy) of a YouTuber positively influences the parasocial interaction of the YouTuber with the audience.

According to Kelman (1958), another factor of the parasocial interaction of a YouTuber would be physical attractiveness. The physical attractiveness of the speaker can influence the audience because the process of identifying a person undergoes, wanting to be like the speaker, creating a positive relationship between the two parts. Some studies show how different segments of society modify personality features, ways of dressing, and hairstyles to resemble a famous person admired by them (Peter, 2004; Boon 2001). The reason for this is that parasocial relationships are constructed toward an asymmetric relationship between the audience and the media figures (like influencers) (Giles, 2020) In fact, physical attractiveness has been proven to be related to social interaction (Reis et al.,1980; Rubin & McHugh,1987; Rubin & Step, 2000). For example, Lee & Watkins (2016) tested in one of their studies about the influence of YouTubers on luxury brands' consumption that physical attractiveness has a positive influence on parasocial interaction. Moreover, Sokolova & Perez (2021) also proved how important it was the relationship between physical attractiveness and parasocial interaction in a study about fitness content on YouTube and the intention to do sports. In the same line, Lee et al. (2023) probed with a sample of 179 social media users that physical attractiveness and attitude homophily are critical predictors of para-social relationships. For this reason, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: The physical attractiveness of a YouTuber positively affects parasocial interaction and the audience.

2.3 Effects of the parasocial interaction of the YouTuber regarding popularity

The relation that parasocial interaction has with popularity has also been investigated. Parasocial interaction occurs when there is a feeling of intimacy and proximity between the YouTuber and his followers (Dibble et al. 2015). This relationship will lead the YouTuber to have more popularity. For example, Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) found a positive relationship between the user's emotional bonding with the vlogger he follows and the amount of time he spends consuming his content. Also, other studies could demonstrate that the amount of emotional attachment the audience has to a content creator is related positively to the time spent consuming his content (Folkvord et al., 2019). Therefore, according to Shatzopolou et al. (2010), one parameter defining popularity on YouTube is the number of times a video is watched. We can also suppose that parasocial interaction will entail an increase in popularity. In conclusion, according to Ladhari et al. (2020), there is a positive

relationship between the emotional bonding between the audience and the YouTuber (parasocial interaction) and the popularity of the YouTuber. Thus, we can make the following statement:

H6: The parasocial interaction of a YouTuber regarding his/her audience positively influences his/her popularity.

2.4 Final impact regarding the purchase intention

The purchase intention can be defined as the conscious and individual plan to face a brand purchase (Spears & Singh, 2004).

When a consumer wants to purchase something and wants some tips, influencers have gained importance in this stage of the purchase (Hsu et al., 2013).

The YouTuber's popularity can influence the purchase intention of the followers with specific products (Putri et. Al., 2024). Several authors (Jin & Phua, 2014; Hill et al., 2017; Amertadevi et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024)) have found that content creators (also known as vloggers or YouTubers) have a positive effect on purchase intention when they recommend a brand, turning popularity into one indicator of purchase intention (Hill et al., 2017; Amertadevi et al., 2023; Putri et at., 2024) Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: The popularity of a YouTuber positively affects the purchase intention of healthy food.

On the other hand, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein, 1979) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) show that the attitudes toward a specific behavior can explain the behavior itself (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Ajzen, 1991). Research carried out by Wadhera & Capaldi-Phillips (2014) could explain that the positive attitude of a consumer toward a specific product increases the intention to try it. Likewise, Küster-Boluda & Vila-Lopez (2020) proved in research about low-fat products that a consumer with a positive attitude towards a product is more predisposed to buy it. In this sense, and the context of virtual influencers, the attitude towards healthy eating can affect purchase intentions (Vila-López et al., 2023). Therefore, we can assume that the follower's attitude towards healthy eating can influence his intention to buy healthy food. Due to the stated above, we propose the following hypothesis:

H8: The attitude of followers towards healthy eating positively affects the purchase intention of healthy food.

Figure 1 portrays all the hypotheses previously mentioned.

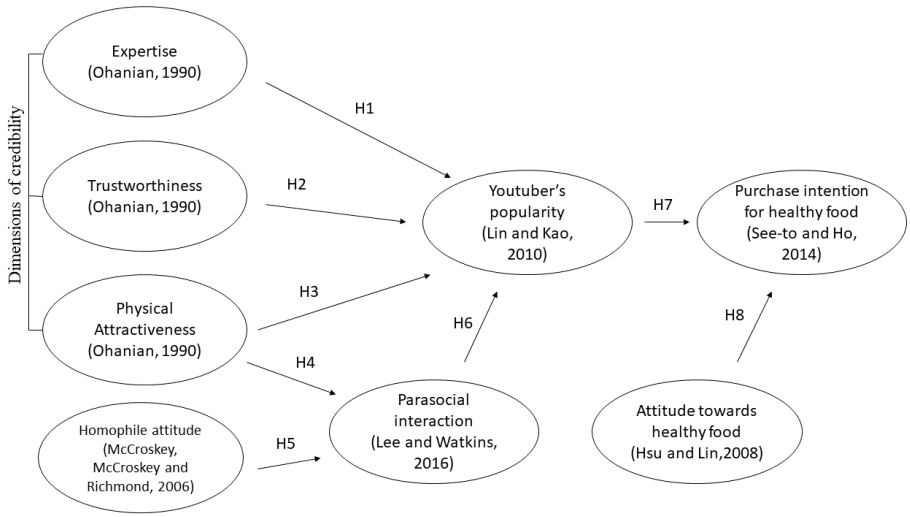

Figure 1 - Proposed Theoretical Model

Alt Text: Figure 1 shows the proposed theoretical model with the eight hypotheses raised.

3. METHODOLOGY

To test the proposed theoretical model, a quantitative study was carried out with influencers' followers related to healthy eating on YouTube. Thus, a non-probabilistic sampling was conducted using five-year age and gender quotas on 500 individuals residing in Spain. The stratified proportions of the country's population provided by the INE (2021) were used as a basis to establish the quotas. Beyond the parameters we controlled before launching the survey, the employment situation of the people in our sample consists of 51% full-time workers, 13.8% students, 13.2 % unemployed, 10% part-time workers, 5.4% self-employed, and 3.6 retired. Likewise, regarding the level of income of the sample, 29.8% of the participants affirm that they have an average annual income of between € 20,001 and € 35,000, 22.6% are between € 12,001 and € 20,000 per year, 15.8% earn between € 6,001 and € 12,000 per year, 15% have an income between € 35,001 and € 60,000, 13.8% are between € 0 and € 6,000 per year and, finally, 3% have annual earnings of more than € 60,0001. On the other hand, the level of studies of each respondent was also collected: 32.2% have undergraduate university studies, 16.8% have a bachelor's degree, 16.6% have studied a higher degree training cycle, the 13.6% have a university master's degree, 7.2% have only completed

secondary education, 6.6% have completed a mid-level training cycle, 4.6% have only primary education, 4% don't have any studies at all and 2% have a doctor's degree.

To collect information, a structured questionnaire was used to measure the model variables and certain sociodemographic characteristics of the respondent, following structure: presentation, data policy/consent, filter questions, concepts-related questions, sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, work situation, income, studies). This questionnaire was applied to the second semester of 2021.

It should be noted that the different concepts were measured using grade 5 Likert scales from scales previously developed in the literature (Table 1). Thus, expertise, physical attractiveness, and trustworthiness were measured using the scales proposed by Ohanian (1990). The parasocial relationships were measured using the scale proposed by Lee & Watkins (2016). Likewise, the homophile attitude was measured through the theory propounded by McCroskey et al. (2006). The popularity of the YouTuber was measured with the scale proposed by Lin and Kao (2010) and the attitude toward healthy food with the one that Hsu & Lin (2008) proposed. Finally, the intention to purchase healthy food was measured using the scale proposed by See-to & Ho (2014).

To contrast the hypotheses of the proposed theoretical model, the use of structural equation modeling was used, using the IBM SPSS Statistics V.25 and R Studio software with the maximum likelihood estimation method.

Table 1 - Measurement of the proposed variables

Factor	Items	Authors
Expertise	My favourite YouTuber is an expert. My favourite YouTuber has experience in the topic. My favourite YouTuber has a lot of knowledge about the topic. My favourite YouTuber is fully prepared in the topic. My favourite YouTuber is specialized in the topic.	Ohanian (1990)
Reliability	I can rely on my favourite YouTuber's words. My favourite YouTuber is honest. My favourite YouTuber is a reliable source of knowledge. My favourite YouTuber is sincere. My favourite YouTuber creates reliable content.	Ohanian (1990)
Physical attractiveness	My favourite YouTuber is attractive. My favourite YouTuber is stylish. My favourite YouTuber is handsome. My favourite YouTuber is elegant. My favourite YouTuber is sexy.	Ohanian (1990)
Homophile attitude and the YouTuber-audience	My favourite YouTuber thinks like me. My favourite YouTuber shares my core values. My favourite YouTuber is like me. My favourite YouTuber treats other people like me. My favourite YouTuber is like me. My favourite YouTuber behaves like me. My favourite YouTuber has similar ideas My favourite YouTuber and I have a lot of things in common.	McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, (2006)
Parasocial interaction and relationship YouTuber-audience	I can't wait to see the YouTuber in his channel. If the YouTuber appeared in another channel, I would watch that video. When I see this YouTuber, I feel like I'm part of his group. This YouTuber makes me feel like we are old friends. I would like to meet this YouTuber. If an article about the YouTuber were published in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it. The YouTuber makes me feel good, like I was with friends. When the YouTuber show me what he thinks about healthy food, it helps me to decide about these products.	Lee & Watkins (2016)
Youtuber's popularity	My favourite YouTuber is famous My favourite YouTuber is sexy. My favourite YouTuber has many followers. The popularity of my YouTuber is increasing. My favourite YouTuber has many comments in each of his videos.	Lin & Kao (2010)
Purchase intention of healthy products	I would buy the products the YouTuber promotes in the future. I would recommend buying the products of this YouTuber to my close people	See-to & Ho (2014)
Attitude towards healthy food.	I like to have a healthy diet. I feel comfortable with a healthy diet.	Hsu & Lin (2008)

Alt Text: Table 1 summarizes the scales used to measure the concepts of the theoretical model proposed.

4. RESULTS

In the first place, and prior to the contrast of the proposed theoretical model, the psychometric characteristics of the measurement model were analysed. Thus, we can verify that the model is reliable and convergent valid through Table 2. On the other hand, we confirm the presence of discriminant validity through the results of Table 3. Although we can see that the AVE for expertise is slightly inferior to the square of the correlation with trustworthiness so close to the limit, the previous results lead us to affirm the discriminant validity. This same case occurs in the AVE of parasocial interaction with the correlations with homophile attitude and purchase intention, but as in the previous case, it is so at the limit that the previous results lead us to affirm the discriminant validity of the model.

Table 2 - Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Indicators	Standardized factorial loading (L)	t value	CA	CR	AVE
F1 Expertise	EXP1	0.862**	24.080	0.952	0.951	0.797
	EXP2	0.906**	26.172			
	EXP3	0.930**	27.413			
	EXP4	0.912**	26.441			
	EXP5	0.851**	23.574			
F2 Physical attractiveness	AF1	0.805**	21.267	0.913	0.915	0.682
	AF2	0.852**	23.198			
	AF3	0.883**	24.606			
	AF4	0.808**	21.394			
	AF5	0.777**	20.166			
F3 Trustworhiness	INT 1	0.905**	26.073	0.951	0.951	0.795
	INT2	0.871**	24.471			
	INT 3	0.895**	25.595			
	INT4	0.888**	25.269			
	INT5	0.898**	25.751			
F4 Parasocial Interaction	IP1	0.806**	21.538	0.925	0.927	0.613
	IP2	0.804**	21.468			
	IP3	0.813**	21.833			
	IP4	0.758**	19.689			
	IP5	0.700**	17.627			
	IP6	0.756**	19.620			
	IP7	0.840**	22.952			

	IP8	0.780**	20.514			
F5 Homophile attitude	RH1	0.730**	18.598	0.925	0.926	0.61
	RH2	0.777**	20.342			
	RH3	0.797**	21.109			
	RH4	0.778**	20.382			
	RH5	0.735**	18.773			
	RH6	0.797**	21.103			
	RH7	0.827**	22.333			
	RH8	0.803**	21.343			
F6 Popularity	POP1	0.720**	18.161	0.897	0.903	0.701
	POP2	0.889**	24.893			
	POP3	0.871**	24.068			
	POP4	0.858**	23.525			
F7 Purchase intention	IC1	0.887**	24.219	0.883	0.883	0.79
	IC2	0.891**	24.387			
F8 Attitude towards healthy food	AAS1	0.922**	25.042	0.915	0.915	0.843
	AAS2	0.914**	24.704			

Chi2(674)= 1885.746 (p=0.000); CFI=0.931; TLI=0.924 RMSEA(90%CI)= 0.060 (0.057; 0.063)
*** = P<0,01; CA= Cronbach's alpha; CR= Composite reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted*

Alt Text: Table 2 demonstrates the reliability and the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 3 - Discriminant Validity

Factor	Expertise	Physical attractiveness	Trustworthiness	Parasocial interaction	Homophile attitude	Popularity	Purchase intention	Attitude towards healthy food
Expertise	**0.797**	0.175	0.874	0.562	0.295	0.476	0.42	0.485
Physical attractiveness	0.07	**0.682**	0.241	0.312	0.306	0.311	0.274	0.082
Trustworthiness	0.803	0.107	**0.795**	0.632	0.404	0.529	0.498	0.509
Parasocial interaction	0.387	0.155	0.399	**0.613**	0.745	0.639	0.76	0.425
Homophile attitude	0.142	0.152	0.163	0.619	**0.61**	0.486	0.647	0.369
Popularity	0.298	0.156	0.28	0.48	0.236	**0.701**	0.629	0.519
Purchase intention	0.246	0.131	0.248	0.643	0.419	0.396	**0.79**	0.462
Attitude towards healthy eating	0.306	0.031	0.259	0.249	0.136	0.269	0.213	**0.843**

Diagonal: Diagonal: AVE; On the diagonal: upper limit of 90% CI for estimated factor correlations; Below the diagonal, squared correlations between factors.

Alt Text: Table 3 shows the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Once the psychometric characteristics were verified, the theoretical model formulated based on covariances was analyzed. In this way, we can observe the relationships between the factors that form the model (Table 4). All the factors show positive coefficients and are statistically significant at p <0.001 or p <0.01, with two exceptions: the effect of expertise on popularity (H3) and the influence of integrity on popularity (H5).

Table 4 - Hypotheses Test

Hypothesis	**Standardized beta**	**T value**	**Is the hypothesis supported?**
H1 Expertise -> Youtuber's popularity	0.058	0.572	Not
H2 Integrity-> Youtuber's popularity	0.166	1.559	Not
H3 Physical attractiveness -> Youtuber's popularity	0.119*	2.827	Yes
H4 Physical attractiveness -> Parasocial interaction	0.083*	2.04	Yes
H5 Homophile attitude -> Parasocial Interaction	0.644**	14.731	Yes
H6 Parasocial Interaction -> Youtuber's popularity	0.490**	11.215	Yes
H7 Popularity-> Purchase intention	0.502**	12.28	Yes
H8 Attitude towards healthy eating -> Purchase intention	0.210**	5.242	Yes

Chi2(692)= 2615.318 (p=0,000); CFI=0.891; TLI=0.883 RMSEA(90%CI)= 0.075 (0.072; 0.078)

Alt Text: Table 4 offers a synthesis of the hypotheses test.

Therefore, regarding the three dimensions of credibility enunciated by Ohanian (1990), we can affirm that no significant relationship is observed between expertise and popularity, which is why H1 is rejected. Likewise, trustworthiness is not related to popularity, so H2 is rejected. However, there is a relationship between the physical attractiveness of a YouTuber and their popularity (β = 0.119), which confirms H3. The latter is, therefore, the only dimension of credibility that significantly influences popularity.

Regarding the antecedents of parasocial interaction, we can affirm, on the one hand, that there is a positive and significant relationship between physical attractiveness and parasocial interaction (β = 0.083), thus demonstrating H4. On the other hand, the homophile attitude that exists between the YouTuber and his audience also significantly affects the parasocial interaction established between them (β = 0.644), so H5 is accepted. It can be observed that the level of influence of the

homophile attitude on parasocial interaction is much stronger than that exerted by physical attractiveness.

Continuing with the confirmation of the hypotheses, parasocial interaction is the factor that most strongly influences the popularity of the YouTuber (β = 0.490), thus demonstrating H6. That is, popularity will be explained by the physical attractiveness of the YouTuber (H3) and their parasocial interaction (H6). On the contrary, the YouTuber's level of expertise (H1) and trustworthiness (H2) will not improve its popularity.

Finally, the popularity of the YouTuber has a notable influence both on the intention to purchase healthy eating products (β = 0.502) (H7), and on the positive attitude of its followers towards healthy eating (β = 0.210) (H8). Thus, H7 and H8 are confirmed.

5. DISCUSSION

This research contributes to the literature through an investigation that seeks to investigate the relationship between the consumption of videos in a specific social network, YouTube, and the purchase intention generated in public by the content creators of that social network; all this is encompassed within the framework of healthy eating.

It has sought to expand the existing knowledge in the field of the influence generated by social networks and their content creators on healthy eating consumers. In addition, this research has focused on YouTubers since their interest in marketing research is increasing, and their great ability to influence their followers to purchase products has been demonstrated (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). This study has contributed more to the understanding of their influence through the Internet and how they can exercise this influence to generate purchase intentions in their followers.

Therefore, the following conclusions can be drawn through YouTube and with a sample of 500 participants, with respondents of both genders and of all five-year age gap groups faithfully representing the distribution of the Spanish population.

First, regarding the three credibility dimensions that Ohanian (1990) defined, only physical attractiveness significantly influences popularity. The other two, expertise and trustworthiness, do not affect this factor, and that reinforces one of the conclusions that was demonstrated in the study carried out by Ladhari et al. (2020), where it was also stated, in this case, that the expertise of a YouTuber did not influence his popularity. This may be because within the digital field and through new ways of consuming content, the concept of popularity perceived by the YouTube audience is very different from the one that could be observed in studies carried out on television influencers, radio influencers, or other types. In the digital world and in the specific field of healthy eating, it seems that beauty sells more than trustworthiness and expertise.

Secondly, we can observe that the homophilic attitude established between a YouTuber and his audience affects very significantly the parasocial interaction that is created between both within the field of healthy eating, reinforcing the theses of Lee and Watkins (2016), who studied the same thing but in relation to consumers of luxury products.

Finally, the intention of the followers to purchase healthy eating products in this field is influenced both by the popularity of the YouTuber, as indicated by the study carried out by Ladhari et al. (2020), and by the attitude towards healthy eating, as indicated by Wadhera & Capaldi-Phillips (2014) and Küster-Boluda & Vila-Lopez (2020). This indicates that the influence of a YouTuber on the purchase intention of his audience on healthy eating will be attenuated by what his audience thinks previously and individually about this field. That is, popular YouTubers will improve the purchase intention among their audience, but the previous attitude that the audience has towards a healthy lifestyle, either positive or negative can reinforce or reduce respectively this influence.

6. CONCLUSION

Compared to previous studies, this research sheds light on the influence that content creators exert within YouTube in a specific and little-studied sphere: healthy eating. Thus, we can observe that without the YouTuber being considered an expert in healthy eating, and regardless of the trustworthiness perceived by the audience, his popularity will increase due to his physical attractiveness and parasocial interactions that he establishes with his audience. This may be because a person with whom we establish emotional ties, although we do not know them, we tend to recommend them to our acquaintances, as well as interact in their videos, which increases their popularity. Therefore, companies in this industry should believe in handsome influencers who can generate interactions through their videos.

We can see that the more the followers can be reflected with the YouTuber they follow, the greater the parasocial interaction they will create, which in turn will affect their popularity. In this way, it is recommended that the YouTuber addresses the population segment with which they have more things in common or modify certain aspects to resemble the segment of the population they want to target. A generalist mass marketing strategy would not be valid, but rather, we would have to address the audiences in which the content creator shares a greater parasocial interaction. When carrying out campaigns to improve the purchase of healthy food for the Spanish population, it would be recommended to use the most popular YouTubers, that is, with more followers and a greater number of reproductions in their videos, above experts, nutritionists, or other profiles that despite their abilities do not have this large number of followers.

This research may be of special interest to companies and public institutions that wish to promote healthy eating, one of the main challenges of this century, who should pay great attention to YouTubers due to their influence to change the buying behavior of their audience.

The study's main limitations are derived from the type of sampling and geographic scope. Also, since the scope of the study is healthy eating, the results for other fields may differ. All of them could make it difficult to generalize the results, but they allow for the opening of new lines of research.

On the other hand, the role of the influencer is studied, but future research should be aimed at analyzing those aspects of the message and the receiver that can determine the intention to eat a healthy diet.

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