



The Rupture of the Authenticity Contract: Influencer Advertising, Emotional Expectations, and Negative Attitudes among Peruvian Gen Z Consumers

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Abstract. This study examines how unmet emotional expectations generated by influencer advertising shape negative attitudes among Peruvian Generation Z consumers. Focusing on TikTok and Instagram as digital environments where brands, influencers, and users construct affective relationships, the research explores how young consumers interpret promotional messages when the promised authenticity, well-being, or aspirational value does not match their actual experience. A qualitative phenomenological design was applied through 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Peruvian users aged 18 to 25 who regularly consume influencer advertising on social media. The findings show that authenticity operates as a central and non-negotiable expectation in influencer–audience relationships. When this expectation is violated, participants do not interpret the experience merely as commercial dissatisfaction, but as a symbolic betrayal of a parasocial bond. This rupture produces emotional disappointment, cognitive distrust, and behavioral rejection, including avoidance, negative word of mouth, un-following, and symbolic cancellation. The study proposes the concept of the “rupture of the authenticity contract” to explain how perceived inconsistency between influencer discourse, brand promotion, and consumer experience undermines credibility in platform-based advertising.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Authenticity, TikTok, Instagram, Generation Z, Negative attitudes.

1 Introduction

Digital platforms have transformed the relationship between brands, influencers, and consumers by turning advertising into a continuous and emotionally charged form of communication. On TikTok and Instagram, influencers operate as symbolic mediators between brands and audiences, combining personal narratives, audiovisual storytelling, and platform visibility to construct affective bonds with followers [1, 2, 3].

This transformation is particularly relevant among Generation Z consumers, whose media habits are shaped by short-form video, algorithmic recommendation systems, and constant exposure to branded content. In this context, influencer advertising relies

on emotional promises of authenticity, well-being, self-expression, and belonging, making influencers appear as relatable figures whose recommendations are grounded in trust and lived experience [4, 5, 6].

However, this affective logic also creates a fragile relationship. When the experience of the promoted product or service does not match the emotional expectation created by the influencer, consumers may perceive a rupture between discourse and reality. This rupture can generate disappointment, distrust, and rejection, especially when the recommendation is interpreted as forced, scripted, or motivated primarily by commercial interests. In such cases, the negative reaction is not limited to dissatisfaction with the brand; it may also affect the credibility of the influencer, whose perceived authenticity is central to the relationship with the audience [4, 7, 8].

Although previous studies have examined influencer credibility, parasocial interaction, consumer engagement, and the persuasive effects of influencer marketing, less attention has been paid to what happens when the emotional expectations generated by influencer advertising are not fulfilled [4, 5, 9]. This gap is especially relevant in Latin American contexts, where young consumers are intensive users of social media platforms but remain underrepresented in research on emotional disappointment, authenticity breaches, and negative attitudes toward influencers and brands.

This study addresses that gap by examining how unmet emotional expectations generated by influencer advertising shape negative attitudes among Peruvian Generation Z consumers. The research focuses on young users aged 18 to 25 who consume influencer advertising on TikTok and Instagram. Through a qualitative phenomenological design based on 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews, the study explores how participants interpret authenticity, how they identify inconsistency in promotional messages, and how emotional disappointment becomes cognitive distrust and behavioral rejection.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, it provides empirical evidence on how Peruvian Gen Z consumers experience disappointment in platform-based influencer advertising. Second, it proposes the concept of the “rupture of the authenticity contract” to explain how perceived inconsistency between influencer discourse, brand promotion, and consumer experience transforms affective expectations into negative attitudes. By doing so, the study contributes to research on digital communication, influencer marketing, and consumer behavior in social media environments.

2 Theoretical Background

Influencer advertising has become a central strategy in digital communication because it combines commercial persuasion with personal storytelling. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer-generated content is often embedded in everyday narratives, lifestyle routines, humor, beauty practices, or aspirational experiences, making promotional messages appear less intrusive and more connected to users’ everyday lives [4, 5, 9]. In this context, influencers are perceived not only as endorsers, but as relatable figures whose recommendations depend on credibility, perceived authenticity, and opinion leadership [5, 6, 9].

Affective promises are central to this persuasive dynamic. Influencer advertising often links products, routines, or lifestyle practices to emotional outcomes such as confidence, well-being, self-expression, belonging, empowerment, or personal transformation. These promises do not depend only on the functional value of the promoted product, but on the symbolic meaning attached to the influencer's experience and identity [10, 11]. For this reason, the persuasive value of influencer advertising is strongly tied to the relationship between the influencer, the brand, and the audience.

Authenticity is one of the most important dimensions in influencer–audience relationships. Influencers are expected to appear coherent, spontaneous, and personally connected to the products or lifestyles they promote. However, authenticity in social media is also a performed and mediated practice shaped by platform norms, audience expectations, and commercial pressures [4, 12]. Sponsored content can be accepted when it appears consistent with the influencer's usual narrative, values, and lifestyle; conversely, when a recommendation is perceived as scripted, forced, or disconnected from the influencer's identity, users may interpret it as commercially motivated and emotionally inauthentic [4, 7].

This relationship can also be understood through parasocial trust. Although the relationship between followers and influencers is one-sided, users may experience familiarity, closeness, and emotional connection with influencers they follow regularly. This perceived closeness increases the persuasive potential of recommendations, but also raises expectations of honesty and responsibility. When these expectations are violated, the negative reaction may be stronger than in traditional advertising because the perceived breach affects not only the brand, but also the symbolic bond with the influencer [13, 14].

When emotional expectations generated by influencer advertising are not fulfilled, consumers may experience cognitive and affective dissonance. Cognitive dissonance occurs when previous beliefs or expectations conflict with later experiences [8]. In this context, consumers may initially trust the influencer's recommendation, but later reinterpret the message as misleading when the promoted product or service does not match the promised emotional benefit. This process may generate negative attitudes at emotional, cognitive, and behavioral levels, including disappointment, distrust, avoidance, negative word of mouth, unfollowing, and symbolic cancellation [7, 15, 16, 17].

Based on this theoretical discussion, the present study argues that influencer advertising establishes an implicit authenticity contract between influencer and audience. When the emotional promise communicated by the influencer is perceived as inconsistent with the consumer's experience, this contract is ruptured. The rupture may transform affective trust into distrust, disappointment, and active rejection.

Recent evidence also supports the need to examine the negative side of influencer advertising. Studies on influencer self-disclosure show that sponsored communication is increasingly standardized across platforms, which makes transparency and perceived authenticity central to audience evaluation [23]. In Peru, recent research on influencer advertising has found that young audiences can perceive such content as credible and emotionally appealing while still showing limits in interaction or commitment [24]. Other recent studies connect perceived inauthenticity with consumer cynicism, reduced purchase intention, and weaker brand loyalty [25], while research on emotional

marketing among Peruvian millennial and centennial audiences warns that poorly executed emotional strategies can generate controversial or negative brand associations [26].

3 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how Peruvian Generation Z consumers experience and interpret unmet emotional expectations in influencer advertising [18]. This approach was appropriate because the objective was to understand participants' meanings, emotions, and interpretations rather than to measure the frequency of negative attitudes. The study also incorporated a multiple-case logic, as each participant's experience was treated as an individual case that contributed to identifying common patterns across narratives [19].

The study used purposive sampling to select participants with direct experience of the phenomenon [20]. The sample consisted of 15 Peruvian consumers aged 18 to 25, living in Lima, who regularly used TikTok and Instagram and had been exposed to influencer advertising. Participants were selected according to three criteria: being part of Generation Z, consuming influencer content on TikTok or Instagram, and having experienced or identified a case in which a promotional message did not match the actual product or service experience.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis. The interviews followed a thematic guide focused on emotional promises, perceived fulfilment or non-fulfilment, emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions, and changes in attitudes toward brands and influencers [21]. Interview excerpts are identified using anonymized codes: "E" refers to the interview number and "P" to the question or prompt from the interview guide.

A complementary qualitative content analysis was conducted on 100 influencer posts from TikTok and Instagram [22]. The corpus included 50 TikTok posts and 50 Instagram posts, corresponding to 20 influencers in total, with five posts selected per influencer. The content sample was strategically selected according to three criteria: the influencers had been mentioned by participants; the posts contained a high emotional load related to well-being, success, beauty, or authenticity; and the public comment sections included signs of disappointment, irony, distrust, or audience validation.

The coding matrix included the following variables: content code, influencer, platform, type of content, main promoted emotion, communicative resources, emotional language, visual aesthetics, implicit affective promise, product presence, authenticity cues, potential dissonances, and public comments. The purpose was not to quantify engagement metrics, but to identify recurrent communicative patterns through which influencers constructed emotional promises and authenticity cues.

Interview transcripts were analyzed through thematic coding. Initial codes were generated around authenticity, emotional expectation, disappointment, distrust, rejection, and symbolic cancellation. These codes were then grouped into broader analytical themes. Interview data and content analysis were triangulated: the content analysis identified the affective promises communicated by influencers, while the interviews

showed whether participants recognized those promises, when they perceived them as unfulfilled, and what reactions emerged when expectations conflicted with actual experience.

To respond to the need for greater analytical transparency, the coding process followed four successive stages. First, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly and coded line by line using initial descriptive codes such as emotional promise, perceived authenticity, forced promotion, disappointment, distrust, avoidance, negative word of mouth, and symbolic cancellation. Second, these initial codes were compared across the 15 individual cases and grouped into intermediate analytical clusters: platform normalization, authenticity expectation, affective dissonance, credibility loss, and behavioral rejection. Third, the clusters were refined into the four final categories reported in the findings: normalization of influencer advertising, authenticity as a non-negotiable expectation, emotional/cognitive/behavioral negative attitudes, and natural integration as the fulfilment of the authenticity expectation. Fourth, the content analysis was integrated through a joint analytical matrix: the posts identified the affective promises and authenticity cues produced by influencers, while the interviews explained how participants interpreted those cues, when they perceived them as unfulfilled, and how this perception shaped negative attitudes.

Participation in the interviews was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were identified through codes rather than personal names. The content analysis used publicly available posts and comments, focusing on communicative patterns rather than on identifying individual users.

4 Findings

The integrated analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews and 100 influencer posts from TikTok and Instagram revealed four main themes. The content analysis identified how emotional promises were constructed through platform-based communicative resources, while the interviews showed how young consumers interpreted those promises and reacted when they perceived a mismatch between influencer discourse and actual experience.

Across the corpus, affective promises were mainly constructed through first-person storytelling, close-up shots, voice-over narration, music, aspirational editing, humor, visual transitions, reflective captions, product visibility, and everyday-life scenarios. TikTok content tended to rely on short-form immediacy, trends, humor, routines, transformation narratives, and motivational storytelling. Instagram content showed a stronger emphasis on curated aesthetics, reflective captions, artistic self-expression, fashion, beauty, lifestyle imagery, and aspirational self-presentation. In both platforms, authenticity cues were strongest when influencers used vulnerability, natural language, ordinary routines, and personal testimony. Potential dissonances appeared when content became overly aspirational, scripted, highly edited, product-visible, or commercially ambiguous.

4.1 Normalization of Influencer Advertising in Everyday Platform Use

The first finding shows that influencer advertising is embedded in participants' everyday use of TikTok and Instagram. These platforms were described not as occasional media channels, but as routine environments for entertainment, information, social connection, self-expression, and consumption guidance. The content analysis confirmed this normalization: promotional or potentially promotional posts were frequently presented through routines, Storytimes, humorous sketches, outfit transitions, personal reflections, beauty routines, lifestyle reels, and motivational videos. Thus, advertising was often integrated into the everyday language of the platform rather than presented as an explicit commercial interruption.

Participants explained that their openness to influencer advertising depended on their previous relationship with the influencer. If they regularly consumed the influencer's content, the recommendation generated curiosity; if the influencer was unknown or perceived as distant, the reaction was more skeptical:

"It depends on how much I watch the influencer. If I consume their content a lot, I get curious and think: 'This could be a product that works for me.' But if it is an influencer, I do not follow much, I become more skeptical" (E03, P04).

This finding suggests that platform familiarity and repeated exposure create an initial scenario of conditional trust. Participants did not accept influencer advertising passively; they evaluated whether the promotional message was coherent with the influencer's previous content, tone, values, and perceived usefulness.

4.2 Authenticity as a Non-Negotiable Affective Expectation

The second finding identifies authenticity as the central affective expectation in influencer advertising. Participants did not expect influencers to be free from commercial interests, but they did expect promotional content to feel consistent, sincere, and connected to the influencer's real experience. Sponsorship was not necessarily rejected; distrust emerged when the recommendation was perceived as forced, scripted, exaggerated, or disconnected from the influencer's identity.

The content analysis showed that authenticity was mainly constructed through vulnerability, first-person narratives, ordinary routines, natural language, emotional self-disclosure, and visible coherence between the influencer's lifestyle and message. By contrast, authenticity appeared weaker when posts relied heavily on scripted enthusiasm, rapid visual transitions, aspirational exaggeration, or visible products without clear personal justification. Participants showed a high level of advertising literacy and were able to detect when a post sounded like a brand script:

"It feels a bit fake. I feel that brands already have them programmed: 'you have to say this, this, and this'" (E09, P03).

This finding supports the idea of an implicit authenticity contract. Followers accept the commercial nature of influencer advertising as long as the influencer appears to protect the relationship of trust with the audience. When this perceived coherence is broken, participants interpret the situation not only as a marketing failure, but as a violation of the bond established with the influencer:

“It is difficult. It is like when someone is unfaithful to you. Maybe if they make serious collaborations and show authenticity, I could trust again, but otherwise, no” (E04, P16).

4.3 Formation of Negative Attitudes: Emotional, Cognitive, and Behavioral Reactions

The third finding shows that unmet emotional expectations produce negative attitudes at emotional, cognitive, and behavioral levels. The content analysis helped explain the origin of these expectations: across both platforms, affective promises were rarely limited to the functional value of a product. Instead, they were connected to emotional outcomes such as confidence, beauty, self-improvement, calmness, empowerment, belonging, resilience, and personal transformation.

When participants experienced a mismatch between this affective promise and the actual product or service, the reaction was not only functional dissatisfaction. The emotional framing of the content intensified the sense of deception:

“I felt scammed because I thought the product was going to help my skin, and it did absolutely nothing. The influencer said it was the best thing she had ever tried” (E07, P12).

At the cognitive level, participants reinterpreted the influencer’s credibility. After the negative experience, they questioned whether the influencer had actually used the product, whether the recommendation was honest, and whether future collaborations could be trusted. Responsibility was attributed to both the brand and the influencer, but the influencer was judged more severely because of the personal trust invested in them:

“I think both are responsible. First, the influencer, because they are supposed to establish trust with their followers and that trust is totally broken. The brand too, because you realize it is not sincere with you and fills you with misleading advertising” (E13, P13).

At the behavioral level, the rupture generated concrete rejection practices. Participants reported avoiding the brand, skipping its advertisements, unfollowing the influencer, reducing interaction with their content, sharing negative experiences with friends, or warning others in comments. These practices show that negative attitudes were not limited to private disappointment; they also became visible actions within social and digital environments.

4.4 Natural Integration as Fulfilment of the Authenticity Expectation

The fourth finding clarifies what participants considered acceptable influencer advertising. The opposite of disappointment was not the absence of advertising, but the natural integration of promotional content into the influencer’s usual narrative. Participants valued advertising that appeared coherent, contextualized, transparent, and supported by real experience.

The content analysis confirmed that posts with stronger authenticity cues tended to integrate emotional promises into narratives of everyday life, vulnerability, personal testimony, humor, or self-expression. These posts did not present the influencer merely as a seller, but as a person sharing an experience, routine, reflection, or practical

recommendation. Participants preferred storytelling over direct lists of product benefits and valued consistency between the influencer's online identity and offline behavior:

"They should speak from real experience, show how they use the product, and not just mention it because they are being paid. That creates more trust" (E02, P15).

This finding confirms that participants do not reject influencer advertising as such. They reject advertising that violates the perceived authenticity of the influencer. When the commercial message is integrated into a coherent personal narrative, the affective expectation is fulfilled, and the relationship of trust can be maintained.

Overall, the findings suggest that negative attitudes arise when participants perceive a rupture between three elements: the influencer's discourse, the brand's promise, and the consumer's actual experience. This rupture transforms the influencer from a trusted mediator into a commercially suspicious figure. In this process, authenticity becomes the key condition that determines whether influencer advertising is accepted, questioned, or rejected.

5 Discussion

The findings show that negative attitudes toward influencer advertising do not emerge only from product dissatisfaction, but from a perceived rupture between emotional promise, influencer credibility, and consumer experience. The integrated analysis of interviews and platform content indicates that influencers construct affective expectations through storytelling, vulnerability, aspirational aesthetics, humor, self-care routines, fashion content, and personal testimony. These resources transform promotional messages into emotionally meaningful narratives. However, when consumers perceive that the recommendation is scripted, exaggerated, commercially ambiguous, or disconnected from the influencer's actual lifestyle, the emotional bond becomes fragile.

This study contributes to the literature on influencer marketing by proposing the concept of the "rupture of the authenticity contract." This concept refers to the moment in which followers perceive that the influencer has violated an implicit expectation of coherence, honesty, and experiential truth. Previous research has emphasized authenticity as a key condition for influencer credibility and branded content effectiveness [4, 5, 6]. The present findings extend this discussion by showing that authenticity is not merely a desirable attribute, but a relational expectation that structures the moral evaluation of influencer advertising.

The results also show that young consumers do not reject commercial collaborations by default. Participants were aware that influencers are paid for advertising, but they expected promotional content to remain coherent with the influencer's identity, tone, values, and lived experience. This nuance is important because it suggests that the problem is not sponsorship itself, but the perception of inauthenticity. Sponsored content can be accepted when it is naturally integrated into the influencer's narrative and supported by credible signs of personal use. Conversely, when the recommendation appears forced or disconnected, users interpret the message as a breach of trust.

The content analysis helps explain why this breach can be emotionally intense. Across TikTok and Instagram, influencer posts frequently attached products, routines,

or lifestyle practices to promises of confidence, beauty, emotional well-being, self-improvement, empowerment, belonging, or personal transformation. These promises increase the persuasive value of content, but they also raise the affective stakes of the consumer experience. When the real outcome does not match the promised emotional benefit, disappointment is interpreted not only as a functional failure, but as a form of deception.

This process can be understood through cognitive dissonance theory [8]. Participants initially trusted or considered the influencer's recommendation because it was embedded in a familiar and emotionally credible narrative. When the product experience contradicted that expectation, participants reinterpreted the influencer's credibility and questioned the sincerity of future recommendations. The dissonance was resolved through skepticism, distrust, avoidance, and, in some cases, public warning behaviors.

The findings also contribute to the understanding of parasocial relationships in platform-based advertising. Influencers were not evaluated only as commercial endorsers; they were judged as familiar figures who had built a symbolic bond with their audience. This helps explain why participants attributed greater responsibility to the influencer than to the brand. The brand was perceived as a commercial actor expected to sell, while the influencer was expected to act as a moral filter between the brand and the community. When this expectation was violated, the sanction became more personal and reputational.

At the behavioral level, the study confirms that negative attitudes in digital environments can become visible and socially amplified. Participants reported unfollowing, avoiding content, skipping ads, warning friends, and commenting publicly about negative experiences. These practices align with symbolic cancellation understood as a withdrawal of attention, credibility, and moral legitimacy from the influencer. In this sense, the rupture of the authenticity contract does not only affect purchase intention; it can damage the influencer's symbolic capital and the brand's credibility within the audience's social environment.

Finally, the comparison between TikTok and Instagram suggests that platform formats shape how emotional promises are constructed. TikTok content tended to rely on immediacy, humor, trends, routines, transformation narratives, and motivational storytelling. Instagram content was more strongly associated with curated aesthetics, reflective captions, lifestyle imagery, fashion, beauty, and artistic self-presentation. Despite these differences, the same pattern appeared across both platforms: authenticity was strengthened by vulnerability, natural language, everyday scenes, and personal testimony, while dissonance emerged when content became overly aspirational, scripted, highly edited, or commercially ambiguous.

Overall, the findings suggest that influencer advertising operates through a delicate balance between emotional persuasion and perceived authenticity. The more a message depends on affective promises, the greater the risk when the consumer perceives a mismatch between expectation and reality. For brands and influencers, this means that credibility depends not only on visibility or engagement, but on the ability to sustain coherence between discourse, product experience, and community trust.

6 Conclusions

This study concludes that, among Peruvian Generation Z consumers, influencer advertising generates negative attitudes when the emotional promise communicated by the influencer is perceived as inconsistent with the actual consumer experience. The central expectation is not the absence of commercial collaboration, but the preservation of authenticity. When followers perceive that the influencer has replaced personal experience with a scripted or purely commercial recommendation, the relationship is interpreted as a rupture of an implicit authenticity contract.

The rupture operates at three interconnected levels. Emotionally, it produces disappointment, frustration, and a sense of symbolic betrayal. Cognitively, it encourages distrust and a reassessment of the influencer's credibility. Behaviorally, it leads to rejection practices such as avoidance, unfollowing, negative word of mouth, reduced purchase intention, and public warning. The findings therefore show that influencer advertising must be evaluated not only by visibility or engagement metrics, but also by the coherence between discourse, product experience, and community trust.

The study has limitations. The sample was intentional and limited to 15 young consumers living in Lima, so the results cannot be generalized to all Peruvian Generation Z users or to consumers with different levels of digital access. The analysis focused on TikTok and Instagram, which means that the dynamics of trust and disappointment may differ on long-form video platforms, livestreaming environments, or private messaging spaces. Future research could compare micro-influencers and macro-influencers, examine differences by product category, test the proposed authenticity-contract construct quantitatively, or conduct cross-cultural comparisons between Peru and other Latin American markets. Recent studies on consumer cynicism, youth well-being, and emotional marketing suggest that these comparative extensions are especially relevant for understanding the long-term effects of failed affective promises in influencer advertising [25, 26, 27].

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