

# Effects of Sensation Seeking, Creator Attractiveness, Content Novelty, and Credibility on Branded Entertainment

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## Abstract

**Purpose :** This study explored the effects of branded entertainment on the information processing of consumers. It proposed modeling factors influencing consumer behaviors.

**Methodology :** Using Korean female consumers as research samples, this study collected survey samples, and tried to identify the roles of consumer psychological factors, creator attractiveness, and content factors on purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention.

**Findings :** The findings of this study showed that sensation-seeking influenced both purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. Creator attractiveness was related in positive ways, and content novelty and content credibility influenced purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. Lastly, attitudes toward content was connected to both purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention.

**Practical Implications :** The hierarchical regression model of this study suggested certain academic implications and could also provide managerial implications in terms of the production of branded entertainment, especially focusing on creators' attractiveness and content styles. The research product was limited to only cosmetics, and future research will be necessary with more diverse products.

**Originality :** Unlike prior research on influencer marketing, the current work built an attractiveness model of influencers incorporating sensation seeking, novelty, and ad credibility.

**Keywords :** sensation-seeking, content novelty, attractiveness, advertising credibility, purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth

**Paper Submission Date :** January 5, 2024 ; **Paper sent back for Revision :** August 5, 2024 ; **Paper Acceptance Date :** December 22, 2024 ; **Paper Published Online :** February 15, 2025

As various novel media are introduced into the market, media environments face huge changes, and one of the major changes in the advertising industry is that traditional media advertising is continuously losing its influence. The situation of newspapers is well-known, and it is even difficult to reach individual consumers using broadcasting media. This difficulty is because consumers can access a variety of alternative media that carry visual images and clips; as a result, TV viewership keeps declining (Park & Jun, 2018). Another

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.17010/ijom/2025/v55/i2/174747>

problem the media faces is that audiences avoid advertising. Today, the word *advertising* tends to have negative connotations, and it is difficult for advertisers to breach audiences' psychological barriers. In this media environment, branded entertainment is becoming a solution as one of the sustainable advertising formats (Lee et al., 2019). As the business model of exposure-oriented advertising loses its effects, advertising industries need alternative business models. Branded entertainment requires fewer resources than traditional advertising and could become the future of advertising, providing sustainable business models in the competitive advertising environment. Branded entertainment can be effectively used to deliver boring content, especially government policies (Choi & Jun, 2020).

Branded entertainment refers to entertainment content that marketers make for commercial purposes (Hwang & Jeong, 2014). It is a new form of advertising that combines advertising and entertainment, and it enables advertisers to expose their products and brands within single entertainment sources. It can be presented in the form of movies or games. Branded entertainment is similar to product placement, although there are differences. For one, product placement uses indirect marketing to place brands and products within existing content ; whereas, branded entertainment is entertainment content made solely to present brands and products. Branded entertainment is also similar to, but distinct from, art infusion, in which works of art are inserted into advertisements (Son et al., 2021). However, the execution of branded entertainment requires caution. Although it is a form of content, such as article-type advertisements in Internet newspapers, if it deceives readers, it causes negative attitudes and avoidance of advertisements (Choi et al., 2021). Branded entertainment, also known as branded content or native advertising, involves integrating a certain brand's message within content that audiences find engaging and entertaining. While this strategy can be effective in building brand awareness and affinity, it also carries the risk of provoking negative attitudes and avoidance behaviors if consumers perceive it as deceptive. This perceived deception can erode trust, which is a cornerstone of any consumer-brand relationship. Research indicates that once trust is broken, it can be difficult to rebuild, and consumers may become skeptical of future interactions with the brand, regardless of the transparency of subsequent content (Hoffman et al., 1999).

In spite of the importance of branded entertainment in advertising industries, academic research on branded entertainment is limited to a certain theme of advertising perspectives. Commonly, academic studies are late to follow current practical advertising. We tried to fill these academic gaps and provide insights for researchers and practitioners. In this study, the factors of branded entertainment are divided into consumers' personal characteristics, creator factors, and content factors to find out their influence on purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. We aimed to explore how consumers accept branded entertainment without negative perceptions. Using content from a multichannel network (MCN) in Korea, we tried to find antecedents of this new type of sustainable advertising. Korea has a solid mobile infrastructure, and MCN is very popular among mobile users. We proposed that the advertising (content at the branded entertainment) could be effective because of consumer psychological tendency as well as content- and creator-related variables. Dependent variables are the behavioral intentions of consumers, such as purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. This approach could provide both academic and managerial implications.

## Literature Review

Branded entertainment can be understood as covert marketing because it does not ignite the persuasion knowledge of consumers (Wei et al., 2008). There are several concepts influencing consumer purchase intention bypassing psychological barriers of consumers. This study focuses on a consumer psychology element, creator attractiveness, and content characteristics. When we try to understand particular content that plays persuasive roles, independent relationships for classified variables should be investigated. For branded entertainment, the psychological tendency of consumers could influence attitudes or behavioral intention, and creators are also

important because they are identical to advertising models of traditional advertising. In addition, the characteristics of the content itself need to be investigated. Sensation seeking as a consumer psychology variable is the critical concept of the research model of this study influencing the behavioral intention of consumers.

### ***Sensation Seeking***

The concept of sensation-seeking has received considerable attention in human personality research since Marvin Zuckerman first developed the sensation-seeking bias measure in the early 1960s. Zuckerman (1979) defined sensation seeking as “a desire for new, diverse, complex stimuli and experiences, and the willingness to take physical and social risks to gain such experience” (p.10). Zuckerman's sensation-seeking scale is based on the following sub-factors: thrill and adventure seeking, disinhibition seeking (boredom and susceptibility), and experience seeking. Individuals tend to maintain a moderate degree of excitement or arousal through external stimulation and experiences of the new. Sensation seeking is a personality variable that reflects the sensory stimulation individuals feel at different levels and the extent to which they seek intense stimuli. Individuals with high sensation-seeking tendencies tend to maintain high excitability with stronger stimuli, and individuals with a low sensation-seeking tendency tend to avoid or ignore intense stimuli that exceed their comfortable states of excitement (Zuckerman, 1994).

Sensation seeking is a main personality variable that predicts various addictive phenomena (drug, alcohol), and behaviors related to sensation seeking include high-risk activities (dangerous driving, dangerous sports, indiscriminate sexual activity), substance abuse (illegal drug consumption), addiction (to the Internet, pornography, drugs, etc.), and media viewing (viewing violent videos and horror movies). Sensation-seeking is linked to fear and a desire for intense stimulation, and individuals with high sensation-seeking tend to prefer intensely stimulating content (Zuckerman, 1994). Study findings show that the higher a person's sensation-seeking tendency, the more likely he or she is to consume horror movies, participate in dangerous sports such as bungee jumping and rock climbing, and enjoy scary amusement park rides (Hoyle et al., 2002).

Individual sensation-seeking tendencies are known to be closely related to information-seeking behaviors as well as risky behaviors. Assuming media and messages as stimuli, sensation seeking is a variable that determines the mental resources of the user, who accepts and processes the stimuli. People with a high sensation-seeking tendency prefer dramatic, complex, and rapidly evolving messages because they prefer high stimulation (Palmgreen et al., 1991). The results that relate sensation-seeking and content stimulation are summarized as follows: individuals with high sensation-seeking tend to seek new and novel content (Niederdeppe et al., 2007), including strong horror movies (Zuckerman, 1994). In advertising, sensation-seeking affects advertising memory (Everett & Palmgreen, 1995). The effects of advertising are related to the nature of advertising copy and visual creativity (Lang et al., 2005), and thus, it is necessary to adjust advertising stimulus levels based on audiences' sensation-seeking tendencies (Donohew et al., 2012).

As the roles of consumer characteristics become important, researchers get interested in relationships between sensation seeking and behavioral intention (Choi, 1993). Sensation-seeking is found to influence the preference of website design (Martin et al., 2005). Sensation-seeking also mediates shoplifting (Bai et al., 2019). Sensation-seeking makes differences in physiological, cognitive, and emotional responses in the emotional anti-alcohol abuse advertisement (Lee & Shin, 2011).

### ***Attractiveness***

Communication research has continuously explored how people's perceptions affect communication effectiveness. Attractiveness is a response formed through personal experience, and satisfaction in interpersonal

relationships affects people's emotional and physical states. Social psychology research that focused on forming and maintaining relationships concluded that attractiveness to others is the basis of relationships (Batool & Malik, 2010).

The definition of attractiveness varies widely among studies. Most definitions are related to physical attractiveness, such as attractiveness of the face or other external features (Baker & Churchill Jr., 1977; Patzer, 1983). McWhirter (1970) highlighted introspection and ability as elements of attractiveness, reflecting intellectual ability, morality, and intuitive preferences. Many studies have been conducted with attractiveness as an independent variable, and as the related research increased, researchers began taking multidimensional approaches to the topic (Triandis, 1964). McCroskey et al. (1971) presented the concept of interpersonal attraction by adding social attraction and task attraction to preexisting physical attraction. They defined attractiveness as a judgment of whether or not people like others and how good people feel about others' presence. Other researchers used physical, social, and task attractiveness to explain different variables through the 2000s.

Physical attractiveness is the most prominent and easily accessible feature in humans (Solomon & Saxe, 1977). There is a widespread belief that people's appearances, especially their faces, can explain their inner qualities, moral norms, and socialization (Hassin & Trope, 2000; Singh & Nanda, 2022). Physical attractiveness relates to traits such as height, skin color, smell, hairstyle, dress, and makeup, as well as facial appeal (Barber, 2001). Task attraction is defined as whether a model can reliably validate the message that a person is claiming (McCracken, 1989). Byrne (1971) presented four measures, including behavioral and affective attraction, for use in assessing individual attractiveness. Hakim (2010) described social attraction as an important factor in the study of erotic capital. She argued that social attraction is the ability to make others feel comfortable and cheerful, to make them want to know more, and, ultimately, to make people like someone or something. Social attraction is known to help people clearly perceive others, control their behavior in different situations, and exercise appropriate influence while effectively responding to others (Gardner, 1993). Social attractiveness can change others' opinions and behaviors by providing favorable impressions and appeal (Baron & Markman, 2003).

Attractiveness has been consistently described as an important variable in personal relationships, and researchers have suggested that attractiveness be utilized as a facet of personal capital (Back et al., 2011). In particular, many studies on celebrity endorsements in advertising have described that celebrities' attractiveness enhances communication effects more than the attractiveness of ordinary people. Celebrities are defined as people who have public recognition for accomplishments in particular fields such as entertainment, sports, or politics (Khatri, 2006); they are characterized by personal charm, unique lifestyles, and other collective characteristics, and they enjoy high public perception. Companies widely use celebrities in marketing because of their recognition and influence. People's high awareness of celebrities causes celebrities' advertisements to stand out even among ad clutter (Tanwar et al., 2021).

The culture of openness, sharing, and communication brought about by the digital era has created a social atmosphere that recognizes social creators as one of the most important entertainment resources. Social creators have been able to discover and implement various genres of content, including materials that are easily accessible in everyday life, to convey fun and interest to users. It was the surprising result of a July 2015 survey that *Variety* commissioned that the five most influential figures among Americans aged 13–18 were all YouTube stars. There is a need for studies on the attractiveness of celebrated creators, who have emerged along with changes in the media.

## **Novelty**

The dictionary definition of novelty is the state or quality of being novel or new. Terms such as “fresh,” “unique,” “divergent,” and “unexpected” have been associated with novelty (Belch & Belch, 2018). The concept of novelty has mainly been studied in the context of creativity, especially in the advertising industry. Creativity is a key

element of advertising effectiveness (Sheinin et al., 2011), and novelty has been considered as the basis of creative advertising (Ang et al., 2014).

Novelty in advertising is known to generate arousal because it is a necessary condition for advertising attention (Berlyne, 1973), and information with high novelty can lead to higher recall (Heckler & Childers, 1992) and more favorable attitudes and responses than novelty-weak information (Lee & Mason, 1999). The discriminated effect of novelty can be assessed by applying the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). The model's functional dimensions are the central cues that have a strong influence on persuasion, whereas its hedonic dimensions are peripheral cues with a weak influence (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the ELM, novelty is expected to have an impact on psychological benefits by improving brand effects (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

As noted earlier, branded entertainment is content that was created solely for a specific product or brand, and it reflects a company's brand message to consumers within the storyline of the content (Hudson & Hudson, 2006). It differs from advertising that already exists, and it reveals the personality of its creator. Most creators who produce their content also contract with advertisers to produce branded entertainment. However, media users do not simply accept content that is presented to them. They show active consumption behavior by searching for the content that they want. Creators, thus, must consider the novelty of content to satisfy consumers' needs. In this study, we investigated the influence of branded entertainment on consumers' evaluations using novelty—the core of branded entertainment—as the independent variable.

### ***Advertising Credibility***

Credibility is defined as a given entity's believability to individuals and/or groups (Carnevale & Wechsler, 1992). Researchers view credibility as a multidimensional perspective viewed through underlying factors such as cognition, emotion, and behaviors (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). Recent studies continue to emphasize the pivotal role of credibility in persuasive communication. Manzoor et al. (2023) examined the persuasive power of reputation in online deliberations, finding that individuals' credibility significantly impacts their persuasion rate beyond the validity and strength of their arguments. Recent studies have continued to explore the significance of truthfulness and accuracy in advertising credibility. A qualitative study examined how advertising credibility is defined and its effects on brands and corporate perceptions. The findings suggest that advertising credibility is characterized by attributes such as accuracy, honesty, and reliability (Hussain et al., 2020). Advertisements help consumers make purchasing decisions by communicating information about products and services.

Some studies emphasize the importance of advertising credibility on consumers' perception of the authenticity of advertising messages. Mosa (2021) explored the effects of advertising credibility on brand credibility, corporate credibility, and corporate images. The study found that consumers' perceptions of advertising authenticity significantly influenced their trust in the brand and the corporation. Because consumers ignore or avoid advertising that lacks credibility, many advertisers have long sought to build credibility in order to form or change consumers' attitudes. The reliability of the media is sometimes considered important for advertising credibility. As was the case with traditional media research, active research has been conducted on new media as well. Edelson et al. (2019) analyzed the transparency of political advertisements on major social media platforms, highlighting how the credibility of media platforms affects the perceived trustworthiness of the ads they host. Al Qundus and Paschke (2018) explored how various attributes, such as user roles and content quality, affect trust in social media platforms, which in turn influences the credibility of advertisements displayed. These studies underscore the significant role that media credibility plays in shaping consumer perceptions of advertising trustworthiness. Brands aiming to enhance their advertising effectiveness should consider the credibility of the media channels they utilize.

The influences of information sources on advertising reliability are relatively consistent. In the field of

communication, research has addressed different communicator characteristics in terms of how they affect message processing (Addington, 1971). Reliable sources reduce negative thoughts about advertising and reduce consumer uncertainty regarding products (Gautam et al., 2022). As information sources became more important in advertisements, the use of celebrities began to increase (Sathyanarayana et al., 2019). Consumers remember products that include celebrity endorsements better than those that do not, and they expect these products to be more valuable (Clark & Horstmann, 2005). In advertising research, credibility has been actively studied as similar to reliability, and studies have been conducted to find the precedents of celebrity source credibility. Based on these studies, this study investigated the relationships between advertising reliability as a dependent variable and creator attractiveness, content, and sensation seeking as independent variables.

## Hypotheses

It is acknowledged that highly sensation-seeking people like novel and unique products (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Lim et al. (2008) found that people's emotional reactions to media messages differed based on their sensation-seeking. Users who had a high sensation-seeking tendency were more positive about highly interactive products. Because these individuals tend to favor new and exciting content, we hypothesized a positive impact of sensation-seeking on behavioral intention, such as purchase intention of products depicted on branded content and WOM intention of branded content itself.

✎ **H1** : Sensation seeking will influence behavioral intention.

The discussion on the effects of celebrity endorsement is divided into source credibility and source attractiveness models. The source attractiveness model relates to the familiarity, likability, similarity, and attractiveness of information sources (Petty et al., 1997), and attractiveness grew in importance with the increased use of celebrities as spokespersons for products and services (Baker & Churchill Jr., 1977). In a study on celebrity credibility, Ohanian (1990) suggested that attractiveness enhanced message persuasiveness. People who are attracted to someone will pay attention to what that person is interested in and hope to increase the frequency, depth, and intensity of interactions. Individuals who are considered attractive are often regarded as fair and trustworthy as well (Tedeschi, 1974), and Milazzo and Mattes (2016) found that the attractiveness of politicians influenced voters' decisions. In this context, for content creators who can be considered celebrities, their attractiveness might have a positive impact on consumer decision-making and lead to ultimate behavioral intention.

✎ **H2** : Creator attractiveness will influence behavioral intention.

✎ **H2-1** : Social attractiveness will influence behavioral intention.

✎ **H2-2** : Physical attractiveness will influence behavioral intention.

✎ **H2-3** : Professional attractiveness will influence behavioral intention.

A study that analyzed the discriminative effects of novelty on consumer brand judgments showed that novelty affected brand attitudes (Sheinin et al., 2011). Branded entertainment is a new form of advertising that is separate from traditional media, and hence, it is plausible to posit that the novelty of branded entertainment will affect consumers' evaluations and actual behavioral intention.

✎ **H3** : Content novelty will influence behavioral intention.

The effect of advertising credibility in persuasive communication is well documented in the literature (Choi & Rifon, 2002). Credibility is said to form consumer attitudes and purchase intention (Thorson & Rodgers, 2019). MCN content is similar to advertising messages. In this regard, it can be hypothesized that advertising credibility will be linked to purchase intention and WOM positively.

⇒ **H4** : Advertising credibility will influence behavioral intention.

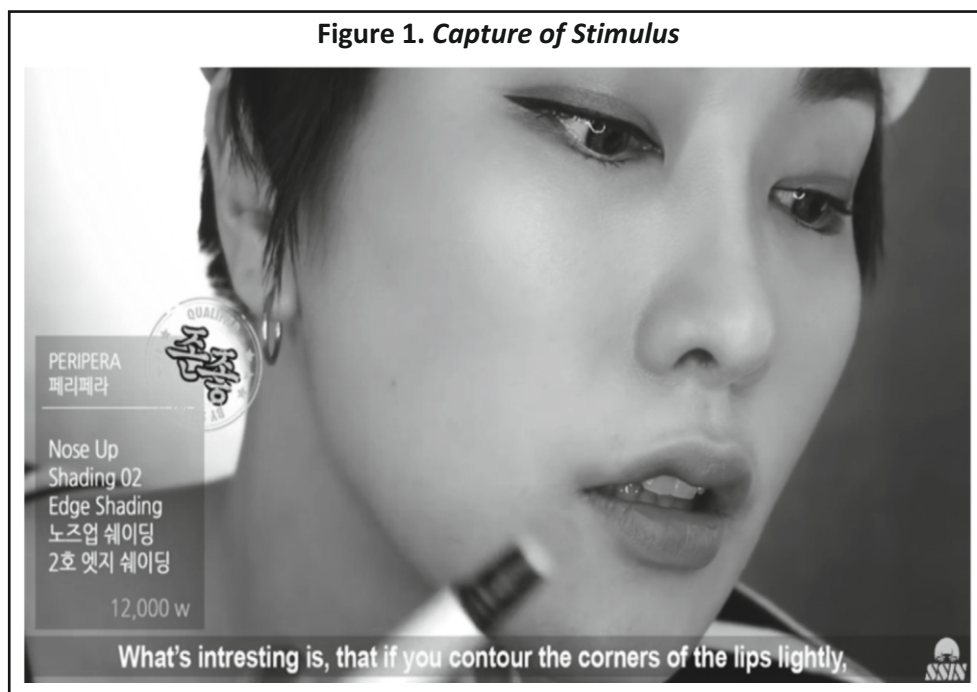
Purchase intention refers to a person's willingness to purchase a product in the future. If the purchase intention is high, the probability of an actual purchase increases. Purchase intention has been widely used as a measure of advertising effectiveness and can ultimately be considered a final indicator of advertising effects. Conversely, attitudes toward advertising are directly related to purchase intention (Homer & Yoon, 1992; Low & Lamb Jr., 2000). As SNSs gain popularity, WOM becomes a more important indicator of consumer behaviors. This relationship between attitudes and behavioral intention is frequently found in advertising literature. Based on the many precedent studies about advertising attitudes and purchase intention, we propose the following hypothesis :

⇒ **H5** : Attitudes toward content will influence behavioral intention.

## Methodology

### Stimulus

This study selected the stimulus of branded entertainment from MCN. MCN is one of the emerging platforms incorporating content creators. Korea is leading the MCN business. The creator used in this study is popular and has 1.6 million followers. She made various cosmetic content and cooperated with related products. This is why we chose the creator as a stimulus in this study. The stimulus is also about sponsored cosmetic products (refer to Figure 1).



## Samples

To verify the proposed branded entertainment model, this study used a survey research method. A research firm was recruited to collect general samples. The survey was conducted in January 2020. The survey questionnaire was sent via email to research panels, and responses were collected. This study conducted a survey targeting women in their 20s and 30s who are the main users of branded entertainment for beauty. A total of 340 female respondents participated. Among respondents, teenagers were 113 (33.2%) ; in their 20s were 116 (34.1%), and in their 30s were 111 (32.6%). Their mean age was 25.2 years. For their jobs, students were 169 (49.7), professionals were 36 (10.6%), office workers were 77 (22.6%), sales workers were 2 (0.6%), and others were 56 (16.5%).

## Measurement

Sensation seeking was measured by Hoyle et al. (2002) scales including "I would like to explore strange places," "I get restless when I spend too much time at home," "I like to do frightening things," "I like wild parties," "I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned routes or timetables," "I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable," "I would like to try bungee jumping," and "I would love to have new and exciting experiences, even if they are illegal" ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ).

Attractiveness is measured by McCroskey and McCain (1974) scales. Social attractiveness is "This Creator is humorous," "This Creator is good at talking," "This Creator makes people happy," "This Creator makes people comfortable," "This Creator is good at expression such as gesture," "This Creator makes people want to talk," and "This Creator will make good relationship with people" ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

Content novelty is measured using preexisting scales that Sheinin et al. (2011) used, such as "This content is original," "This content is different from my expectations," "This content is memorable," "This content is visually interesting," and "This content is different" ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

Content attitudes are measured by the common scales of attitudes (Batra & Stayman, 1990). Five measurement scales are used for measuring advertising credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Specific scales include "This advertising is that you can trust," "This advertising doesn't pretend to be something it isn't," "The products in this advertising claims are believable," "Over time, my experiences with this advertising have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less," and "This advertising delivers what it promises" ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

Four items are used to measure purchase intention (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Items are "I intend to purchase this product," "I am positive about purchasing this product," "I intend to purchase succeeding products," and "I will recommend this product to others" ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ). Word-of-mouth intention was measured by Han and Lee's (2014) items. The measurement items for all variables are as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Measurement Items**

| Variables                    | Measurement Items                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | References                                   | Reliability     |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Sensation Seeking</b>     | "I would like to explore strange places," "I get restless when I spend too much time at home," "I like to do frightening things," "I enjoy wild parties," "I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned routes or timetables," "I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable," "I would like to try bungee jumping," and "I would love to have new and exciting experiences, even if they are illegal." | Hoyle et al. (2002)                          | $\alpha = 0.80$ |
| <b>Social Attractiveness</b> | "This creator is humorous," "This creator is good at talking," "This creator makes people happy," "This creator makes people feel comfortable," "This creator is good at expressions such as gestures,"                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Kim & Jun (2016) ; McCroskey & McCain (1974) | $\alpha = 0.96$ |

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                              |                 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------|
|                                    | "This creator makes people want to talk," and "This creator will build good relationships with people."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                              |                 |
| <b>Physical Attractiveness</b>     | "This creator is good looking," "This creator has masculine (or feminine) beauty," "This creator's facial appearance is above average," "This creator's face is well-balanced," "This creator is sexy," "This creator is fashionable," "This creator is physically attractive," "This creator's face is attractive," "This creator is sexually attractive," "This creator is sexually appealing," and "This creator has a stylish image." | Kim & Jun (2016) ; McCroskey & McCain (1974) | $\alpha = 0.95$ |
| <b>Professional Attractiveness</b> | "This creator has intellectual ability," "This creator is sincere," "This creator has the ability to work well," "This creator is qualified to be a social leader," "This creator seems to be fair," "This creator fulfills social responsibility," and "This creator can solve any work-related situation."                                                                                                                              | Kim & Jun (2016) ; McCroskey & McCain (1974) | $\alpha = 0.94$ |
| <b>Content Novelty</b>             | "This content is original," "This content is different from my expectations," "This content is memorable," "This content is visually interesting," and "This content is different."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Sheinin et al. (2011)                        | $\alpha = 0.94$ |
| <b>Ad. Credibility</b>             | "This advertisement is one that you can trust," "This advertisement doesn't pretend to be something it isn't," "The products in this advertisement make believable claims," "Over time, my experiences with this advertisement have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less," and "This advertisement delivers what it promises."                                                                                   | Erdem & Swait (2004)                         | $\alpha = 0.95$ |
| <b>Content Attitudes</b>           | "This content is favorable," "This content is useful," "This content is beneficial," "This content is valuable," and "I am satisfied with this content."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Batra & Stayman (1990)                       | $\alpha = 0.96$ |
| <b>Purchase Intentions</b>         | "I intend to purchase this product," "I am positive about purchasing this product," "I intend to purchase subsequent products," and "I will recommend this product to others."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Davis (1989) ; Venkatesh & Davis (2000)      | $\alpha = 0.95$ |
| <b>WOM Intentions</b>              | "This content is worth sharing," "People will be interested in this ad when they share this content on social media," and "I want to share this content so people know it's my preferred product."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Han & Lee (2014)                             | $\alpha = 0.87$ |

## Analysis and Results

This study performed a principle component analysis using the varimax rotation method to analyze the construct validity of each measure. It was composed of six variables; the factor loading value was over 0.50, and the Eigenvalue was greater than 1, all of which show that construct validity was achieved. Next, a reliability analysis of the measures showed a Cronbach's alpha value of over 0.80, which is higher than the standard accepted reliability levels.

### Hypothesis Test

Table 2 shows the results of the hypotheses test. A three-stage hierarchal regression analysis was executed to test the six hypotheses. In this study, it was judged that hierarchical regression analysis was a valid analysis method in terms of the study design to examine the influence of personal characteristics, creator factors, and content factors. In the first stage, we verified that sensation-seeking has a direct effect on the purchase intention. In the second

stage, we included three factors of attractiveness: social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, and professional attractiveness. In the final stage, we included content novelty, content credibility, and attitudes toward content to verify the effect of content characteristics on the purchase intention of advertised products.

In the first stage, sensation-seeking was a critical variable that had a positive effect on purchase intention. The coefficient of determination of the model was 7.3%, which shows a small explanatory power. However, in the second stage, the model included three types of attractiveness such as social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, and professional attractiveness. This showed a higher coefficient of determination (41.0%) compared to Model 1, which only included sensation seeking. Simultaneously, the effect of sensation-seeking (SS) was still strong, and three types of attractiveness (SA, PA, and PRA) had a positive effect on purchase intention. In the final stage, we included content novelty, content credibility, and content attitudes. The results of the analysis show that the third model has a higher coefficient of determination (62.3%) than model 2. The results of the verification on the effects of major variables show that content credibility and attitudes toward content have a meaningful effect on purchase intention. However, we show that the relative effect of content novelty on purchase intention is not meaningful. In addition, sensation seeking, which has a meaningful effect in Model 2, shows a partially meaningful effect of  $p < 0.1$ , and social attractiveness, which also has a meaningful effect in Model 2, shows a partially negative meaningful effect of  $p < 0.1$ .

Next, another hierarchal regression analysis was executed for word-of-mouth intention (in Table 3). Sensation

**Table 2. Results of Hierarchal Regression Analysis**

| DV                            | IV                          | Model 1   | Model 2    | Model 3    |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Purchase Intentions           | Sensation-Seeking           | 0.274***  | 0.156***   | 0.060#     |
|                               | Social Attractiveness       |           | 0.219**    | -0.116#    |
|                               | Physical Attractiveness     |           | 0.162**    | 0.094*     |
|                               | Professional Attractiveness |           | 0.292***   | 0.023      |
|                               | Content Novelty             |           |            | 0.053      |
|                               | Ad. Credibility             |           |            | 0.396***   |
|                               | Content Attitudes           |           |            | 0.391***   |
| Adjusted $R^2 = (\Delta R^2)$ |                             | 0.073     | 0.410(.34) | 0.623(.21) |
| F                             |                             | 27.493*** | 65.394***  | 64.207***  |

**Note.** #  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 3. Results of Hierarchal Regression Analysis**

| DV                            | IV                          | Model 1   | Model 2    | Model 3    |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Word-of-mouth Intentions      | Sensation-Seeking           | 0.288***  | 0.152***   | 0.060*     |
|                               | Social Attractiveness       |           | 0.418***   | 0.093#     |
|                               | Physical Attractiveness     |           | 0.100*     | 0.031      |
|                               | Professional Attractiveness |           | 0.264***   | 0.008      |
|                               | Content Novelty             |           |            | 0.077#     |
|                               | Ad. Credibility             |           |            | 0.112*     |
|                               | Content Attitudes           |           |            | 0.597***   |
| Adjusted $R^2 = (\Delta R^2)$ |                             | 0.080     | 0.563(.49) | 0.743(.18) |
| F                             |                             | 30.482*** | 125.311*** | 79.121***  |

**Note.** #  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

seeking is also a significant variable influencing WOM. The coefficient of determination of the model is 8.0%. The second model, which includes three types of attractiveness, shows a higher coefficient of determination (56.3%) compared to the first model. Simultaneously, the effect of SS is still strong, and three types of attractiveness (SA, PA, and PRA) have a positive effect on WOM. The final model, which includes content novelty, content credibility, and content attitudes, shows that the third model has a higher coefficient of determination (74.3%) than the second model. The results show that content credibility and attitudes toward content have a significant effect on WOM. However, the content novelty is not significant on WOM. In addition, sensation-seeking is still significant, and social attractiveness, which has a meaningful effect in Model 2, shows a partially meaningful effect of  $p < 0.1$ , and physical attractiveness and professional attractiveness changed to be not statistically significant.

## Discussions and Conclusion

This study explores the effects of sensation-seeking, creator attractiveness, content novelty, advertising credibility, and content attitudes on behavioral intentions such as purchase intention and WOM intention. First, we used sensation seeking as a consumer psychological variable and the starting point of the research. The study's findings show that sensation-seeking influences behavioral intention in the first model (H1). Creator attractiveness, such as social, physical, and professional attractiveness, influences the purchase intention of advertised products and WOM intention (H2). For content variables, advertising credibility (H4) and attitudes toward content influence behavioral intention positively (H5). However, we found no direct relationships between content novelty and purchase intention (H3) and found only limited relationships between content novelty and WOM intention.

However, this study may have some limitations because it is conducted only on Korean female consumers of a single cosmetic product category. The findings of this study provide several implications. Branded entertainment consumes little resources compared to traditional media advertising, and so shows potential as a sustainable advertising format for the future advertising industries. Branded entertainment can also be a sustainable business model in the upcoming new era of digital media environments. This proposition is in the same line of thought that brand webtoon is one of the sustainable advertising tools as branded entertainment (Lee et al., 2019). This study also supports this proposition in the MCN creator content and suggests more detailed consumer information processes of branded entertainment. The hierarchical regression model of this study suggests certain academic implications. First, the model presents hierarchical relationships among academic concepts regarding branded entertainment. The most important characteristic of branded entertainment is that consumers accept its messages without resistance (Wei et al., 2008), and this study supports preexisting literature. Given that branded entertainment marketing has become popular and is used to communicate commercial messages without advertising avoidance, academic analyses of branded entertainment in terms of consumer perspectives could make theoretical contributions to future branded entertainment researchers. At present, there is little research on branded entertainment, and this study can fill this academic gap.

As the model suggests, sensation-seeking is a starting point in terms of consumer processing of branded entertainment. It is frequently used in addiction research, and it refers to certain personal characteristics (Zuckerman, 1994). This study extends the concept of sensation seeking into marketing communication research and explores the information-processing stages. These results are in the same line of thought that it is related to a certain marketing communication message (Lee & Shin, 2011; Wei et al., 2008). It is very interesting to find that a particular psychological tendency influences behavioral intention directly. MCN content is a distinctive format of advertising, and this characteristic of content is favored by consumers who seek strong sensation.

Creator attractiveness influences behavioral intention. Traditional advertising literature suggests the role of

celebrities in communication effects (Khatri, 2006). This study confirms the old but valid relationship in the MCN environment again. Particularly, classifying attractiveness into three distinctive dimensions, this study finds individual influences of social, physical, and professional attractiveness. As various literature suggests, the attractiveness of endorsers featured in advertising messages exerts a strong impact on the behavioral intention of consumers. Three dimensions of attractiveness provide a deeper understanding of celebrity evaluation (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). This study finds that three-dimensional attractiveness is useful in marketing communication. It can be said that it is different from previous studies that attractiveness was divided into social, physical, and professional to investigate the impact of detailed attractiveness dimensions.

For content variables, we find advertising credibility to be essential in the research model. As Thorson and Rodgers (2019) suggested, perceived advertising credibility is the antecedent to purchase intention and WOM intention. Branded entertainment aims to make audiences accept commercial messages without intentional resistance. However, cognitive confidence is necessary for ultimately affecting consumer behaviors. Credibility can be the cognitive link to behavioral intentions, and this study supports this hypothetical relationship by showing that advertising credibility influences purchase intention and WOM intention. This result is supportive of other credibility studies in advertising fields (Choi & Rifon, 2002; Rao & Rao, 2019). That is the perceived credibility of entertainment content, which leads to the intention to purchase the advertised product and the intention to deliver the content. It is also supported that attitudes toward content influence purchase intention. The relationship between attitudes and consumer behavioral intention is well documented, and this study reconfirms the relationship in the branded entertainment content.

However, content novelty does not influence purchase intention. We hypothesize that the effects of branded entertainment stem from their novel nature compared with traditional advertising, but this prediction is not supported. This result is different from previous literature in that novelty influences consumer evaluation (Belch & Belch, 2018). Branded entertainment made by MCN creators indeed appeals to consumers with novel perceptions, but we find no direct relationship between them. Despite this, it is interesting to find the influence of novelty on WOM intention even with a limited level ( $p < 0.10$ ). Novelty might be effective in posting the content on their SNSs when consumers are more satisfied with the content.

## Managerial and Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study provide some managerial implications for practitioners such as marketers, content producers, and advertising planners. When using branded entertainment for marketing purposes, advertisers should consider consumers' psychological tendencies. People demonstrate behavior patterns that can be used to segment consumers and present different marketing messages based on these consumer segments. As discussed earlier, people who seek sensation pursue novel stimuli, and novel advertising communication could appeal to these consumers (Choi, 1993). Consumer segmentation is easier in the online environments where MCN content is distributed than it is with traditional advertising media.

When producing branded entertainment, creators should consider content completeness and attractiveness. These are important for developing content that is not only informative but also engaging and appealing, ensuring that marketing campaigns resonate deeply with their target audience and drive better engagement and conversion rates. To implement content completeness effectively, marketers should start with thorough research. This involves using tools such as keyword analysis and competitor benchmarking to understand what the audience is searching for and identify gaps in existing content. By understanding the common questions and pain points of the audience, marketers can create content that is both detailed and highly relevant.

Zhang and von Dran (2001), providing comprehensive information that meets user needs, is critical for user satisfaction and content effectiveness. In addition to comprehensively covering the topic, content completeness

also involves supporting the content with evidence such as data, statistics, case studies, or expert opinions. This approach adds depth and credibility, making the content more trustworthy. As Park and Lee (2009) highlighted, the inclusion of data and credible references enhances the perceived quality of content, thereby increasing its effectiveness. Branded entertainment takes different forms and provides novel consumer experiences such as ad movies, ad-games, and branded cartoons, and this novelty makes distinctive impressions on consumers. In MCNs, popular creators are hired to insert commercial messages in their content, and with this in mind, branded entertainment content should be strategically developed, well-made, and properly executed. Particularly attractive creators are essential to effective branded entertainment. As the results illustrate, attractiveness includes various aspects, and only physical attractiveness is not enough. More specific attractiveness strategies are required depending on product categories or genres of branded entertainment. Considering the fact that various characteristics of consumers affect branded entertainment, it will be necessary to discover creators with various charms in various fields. Personalization is increasingly important in today's marketing environment. Tailoring content to the specific needs and preferences of the audience can significantly enhance its attractiveness. Segmentation and personalization help deliver content that speaks directly to the audience's unique challenges and interests. As noted by Tam and Ho (2005), personalized appeal and attractiveness are more likely to engage users and lead to positive user experiences.

Content credibility is an important factor in branded entertainment, which tends to focus more on consumer interests and entertainment than on product information, and as the results of this study show, even entertainment should ensure content credibility. This result shows that heuristic messages could affect cognitive judgment and lead to certain decision-making. This is why branded entertainment is powerful and could be a sustainable advertising format in future marketing. Given that we found credibility to be essential in purchase intention and WOM intention, advertisers should attempt to ensure the credibility of content and its endorsers. We recently saw a case where YouTubers' trust was damaged due to back advertisement problems. It shows that trust is the key for creators to be sustainable.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research**

This study has some limitations. The main limitation is that this study used only female samples due to product characteristics. This could restrict the generalization of the results. The research product was limited to only cosmetics, and future research is necessary with more diverse products. For example, products for men can be studied to generalize the results of this study. In addition, future research could study populations other than Korean consumers to generalize the study results. For example, studies with culturally different Western consumers could provide other insights into branded entertainment. Another future study to explore business players other than consumers could be fruitful. We hope this research will stimulate advertising studies that focus on branded entertainment as a sustainable business model of advertising.

Another limitation of the study could be pointed out as the failure to additionally consider potential influencing factors on consumer behavior intention. These factors may not be adequately accounted for, which can limit the generalization of the results. To address this issue and enhance the robustness of the findings, several strategies can be employed. First, it is crucial to incorporate control variables such as brand loyalty and past brand experience into the study design. By controlling for these variables, results can more accurately isolate the specific effect of sensation seeking and creator attractiveness on behavioral intention without the confounding influence of these other factors. Advanced statistical techniques, such as regression analysis or structural equation modeling (SEM), can be particularly useful in this regard. These methods allow for a more precise examination of the relationships between variables, ensuring that the effects of other influential factors do not overshadow the impact of sensation-seeking and creator attractiveness. Incorporating additional variables and expanding theoretical frameworks can

also enhance the study. For instance, brand loyalty or past brand experience could be introduced as moderating or mediating variables to explore how they influence the relationship between sensation-seeking and behavioral intention. This approach can provide a more nuanced understanding of how these factors interact and affect consumer behaviors.

## Authors' Contribution

Dr. Jungryum Kim conceived the idea and developed a theoretical research design to undertake the empirical study. Dr. Dahyun Hong collected the research data. Dr. Jong Woo Jun analyzed the data and supervised the whole study.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

## Funding Acknowledgment

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or for the publication of this article.

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