



False Product Reviews on Social Media by Influencers: Lessons Learned from Five Magic Skin Products

Ratanasuda Punnahitanond

School of Communication Arts, Bangkok University

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Abstract

This study has two objectives: 1) to investigate how false product reviews of Magic Skin products on social media were presented by influencers based on message components and approaches; and 2) to examine what type of influencers are involved in these false product reviews. Using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 73 false product reviews of five Magic Skin products (Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin, Fern Cleo, Slim Milk, Mezzo Serum, and Mezzo Facial Soap) by 59 Thai influencers on social media, the results of content analysis in terms of message component yield that these false product reviews were mainly in the forms of photo captions or Instagram comments presented in three patterns of a half body shot photograph of influencer(s) with the reviewed product and/or its package. As for message approach, the analysis results indicate that words associated with beauty ideal, product benefits, unique selling proposition (USP), testimonials, and product-as-hero were used by influencers in their reviews. Two types of influencers are involved in these false product reviews; conventional celebrities outnumbered the Internet idols. The findings offer not only valuable lessons for regulatory agencies and consumers, but also several future research topics for academics as well as useful managerial implications.

Introduction

Background

Revenue in the Cosmetics and Personal Care market in Thailand amounts to US\$ 6,171,000 in 2018. The market is expected to grow annually by 7.7% (2018 – 2021). Its largest market segment is the skin care with a market volume of US\$ 2,267,000 in 2018 (www.statista.com). The Economic Intelligence Center at the country's Siam Commercial Bank (EIC-SCB) forecasted the supplement market is expected to expand significantly

in the next 10 – 15 years, growing at around 7% a year (Scattergood, 2017). Thais are among the top consumers of vitamins and dietary supplements in the world. The sales value of dietary supplements in Thailand was estimated at \$833 million in 2013, with a projected annual growth rate of 10-15 percent over the next five years, reaching \$1.7 billion in 2018 (The International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, June 29, 2016).

This industry looks promising. However, its dark side was recently exposed. The Royal Thai Police

* Corresponding author
Email: ratanasuda.p@bu.ac.th

revealed that Magic Skin product range with over 250 different brands had used false FDA (Food and Drug Administration) certification numbers on the products and were produced at unregistered factories without standard. One prominent strategy used by Magic Skin Inc. is influencer marketing in the form of product reviews on social media. The false claims were brought against the Magic Skin Inc. and influencers by the FDA and consumers. The company and those influencers were accused of violating the Cosmetics Act by using misleading photos and/or words in reviewing the Magic Skin range products, and the Food Act by falsely presenting the properties of food supplements, along with unauthorized advertising of the products. They could also be charged with computer crime for putting fake information in to computer systems (Online Reporters, 2018). The economic damage caused by this fraud and false product reviews was estimated to be 111,000,000 Baht and the regulatory agencies received many consumers' complaints of physical harm caused by substandard manufacturing ("Celebrities facing charge," 2018).

Research Objectives

Due to the huge damage caused by the influencers' false product reviews for Magic Skin, this study investigates how false product reviews were presented by influencers in terms of message component and message approach. It also examines what type of influencers made these false reviews. Findings will not only enable the Thai government officials and the public to be aware of message presentation used in false product reviews by influencers, but also provides empirical evidences for the regulatory agencies to realize that it is imperative to amend relevant regulations to guard against possible hazard of false product reviews by influencers. The following section reviews literature regarding influencer marketing, false product reviews, message component, and message approach.

Influencer Marketing

The emergence of different social media channels offers marketers and influencers wider marketing opportunities in connecting with potential consumers. Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

They can be classified into two types – 1) conventional celebrities and 2) Internet idols. Conventional celebrities are those who had acquired their fame from various careers in business, sports, politics, or entertainment such as athletes, politicians, actresses, singers or models whereas Internet idols are those who had acquired their fame solely on social media. These idols are the bloggers, YouTubers, or trainers who have become recognized names initially without agents, simply by attracting huge followings on their social media accounts (Saul, March 27, 2016).

One significant marketing strategy the Magic Skin Inc. used to promote its products is its audacious campaign involving 59 famous Thai influencers who endorsed the products. To gain a competitive advantage and expand their client base, many marketers have adopted 'influencer marketing' that involves a person or a group of people who possess the ability to influence the behavior and/or the opinion of others (Combley, 2011). Based on Einarsson (2017), the influencer endorsement via social media was effective due to intimacy and trust formed between the social media influencer and the follower. The influencer was perceived by the followers as their friend or a role model and therefore recommending something to them as a friend not as a marketing tool. They were more likely to buy a product or service if it was promoted by social media influencer. These influencers possess a variation of power -- referent power, the power over people, influencing others and/or being a role model to a group (Turner & Schabram, 2012).

As the original form of influencer marketing, 'celebrity endorsement,' is "a type of channel in brand communication through which a celebrity acts as the brand's spokesperson and certifies the brand's claim and position by extending their personality, popularity and status in the society or expertise in the field to the brand." (Sivesan (2013, p.2). A review of literature on celebrity endorsement identifies 'source credibility' as the significant predictor of desirable outcomes such as attitudes towards the advertisement, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). According to Boyd and Shank (2004); and Fink, Cunningham, and Kensicki, (2004), it was found that athletes' attractiveness and expertise are positively correlated with their persuasion effectiveness. Interestingly, findings by Eisend and Langner (2010) show that source attractiveness is the dominant predictor of attitude towards brands in the immediate condition

while source expertise is the significant driver in the delayed condition. Based on the power of social media and influencers' persuasive ability, influencer endorsement via social media in the form of product reviews have become important marketing strategy in today's digital world because it associates the brand positively (or negatively) with a famous person and qualities that make that person a celebrity.

False Product Reviews

Product review is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as a report in mass media such as newspaper or magazine in which an expert gives an opinion about a product or compares various similar products. Marketers have incorporated product reviews into advertising (Channel Signal, 2018). Product reviews can be made by either real consumers or influencers. In this case study, two types of the Magic Skin products -- skin care and dietary supplements -- were reviewed on social media by many influencers, who were paid six-digit amounts to review the products by posting photos of themselves and a reviewed product and sharing opinions about them in captions or comments sections (See Figure 1 - 2 for some examples). Perceiving these product reviews as genuine reviews rather than a paid opinion, most consumers trusted these influencers' reviews and purchased the reviewed products with the hope that they would yield positive results as reviewed.



Figure 1 Examples of False Product Reviews in the 'IG Comment' Format

Source - Left photo: Release seven stars in the first lot due to their involvement with Magic Skin. (2018, April 23). *Spring News*. Retrieved June 5, 2018 from <https://www.springnews.co.th/view/243622>

Source - Right photo: Seven famous stars in the first lot are in line for being investigated on their involvement in Magic Skin product reviews. (2018, April 25). *Line*

Magazine. Retrieved June 10, 2018 from <https://line-mag.com/ครา มา คารา/เมจิกสกิน>



Figure 2 Examples of False Product Reviews in the 'Photo Caption' Format

Source: Left photo, Seven famous stars in the first lot are in line for being investigated on their involvement in Magic Skin product reviews. (2018, April 25). *Line Magazine*. Retrieved June 10, 2018 from <https://line-mag.com/ครา มา คารา/เมจิกสกิน>

Source: Right photo, Netizens collected Magic Skin presenters' photos. Officials are about to prosecute them if involved with sales. (2018, April 22). *Manager Online*. Retrieved from <https://mgronline.com/online/section/detail/9610000039682>

According to the American Marketing Association (2018), advertising is defined as “the placement of announcements and persuasive messages in time or space purchased in any of the mass media by business firms, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and individuals who seek to inform and/ or persuade members of a particular target market or audience about their products, services, organizations, or ideas.” Although product reviews by influencers may not be clear in terms of purchasing time and space in mass media, they involve a paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of products or services. Accordingly, the same criteria for false advertising can be applied such that product review is considered ‘false’ when it is misleading as the reviewers were perceived as real product users, which in fact they merely got paid for their product reviews, and when it involves over-claim. According to the Cosmetics Act B.E. 2535 (1992), advertising claims must not indicate that those cosmetic products have the capability which, in fact, does not exist (over-claim) or is the cause of misunderstanding in their quality (misleading). According to the data from Manager Online

(April 28, 2018) in Table 1, the product reviews of the following five Magic Skin products by Thai influencers clearly violated both the Cosmetics Act B.E.2535 (1992) and the Consumer Protection Act B.E.2522 (1979).

Table 1 Comparison of False Claims and Facts in the Product Reviews by Influencers

Reviewed Products (Product Type)	False Claims	Facts
1. Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin (Dietary Supplements)	Combination of multiple vitamins for eyes, hair, skin, and nails	Not yielding results in 7 days
2. Mezzo Serum (Skin Care)	Face serum made of placenta	Made of soybean, hand-made with sub-standards
3. Fern Cleo (Dietary Supplements)	Powdered drink eliminating fat	Not slimming Irregular menstruation
4. Mezzo Facial Soap (Skin Care)	Cleaning face, reducing dark spots, and shielding skin from pollutions	Not yielding results as advertised
5. Slim Milk (Dietary Supplements)	Slim Milk made of Garcinia and Cactus	Powdered milk with artificial smells

Source: Lessons from Magic Skin: Don't trust only if there is FDA certification number. Don't trust only if stars endorsed the products. (2018, April 28). *Manager Online*. Retrieved June 30, 2018 from <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9610000041403>

Message Component

Along the same line with advertising messages, product reviews typically include two major components – visual and verbal components. Visual components include illustrations or animation, photos or film shots, color, typography, layout (print media), and composition (photography, video, or film) (Wells, Moriarty, & Burnett, 2006). Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells (2015) conclude that photography yields realism while illustration gives fanciful images. Color attracts attention, provides realism, establishes mood, and builds brand identity. In addition to its functional role, typography has an aesthetic role and contributes to the mood of the message. Layout, an arrangement of all of a print piece's elements, gives the reader a visual order to the information in the layout, while it is aesthetically pleasing and makes a visual statement for the brand. Composition is how the elements in a picture are arranged, either through placement or by manipulating the photographer's viewpoint. In sum, visual components are important in advertising since they create impacts – grabbing attention, maintaining interest,

creating believability, and sticking in memory. They also tell stories, deliver emotion, and create brand images (Moriarty et al., 2015).

Verbal components are text or written messages such as caption, dialogue, headline, sub-headline, body copy, tagline, and slogan (Wells et al., 2006). A caption is defined by Moriarty et al. (2015, p.281) as “a sentence or short piece of copy that explains what you are looking at in a photo or illustration.” Tagline is a short phrase that wraps up the key idea or creative concept that usually appears at the end of the body copy. Advertising copy is usually written in a conversational style using real people language, and it should be as simple as possible. Words are particularly crucial when advertisements are complex, abstract, promote a high-involvement product, and require explanation (Moriarty et al., 2015).

Findings by Decrop (2007) show that picture and text are the prevailing elements of print advertisements. Pictures are especially effective in attracting the consumer and arousing a behavioral intention, whereas text is most powerful in conveying information.

Message Approach

Message approach is the techniques that advertisers use to present their messages. In terms of the literary viewpoint, a combination of two basic literary techniques have been used in advertising to win the consumer: lectures and dramas (Wells, 1986). Moriarty et al. (2015) discussed the differences between lecture and drama. In particular, a lecture is instruction usually given verbally or it could be a demonstration using visuals. Evidence is presented and a technique such as an argument is used to persuade the audience. In contrast, drama relies on the audience to make inferences about the product or brand. Through drama, advertisers tell stories about their products, and the characters speak to each other.

As for the psychological viewpoint, Moriarty et al. (2015) proposed that the psychological appeal of the product to the consumer is used to describe a message that speaks to consumers. An appeal connects with some emotion that makes the product particularly attractive such as sex, security, esteem, and appetite. Appeals can also have a logical dimension such as status, convenience, value, economy, or savings (Moriarty et al., 2015). Therefore, advertisers can choose between emotional and rational appeals to communicate to their audience.

In terms of the sales viewpoint, advertisers

usually make some kinds of “claim,” a product-focused strategy based on a prediction about how the product will perform. A “selling premise” is used to state the logic behind the sales offer (Moriarty et al., 2015). Four types of selling premises are prevalent in the advertising industry (see table 2 for details).

Table 2 Description of Selling Premises

Selling Premises	Description
1. Benefit	Emphasizes what the product can do for the user by translating the product attribute into something that benefits the consumer.
2. Promise	Emphasizes the future and predicts that something good will happen if the product is used.
3. Reason Why	Emphasizes the logic behind why you should buy something, although the reason sometimes is implied or assumed.
4. Unique Selling Proposition (USP)	Emphasizes the selling point both unique to the product and important to the consumer.

According to Jordaan, Ehlers, and Grove (2011), Belch and Belch (2007, p.275), O’Guinn et al. (2009, p.341), Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008, p.178) and Wells et al. (2006, p.344) who all agreed on eight message approaches that are universal among advertisers, namely straightforward message, testimonials, demonstration, slice of life, dramatization, fantasy, animation and comparisons. In addition, Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells (2015) proposed other three message approaches, namely product-as-hero, humor, and teasers (See Table 3 for their description).

Table 3 Description of Message Approaches

Message Approaches	Description
1. Straightforward Message	Provides basic information about the product or brand without employing feelings or special tricks (Wells et al., 2006, p.344)
2. Testimonials (Spokesperson/ Endorser)	Entails a person with product experience providing a positive report on the brand (Belch & Belch, 2007, p.277)
3. Demonstration	Shows the actual working of the product in terms of advantages, ease of consumption, as well as the effectiveness of the product (Koekemoer, 2004, p.166)
4. Slice of life	Presents an everyday situation where a person is faced with a consumption problem that occurs in daily life (Belch & Belch, 2007, p.277)
5. Dramatization	Relates a short tale where the product serves as the main focus (Belch & Belch, 2007, p.281) A more theatrical version of slice-of-life, often showing the extremes of possible situations
6. Fantasy	Puts the characters in the advertisement or commercial in a realm where their dreams become a reality or they can enjoy an imaginary escapade (Blakeman, 2007, p.97)

Message Approaches	Description
7. Animation	Uses various animated characters to relate the brand message. Techniques include cartoons, puppets, illustrations or similar fictional creations (Arens et al., 2011, p.403)
8. Comparisons	Entails the advertiser favorably comparing its brand with that of competing brands; focusing on attributes of the brand that are superior to those of competitors’ brands (Wells et al., 2006, p.81)
9. Product-as-Hero (Problem Solution Message)	Showcases the product as the solution for consumers’ problem (Moriarty et al., 2015, p.252)
10. Humor	Use humor to create the warm feelings (Moriarty et al., 2015, p.252)
11. Teasers	Do not identify the product or do not deliver enough information in order to arouse curiosity (Moriarty et al., 2015, p.252)

Methodology

Study Design

This study applies a combination of quantitative and qualitative approach, using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of Thai influencers’ false product reviews of five Magic Skin products. Three of them are dietary supplements whereas two of them are skin care products. Content analysis is a research method used to detect the existence of ideas, concepts and “truth” hidden in the texts, and to identify the intentions, focus or communication trends of an individual, group or institution (Sukamolson, 2009), which is ‘Magic Skin Inc.’ in this study.

Population and Unit of Analysis

Magic Skin products were promoted in the company’s web pages and in the influencers’ Instagram, Facebook, and/or YouTube during 2017 and 2018. As this study investigates the Thai influencers’ false product reviews of Magic Skin on social media, the target population of this study is false product reviews of five Magic Skin products by 59 Thai influencers who have been summoned by the Police (see details in Table 4). Based on the availability of these influencers’ false product reviews of Magic Skin on the Internet, 73 product reviews of five products -- 1) Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin, 2) Fern Cleo, 3) Slim Milk, 4) Mezzo Facial Soap, and 5) Mezzo Serum – were purposively selected as samples of this study.

Due to the ongoing prosecution of this case, all of the Magic Skin product reviews in the video format posted by these influencers on social media were not

accessible and were excluded for examination. As a result, only false product reviews in the picture and text format serve as valid units of analysis for this study. It should be noted that most of the influencers reviewed only one product. However, ten of them (No.4, 8, 15, 20, 28, 31, 40, 42, 45, 53) reviewed two products, while two of them reviewed three products (No.14, 37).

Table 4 List of 59 Influencers and Their Reviewed Magic Skin Products

Influencer's Name & Type	Reviewed Products				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sarunrat Visutthithada (Lydia) - Celebrity	✓				
2. Ungsumalynn Sirapatsakmetha (Patty) - Celebrity	✓				
3. Juthawut Pattarakampol (March) - Celebrity	✓				
4. Apitsada Kreurkongka (Ice) - Celebrity	✓		✓		
5. Virithipa Phakdeeprang (Woonsen) - Celebrity	✓				
6. Puttichai Kasetsin (DJ Putt) - Celebrity	✓				
7. Ornapa Krisadee (Ma) - Celebrity	✓				
8. Lakkana Wattanawongsiri (Aum) - Celebrity	✓	✓			
9. Isara Kitnitchee (Tom Room 39) - Celebrity	✓				
10. Wichian Kusolmanomai (DJ Petjah) - Celebrity	✓				
11. Hansa Jeungwiwattanawong (Nuclear) - Celebrity	✓				
12. Kan Kantathavorn - Celebrity	✓				
13. Ratchawin Wongviriya (Koy) - Celebrity	✓				
14. Sririta Jensen (Rita) - Celebrity	✓	✓	✓		
15. Sumonthip Leungutai (Kubkib) - Celebrity	✓		✓		
16. Apinya Sakuljaroensuk (Saiparn) - Celebrity		✓			
17. Kulamas Limpavuthivaranond (Kanomjeen) - Celebrity	✓				
18. Pichaya Nitipaisankul (Golf) - Celebrity	✓				
19. Usamaneer Vaithayanon (Kwan) - Celebrity		✓			
20. Phupoom Phongpanu (Ken) - Celebrity	✓	✓			
21. Warattaya Nilkuha (Jui) - Celebrity			✓		
22. Nalin Hohler (Sara AF) - Celebrity	✓				
23. Napapa Tantrakul (Patt) - Celebrity	✓				
24. Sudarat Butprom (Tukky) - Celebrity	✓				
25. Mallika Jongwatana (Tub Tim) - Celebrity	✓				
26. Maria Poonlertlarp - Celebrity		✓			
27. Nana Rybena - Celebrity	✓				
28. Sheranut Usanon (Namcha) - Celebrity	✓	✓			
29. Suteewan Thaveesin (Bitoeys Rsiam) - Celebrity	✓				
30. Pimchanok Luevisadpaibul (Baifern) - Celebrity	✓				
31. Sutatta Udomsilp (PunPun) - Celebrity	✓	✓			
32. Paradee Yoopasuk (Ple) - Celebrity			✓		
33. Nathatai Saengphet (Faii Amfine) - Celebrity		✓			
34. Theerada Mokkhasak (Ploy) - Celebrity			✓		
35. Saran Siriluksana (Porsche) - Celebrity	✓				
36. Savika Chaiyadej (Pinky) - Celebrity	✓				

Influencer's Name & Type	Reviewed Products				
	1	2	3	4	5
37. Esther Supreeleela - Celebrity	✓	✓	✓		
38. Focus Jeerakul - Celebrity	✓				
39. Rasri Balenciaga (Margie) - Celebrity	✓				
40. Wanida Termthanaporn (Gyby) - Celebrity		✓	✓		
41. Patida Kamnerdploy (May Fuang) - Celebrity	✓				
42. Kaneungnich Jaksamithanon (Rotmay) - Celebrity	✓	✓			
43. Sammy Cowell - Celebrity		✓			
44. Sutthirak Srithongkul (Got) - Net idol				✓	
45. Orapan Dansiriwattanakun (Aoffy Maxim) - Net idol	✓	✓			
46. Tisanart Sornsuek - Celebrity	✓				
47. Chalita Suansane (Namtan) - Celebrity			✓		
48. Saira Mirror - Net idol		✓			
49. Khonpetch Jetsri - Net idol				✓	
50. Jessie Vard - Net idol			✓		
51. Nisamaneer Lertworapong (Nong Nat) - Net idol				✓	
52. Supalai Chaimongkol (Ying) - Net idol			✓		
53. Teerawat Budaya (Dutdew bigbang) - Net idol		✓	✓		
54. Varinthorn Watsang (Anna TV Pool) - Celebrity				✓	
55. Jenny - Net idol		✓			
56. Kanokrata Horavechakul (Muay So Hot) - Net idol				✓	
57. Cris Horwang - Celebrity					✓
58. Pachara Chirathivat (Peach) - Celebrity					✓
59. Saitham Wangprasert (Noey) - Net idol		✓			

Notes: 1 = Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin, 2 = Mezzo Serum, 3 = Fern Cleo, 4 = Mezzo Facial Soap, 5 = Slim Milk

Procedure and Data Collection

The first step of this study involved collecting secondary data from the online sources. Secondary data were collected during May 15 - June 20, 2018 via online platform of the leading news media and popular social media in Thailand. The news media data sources include *Line Magazine*, *Spring News*, *Thairath*, *Manager*, and *Bangkok Post*. These sources are appropriate for the analyses as they are representatives of different platforms of news media in Thailand. *Line Magazine* is popular online news, *Spring News* is popular television news, while *Thairath*, *Manager*, and *Bangkok Post* are leading newspapers providing both offline and online news to the Thai audiences. Product information and product reviews of Magic Skin were accessed via google image and Facebook using relevant keywords such as "Magic Skin," "Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin," and "Mezzo," of the relevant products, which is the major marketing commu-

nication source used by Magic Skin Inc. and sales agents. After data collection, 73 false product reviews of five products posted by 59 influencers on social media were thoroughly read. Then, the qualitative content analysis was performed to identify patterns of message component and message approach in the content. Finally, the false product reviews were quantitatively analyzed in terms of influencer type.

Data Analysis

Regarding message component, two types of content were qualitatively analyzed – 1) visual content of the false product reviews by 59 influencers, which are color, photos, and layout of the review; and 2) verbal content of the false product reviews, which are texts in the influencers' reviews. Each of the false product reviews were thoroughly viewed and analyzed to identify the emerging patterns in terms of visual and verbal content.

In terms of message approach, two dimensions of message were qualitatively analyzed – 1) reasons that might appeal to potential customers or 'selling premises' of the false product reviews (see details in Table 2); and 2) formats of the false product reviews, which were categorized into 11 formats (see details in Table 3). Each of the false product reviews were thoroughly read and categorized into one of the four selling premises; and one of the 11 content formats.

Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were also used to describe the type of influencers who are involved in these false product reviews.

Results

As for two different message components, the qualitative content analysis of the false product reviews reveals that the *visual components* of those product reviews in both 'photo caption' and 'IG comment' formats for all products were similarly presented in three patterns of a half body shot photograph of one or two influencers who posed with the endorsed product and/or its package. The first pattern is influencers holding only the product. The second pattern is influencers holding only the package. The third pattern is influencer holding both product and package (see examples of these patterns in Figure 3). Only one layout, influencers and product were placed at the center of the reviews, was prominent. Warm or bright colors were used to reflect the youthful appeal of the products. There was no fixed pattern of typography in all the reviews.

In terms of *verbal components*, the analyses show that product reviews in the 'photo caption' format used two patterns. The first pattern is showing influencer's name, price, product name and its benefit that users will gain. The second one is the product name together with its attribute such as being admired by many people. As for the product reviews in the 'IG comment' format, one pattern was found. That is, the body copy (text) started with the influencer's name and his/her short comments and hashtags regarding Magic Skin products. It should be noted that product reviews by influencers contained only body copy. This is quite different from the typical print advertisements composing of such elements as headline, sub-headline, body copy, and slogan.

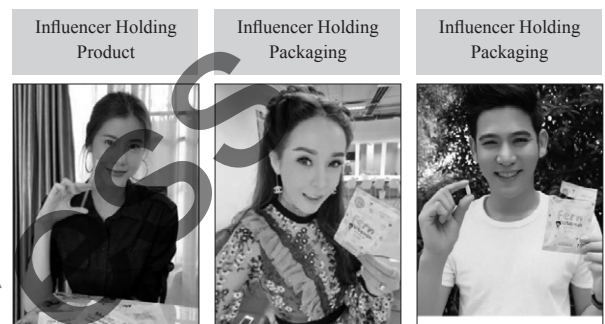


Figure 3 Patterns of Visual Components in the False Product Reviews

Source: Seven famous stars in the first lot are in line for being investigated on their involvement in Magic Skin product reviews. (2018, April 25). *Line Magazine*. Retrieved June 10, 2018 from <https://line-mag.com/ดราม่าคาราเมกิกสกิน>

Table 5 Patterns of Verbal Component in the False Product Reviews

Visual Component	Verbal Component	
	1 st Pattern	2 nd Pattern
Photo Caption Format	Showing influencer's name, price, product name and its benefit that users will gain	Showing the product name together with its attribute such as being admired by many people
IG Comment Format	The body copy (text) started with the influencer's name and his/her short comments and hashtags regarding Magic Skin products	

The qualitative content analysis of the data in terms of *message approaches* indicate that the false product reviews of Magic Skin by influencers mainly used "testimonials" and "product-as-hero" approach. They were presented in lecture rather than drama format

as a particular argument was used to persuade the target audience. Rational appeal such as economy due to the presentation of low price was implicit. Selling premises in terms of benefits were shown in both ‘photo caption’ and ‘IG comment’ formats for all products. The advertised benefits include slim body and beautiful skin. Interestingly, the unique selling proposition (USP) was used for one product, Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin, which falsely claimed that its combination of multiple vitamins is an one pill solution for problems on skin, hair, nails, and eyes (See examples of these patterns in Table 6).

Table 6 Patterns of Selling Premises and Message Approaches in the False Product Reviews

Selling Premises		Message Approach	
Benefits	USP	Testimonials	Product-as-Hero
Mezzo Serum - White and radiant skin in 7 days - White and clear face		- My beauty secret for clear skin - I choose Mezzo.	
Mezzo Facial Soap - Destroying acne - Removing make-up - Clear face without acne			- One bar solution
Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin - Skinny - Reducing fat	- End all problems on skin, hair, nails, and eyes	- I choose Shi-No-Bi. - Self-care is not difficult anymore. - End all problems about self-care. - Fall in love with Shi-No-Bi. - Beautiful as a whole	- One pill solution - First one in the universe
Fern Cleo - Slim arms and legs - Flat stomach		- Influencers hold the packaging or product in the glass	
Slim Milk - Weight loss - Flat stomach			- Replace weight loss pills

Among five products reviewed by 59 influencers, Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin has the highest number of review (36 reviews) whereas Slim Milk has the lowest number (2 reviews). Approximately half of the false product reviews (49.32%) were done for Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin, followed by Mezzo Serum (24.66%). Table 7 presents details of false product reviews in terms of influencer type and product type.

Table 7 Frequency and Percentage of Reviewed Products Based on Product and Influencer Type

Influencer Type	Product Type					
	Dietary Supplements 50 (68.49%)			Skin Care 23 (31.51%)		Total 73 (100.0%)
	Fern Shi-No-Bi Vitamin	Fern Cleo	Slim Milk	Mezzo Serum	Mezzo Facial Soap	
Conventional celebrity	35 (47.95%)	9 (12.33%)	2 (2.74%)	13 (17.81%)	1 (1.37%)	60 (82.19%)
Internet Idol	1 (1.37%)	3 (4.11%)	0 (%)	5 (6.85%)	4 (5.48%)	13 (17.81%)
Total	36 (49.32%)	12 (16.44%)	2 (2.74%)	18 (24.66%)	5 (6.85%)	73 (100.0%)

In addition, it was found that among 59 influencers, 50 conventional celebrities are famous actors, singers, models, and television anchors. Based on their high level of fame and physical appearance, they possess at least two of the three dimensions of source credibility -- attractiveness and trustworthiness. Although the Internet idols can be viewed as less trustworthy than conventional celebrities due to their smaller scale of fame among general consumers, they are considered not only highly attractive but also expert in terms of beauty or personal care products.

Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that in terms of message component, visual components of Magic Skin false product reviews were mainly half-shot photographs of influencers with the product and /or packaging in the forms of photo captions or IG comments. Verbal components were mostly words associated with females’ beauty ideal such as white, clear and radiant skin, slim, and flat stomach. Benefits and USP were found most often as their selling premises, while testimonials and product-as-hero were predominantly used to persuade the target audience. It is evident that opinion leaders or influencers play a significant role in consumers’ decision making. This study’s findings are highly consistent with the past research findings mentioned previously. Both types of influencers are normally perceived by typical consumers as role models who are likely to strengthen consumers’ confidence in the endorsed products (“Lessons from Magic Skin,” 2018). As both skin care and dietary supplements are considered important and personally relevant (or high involvement products), consumers often rely on these endorsements when

making purchase decisions (Wells et al., 2006). It is not surprising to see that influencer marketing for Magic Skin yields sales of over ten million Baht for the owners and agents during the past six years (“Lessons from Magic Skin,” 2018).

Reviewers should be qualified by experience or training to make any recommendations, and they must actually use the product. These influencers who improperly reviewed Magic Skin products should have been liable if regulatory agencies determine there is a deception. The results on this issue reflect that Thailand’s advertising regulations are outdated and require a timely amendment to guard against deception and unfair advertising practices via social media.

The quantitative data analysis results reveal that product reviewers of five Magic Skin products are conventional celebrities and the Internet idols. Interestingly, there seems to be a possible relationship between influencer type and their reviewed products. In particular, conventional celebrities tend to review dietary supplement to a larger extent than skin care product while vice versa is for the Internet idols (see Table 7). This may derive from the ‘celebrity match-up product’ or the matches between endorsers and products. Literature on celebrity endorsements indicates that communications effects are improved when there is a fit, or match-up, between the endorser and the brand (Torn, 2012). Qualities of conventional celebrities such as attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness (Amos et al., 2008) seem to be better matched with the dietary supplements (higher health risk) while those of the Internet idols such as attractiveness, likeability, and expertise seem to be better matched with the skin care (lower health risk). This possible relationship should be explored further in the future.

In addition, what seemed to be a rather straightforward product reviews turns out to be an extremely powerful image with connotations, such as femininity, elegance, and sophistication. This social phenomenon can be explained by a “correspondent inference,” which is the assumption that individuals’ behavior is a reflection of their beliefs and underlying predispositions, rather than the result of some situational variable. Thus, influencers reviewing certain Magic Skin product is likely to lead the consumer to infer that the influencers actually like the brand and are typical users of the brand. This occurs despite the fact that most consumers are aware that influencers are paid to endorse such brands (Kardes, Cline, & Cronley, 2011). Accordingly, it is common to

see many large companies with very high marketing budgets per year on celebrity endorsement to achieve a favorable impact on brand image.

Suggestions

The findings of this study offer several future research topics for academics as well as useful managerial and legal implications. Whether and how false product reviews by different type of influencers exert influences on Thai consumers in terms of brand attitudes and purchase decision should be further investigated. It would be worthwhile to examine whether this social influence phenomenon occurs with other high involvement products such as insurance, real estate or financial services. Future study may examine whether influencer marketing for product types with different level of perceived health risk differently influences consumers’ cognition and behaviors.

Government officers or policy makers should also take into consideration salient patterns of message approaches such as testimonials, and thus initiating a policy that requires advertisers and reviewers to validate any claims when requested by the involved parties. Regulatory agencies should have some kinds of remedies for deception and unfair practices including substantiation of advertising claims and corrective messages. The FDA also needs to increase consumer protection measures by setting a more effective monitoring and warning system of substandard and illegal products. In addition to governmental controls, the marketing industry should strengthen its self-regulating mechanism.

With the increased use of influencer marketing, media literacy education should be supported by the Royal Thai government so that the Thai citizens gain the ability to analyze any media message and thus are empowered for living their lives in a media-saturated culture. Media literacy will enable Thai consumers to be well aware of potential harms caused by the influencer marketing and be more skeptical of influencers as a marketing tool. Finally, the wise words of a character from the Spiderman, “with great power comes great responsibility” are relevant with this case. Therefore, it can be deduced that the more followers the influencers have, the more people they influence with their posts and reviews which leads to greater responsibility. The influencers need to be aware of the impact they are making on people and the power they possess for them to make ethically correct choices regarding product placement and reviews on their profiles.

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