

Dupe-licity Effect: How Viral User-Generated Content Influences Sales

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Abstract

This project examines the rise of “dupes” in the beauty industry, which are affordable alternatives to high-end products that spread through side-by-side comparisons on social media. We combine weekly sales data on ~190,000 beauty products with more than 13,000 dupe-related TikTok videos: using product mentions extracted from the videos, we link exposure to SKU-level sales outcomes. Early results show that dupe content sparks short-term sales increases for the cheaper alternative while generating persistent gains for the original product. This pattern suggests that user-generated comparisons both encourage trial of trendy low-cost options and reinforce visibility, desirability, and perceived value for premium brands. We contribute to research on imitation goods and earned media by focusing on a socially endorsed form of brand mimicry that blurs lines between endorsement and substitution, while offering strategic guidance for brands navigating an algorithm-driven attention economy.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media