Unveiling the Pitfalls of Celebrity-turned-Influencers on TikTok:

Insights from AI-Facilitated Investigative Studies

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This paper investigates the impact of employing celebrity-turned-influencers (CTIs), an understudied 'niche' group of influencers, to promote brand sales on TikTok (Douyin in China). Contrary to the prevailing arguments in endorsement literature, which posits that celebrities, as figures of admiration and fascination, would be effective social media influencers in driving sales, our qualitative investigation challenges this assumption. By comparing ten successful and unsuccessful CTIs in promoting brands on TikTok, this study identifies the inherent pitfalls within their approach and profession that contribute to their underperformance. Leveraging an inductive approach of qualitative analysis, our findings show that CTIs are likely to lean on fandom to drive brand sales. Further, our findings, which were cross validated with independent AI coding, uncover new dimensions: career commitment and social media management are essential to CTIs' success. These issues have theoretical and managerial implications in today's influencer marketing.