

# Social Media Influencer Endorsement: How Attitude Towards Endorsement Affects Brand Attitude

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## ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the effect of social media influencer endorsements on brand attitude. Further, this research investigates the mediation effect of attitude towards endorsement on brand attitude. Based on previous studies of endorsements, factors that affect the brand attitude were chosen. The factors are trust and expertise from the source credibility model, follower ratio, brand congruency with the influencer personality, and sponsorship disclosure. Primary data was collected using a structured survey of 220 respondents. The analysis was performed using Preacher and Hayes Mediation Model 4 and multiple linear regression. From the results of the path and mediation analysis, it is concluded that there is a mediation effect on brand attitude by expertise, brand congruency, and follower ratio. The research helps digital marketers to choose collaborations with social media influencers more effectively to create a positive brand attitude.

## KEYWORDS

Attitude Towards Endorsement, Brand Attitude, Brand Congruency, Expertise, Influencer Follower Ratio, Social Media Influencer Endorsements, Source Credibility, Sponsorship Disclosure, Trustworthiness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social Media has a reach to the world's population with no demographic and physiographic limitations (Alrubaian et al., 2019). Millions of people use social media platforms to connect, learn, share, and grow. In India from 2015, there has been a significant jump in the number of social media users from 142.23 million social media users to 351.4 million users in 2019. Influencer marketing is said to grow to an exponential \$9.7 billion in the year 2020, and companies are shifting their strategy from mega influencer to micro-influencers (Influencer marketing hub, 2020). Globally, consumers are adapting, which represents a challenge to adapt communication strategies in this changing digital world. Marketers focus their campaigns around an intersection at a digital, local, and social level.

The evolution of social media started with Wikipedia's launch in 2001, after which Napster was introduced in 2002, which was a Kuala Lumpur, based social gaming site. MySpace was introduced in 2003. One of the most famous social media platforms, Facebook was introduced in 2004 at the same time, Orkut was launched, which was more popular among the Brazil and Indian population. With currently 2 billion users of Youtube, the video streaming platform was established in 2005.

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Twitter, the microblogging and social networking site, was established in 2006 with currently 321 million active users. Instagram was introduced in 2010 as a photo-sharing site and is now the most popular social networking (Irani, 2016).

Marketers have used these high rates of social media usage to their advantage to build positive brand evaluation using influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a form of endorsement in which companies utilize the users on social media with a high following who are known as influencers to promote their products and brand (Kádeková & Holienčinová, 2018). This concept is then used by marketers to rope in Social Media Influencers (SMIs) for collaborations and sponsored posts shared by the influencer. These SMIs significantly impact brand evaluations and brand attitude (De Veirman et al., 2017). With the rise of influencers, the question also arises about “whom to believe in an environment where anyone can say anything about anyone” these mainly occur due to problems such as fake followers and fake news (Van Der Heide & Lim, 2016). This leads us to the concept of source credibility; this concept plays a very crucial role in influencer marketing, which helps analyze the attitudes towards the endorsement, which mediates the attitude towards the brand (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). An SMI should also fit well with the brand and the reason being an influencer who does not portray an image on the same lines as the brand might lead to a negative impact on the brand, so along with source credibility, brand congruence must be also tested. The research focuses on sponsorship disclosure (i.e.) if a consumer might react differently to a paid endorsement compared to an unpaid one. This research also focuses on social media influencers who have a large following through content creation on Instagram. This emerging trend of influencer marketing has shifted customer’s trust from celebrity endorsers who read from scripted messages to SMIs with a genuine audience (Schouten et al., 2020). The research gap of a combination of crucial social credibility cues such as SMI follower count (Dhanesh et al., 2019), sponsorship disclosure and SMI-brand congruency (Breves et al., 2019) and primary dimensions of the source credibility model (expertise and trustworthiness) are taken into account and how they affect attitude towards brand while mediated by the attitude towards endorsement. Understanding the mediating effect of attitude towards endorsement via the factors mentioned above would help marketers understand and analyze an influencer before bringing them on board.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Endorsements**

According to the Federal Trade Commission guidelines, an endorsement is an advertising message that consumers will be more likely to believe as it comes from someone other than the sponsoring party (Tobin, 1973). Endorsements are among the most popular strategies in which marketers have promoted their brands, services, and products. Celebrity endorsements are used to transfer the impact and influence a celebrity has onto the brand, which would improve the customer’s intent to use or purchase the product endorsed (Atkin and Block, 1983). It has been found that celebrity endorsements play a significant role in positively impacting brand attitude, the credibility of the advertisement, and purchase intentions (Erdogan, 1999) and improving brand recall and recognition (Misra & Beatty, 1990). However, time and again, researchers have cautioned us regarding how endorsements can be a double-edged sword; that is, if a celebrity does not have brand fit, then this kind of pairing can prove to be very detrimental (Erdogan, 1999). Based on research studies with the new generations, it has been published that consumers are leaning more towards SMI endorsements rather than celebrity endorsements (Schouten et al., 2020).

### **2.2 Social Media Influencer Endorsements**

Social Media Influencer can be defined as a kind of micro-celebrity who uses self-presentation on social media platforms by creating an online image, which is used to attract and create engagement with a massive number of followers (Khamis et al., 2016). The influencers range from artists, fashion

lovers, fitness, musicians, photographers. Influencers are categorized broadly into four types based on the number of followers: mega influencers (more than 1 million followers), macro-influencers (1,00,000 to 1 million followers), micro-influencers (1000 to 1,00,000 followers), Nano Influencers (1000 and below). With personalized feeds and information, these influencers are usually perceived to be more relatable and accessible. They have a niche set of followers who are deeply engaged and dedicated to the influencer (Wissman, 2018). A comparative study measuring the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements and influencer endorsements based on the role of credibility and product-endorsers' role fit impact on brand attitude and purchase intentions (Schouten et al., 2020). In addition to using celebrities such as supermodels, actors, and athletes, marketers are also increasingly using Social Media Influencer endorsements to add value to their brands (Marwick, 2015). Social Media Influencers are increasingly being utilized by brands and organizations to gather an audience on social media through influencer marketing. Recent technologies have made it easier for brands to identify which influencer would be the best fit for their organization through applications like IBM Watson AI Personality (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). In short, an SMI is someone who builds and maintains relationships with followers on social media platforms by providing them with informative, entertaining content through personal branding, which helps influence consumer's attitudes and behaviors towards a brand. Organizations try to use this personal branding to their advantage by using SMI's in their marketing strategies (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Endorsers are usually paid through a barter system (i.e.) by providing them products and, if not, then through payments. While a micro-influencer might get somewhere around \$150, a mega influencer with more than 1 million followers can earn up to \$15,000 per promotion (Crain, 2018). There is a fine balance that needs to be maintained between commerce and credibility for SMIs and sponsoring brands (Abidin & Ots, 2015). In exchange for payment or barter, SMI's produce content on social media platforms in the form of their personal story and connect with the brand and their personal opinions, which would favor the brand to help consumers form a positive attitude towards the brand.

### **2.3 Brand Attitude**

Brand attitude is an individual's internal evaluation of a brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981). A brand attitude is defined as a customer's continuous preference and trend to choose one specific brand over others (Wu & Wang, 2011). While brand attitude defines the consumer's continuous preference for the brand, it also defines the positive or negative evaluations a consumer makes towards the brand, which ultimately leads to their habitual use of the particular brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990). Studies on endorsements have proven that if there is a positive impact on the consumers' endorsement, it leads to a positive brand attitude (Bergkvist et al., 2016).

### **2.4 Source Credibility**

Influencers usually possess knowledge in a specific subject based on which they attain followers (Lou & Yuan, 2018). The knowledge in this subject enables an influencer to gain followers with similar ideologies and thus helps build better and meaningful relationships with the audiences who evaluate the brand based on the endorsement from the influencers (Childers et al., 2018). This is termed as source credibility in this study. Previous research has demonstrated that source credibility impacts attitude towards an ad, attitude towards the brand (Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Atkin and Block, 1983; Lafferty et al., 2004). An influencer and peer endorser are similar in ways as they both rely on the source's trust and authenticity. The credibility of an endorser can be measured using the 4-dimensional conceptualization, which includes expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity (either ideologically or demographically) (Munnukka et al., 2016) out of which the two primary dimensions are considered in this paper based on previous research where attractiveness and similarity did not have a significant effect (Bhatt et al., 2013).

### **2.4.1 Social Media Influencer Expertise**

Expertise by an endorser is defined as an endorser's capability to make claims, which are valid as perceived by the consumer (Hovland et al., 1953). An endorser is most likely to be believed if the endorser possesses any relevant competency, skills, and knowledge (Homer and Khale, 1990). Based on this, endorsers can be split into expert endorsers and consumer endorsers. While expert endorsers can be used for products with high involvement and consumer endorsers can be used for low involvement products (Friedman et al., 1976). It is suggested that perceived expertise leads to a positive attitude towards the endorsements (Xiao et al., 2018). Even though there is an inconsistency among the research for expertise where some studies have found that expertise is not an important factor to be considered for credibility while performing brand evaluation while other studies have suggested that it is essential to consider product involvement when considering expertise (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). Thus the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Perceived Expertise of the social media influencer will have a positive and significant impact on brand attitude.

### **2.4.2 Social Media Influencer Trustworthiness**

While expertise addresses how equipped an SMI endorser is in a particular field, trustworthiness is when the consumer can accept the message based on the consumer's perception of whether the endorser will communicate information accurately (Sertoglu et al., 2014). While the endorser may have other positive qualities, which may lead to a good brand attitude, a lack of trustworthiness will have a negative impact (Erdogan, 1999). In addition to two primary dimensions of the source credibility model: expertise and trustworthiness, other credibility cues are to be considered to understand how the attitude towards the brand is mediated by the attitude towards endorsement based on the research gap identified. Thus forming the following hypotheses:

H2: Perceived Trustworthiness of the social media influencer will have a positive and significant impact on brand attitude.

### **2.5 Social Media Influencer- Brand Congruence**

Endorser- Brand Congruence has been the focus of many studies and is called fit, similarity, and relevance. Endorser-brand congruence is nothing but the degree of similarity of consistency between a brand and the brand's extensions, such as an endorser (Aaker and Keller 1990), in this case, an SMI. Endorsement studies particular to influencers have shown the importance of impact on the brand congruence on having a positive brand attitude (Breves et al., 2019). Social Adaption theory has been used in celebrity endorsement based research to understand the impact of celebrity product match on consumer attitudes (Mishra et al., 2015). Brand congruence is an important factor in influencer endorsements as any perceived lack of fit between an endorser and a brand can have a negative impact on the brand evaluation, which finally affects the purchase intention (Lafferty, 2009). Volvo was criticized heavily for its poor influencer strategy in collaboration with the influencer Chriselle Lim, who, after the collaborations, posted a video of apology (Curalate, 2016). Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Under conditions of Social media influencer personality–brand personality congruence will have a positive and significant impact on brand attitude.

## 2.6 Sponsorship Disclosure

One of the main aims of disclosure is to discourage any attempts of deception, which thereby activates persuasion knowledge (Cain, 2011). Knowledge about persuasion and how to cope with attempts of persuasion is persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Sponsorship disclosure affects the persuasion knowledge of an influencer and has an impact on the credibility of the influencer (Carr & Hayes, 2014). An SMI must disclose potential advertisements using language such as “paid advertisement” or “sponsored” (Evans et al., 2017). It was also found that an implicit disclosure of the brands’ involvement decreased the credibility of the SMI, while an explicit disclosure of the brands’ disclosure increased the credibility of the SMI. Audiences must be aware of the influencer’s potential biases through full disclosures (Carr & Hayes, 2014). Thus forming the following hypotheses:

H4: Sponsorship Disclosure of the endorsement by the social media influencer will have a positive and significant impact on brand attitude.

## 2.7 Influencer Follower Ratio

Previously performed research regarding endorsement and how they affect brand attitude have failed to account for important markers used by users to assess social media credibility, which is the number of followers or otherwise known as follower ratio (Sundar, 2008). The bandwagon Heuristic explains that when other individuals also find a source that is popular, trustworthy, or reliable, then they find it reliable too (De Veirman et al., 2017). Thus it is essential to consider that bandwagon effects might have a large impact on credibility. It has been determined in various previous studies that these cues are considered important in social media to classify if the source is credible or not (Metzger et al., 2010; Sundar, 2008; De Veirman et al., 2017). But there is also the threat of influencers acquiring fake followers to inflate the follower count on display. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Influencer follower ratio of the social media influencer will have a positive and significant impact on brand attitude.

## 2.8 Attitude Towards Endorsements

Based on findings related in areas of research of endorsements, customer relationship management (CRM), and sponsorships that affect factors such as SMI- brand congruence, sponsorship disclosure, SMI expertise, and SMI follower relationship would have an effect on the mediating factor of attitude towards SMI endorsements rather than directly on attitude towards the brand. It has been found in previous studies of CRM that consumers’ attitude towards the alliance between the non-profit organizations and brands mediates the effect on attitude towards the brand (Lafferty et al., 2004). Based on attitude theory, attitude towards an endorsement can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of an alliance between an endorser and a brand. Based on research, it is expected that the cognitions that are endorsement related influence attitude on endorsements the same way that ad-related cognitions influence attitude towards an advertisement (MacKenzie et al., 1986). Similarly, attitude towards the brand in a celebrity endorsement is also mediated by the attitude towards celebrity endorsement, which is affected by factors such as attitude towards celebrity, celebrity brand fit, celebrity expertise, and celebrity motive (Bergkvist et al., 2016). Thus forming the following hypotheses:

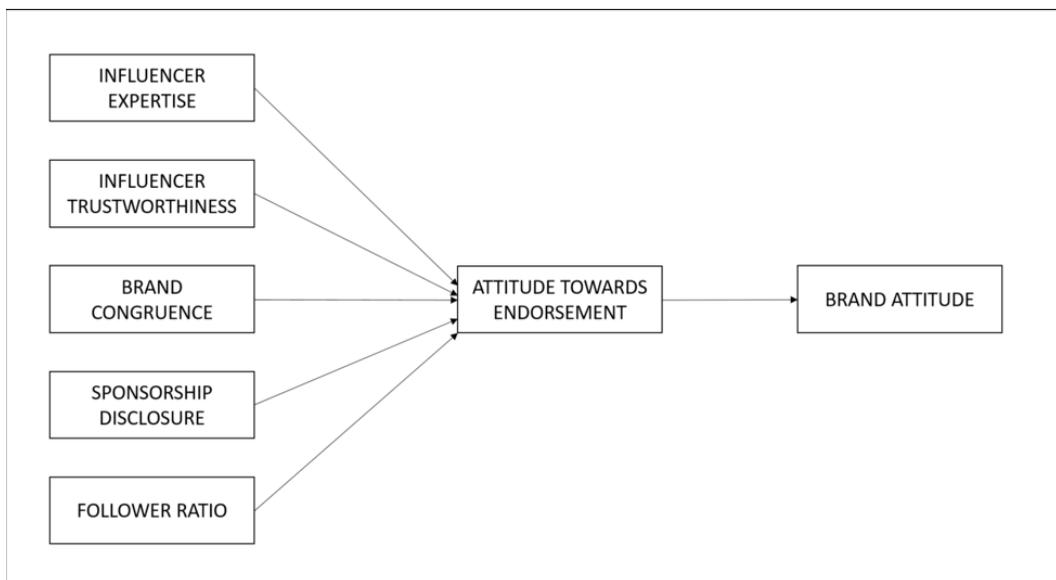
H6: Attitude towards endorsement mediates the effects of expertise (H1), trustworthiness (H2), brand congruence (H3), sponsorship disclosure (H4), follower ratio (H5), on attitude towards the brand.

While celebrity endorsement in the context of mass media has been studied extensively over the span of last 20 years, there is a significant gap in understanding SMI Endorsements in digital

media context. In addition, while the previous research papers have studied the effect of individual factors they have not considered the impact of ‘Source Credibility Model’ in combination with the Attribution Theory and Social Adaption Theory. Social Adaption thory suggests that an endorser whose personality is congruent with a brand’s personality would be construed as an effective new source of information. Attribution Theory presents an argument that when the personality of an endorser matches the endorsed brand personality it leads to internal attributions. This is because of the fact that the customers are likely to think that the celebrity is endorsing the brand as it matches their personality instead of the financial benefit they receive from it. The importance of considering sponsorship disclosure stems from the above argument, it is necessary to understand if a customer’s attitude is impacted by the explicit knowledge of a sponsorship which is beneficial to the endorser. The rationalization on the part of the consumer will have a significant impact on the customer’s attitude towards the brand mediated by attitude towards endorsement (Mishra et al., 2015).

Based on the above discussion, the study proposes the following conceptual model of attitude formation of SMI endorsements (refer Figure 1):

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the effects of factors affecting brand attitude mediated by the attitude towards the endorsement



### 3. METHODOLOGY

The gaps identified from the literature review are the absence of substantial research to identify the factors affecting brand attitude mediated by the attitude towards social media influencer endorsement. It is also worth mentioning that there has not been sufficient research done in the Indian context to study Social Media Influencer Endorsement. Based on the gaps identified in the study, the objectives are:

- To establish the significant factors that influence the attitude towards the brand based on social media influencer endorsements
- To analyze the mediating effect of attitude towards endorsement on attitude towards the brand

This study is performed using a descriptive research technique. Primary data for this research is collected through a structured online survey questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was floated, which measures respondents' attitude towards the brand, the endorsement itself, the social media influencer's expertise, trustworthiness, brand congruence with social media influencer's personality, sponsorship disclosure. The questionnaire comprises two parts, where the first part consisted of questions related to the demographics of the respondents and screening questions. The screening questions checked if the respondent was familiar with social platforms like Instagram. A visual cue was provided (product, service, and an event endorsed by an influencer) to help check if the respondent was familiar with influencers. The second part had questions related to the dependent and independent variables. All the seven constructs with a total of 29 items are measured with a 5 point Likert scale adapted from previous literature. A 5 point Likert scale is used instead of a 7 or 9 point Likert scale due to a higher number of respondents. (Shing-On Leung, 2011)

A total of 708 e-mail addresses of urban Indian college students were chosen as respondents as they are most active on social media platforms (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Baek and Morimoto, 2012). A homogenous student sample can help in reducing error variance thereby facilitating better theory-testing (Baek and Morimoto, 2012). An invitation to participate e-mail containing the survey URL was sent to each of the potential participants. Based on various researchers recommendations for appropriate sample size in multiple linear regression with mediating analysis (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Boerman et al., 2012; Bergkvist et al., 2016), a total of 283 responses were collected, out of which 220 usable responses were taken for analysis. Chronbach alpha is calculated to check the reliability, unidimensionality, and validity of each construct. Factor Analysis is performed with SPSS to reduce the individual independent factors into fewer dimensions. Path analysis is done using multiple linear regression analysis. The linear autocorrelation is checked using the Durbin Watson values, and the multicollinearity among the variables are tested using the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values.

#### **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

Out of the 220 responses, 53.4% of the recorded responses were male and 46.6% from females. Some 73.3% of the respondents were students, while 19.1% were employed full time, and the rest were employed part-time and looking for opportunities. All the respondents are exposed to social media platforms, and youtube has the highest usage rate, followed by Instagram and LinkedIn then Facebook and then twitter.

Common Method Bias (CMB) occurs when the estimates in a relationship between two or more constructs are biased because they are measured with same method (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). To assess the impact of common method bias in this study, Harmon one factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) was conducted on the 7 crucial variables in our conceptual model. Results from this test showed that the most covariance explained by one factor is 32.26%. As the covariance is less than the indicated 50% it shows that this study is not impacted by Common Method Bias (Liang et al., 2007).

#### **Reliability Analysis**

All measure items loaded on the constructs respectively have scored above 0.70, indicating good reliability of constructs. Cronbach's alpha of the constructs is given in Table 1. As a rule of thumb, researchers consider a measure to have adequate inter-item reliability if Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeds .70 (Leary, 2007). Based on this theory, the results showed that all the study's measurement constructs have achieved good reliability (refer to Table 1).

#### **Factor Analysis**

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the Barlett's test of sphericity are used for analyzing the sampling adequacy as well as the test for sphericity, which were both applied to all the measurement constructs. A principle-component analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted using the software tool SPSS

**Table 1 Reliability analysis of the constructs**

Measurement Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Expertise	4	0.785
Trust	4	0.804
Brand Congruence	2	0.769
Sponsorship Disclosure	3	0.826
Follower Ratio	4	0.824
Attitude towards the Endorsement	5	0.702
Brand Attitude	4	0.737

yielding seven factors. The results are given in Table 2. KMO is used to determine sampling adequacy and is used to ensure that the constructs that are measuring a particular concept are measuring the concept indeed. A calculated value of KMO between 0.5 and 1.0 is an indicator of sampling adequacy. The KMO measures of sampling adequacy values for the constructs were indicating normal distribution in the data and appropriate sample size. The chi-square value of Bartlett’s test of sphericity compares an identity matrix with an inter-item correlation matrix. These results indicate that the p-value (Sig.) of  $.000 < 0.05$  makes the factor analysis valid.

**Table 2 Results from Factor Analysis**

Measurement Constructs	KMO Measure of Sampling adequacy	Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-square	Sig.	Total Variance Explained Cumulative %
Expertise	0.707	277.842	0.000*	61.142
Trustworthiness	0.742	356.578	0.000*	63.922
Brand Congruence	0.500	107.351	0.000*	81.207
Sponsorship Disclosure	0.721	239.170	0.000*	74.210
Follower Ratio	0.797	304.283	0.000*	65.569
Attitude towards the Endorsement	0.763	215.877	0.000*	57.878
Brand Attitude	0.738	189.502	0.000*	56.191

Note:  $p < 0.05^*$

## Path Analysis

Path analyses are performed by applying multiple linear regression on the data with alpha as 0.05. Based on the results in this model, the paths from expertise (H1), brand congruence (H2), and follower ratio (H5) are statistically significant with significance  $p < 0.05$ . The analysis also revealed two factors estimates were not statistically significant (i.e.,  $p = 0.244$  for trustworthiness,  $p = 0.777$  for sponsorship disclosure). A possible cause of the offending estimate may be the relatively small sampled-size of our study *is-a-vis* the observed variables (Kline, 2015). Figure 2 gives the results for the path analyses. The variance inflation factor (VIF) value of the regression model is between 1.119 and 1.843, which were below 10, so there was no “collinearity” in this regression model (Hair

*et al.*, 1998). The regression model explained a substantial amount of the variance in attitude towards endorsement (0.458). However, the variance explained was lower for the brand attitude (0.431). This might be because other factors influence attitude towards the brand, such as previous experience with the brand, word of mouth.

Figure 2 A path analysis of the effects of independent variables on brand attitude while mediated by the attitude towards endorsement.

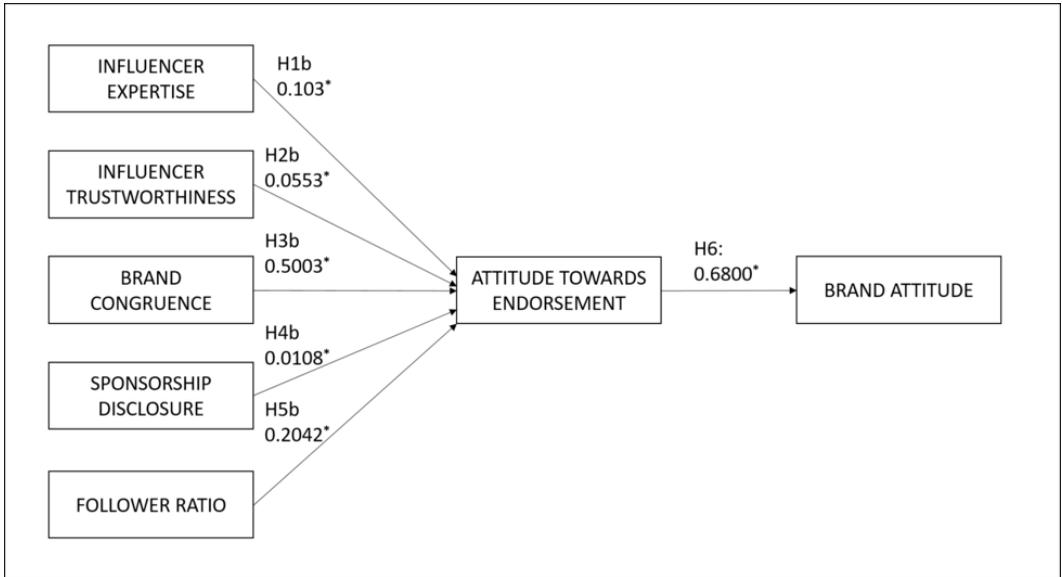


Table 3. Results from mediation analysis (dependent variable: Brand attitude; mediator: attitude towards Endorsement)

Independent Variable	Mean Indirect effect	95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL	
		Lower limit	Upper Limit
Expertise	0.0675	0.0039	0.1405
Trustworthiness	0.0376	-0.0252	0.1015
Brand congruence	0.3402	0.2469	0.4433
Sponsorship Disclosure	0.0073	-0.0439	0.0590
Follower Ratio	0.01389	0.0749	0.2109

### Mediation Analysis-

A mediating bootstrapping analysis (using 5,000 sub-samples and 95 percent confidence intervals [CI]) was performed using the SPSS macro indirect (Preacher and Hayes 2008) model 4. The results of the mediation analyses with the indirect effect of the independent variables on Brand attitude with the attitude towards the endorsement as the mediating variable lends support to H1, H3, H5. Three of the independent variables of the five considered in this research had perfect mediation, which

indicates that the mean indirect effect was significant, and the confidence intervals did not include a zero. However, trustworthiness and sponsorship disclosure around the offending estimate includes a 0 point, which indicates that model-misspecification is *not* a likely cause of the offending estimate (Dillon *et al.*, 1987) and as explained, a possible cause of the offending estimate may be the relatively small sample size. Table 3 gives the results from the mediation analysis.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

From the above analysis, it can be inferred that while measuring the direct effect through regression and the indirect effect through SPSS Macro model 4 (Preacher & Hayes). Hypotheses H1, H3, and H5 are accepted, and the hypotheses H2 and H4 are rejected. It is seen that three independent variables—expertise, brand congruence, and follower ratio have a significant effect on brand attitude mediated by the attitude towards endorsement.

The mean score of brand congruency with the influencer personality is approximately four, and also the beta coefficient of brand congruency has a value of 0.505, which shows that it has a more significant impact on brand attitude. The average sentiment of consumers' attitudes towards a social media influencer endorsement is highly influenced by brand congruency with the influencer's personality. Factors such as expertise and follower ratios mean range approximately between 3.25 to 4 while having an unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.103 and 0.2042. The scores indicate that while expertise is a crucial factor to be considered, sometimes collaborations with influencers occur based on the influencer's reach and engagement more than the expertise. This explains how for each social media influencer, the ratio of the impact of each of the factors such as expertise, brand congruence, and follower ratio might vary, but they do impact brand attitude.

This study extends previous research on influencer endorsements. In line with previous research, the study shows that expertise, brand congruence, and follower ratio positively impact brand attitude. As implicated in previous studies drawbacks that follower ratio was an important factor which was not considered while measuring the impact of attitude towards brand along with Brand congruence (Mishra *et al.*, 2015) and considering it as a factor in this model has shown that it indeed does have a positive impact. The study's uniqueness is in analyzing the impact of the mediating variable attitude towards social media influencer endorsements. The effects of the influencer-related factors included herein are wholly or partly mediated by attitude towards endorsement, rather than primarily having direct and indirect impact on brand attitude.

This study has investigated the factors of social media influencer endorsements affecting brand attitude in the Indian context while mediated by the attitude towards endorsement. The proposed model extends the source credibility model by checking the influence of factors like brand congruence with influencer personality, sponsorship disclosure, and follower ratio for the influencer. This study highlights that it is imperative to examine multiple components as they are proving to be indispensable in improving the effectiveness of social media influencer endorsements. The construct helps one to understand the effects of social media influencer endorsement on brand attitude in influencer marketing, which incorporates the value of an influencers' credibility popularity as well as match up with the brand and lays the groundwork for a more comprehensive model in the future.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The study focuses on social media influencers and the credibility of influencer endorsements. It is, however, conceivable that social media users' beliefs and attitudes may change across platforms because of the message modality or influencers' content variations across different platforms. Moreover, the insignificant impact of trustworthiness and sponsorship disclosure may be studied in future studies. Future research may not only investigate the roles of interactive platforms' affordances and consumers' differences in social media influencer endorsements but also identify critical boundary conditions or mechanisms of its effects on brand building and consumer behaviors.

It would be worth exploring the role of cultural factors in social media. Further, future studies can also study the construct with other research designs such as experimental designs or study causal relationships or replicate reported results using cross-platform social media endorsements focussed on specified brands or high performing influencers.

## **7. THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study makes significant contributions to the social media marketing literature. It offers a theoretical contribution by providing the factors impacting Indian consumer's attitude towards brand and how attitude towards endorsement acts as a mediator which helps researchers to further build a robust model.

In line with the conclusion in this study regarding sponsorship disclosure, in July 2021 the Advertising Standards Council of India ("ASCI") had released the Guidelines for Influencer Advertising in Digital Media. These guidelines are to enable consumers to identify when influencers are deriving some benefit for promoting a product, and for influencing opinions and behaviours. These Guidelines prescribe stringent disclosure requirements for influencers, placing obligations on both influencers and advertisers thus ensuring that consumers are made aware of the financial benefits of the endorsement for the influencer.

The findings in this study help provide insights to the digital marketing managers for drafting various advertising strategies on how to increase the favorable brand attitude in consumers' minds. As an effort to create a favorable brand attitude in the minds of the consumers, the suggested areas are first ensuring that the influencers' collaboration as a source of endorsement is trustworthy to be perceived well by the user. Second, ensuring that there is a brand congruence with the influencer's personality would ensure that the endorsement the consumers are exposed to helps build a better connection with the brand. One of the crucial managerial implications of this study's findings is that the credibility of the influencer in an endorsement can positively impact the endorsed brand equity, which is represented by four aspects- brand associations, brand loyalty, quality, and brand awareness. This suggests that marketers should recruit and collaborate with influencers with good credibility while making sure there is a brand congruence with the influencer's personality so that the endorsements deliver the desired meaning. A combination of such knowledge could help brands implement potentially more effective influencer marketing campaigns. In line with the above discussion, advertisers and marketers can use the social media influencer endorsements to develop a strong and positive brand attitude and attitude towards the endorsement.

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