

Instafamous and social media influencer marketing

Social media
influencer
marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to test the effects of two types of celebrities (Instagram celebrity vs traditional celebrity) on source trustworthiness, brand attitude, envy and social presence. The proposed theoretical model consists of the celebrity type as the independent variable, social presence as the mediator and self-discrepancy as the moderator.

Design/methodology/approach – A randomized two-group comparison (Instagram celebrity vs traditional celebrity) between-subjects experiment ($n = 104$) was conducted.

Findings – The results indicate that consumers exposed to Instagram celebrity's brand posts perceive the source to be more trustworthy, show more positive attitude toward the endorsed brand, feel stronger social presence and feel more envious of the source than those consumers exposed to traditional celebrity's brand posts. Structural equation modeling (Mplus 8.0) and bootstrap confidence intervals indicate that social presence mediates the causal effects of celebrity type on trustworthiness, brand attitude and envy. Multiple regression analyses reveal the moderating effects of appearance-related actual-ideal self-discrepancy.

Practical implications – Ultimately, managerial implications for social media marketing and Instagram influencer-based branding are provided. From the perspective of marketing planning, the findings speak to the power of influencer marketing as an effective branding strategy.

Originality/value – The paper discusses theoretical implications for the marketing literature on celebrity endorsements.

Keywords Brand management, Instagram, Social media marketing, Celebrity endorsements, Social presence, Luxury branding, Instafamous

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Instagram is a platform that is based on visual aesthetics and filtered images, which makes it a suitable ecosystem for promoting beauty products, popularizing certain body images and advocating luxurious lifestyles and prominent luxury brands (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Instagram is also a social media app that allows users to gather followers, connect with different brands and entities, and facilitate social interactions among consumers (Blight *et al.*, 2017). Considering these unique characteristics of Instagram, this study investigates the utility of leveraging fashion influencers on Instagram in promoting luxury brands.

Fashion enthusiasts have gained popularity and achieved a huge success through Instagram, partly due to the aesthetic appeal of Instagram filters and the platform's capability to reach wide audiences. The rise of fashion bloggers, referring to individuals who provide fashion tips and introduce certain products and brands via their social media accounts and blog posts, caught the interest of fashion brands (Paton, 2014). What some brands found intriguing is that these Instagram personalities are effective in spreading messages about new products, starting and popularizing new trends and driving up sales. Based on the magnitude of influence, these Instagram celebrities are labeled as the Instafamous (Dewey, 2014). The phenomenon of Instafamous has developed specifically in this platform due to its unique features: ability for social interaction and aesthetical



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presentation, which allow users to build personal narratives and showcase identities that attract audiences (Abidin, 2016). Nowadays, deploying influencers like Instafamous for branding has become a defining element of social media marketing campaigns (De Veirman *et al.*, 2016). In the fashion domain, most of the promotional efforts take place on Instagram (Carah and Shaul, 2016). However, there is no scholarly research that examines how otherwise ordinary people became so successful and influential as brand endorsers (Comenos, 2018). The current research aims to address this gap.

The key research problem that must be addressed is what explains the prominence of Instagram influencers over traditional celebrities in recent years. To answer this question, we conducted an experiment comparing how users react differently to posts featuring the same product endorsed by two different types of celebrities: traditional celebrities vs Instagram celebrities. Before launching an Instafamous campaign, digital marketers need to test if partnering with Instafamous is more effective for their clients than partnering with traditional celebrities. Since no study has studied the effects of celebrity type on trustworthiness within the context of visual image-based social media platform, the current study tested the differential effects of Instafamous vs traditional celebrities on social media marketing outcomes. Our experiment examined how audiences are able to distinguish two types of celebrities (celebrity type as the independent variable), how they perceive them as socially present (social presence as the mediator) and how these two variables affect brand evaluation (trustworthiness and brand attitude as the dependent variables). This study expanded celebrity credibility model to include new forms of celebrities and identify the major psychological mechanisms that make them more appealing to consumers. This study has two main objectives: to measure if there is a difference in how people perceive trustworthiness of Instafamous vs traditional celebrities and to provide theoretical explanations for the underlying mechanisms.

Theoretical frameworks

Instafamous

Social media celebrities refer to individuals who became famous via their social media presence, as opposed to traditional celebrities who are famous from film, music and TV shows (Khamis *et al.*, 2016). Traditionally, celebrity endorsement only considers celebrities who created value for themselves through sports, music or movies, before participating in advertising activities (Kamins *et al.*, 1989). However, the alternative forms of celebrities we see today fall outside the traditional categories, which is a phenomenon that arguably started with the rise of reality TV stars. When studying the effects of this new type of celebrities, it has been found that consumers have a stronger connectedness toward them (Tran and Strutton, 2014) and they perceive them as more authentic (Stefanone *et al.*, 2010). The perceived realness of those non-traditional stars and the deep connectedness result in higher purchase intention of the products they endorse, because consumers personally identify with them and try to imitate them (Tran and Strutton, 2014). A variety of contemporary social media celebrities create value for their personal brands while engaging in quasi-promotional activities (Duffy and Hund, 2015). The brands of these influencers are perceived as real and relatable, so they become more approachable and compelling to imitate. Fashion bloggers on Instagram have a highly integrated relationship with and critical reliance on the brands they choose to feature, because their livelihood and fame are mainly dependent on those factors (McQuarrie *et al.*, 2012). Conversely, traditional celebrities engage in social media as an instrumental and promotional tool for their work in mainstream media industry domains. The uniqueness of micro-celebrities is manifested by the way they connect with audiences and the interpersonal intimacy deeper than appearing in TV shows or mainstream movies (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016).

If social media celebrities are non-traditional forms of celebrities, what makes them called “influencers” even on popular media and why are they prominent in digital marketing to the extent that they sometimes overshadow mainstream celebrities? When discussing social media influencers, it has to be carefully explained if this term is the same as micro-celebrities. Influencers are defined as “people who built a large network of followers, and are regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches” (De Veirman *et al.*, 2016, p. 1). On the other hand, micro-celebrities are defined as “[...] everyday, ordinary internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in ‘digital’ and ‘physical’ spaces, and monetize their following by integrating ‘advertorials’ into their blogs or social media posts and making physical paid-guest appearances at events” (Abidin, 2016, p. 3). These two terms are almost conceptually identical and the major characteristics of them are: large numbers of followers, active engagement and promotion of products or brands.

Popular fashion bloggers on Instagram can be described as both micro-celebrities and influencers interchangeably, as they meet the criteria for each term. The current study operationally defines an Instagram influencer as any popular Instagram character with a high number of followers, who has a high taste in fashion and lifestyle, which enables them to monetize their appearance. These influencers can be considered micro-celebrities because they have relatively high recognizability, and they use it for social influence and monetization. Social media influencers enjoy this unique identity of both being famous and ordinary person.

Meaning transfer and source credibility models

Meaning transfer model explains how celebrities add value to a specific brand/product (McCracken, 1986). Celebrities, who transfer the cultural association with their work to the brand they endorse, add value to this brand because its products presumably possess the celebrity’s symbolic power (McCracken, 1986). Celebrities who have positive and culturally desirable traits are effective in enhancing the brand associations via endorsements. The meaning transfer model shows that the cultural value is an integral antecedent to perceived credibility (Batra and Homer, 2004). Applying this model to Instagram celebrities, the issue of meaning transfer becomes more salient but differs from the traditional rule. When certain fashion bloggers become celebrities via Instagram, their cultural value is inherent in their social media presence and embedded in all the posts they share to show how elegant they are in terms of lifestyle, public appearance, visited locations, etc. (Abidin, 2016). Instagram celebrities do not have a plethora of cultural meanings traditional celebrities can draw from what they have created in mainstream media. Rather, whatever symbolic value Instagram celebrities have is based on the personal brands they have created via Instagram posts and stories, the events they have been able to attend and the brands they have associated themselves with.

Another model to assess celebrity effectiveness is source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990). The key to the success of celebrity endorsement is credibility of the source, and influencers’ appeal depends on the extent to which they build their personal brand by their own efforts. When celebrities become successful in building warm and personable relationships with their audiences, they will be perceived as more trustworthy (Silvera and Austad, 2004).

Trustworthiness and brand attitude

Trustworthiness refers to how honest, reliable and dependable the source is perceived to be (Ohanian, 1990). The degree to which audiences perceive the source to be dependable is also associated with trust. Hence, Instafamous may increase the extent to which audiences

perceive the source to be someone who can verify and elaborate on the transmitted information (Labrecque, 2014). Processing messages from sources who seem similar to oneself decreases psychological reactance and systematic examination of the message (Brinol and Petty, 2009). Instagram influencers, therefore, can be more effective in resonating with audiences as they are perceived as more similar to regular audiences, have a higher likelihood of interacting with fans and are easier to associate or identify with than traditional celebrities. Consumers respond to peer Facebook users more positively than to traditional celebrities, especially when the peer users share demographic and attitudinal features (Jin, 2018). In addition to perceived similarity, trustworthiness is an important factor in making Instagram celebrities more influential. Because of the popular knowledge about celebrities' sponsorship contracts, there can be an assumption consumers make such that the public appearance of a celebrity with any branded product is part of a commercial campaign (Silvera and Austad, 2004). Assuming that Instagram celebrities are perceived to be "more like us," they would be perceived as more trustworthy. Since the feeling of social distance decreases the appeal of a celebrity (Thomson, 2006), celebrities with more closeness to fans will create stronger emotional attachment, which shall increase trust:

H1. Instagram celebrities will be perceived to be more trustworthy than traditional celebrities.

Instagram fashion influencers are perceived to be more authentic when their visual appearance and luxurious lifestyle match the symbolic value of luxury brands (Lee and Watkins, 2016). When people encounter a visual image of Instagram celebrity with a luxury product, they would form a positive attitude toward the featured brand if they identify more with the source (Law and Braun, 2000). The positive disposition toward a more identifiable celebrity would transfer into a more positive attitude toward the brand (Jin, 2018). When viewers perceive influencers as more trustworthy, they will be more welcoming toward their fashion recommendations and the brands/products they endorse. In contrast, since traditional celebrities appear on ads for various brands, their commercial motive would be assumed by consumers (Bailey, 2007). An endorsement by traditional celebrities could be perceived as business transaction with the sponsoring brand without any emotional attachment to the brand, whereas Instagram celebrities would be perceived as having higher standards in picking their endorsed brands to which emotional attachment and meanings are assigned:

H2. Luxury brand posts by Instagram celebrities will result in a more positive brand attitude than luxury brand posts by traditional celebrities.

Social presence

Social presence refers to the extent to which media users perceive the mediated characters as psychologically present and intelligible (Rice, 1993). It is an important factor in social media marketing, particularly in explaining how people trust and enjoy e-commerce platforms (Shen, 2012). Since social media marketing is built upon the idea of interacting with brands and peer consumers, listening to genuine reviews and looking at peer users' real experiences (Tafesse, 2016), it is strategically relevant to consider how each online persona makes these interactions look "real." Social presence is a positive predictor of consumers' online trust and intention toward online shopping (Beldad *et al.*, 2010). People feel more comfortable in transacting with an online source, if they feel that an actual human is present at the other end (Shen, 2012). If social media profiles are treated as virtual avatars (controlled by a human behind the scene) or virtual agents with algorithms (controlled by robotic algorithms) for their owners, it is worth examining how effectively they make profile owners look human.

Instagram posts by traditional celebrities can be perceived as robotic or lacking a real human feel. If there is a perception that posts featuring a brand are just sponsored content or being fully scripted, they would be less effective in inducing favorable persuasive outcomes (Russell, 2002). Personable characteristics of celebrities' social media accounts will be diminished if consumers feel that celebrities who serve as brand ambassadors rarely interact with everyday users. One major advantage of social media branding is its affordance for opinion leaders to interact directly with followers on a regular basis. The more interactive a public persona is, the more likely it will generate higher affinity and trust (Van Noort *et al.*, 2012). The cues of interactivity and engagement include numbers of followers, followings, shares, likes and comments. These indices are more significant for non-mainstream celebrities because a "regular" person's high numbers of followers and likes can be attributed to this person's active engagement, openness to audiences and the popularity in the online community (Van Der Heide and Lim, 2016). In contrast, traditional celebrities having high numbers of followers and likes can be interpreted as an extension of the popularity they already have in the offline world, aside from their sociability or proactivity in social media:

H3. Consumers will feel stronger social presence with Instagram celebrities than with traditional celebrities.

The perceived humanity measured by social presence is an integral component of social media marketing planning, because it could enhance the perceived authenticity of the reviews and demonstrations made by the influencers about the brand's products or services (Men and Tsai, 2015). As people perceive influencers to be real, they might develop stronger emotion of envy and consequent urge to have what they have, because the portrayed physical outlook would seem more feasible and attainable. This could translate into a stronger desire for the portrayed brand. Social presence is a significant mediating factor in e-commerce purchasing (Weisberg *et al.*, 2011). Thus, social presence would play a mediating role in determining the effects of celebrity types on trustworthiness, brand attitude and envy:

H4. Social presence will mediate the effects of Instagram celebrities vs traditional celebrities on consumers' source trustworthiness perception, brand attitude and envy.

Envy

Benign envy, referring to the desire to acquire the possessions and status of what others have, with no hostile feelings (Parrott and Smith, 1993), may enhance consumers' attitude toward the envied products. Envy enhances the desire for the affiliated object. When envy is coupled with affinity for the envied source, however, it manifests itself in a motivating desire to resemble the source rather than hostility to take the envied possession away (Lange and Crusius, 2015). Envy is an outcome of identification when the achievements of someone seem feasible based on personal resemblance, since people are motivated to have equivalent achievements (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997). Envy is more common toward people whom we identify with and who are characteristically closer to who we are (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2007). Envy is a strong mediator between social comparison and behavioral motivation, in the domain of body image enhancement (Arnocky *et al.*, 2015). It is logical to assume a positive correlation between envy and motivation to imitate the media figure (Nabi and Keblusek, 2014). If we perceive someone to be identifiable and likeable, we tend to think of their possessions as something attainable, which increases envy and the desire for that possession. If traditional celebrities with an unattainable status are perceived to be too distant from us, then they will spark less

inspiration to imitate them (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997). Inspiration by others' achievements will be lower, if we perceive the superstars as superior even to our best possible selves (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997). When these achievements seem beyond reach, therefore, the envy-motivation link becomes weaker because people assume that they would never reach that status (traditional celebrity status). In contrast, when others' achievements seem to be attainable (social media celebrity status), self-enhancement and inspiration would emerge:

- H5. Luxury brand posts by Instagram celebrities will result in stronger feelings of envy than luxury brand posts by traditional celebrities.

Self-discrepancy

Similar to envy, self-discrepancy is one of the outcomes of comparing oneself to media figures. In the context of luxury branding, social comparison is a psychological mechanism by which exposure to Instagram posts leads to negative affect regarding disposition toward luxury products, such as feeling the need to fill the gap between the material void in real life and ideally desired luxurious possessions (Arnocky *et al.*, 2015). Perceiving a discrepancy between the actual self and the idealized media images leads to stronger motivation to improve. Self-discrepancy is a moderating mechanism for affect change (Dittmar *et al.*, 2009). Appearance-related social comparison induces individuals to experience depressing feelings such as body dissatisfaction and envy (Arnocky *et al.*, 2015). Self-discrepancy can function as a moderating factor in accounting for the effects of viewing physically attractive sources, thus resulting in higher body dissatisfaction when comparing oneself to individuals who are regarded as an ideal version of the self (Szymanski and Cash, 1995). People with higher positions and/or desired qualities cause others' self-discrepancy. This discrepancy results in positive attitude toward the object (or brand), which may translate into actual buying behavior.

In comparison to individuals with low levels of self-discrepancy, people with high levels of body image concerns and high self-discrepancy engage more intensely in social comparisons and experience negative mood. Subsequent self-esteem reduction, in turn, leads them to yield more positively to fashion advertising messages (Bessenoff, 2006). Conversely, people with lower self-discrepancy tend to be less susceptible to outside influence (Pentina *et al.*, 2009). Attractive and popular Instagram influencers would have stronger effects on consumers with lower self-confidence and higher self-discrepancy. Particularly, higher levels of self-discrepancy would heighten consumers' motivation to imitate the influencers' appearance and acquire the luxury brand's products that get them closer to the ideal appearance (Hogg *et al.*, 1999):

- H6. Appearance-related self-discrepancy will moderate the effects of celebrity types on trustworthiness, attitude, social presence and envy.

Method

Design and participants

Data collection was conducted in December 2016. In total, 104 females ($n = 104$) recruited from MTurk participated in a randomized two-group comparison between-subjects design experiment. Participants were recruited with non-probability volunteer sampling methods, since random assignment is sufficient for experimental studies.

Manipulation

For the Instagram profile of a traditional celebrity, Eva Longoria was selected as she represents a celebrity figure with high recognizability and attractiveness. Eva Longoria has

a high number of Instagram followers, which helps not only ensure ecological isomorphism and reasonable level of external validity, but also controls the level of quantitative Instagram popularity across conditions. A fashion blogger's profile (Olivia Palermo) was picked with Instagram posts that insured that the character has similar physical features (e.g. skin tone, style, pose, etc.) with the corresponding traditional celebrity.

The researchers found ecologically isomorphic, externally valid, realistic and comparable photos of Eva Longoria and Olivia Palermo, with the identical product, very similar pose, angle and fashion style. The number of posts, the number of followers and the number of followings were modified to be equivalent across conditions, to control for the effects of quantitative indices and popularity cues on participants' perception of celebrities' active engagement and popularity.

Procedure and measures

Participants were randomly assigned and exposed to one of the two conditions, were exposed to manipulation stimuli and then took a posttest on the mediator and dependent variables. Measurements include trustworthiness dimension of source credibility (Ohanian, 1990, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$), brand attitude (Spears and Singh, 2004, $\alpha = 0.97$), social presence (Lee *et al.*, 2006, $\alpha = 0.93$), actual-ideal self-discrepancy (e.g. mathematical difference between perceived attractiveness of the ideal celebrity ($\alpha = 0.91$) and the actual self ($\alpha = 0.90$)) (Higgins, 1987) and benign envy (Appel *et al.*, 2015, $\alpha = 0.78$). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses ensured measurement validity.

Results

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table I.

Regarding *H1*, consumers exposed to an Instagram celebrity perceived the source to be more trustworthy ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.51$) than those exposed to a traditional celebrity ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(102) = 1.81$, $p < 0.10$ (marginal significance). There was no significant difference between the Instagram celebrity ($M = 6.00$, $SD = 0.99$) and the traditional celebrity ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 0.97$) conditions with regard to source attractiveness perception, $t = 1.18$, $p = 0.24$. This group equivalence regarding the celebrities' perceived attractiveness theoretically and statistically rules out the possible confounding effect of physical attraction. Consistent with *H2*, consumers in Instagram celebrity condition showed more positive brand attitude ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.54$) than in traditional celebrity condition ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.55$), $t = 2.27$, $p < 0.05$. Consistent with *H3*, consumers in Instagram celebrity condition experienced stronger social presence ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.79$) than in traditional celebrity condition ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.55$), $t = 1.93$, $p < 0.05$. Supporting *H5*, consumers in Instagram celebrity condition felt more envious ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.746$) than in traditional celebrity condition ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.51$), $t = 2.00$, $p < 0.05$.

Structural equation modeling (Mplus 8.0) was used to test the hypothesized mediation effect of social presence (SOCPR) (*H4*). The model fit the data well: $\chi^2 = 3.29$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.35$;

	Mean	SD	Correlations			
			1	2	3	4
1. Trustworthiness	4.31	1.51				
2. Brand attitude	4.82	1.57	0.53**			
3. Envy	3.96	1.66	0.42**	0.49**		
4. Social presence	3.58	1.70	0.65**	0.47**	0.53**	
5. Self-discrepancy	0.76	1.45	-0.20*	-0.02	-0.11	-0.24*

Notes: $n = 104$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table I.
Descriptive statistics

CFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.03; SRMR = 0.04. The χ^2 analysis for overall tests the restriction imposed on the direct effects of condition on the dependent variables. The unstandardized estimates and standard errors are shown in Figure 1, supporting *H4*.

Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) were obtained (with 5,000 bootstrap samples) for inference about the mediation effects. The estimated indirect effect of the experimental condition on trustworthiness via social presence was 0.37, and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI was (0.01, 0.78). The estimated indirect effect of condition on brand attitude via social presence was 0.28, and CI was (0.01, 0.64). The estimated indirect effect of the condition on envy via social presence was 0.33, and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI was (0.02, 0.76).

Table II summarizes the results of the regression analysis to test the moderation effect. Unstandardized estimates and standard errors (in parentheses) are shown. The degrees of freedom for *F*-statistic was (3, 100). Condition was coded 0 = traditional celebrity and 1 = Instagram celebrity and self-discrepancy was centered at the mean.

The results confirm the moderation effect of self-discrepancy (*H6*). Estimated simple regression lines for self-discrepancy in TC and IC conditions are presented in Figure 2. The plot created from the estimated regression models is shown in Table II. There was a significant interaction effect between the experimental condition and self-discrepancy on trustworthiness. The increment in R^2 due to the interaction was 0.041 for trustworthiness.

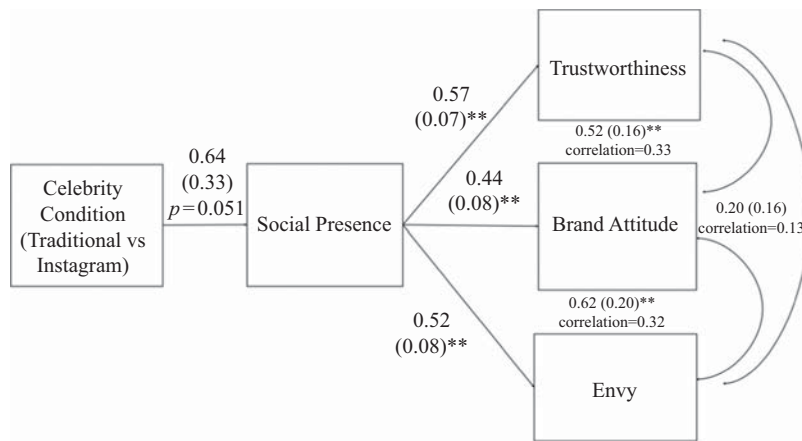


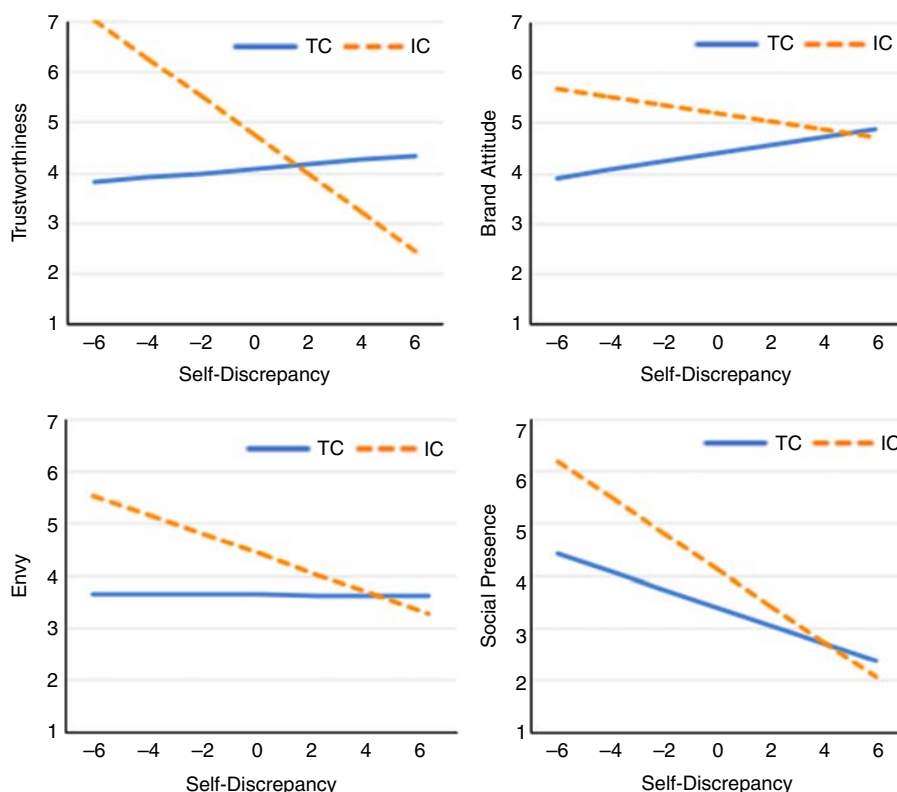
Figure 1. Mediation (*H5*) estimated mediation model

Notes: Condition was coded 0 = Traditional celebrity (TC) and 1 = Instagram celebrity (IC). Unstandardized estimates and standard errors (in parentheses) are shown. R^2 was 0.417 for TRUSTW, 0.224 for BRANDATT and 0.278 for ENVY. ** $p < 0.01$

Table II. Regression analysis (moderation: *H6*)

Effect	Trustworthiness	Brand attitude	Envy	Social presence
Intercept	4.13 (0.21)**	4.47 (0.22)	3.64 (0.23)**	3.27 (0.23)**
Condition	0.33 (0.29)	0.69 (0.31)*	0.63 (0.32)***	0.61 (0.32)***
Self-discrepancy	0.04 (0.15)	0.08 (0.16)	-0.00 (0.17)	-0.17 (0.17)
Condition \times Self-discrepancy	-0.43 (0.20)*	-0.16 (0.21)	-0.19 (0.23)	-0.17 (0.23)
R^2	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.09
Model test	$F = 3.38, p = 0.02$	$F = 1.89, p = 0.14$	$F = 1.90, p = 0.13$	$F = 3.48, p = 0.02$

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$



Notes: Instagram celebrity (IC); Traditional celebrity (TC)

Figure 2.
Moderation (H6)

For the other variables, the R^2 increment due to the interaction effect was 0.01 for brand attitude, 0.01 for envy and 0.01 for social presence. In TC condition, self-discrepancy had no significant relationship with trustworthiness (estimated simple slope = 0.04, SE = 0.15, $p = 0.77$). In IC condition, self-discrepancy was negatively related to trustworthiness (estimated simple slope = -0.38, SE = 0.13, $p < 0.01$), as presented in Figure 2.

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

The current research is one of the first attempts to establish a theoretical framework that explains the effects of social media influencers by providing some evidence that audiences perceive traditional celebrities and Instagram celebrities differently. To explain differences in perception more specifically, the experiment drew upon social presence theory in examining why people connect more strongly with Instagram celebrities than with mainstream celebrities. The concepts of source authenticity and relatedness have been discussed extensively in the popular press, but they have not been established yet as theoretical constructs. Since social presence tackles how people perceive the ease of communicating with the source, it can serve as an explanatory mechanism that helps our understanding of the special nature of the online relationship consumers form and develop with social media influencers. The empirical findings demonstrate the mediating role of social presence in determining the effects of celebrity types on trustworthiness, envy and

brand attitude. These robust findings across different dimensions of consumer behavior (credibility perception, brand attitude and envious emotion) verify the power of social presence in explaining consumers' reaction to brand endorsers. With regard to conceptual explication and development, there are multiple terminologies associated with social media celebrities (micro-celebrities, influencers, Instafamous, opinion leaders, fashion bloggers, etc.). Our research model suggests that as long as these figures have clout over their followers and are regarded as popular, they shall be considered social media celebrities in a sense, without neglecting the unique characteristics they have. This approach helps researchers bridge the gap between qualitative studies on the celebrity culture and management-oriented quantitative studies about advertising and marketing.

This study illuminates the antecedents to trustworthiness in celebrity endorsement. When traditional and Instagram celebrities are viewed as equally physically attractive, different levels of relatedness quantitatively indexed with social presence lead to different levels of trustworthiness even when both appear with the same brand. These findings suggest that perceived sociability is a strong candidate to explain why people prefer social media influencers over traditional celebrities in the digital marketing context. This new category of micro-celebrities would reshape our understanding of celebrity influence, meaning transfer and celebrity credibility in social media marketing. The blurring lines between celebrities and micro-celebrities push researchers to consider how different the Instagram celebrities are from the traditional celebrities. To the best of our knowledge, the present study is the first in finding empirical differences between celebrity types on branding outcomes in Instagram-based social marketing and branding.

Managerial implications

For social media marketing practitioners, this study emphasizes the efficacy of relying on Instagram influencers in branding campaigns, especially for luxury brands. It points to the power of social media as an informational and inspirational source for marketing planning. From the perspective of marketing planning, the current findings point to Instagram influencer marketing as an effective branding strategy. Traditional celebrity endorsement is still a reliable strategy, but for reaching out to consumers who prefer to engage with their brands on social media, influencers could be more effective in especially targeting consumers with different levels of appearance-related self-discrepancy. Since social media marketing relies on interactivity and social comparisons, seeing the brand's products worn by characters consumers can easily identify with increases brand affinity and the urge to fulfill the needs created by social comparison (Jin, 2018). Social media has provided consumers with characters who were able to gather millions of followers, without being part of the professional entertainment industry, fashion houses or record labels. This phenomenon is making people to consider the possibility of becoming a self-made celebrity, and affects how they respond to Instagram influencers. Therefore, the implications for self-branding and self-promotion are significant, by showing the importance of maintaining social presence with users and inducing some level of achievable self-discrepancy that increases followers' motivation. This trend would encourage people to post more appearance-related posts on Instagram, hoping for the potential in gaining some level of influence and popularity. The current experimental findings speak to the power of influencer marketing as a method for branding in social media environments.

Limitations

First, it only focused on a single product category and brand. The focus was limited to luxury branding for it is becoming a pervasive phenomenon in social media marketing,

particularly in visual platforms like Instagram or Pinterest. Second, current data set is missing data on nationality and cultural background of the participants. Third, it is important to note that various social media apps have affordances and spirits different from what Instagram offers. Future studies can consider cross-platform comparisons.

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