Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula?

Klaus-Peter Wiedmann and Walter von Mettenheim
Institute of Marketing and Management, Leibniz University of Hannover, Hannover, Germany

Abstract
Purpose – The importance of influencer marketing is constantly growing. However, little empirical research has examined influencers’ success requirements. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring whether the requirements of influencers’ attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness are relevant for online influencer campaigns. An entry-level luxury fashion brand is the focus of the experiment.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 288 participants completed an online survey evaluating the profiles of influencers who varied in terms of the three abovementioned requirements. The impacts of these requirements on brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust as well as purchase intention and price premium were tested via structural equation modeling.

Findings – The results show that the most important requirement is trustworthiness, followed by attractiveness; surprisingly, the relevance of expertise is virtually nil.

Research limitations/implications – To date, practitioners are still struggling with the success requirements of influencer marketing. They have focused on traditional advertising models and numeric requirements such as the amount of followers. However, regarding merely these requirements can result in wrong decisions. Considering the two requirements, attractiveness and trustworthiness, in a stronger way can provide a remedy to this struggle. In future research, the relevance of the requirements in different involvement conditions and for non-attractiveness-related products might be investigated.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this study is one of the first to explore the success requirements that are directly related to influencers (e.g. attractiveness) rather than numeric requirements of their profiles (e.g. page rank) and the impacts of those requirements on brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust as well as purchase intention and price premium. It adapts the Source-Credibility Model for influencers and shows that its requirements interact in a unique way that is counterintuitive and different from other endorser types such as celebrities or salespersons.

Keywords luxurymarketing, influencermarketing, socialmediamarketing, attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness

Paper type Research paper

In the era of digitization, sensory overload, social distrust and individualization, traditional advertising is losing its effectiveness, and online influencers have become a powerful means of marketing communication (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). The power of these individuals, who are primarily characterized by their ability to create valuable content, their high reputations in specific fields (Cha et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017) and their large number of followers in online social networks (De Veirman et al., 2017), is rooted in the fact that their messages are actively requested and consumed (in contrast to traditional advertising). Moreover, their communications are superior in terms of customization to the target group (Kumar and Gupta, 2016). Social media are more diversified, specialized and fragmented than traditional media such as newspapers or television. Consequently, social media can target the interests of a very specific audience (Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia, 2017). Furthermore, consumers follow influencers of their own free will, in contrast to, e.g. advertising, which consumers try to avoid (Childers et al., 2019). Finally, influencers’ messages appear to come from a “person like you or me” and not from a potentially distrusted company that may be viewed as aiming to convince consumers into buying its products (Jahnke, 2018; Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018).

Against the backdrop of these advantages, brands must know how to conduct a successful online influencer campaign. The major academic research on what drives the success of influencers has mostly focused on numerical requirements such as the number of followers, retweets or page rank. The number of followers may be the only criterion for remuneration (Cole, 2018). Intuitively, these requirements may seem to be excellent for predicting the success of an influencer campaign; however, as the following example shows, they are not sufficient for guaranteeing a successful endorsement. In 2016, the brand Boo Tea Shake sent an email to its influencer Scott Disick. The email included text that he was supposed to post to his followers as well as confidential content such as instructions from the brand. Accidentally, Disick posted not only the text but also the confidential information to his 16 million followers.
The consequence was scorn and eventually a failed campaign (O’Toole, 2016). Disick scored high on traditional requirements such as number of followers or page rank; however, he lacked a crucial virtue – credibility. Against this backdrop, this study will investigate the relevance of source credibility for influencers. It will explore whether the three requirements of credibility in the Source-Credibility Model by Hovland et al. (1982) – specifically, attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness – apply to influencers.

Studies analyzing requirements have obtained partially conflicting results (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Martensen et al., 2018). Moreover, they have mainly focused on the impacts of these requirements on the influence strength or persuasiveness of the influencer. This work contributes to further clarification by analyzing the impacts of the three requirements on brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust as well as purchase intention and price premium with the example of the luxury entry-level fashion brand BOSS. The hypotheses will be tested with structural equation modeling in Smart PLS.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Influencer marketing

1.1.1 Definition

Influencer marketing is a communication strategy using popular and influential users in online social media (Gillen, 2009). Influencers are regarded as special individuals who can create valuable content, have high reputations in specific fields (Cha et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017) and are followed by a large number of users in online social networks (De Vreeman et al., 2017). Reputation can accrue from influencers’ expert qualification in their field of expertise and consumers’ trust in them. Influencers’ success and influence can be determined by engagement, which describes the ability to obtain reactions from consumers on a post (Arora et al., 2019; Freberg et al., 2011). In this way, influencers can connect brands with existing and prospective customers (De Vries et al., 2012). One method of measuring engagement is to compute the numbers of likes, comments, shares, retweets and favorites on an influencer’s post based on different time spans such as monthly, daily or hourly periods (Arora et al., 2019).

1.1.2 Demarcation

The research on influencers is still nascent. Some requirements for the success of influencers have been developed; however, they have not all been empirically validated (Kilian, 2017; Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018; Simmet, 2013). Therefore, in this paper, hypothesis development will rely on:

- relevant general work from the cosmos of psychology; and
- marketing-relevant findings on endorser types other than influencers including salespersons, sales avatars, anonymous models, electronic word-of-mouth and, in particular, celebrities.

It is important to understand the similarities and differences between these latter types and influencers. A central issue is thus whether the requirements developed for other types of endorsers can be transferred to influencers. In the following, the term requirements will be used to designate any influencer-based variables/constructs/attributes/characteristics that might contribute to the success of an influencer campaign.

Influencers’ fame accrues from their own social media efforts. This includes their numbers of followers, shares, likes and comments (Jin and Muqaddam, 2019). These requirements are more significant for influencers (compared with celebrities) because an influencer’s high number of followers and likes can be attributed to his or her active engagement, openness to audiences and popularity in the online community (Van Der Heide and Lim, 2016). By contrast, celebrities’ high numbers followers and likes can be an extension of the popularity they already have in the offline world (Jin and Muqaddam, 2019).

The perspectives of Friedman and Friedman (1976, 1979) on celebrity endorsers highlight a major contrast between the roots of the fame of celebrities and influencers: celebrity endorsers are recognized and famous persons who have not gained their fame through advertised products. Influencers either endorse products by means of non-sponsored posts/stories (which usually show the pros and cons of products/brands) and influencers’ sponsored ads (which mainly focus on pros; brands pay influencers for these ads rather than only sending free samples). At least in the context of non-sponsored posts, influencers may represent their true selves and act in a creative, self-expressive way (Audrezet et al., 2018; Boerma et al., 2017). Thus, influencers appear authentic (Cohen and Tyler, 2016; Marwick, 2013). Celebrity endorsement, by contrast, constitutes a comparatively shallow form of endorsement as celebrity endorsers usually do not provide such in-depth elaborations. Moreover, although influencers have acquired fame, their familiarity lags behind that of celebrities. Rankings classifying the most famous individuals in the world [e.g. “The Most Influential People in 2019” by Ranker (2019) or “Top Ten Most Famous People” by The Top Tens® (2019) (which actually includes more than 300 individuals)] mainly feature actors, singers, fashion models, athletes, entrepreneurs, politicians, aristocrats and religious leaders but no genuine influencers. Influencers and celebrities have certain similarities but also major differences. Therefore, the requirements for one endorser type may not be transferable to another. However, the extent findings can serve as one of many sources to develop hypotheses requiring empirical verification.

Influencers also differ among one another in terms of reach (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018). A differentiation can be made between micro influencers (10,000–150,000 followers) and mid-to-top-tier influencers (more than 150,000 followers). Against this backdrop, influencer marketing offers the opportunity for brands to gain influencers’ audiences and to maximize their reach (Childers et al., 2019). This study will focus on the so-called microinfluencers because they are considered to be a strategic priority for fashion brands. The reasons for this can be found in the lower costs of endorsement and higher perceived authenticity (Boyd, 2016; Owen and Napoli, 2016). Because of their relatively low number of followers, such influencers differ most notably from celebrities in terms of fame.

Overall, influencer marketing can increase the visibility of a company and lead to greater reach. However, the concepts of influencer reach and engagement are not free of limitations. Practitioners should consider whether the reach and
engagement of an influencer accrues from the desired target group (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018). Moreover, practitioners should not succumb to the temptation of merely relying on these relatively easily collectable and quantifiable requirements while ignoring other requirements that are less easy to collect and quantify such as attractiveness (Ki and Kim, 2019).

1.2 Determining requirements for influencers

1.2.1 Requirements and impacts of influencer marketing

The academic research on what makes up the success of influencer marketing remains relatively scarce. Major works stemming from the sphere of computer science or business informatics mainly focus on numeric requirements. In this way, requirements such as the number of followers (De Veirman et al., 2017) page rank and the number of retweets (Kwak et al., 2010) or mentions (Cha et al., 2010) have been identified. In a marketing context, notable pioneering work was carried out by Martensen et al. (2018) who showed that two requirements of the Source-Credibility Model, specifically, expertise and trustworthiness (as well as three further requirements: likability, similarity and familiarity), could positively affect influencers’ persuasiveness. Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) analyzed the impacts of the three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) on influencers’ influence strength. Jin and Muqaddam (2019) analyzed how source type (brand versus influencer) and product placement type (explicit versus moderate product placement) affect the three requirements.

As the elaboration in the course of hypothesis development will show (Section 2), some of the studies produced contradictory results. Moreover, the contribution of this work lies in the direct manipulation of all three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model. The extant studies have either focused on the impacts of the requirements on influencer-content-related requirements or treated the requirements as dependent variables. In this study, the impacts of the requirements on brand satisfaction, brand image and brand trust are investigated, which are of crucial importance for fashion brands. In this way, the emphasis is on directly showing whether and to what extent a brand can benefit from fulfilling these requirements. The three requirements are selected because their high relevance has also been identified, at least in partial form, for other types of endorsers such as celebrities (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Ohanian, 1990; Santos et al., 2019; Silvera and Austad, 2004; Spry et al., 2009). The results of this study can be compared with those of studies on other types of endorsers to identify similarities and differences, e.g. in terms of hierarchy.

1.2.2 Source-Credibility model

The Source-Credibility Model created by Hovland et al. (1982) and further substantiated by Ohanian (1990) will be the core of the upcoming analysis. Counterintuitively, credibility is not synonymous with trustworthiness. Rather, a core tenet of the model is that, to be credible, a source should encompass three requirements: attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness. In the model, credibility is thus a general term that includes all three requirements:

1 **Attractiveness** refers to the physical attractiveness of an individual: Is the source good-looking or ugly? Patzer (1983) stated that in most research, attractiveness is defined as “the degree to which a stimulus person’s facial features are pleasing to observe.” That view will be adopted in this study on influencers.
2 **Expertise** describes the source’s level of knowledge. It is defined in terms of peak or at least high levels of knowledge, experience and problem-solving skills within a given domain. An expert is capable of performing in a domain at a high level that can be achieved by few others (perhaps by only a small percentage of the general population). Becoming an expert requires hard work, long-term training, experience and/or practice. Individuals recognize the difference between expertise and average or low performance in any domain by considering what the expert knows as well as what he or she has done or achieved (Bourne et al., 2014; Garrett et al., 2009). Along these lines, Crisci and Kassnove (1973) showed that the perceived expertise of a psychologist was higher when he was referred to as “Dr” instead of “Mr.” For influencers, this means that expertise can be manipulated by the amount of knowledge they have on the product they endorse. To signal the expertise of a source, it is hence useful to describe whether a source is well versed on a specific issue.
3 Finally, **Trustworthiness** addresses the question of whether an individual is believable: Does the source express his or her honest opinion, or is he or she influenced by third parties? In the introductory example, Disick’s endorsement failed because of a lack of trustworthiness (one of the three requirements for conveying credibility). Disick’s erroneous post brought to light that he was not expressing his honest opinion; rather, he was following instructions from the brand in exchange for a reward. Given that the central driver of trustworthiness is selflessness (Walster et al., 1966), in this study, trustworthiness will be considered to address the question of whether an influencer is judging a brand in an objective way or is biased by financial/material rewards offered by the brand in exchange for a positive endorsement.

1.3 BOSS – an entry-level luxury fashion brand

Influencers are most commonly used for products stemming from the fashion industry (Halvorsen et al., 2013). This phenomenon may be related to the fact that the interest in new fashion trends develops online (Kim and Ko, 2012). Consequently, in the present paper, the hypotheses will be tested by means of influencers who endorse the fashion brand BOSS. BOSS is an entry-level price range luxury brand by HUGO BOSS AG. Since the new orientation of the HUGO BOSS AG brand portfolio for the spring/summer season 2018, the brand BOSS has superseded the former entry-level price range brands BOSS Orange and BOSS Green (HUGO BOSS AG, 2018).

An entry-level price range luxury brand distinguishes itself from a genuine luxury brand primarily through lower prices. In this way, a brand becomes affordable for broad social layers and joins the trend of the “democratization of luxury” (Morace, 2010; Phau et al., 2014). Because of the lower prices it offers, the brand must lower its sights to other features of luxury such
as financial, functional, individual and social value (Phau et al., 2014; Wiedmann et al., 2007). The brand thereby waives exclusivity and becomes more suitable for endorsement by means of a mass medium such as online social networks. Influencers have developed into a fundamental part of luxury brands’ marketing strategies, and companies have increased their budgets for influencer campaigns (Brouwer, 2017).

In the cosmos of luxury entry-level fashion brands, brand satisfaction [the cognitive evaluation of whether the exchange relationship with the brand is rewarding (Esch et al., 2006)] and brand image (consumers associations about a brand (Burmann et al., 2008)] are particularly relevant because fast-changing design trends increase the risk of brand change (Böttner et al., 2008). Moreover, because of proliferation and short life cycles, brand-specific associations such as brand trust [willingness to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001)] are important for fashion brand success (Lee et al., 2003).

2. Hypothesis development

In the following, an overview of works analyzing all three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model will be given. Subsequently, theories and studies focusing on individual requirements will be presented. Based on the findings, hypotheses will be developed.

The attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser for a political party may positively affect the brand image of the party (Smith, 2001). All three requirements can also positively affect brand trust in the context of a celebrity endorsement for a telecom service (Dwivedi et al., 2013).

Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencers’ attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness could positively influence consumers’ brand awareness. Trustworthiness and attractiveness (but not expertise) enhanced followers’ trust in branded content. Sakib et al. (2020) demonstrated that weight loss influencers’ trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness had a positive impact on para-social interaction. In a comparative study on celebrities and influencers, Schouten et al. (2019) found that influencer endorsement led to higher perceived trustworthiness than celebrity endorsements, but failed to demonstrate such an association in terms of expertise. Similarly, the authors were unable to demonstrate that perceived trustworthiness and expertise mediate the relationship between influencer endorsements versus celebrity endorsements and attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product and purchase intention. Ki and Kim (2019) demonstrated that the extent to which a target individual identifies an influencer’s content as visually appealing and showcasing expertise was positively associated with the perception of the influencer as a taste leader.

2.1 Attractiveness

Selected findings from the attractiveness research may be of special relevance for influencer marketing. First, attractive communicators reach greater opinion agreement (Horai et al., 1974). Miller (1970) builds on these findings by expressing that attractive individuals are viewed as:

[... ] individuals who behave with a sense of purpose and out of their own volition, whereas unattractive individuals are more likely to be seen as coerced and generally influenced by others or by environmental conditions.

This phenomenon may imply that a positive message issued by an attractive influencer about a brand or product is more persuasive. Moreover, attractive individuals gain greater popularity (Dion et al., 1972). This may be a special asset for influencers because, according to congruity theory, a positive attitude toward a communicator entails a more positive evaluation of the message (Joseph, 1982; Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955). Furthermore, individuals who are associated with an attractive individual are evaluated more favorably by others (Sigall and Landy, 1973). Consequently, followers may adhere to the message of attractive influencers to build an association with them. Finally, attractive individuals are viewed as being more in line with a desirable normative profile (Lorezo et al., 2010). Thus, attractive influencers may be endowed with aspirational power, which is one way to exert influence on others (Raven, 1965). These findings are also reflected by social adaptation theory, which suggests that comparing one’s physical attractiveness with an attractive testimonial can be helpful for self-evaluation and self-improvement (Martin and Kennedy, 1994). The match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990) suggests that an endorsement is more effective when the endorser and product fit. For attractiveness-related products, the endorser’s attractiveness is a creator of match-up (Till and Busler, 1998). Hence, an advantage for attractive influencers associated with luxury fashion brands may be that they enhance the product’s appeal by building an association with their attractiveness (Jin and Muqaddam, 2019). Kahle and Homer (1985) argue that the match-up hypothesis is linked to social adaptation theory (Kahle and Argyle, 2013). According to this argument, the adaptive significance of information will determine its impact. Thus, information may have adaptive significance in guiding a consumer’s brand evaluation and choice. An attractive endorser may serve as an effective source of information for a product that is attractiveness-related (Kahle and Homer, 1985).

The research backs the theory that an attractive source is effective for changes in attitude toward issues, products and ads (Caballero and Pride, 1984; Chaiken, 1979; Horai et al., 1974; Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kulka and Kessler, 1978; Mills and Harvey, 1972). The sexual attractiveness of a person giving a testimonial has a positive influence on the brand satisfaction of women in relation to cosmetic brands (Apaolaza-Ibáñez et al., 2011). Similarly, attractive celebrity endorsers can positively impact brand satisfaction and brand attitude in the context of pens and colognes (Till and Busler, 1998, 2000). The attractiveness of a celebrity endorser also positively influences brand image in relation to men’s apparel (Malshan and Weerasiri, 2016).

In the context of beauty blogs, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) failed to demonstrate that the requirement of attractiveness could affect the “perceived influence” or the “influence to brand purchase.” However, a marginal relevance may exist under high-involvement conditions. For luxury fashion brands, Lee and Watkins (2016) found that the attractiveness of a vlogger increases para-social interaction. In the context of beauty-related influencer videos on YouTube, Behm-Morawitz (2017) demonstrated that the attractiveness of the influencer motivated viewers to create their own videos.

Overall, the following hypothesis is formulated:
**Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise**

Klaus-Peter Wiedmann and Walter von Mettenheim

---

**H1.** The attractiveness of an influencer significantly positively influences (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand image and (c) brand trust.

**2.2 Expertise**

A source that demonstrates expertise is more persuasive than one that does not (Andersen and Clevenger, 1963). Indeed, individuals tend to agree more with the opinions of experts than with those of non-experts (Horat et al., 1974). Expertise, also referred to as expert power, is embedded in Raven’s (1965) framework of five power bases and describes a way of exerting influence on others. According to the balance model, an endorser’s expertise is helpful in communicating a bond with the product (Mowen, 1980). Moreover, the Heuristic-Systematic model defines expertise as a persuasion cue that triggers individuals to use cognitive heuristics such as “statements by experts can be trusted” (Chaiken, 1979, 1980; Ratneshwar and Chaiken, 1991). The aforementioned match-up hypothesis can also be used to explain the relevance of the requirement, as demonstrating expertise is a way to build a link to the endorsed product (Till and Busler, 1998).

The expertise of diverse types of endorsers has been analyzed in marketing contexts. The expertise of a celebrity endorser was found to have a positive effect on brand attitude for an energy bar (Till and Busler, 2000). Spokes-avatars who are perceived as experts were found to generate higher brand satisfaction and brand attitude in the context of a fictitious clothing brand (Jin and Sung, 2010). Martensen et al. (2018) found that expertise enhanced the persuasiveness of a fashion brand influencer. However, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) failed to demonstrate that beauty influencers’ expertise had an impact on the “perceived influence” or the “influence to purchase,” although it was marginally significant if consumers were in specific situations in which they depended strongly on the influencer’s expertise (an example could be a situation in which a consumer has particularly low expertise). These somewhat contradictory results pinpoint the necessity of verifying this requirement:

**H2.** The expertise of an influencer significantly positively influences (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand image and (c) brand trust.

---

**2.3 Trustworthiness**

A basic tenet of attribution theory is that any source that is perceived as biased will be dismissed (Kelley, 1973). This theory is based on De Soto and Kuehne’s (1959) grouping schema, which states that feelings such as liking or trust are assumed to occur and spread within groups of individuals. If a consumer trusts an influencer and the influencer likes a brand, the consumer will also like the brand. Moreover, according to the balance model, trustworthiness sustains the link between endorser and message (Mowen, 1980).

Findings from the marketing research tend to validate the relevance of the trustworthiness requirement. Spokes-avatars who are perceived as trustworthy were found to generate higher brand satisfaction and brand attitude in the context of a fictitious clothing brand (Jin and Sung, 2010). Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) presupposed the native trustworthiness of word-of-mouth following the work of Chatterjee (2006), Godes and Mayzlin (2004) and Mayzlin (2006); based on this hypothesis, they demonstrated a positive effect of electronic word-of-mouth on brand image and purchase intention in the case of the automobile industry. Martensen et al. (2018) found that influencers’ trustworthiness enhanced their persuasiveness, whereas Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) could not demonstrate that influencers’ trustworthiness had an impact on “perceived influence” or “influence to purchase,” although trustworthiness was marginally significant under higher issue involvement conditions or when consumers pursued a goal that depended strongly on it. In the context of sex education videos, Ferchaud et al. (2018) demonstrated that the authority of YouTube stars is based on viewers’ trust. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3.** The trustworthiness of an influencer significantly positively influences (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand image and (c) brand trust.

---

**2.4 Effects on purchase intention and price premium**

The findings are heavily divided concerning the issue of whether the three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model not only affect brand satisfaction, brand image and brand trust but also have a positive impact on purchase intention and price premium.

The attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser were found to have a positive impact on purchase intention (Kahle and Homer, 1985; Till and Busler, 2000; Tzoumakas et al., 2014). A positive effect of attractive female sales representatives on purchase intention in the context of direct mail advertising for a book has been demonstrated (Caballero and Solomon, 1984). Similarly, the attractiveness of female athlete endorsers has been found to positively impact purchase intention (Liu and Brock, 2011). The expertise of a salesperson has been found to positively affect purchase intention for a “head and capstan cleaner kit” (Woodside and Davenport, 1974). Trust in an influencer has been found to positively influence purchase intention in the context of online shopping (Hsu et al., 2013). Similar findings were produced by Haron et al. (2016) in relation to influencers characterized as opinion leaders in the context of fashion, skincare, gadgets and foodstuffs.

However, other findings partly contradict the abovementioned effects. In the abovementioned work of Haron et al. (2016), influencers’ expertise had no effect on purchase intention. Wu and Lee (2012) could not demonstrate an effect of the trustworthiness of blogs on purchase intention in the context of beauty and medical products. Ohanian (1970) argued that celebrities’ trustworthiness did not affect purchase intention.

A closer consideration of the extent interconnections might help clarify the contradictory results and pave the way for the investigation at hand. The literature states that in the case of positive brand image and brand satisfaction, purchase intention increases, and customers are prepared to pay a price premium (Dennis and Martenson, 2007; Farris et al., 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2014). In light of the ambiguous results and the information on the relationship between the interconnections, the three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model must
not have a direct effect on purchase intention and price premium; rather, brand image and brand satisfaction may have an effect on purchase intention and price premium. These findings lead to the following two hypotheses (Figure 1):

**H4.** The brand satisfaction induced through influencers has a significant positive influence on (a) purchase intention and (b) price premium.

**H5.** The brand image induced through influencers has a significant positive influence on (a) purchase intention and (b) price premium.

### 3. Method and data

The investigations in this work were performed in the following sequence:

1. To select appropriate pictures of attractive/unattractive, low-expertise/high-expertise and trustworthy/untrustworthy stimulus material for use in the influencers’ profiles in the main investigation, pretests were carried out. For this purpose, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used.

2. The empirical investigation included manipulation checks and hypothesis testing:
   - Manipulation checks were carried out by means of an ANOVA.
   - Hypothesis testing was performed with structural equation modeling.

#### 3.1 Pretest

**3.1.1 Pretest on attractiveness**

The empirical investigation used the stimulus material of attractive and unattractive influencers of both genders. According to Joseph (1982) and Dion et al. (1972), in scientific approaches, the attractiveness of an individual is determined by the assessment of third parties. Following the findings of Patzer (1983), who stated that attractiveness refers to facial attractiveness in most research, a pretest \( n = 107 \) was conducted to select attractive and unattractive pictures of female and male individuals. The participants were presented with pictures of the faces of 12 unspecified individuals to determine which pictures would be used for the influencer profile pictures. Six of the presented individuals were female. All pictures were from free image databases.

The participants rated the attractiveness of the faces on a six-item five-point Likert-type scale adapted from Peetz (2012). To assess the quality of the attractiveness construct, a factor analysis using varimax rotation was performed. Beforehand, the factor analysis was confirmed to be appropriate for the set of items (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion = 0.913, \( \text{Blartlett's test} = 0.000 \)) (Dziuban and Shirkey, 1974). Subsequently, a high importance of all item variables for the factor attractiveness was determined (factor loadings = 0.896–0.936) (Kline, 2014). The contribution of the item variables to the explanation of the total statistical scattering was high (average variance extracted: 73.395%) (Brosius, 2013; Hair, 1995). The internal consistency was given, and the set of item variables was suitable for measuring the factor (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = 0.926 \)) (Nunnally, 1978).

To assess the differences in perceived attractiveness, two ANOVAs followed by Scheffé post hoc tests were executed, one for the six female and the other for the six male stimulus subjects.

The ANOVA for the female stimulus subjects was significant \( (p < 0.000) \). The Scheffé post hoc test for the female stimulus subjects showed the greatest MDiff = 0.839 (SE = 0.065) between Female Stimulus Subjects #3 (M = 3.706; SD = 0.489) and #5 (M = 2.866; SD = 0.513). The difference between the two was significant \( (p < 0.000) \). Those two female subjects were consequently selected as attractive and unattractive stimulus material for creating the profile pictures in the subsequent empirical investigation.

The ANOVA for the male stimulus subjects was significant \( (p = 0.000) \). The Scheffé post hoc test for the male stimulus subjects showed that the greatest MDiff = 0.79751 (SE = 0.074) existed between Male Stimulus Subjects #2 (M = 3.403; SD = 0.498) and #4 (M = 2.606; SD = 0.488). This difference was significant \( (p = 0.000) \). Therefore, those two male subjects were selected as attractive and unattractive stimulus subjects for creating the profile pictures in the subsequent empirical investigation.

**3.1.2 Pretest on expertise and trustworthiness**

The empirical investigation included posts and profile information exposing the influencer as expert/non expert and trustworthy/untrustworthy. To test the intended stimulus material, a second pretest \( (n = 85) \) was carried out. The participants were presented with post and profile information exposing the influencer as either trustworthy or untrustworthy and either expert or non-expert.

Expertise was rated on a five-item Likert-type scale adapted from Peetz (2012). Trustworthiness was rated on a five-item Likert-type scale adapted from Ohanian (1990).

To assess the quality of the expertise and trustworthiness construct, a factor analysis using varimax rotation was performed. Beforehand, factor analysis confirmed the appropriateness of the set of items (Expertise: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion = 0.901, \( \text{Blartlett's test} = 0.000 \); Trustworthiness: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion = 0.848, \( \text{Blartlett's test} = 0.000 \)) (Dziuban and Shirkey, 1974). Subsequently, the item variables were found to have a high importance for their respective constructs (Expertise: factor loadings = 0.893–0.956; Trustworthiness: factor loadings = 0.778–0.921) (Kline, 2014). The contribution of the item variables to the
explanation of the total statistical scattering was high (Expertise: average variance extracted: 87.307%; Trustworthiness: average variance extracted: 86.249%) (Brosius, 2013; Hair, 1995). An internal consistency was obtained, and the set of item variables was found to be suitable for measuring the factor (Expertise: Cronbach’s α = 0.964; Trustworthiness: Cronbach’s α = 0.960) (Nunnally, 1978).

To assess the differences in perceived expertise and trustworthiness, two ANOVAs were executed. The ANOVA for expertise was significant (p < 0.000). The difference between the low (M = 2.020) and high expertise stimulus (M = 3.814) was M_Diff = 1.795 (SE = 0.049). The ANOVA for trustworthiness was similarly found to be significant (p < 0.000). The difference between the low (M = 1.949) and high trustworthiness stimulus (M = 3.257) was M_Diff = 1.308 (SE = 0.065). Hence, a successful manipulation was confirmed.

3.2 Subjects, materials and procedure

3.2.1 Product category

The investigation was based on a fictitious scenario in which HUGO BOSS AG planned to present its entry-range brand BOSS by means of influencers after having conducted a new orientation of its brand portfolio for the spring/summer 2018 term.

A pair of jeans was the product to be endorsed. Because a pair of jeans is a gender-specific product, an adjustment to the influencers’ and participants’ genders was considered to be relevant. Performing this adjustment ensured that the product version for (fe)males was presented by a (fe)male influencer to (fe)male participants. Otherwise, it might have been confusing if an influencer had communicated about his or her experience with an item of clothing designed for a member of the opposite gender.

3.2.2 Study design

The study had a 2 (high versus low attractiveness) × 2 (high versus low expertise) × 2 (high versus low trustworthiness) experimental design.

The manipulation occurred by means of influencer Facebook profiles with an integrated post endorsing a pair of jeans by BOSS. Facebook was chosen because this social network allows for a focus on the elements that are of high relevance for this study, specifically, the profile picture of the influencer, the comments and the profile information (compared to other networks such as Instagram or Pinterest, where the emphasis lies more strongly on the image-based staging of the product) (Lin et al., 2018). Through the pictorial and textual elements of these profiles and posts, eight combinations of the three requirements were conveyed to the participants – attractiveness (high versus low), expertise (high versus low) and trustworthiness (high versus low) – as described in the following (Appendix). The stimulus material is based on the results of the pretests in Section 4.1:

- To vary attractiveness, the pictures of the attractive and unattractive female and male individuals selected in the pretest were used as profile pictures.
- Expertise relates to the endorser’s ability to accurately select elegant and stylish clothing. According to the aforementioned elaborations on expertise, this requirement can be manipulated by means of the influencer’s fashion-related education. Hence, high expertise was signaled by revealing that the influencer studied fashion design in a master’s program at a prestigious and exclusive fashion academy in Düsseldorf, Germany, and had won the renowned Audi Fashion Award. Influencers with low expertise stated they studied computer science. This field of study has no connection to fashion; moreover, students of this subject are stereotyped as badly dressed nerds with no interest in their outward appearance (Garcia-Crespo et al., 2008).

- Building on the aforementioned findings that a central driver of trustworthiness is selflessness (Walster et al., 1966), this requirement was manipulated as follows. Influencers with high trustworthiness presented the product in a well-balanced way including both praise and (slight) criticism. They stressed the product was loaned to them by the brand and would be returned to the brand after the endorsement. It became apparent they were intrinsically motivated to test the product and enjoy discovering its strengths and weaknesses. Influencers with low trustworthiness presented the product in an excessively positive way that seemed implausible and gave the impression of being an attempt to con their followers into buying the product. Moreover, it became clear that the influencers were allowed to keep the product and reaped handsome financial rewards for their endorsement.

3.2.3 Questionnaire

The data were collected via a web survey that was shared on research platforms. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: In the first step, the participants’ demographic data (most notably, gender) were collected. In the second step, the participants were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental groups. They were shown the profile of an influencer of the same gender with an integrated post endorsing a pair of jeans by BOSS. The profile and post conveyed one of the eight combinations of attractiveness (high versus low), expertise (high versus low) and trustworthiness (high versus low), as described in the previous paragraph.

Based on the stimulus material viewed by the participants, they were asked to assess the influencer’s level of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (for manipulation checks). In the third step, the participants’ views on brand image (H1), brand satisfaction (H2) and brand trust (H3) as well as purchase intention (H4) and price premium (H5) in relation to the profile and post were queried.

3.2.4 Measures

Attractiveness and expertise were rated on two Likert-type scales with five items each adapted from Peetz (2012). Trustworthiness was queried by a five-item Likert-type scale adapted from Ohanian (1990). Likert-type scales by Wiedmann et al. (2014) were used to assess brand satisfaction (two items), brand image (two items), brand trust (three items), purchase intention (three items) and price premium (two items).

The quality of the scales was assessed by means of a factor analysis. For all constructs encompassing more than two items, the value of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion was 0.728–0.910. For all constructs that included two items, the value of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion was 0.5. However, if a small
number of items is used, such a relatively low value is uncritical (Bühner, 2008). Furthermore, $p_{\text{Harman's}} = 0.000$ applied for all constructs. Thus, all items were suitable for building the respective factors. All sets of item variables were of high importance for their respective construct (factor loadings = 0.790–0.978) (Kline, 2014). For all constructs, the contribution of the respective item variables to the explanation of the total statistical scattering was high (average variance extracted: 76.920%–95.717%) (Brosius, 2013; Hair, 1995). Internal consistency was given for all factors, and the sets of item variables were suitable for building the respective factor (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.923$–0.961) (Nunnally, 1978). Hence, all scales proved to be appropriate for measuring their respective constructs.

3.3 Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks were carried out to verify whether the manipulation of the stimulus material in terms of attractiveness ($N_{\text{Attractive}} = 141, N_{\text{Unattractive}} = 147$), expertise ($N_{\text{High-Expertise}} = 142, N_{\text{Low-Expertise}} = 146$) and trustworthiness ($N_{\text{High-Trustworthiness}} = 142, N_{\text{Low-Trustworthiness}} = 146$) was perceived as intended. For this purpose, three ANOVAs were performed to compare the groups that fulfilled the respective requirements and those that did not. Thus, the respective group assignment was the independent variable. The respective evaluation of the requirement was the dependent variable. The ANOVAs all ascertained significant differences between the compared groups ($M_{\text{Diff}} = 0.801$–1.175, $p < 0.000$), thereby confirming successful manipulation.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Sample characteristics

The data collection was conducted in Germany via a randomized online student survey from February through May 2018 and shared on research platforms. Data on 319 participants were collected. After running the rigorous algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers by means of criteria speed and consistency (Leiner, 2013), valid data from 288 participants (70.3% female) were used. The participants’ average age was 25 years (18–25 years: 47.2%; 26–35 years: 41.5%; 36–45 years: 5.0%; 46–55 years: 4.4%; 56–65 years: 1.3%; 66–75 years: 0.3%).

Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses. SmartPLS software, a leading application for PLS path modeling analysis, was used. The evaluation of the model followed a two-step approach of measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation before the results were analyzed.

3.4.2 Measurement model evaluation

For all reflective measurement constructs, the factor loadings must be examined. Item reliability is considered adequate when the factor loading is greater than 0.707 on its respective construct (Hulland, 1999). A bootstrapping procedure indicated that the factor loadings were 0.821–0.978 ($p < 0.001$) across the set of items (Table 1).

The average variance extracted measures the amount of variance a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount of variance explained by measurement error. A model can be considered convergent when the average variance extracted surpasses 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In this model, the average variance extracted was 0.766–0.957 across the set of constructs (Table 1).

Composite reliability assesses the correlation between indicators and constructs; thus, it reflects whether a factor is suitable for explaining its components. It should be greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). In the present case, the composite reliability was 0.942–0.978 across the set of constructs (Table 1).

Discriminant validity indicates the extent to which a construct is different from others. The level of discriminant validity can be determined by means of the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and the exclusion of cross-loadings (Hair et al., 2014a). The Fornell–Larcker Criterion, according to which the average variance of each latent construct must outpace the construct’s highest squared correlation with any other latent construct (Hair et al., 2012), was similarly fulfilled.

3.4.3 Structural model evaluation

To evaluate the goodness of fit of a model, the coefficient of determination ($R^2$) of every endogenous construct should exceed the value of 0.19 in all cases (Marcoulides, 2009). In the present model, $R^2$ was 0.264–0.726 across the set of endogenous constructs (Table 1), thus fulfilling the criterion.

The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was evaluated by Stone–Geisser’s $Q^2$, which should be larger than zero (Hair et al., 2014b). A blindfolding procedure showed that, in the present model, $Q^2$ was 0.246–0.643 (Table 1) across the set of endogenous constructs. Thus, the predictive relevance was confirmed.

To prevent redundancy, the degree of multicollinearity of the predictors indicating a specific dependent variable in the model should be evaluated. The risk of multicollinearity is low if the variance inflation factor (VIF) value is below the threshold of five (Kline, 2016). In the present model, the VIF was 1.274–2.635 (Table 2). Hence, the assumption was fulfilled.

A core part of a structural measurement model is the hypothesis test. In this context, the path coefficients and significance levels must be considered (Table 2). Path coefficients express the relationship between two latent constructs. A path coefficient can be viewed as being influential if its value exceeds 0.100 (Lohmöller, 1989). For more rigorous, path coefficients should be at least as high as 0.200 (Kock and Hadaya, 2018). The path coefficients were calculated by a bootstrapping procedure, which yielded the following results. The path coefficient between attractiveness and brand satisfaction accounted for 0.167 ($p < 0.01$), yielding partial support for $H1a$. The path coefficients linking attractiveness to brand image and brand trust were 0.241 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.211 ($p < 0.001$), respectively. Thus, $H1b$ and $H1c$ were supported. Concerning expertise, the path coefficient to brand satisfaction was 0.163 ($p < 0.01$), partly supporting $H2a$. The path coefficients from expertise to brand image and brand trust were beneath the threshold of 0.100 and not significant. $H2b$ and $H2c$ were consequently rejected. The path coefficients from trustworthiness to brand satisfaction, brand image and brand trust were 0.315 ($p < 0.001$), 0.352 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.433 ($p < 0.001$), respectively. Therefore, $H3a$–$H3c$ were supported. The path coefficients from brand satisfaction to purchase intention and price premium were 0.298 ($p < 0.01$) and 0.285 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, supporting $H4a$ and $H4b$. Finally, the path coefficients from brand image to purchase intention and price
**Results and discussion**

The results show that social media managers seeking to implement an influencer campaign should primarily pay attention to influencers’ trustworthiness, followed by their attractiveness. The importance of expertise is negligible. Overall, this study allows brand managers to gain more fine-grained insight into the specific effects of the requirements. Trustworthiness has the strongest and most significant impact on brand image, brand trust and brand satisfaction. Attractiveness has a significant effect on brand image and brand trust; brand satisfaction is influenced only at a low significance level by attractiveness. Finally, expertise has a small effect only on brand satisfaction. Expertise does not have an effect on brand image or brand trust. Brand managers can use this information to prioritize specific requirements depending on the goal of their endorsement.

Brand image and brand satisfaction also have an effect on price premium and purchase intention. This suggests that attractiveness and trustworthiness might have an indirect effect on price premium and purchase intention. As influencer marketing is aimed at persuading consumers to purchase the advertised goods (Lee and Park, 2014), and purchase intentions are a critical predictor of actual purchase behavior (Kalwani and Silk, 1982; Notani, 1997), enhancing audiences’ perceptions of endorser trustworthiness and attractiveness leading to an advantageous brand image and brand satisfaction could lead customers to ultimately purchase the advertised goods. However, to be able to claim this with confidence, a pursuant investigation on indirect effects should be carried out.

### Table 1: Evaluation of reflective measurement model and structural model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>Level of significance (t-statistics)</th>
<th>Average variance extracted</th>
<th>Composite reliability</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$Q^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attractiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_1</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td>60.652*</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_2</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>35.371*</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_3</td>
<td>0.904</td>
<td>55.084*</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_4</td>
<td>0.827</td>
<td>37.116*</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_5</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>59.939*</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expertise</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_1</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td>98.885*</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_2</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>103.162*</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_3</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td>106.594*</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_4</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>52.892*</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_5</td>
<td>0.918</td>
<td>77.365*</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trustworthiness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_1</td>
<td>0.904</td>
<td>66.618*</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_2</td>
<td>0.938</td>
<td>96.111*</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_3</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>111.819*</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_4</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td>98.226*</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_5</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>117.501*</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand satisfaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS_1</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>184.256*</td>
<td>0.929</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>0.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS_2</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>164.355*</td>
<td>0.929</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>0.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand image</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI_1</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>135.263*</td>
<td>0.931</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI_2</td>
<td>0.966</td>
<td>154.356*</td>
<td>0.931</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT_1</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>194.194*</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT_2</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>169.862*</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT_3</td>
<td>0.899</td>
<td>59.211*</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purchase intention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI_1</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>104.997*</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI_2</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>102.625*</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI_3</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td>81.728*</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price premium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP_1</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>237.172*</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP_2</td>
<td>0.979</td>
<td>284.976*</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** *Significant at level $p < 0.001$

*premium* were 0.597 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.570 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, in support of $H_{5a}$ and $H_{5b}$. 

---

**Journal of Product & Brand Management**

Volume 30 · Number 5 · 2021 · 707–725

Klaus-Peter Wiedmann and Walter von Mettenheim

---

**Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise**

---

---
The results of this study can be compared with those of the previous studies on the Source-Credibility Model in general and with celebrities in particular. First, it is noteworthy that in early versions of the Source-Credibility Model, only two requirements were included, specifically, expertise and trustworthiness (Bowers and Phillips, 1967). The results of this study suggest that for influencers, the model could also be narrowed down to two requirements: attractiveness and trustworthiness. In contrast to the results of this study, the (general) findings of McGuire (1985) indicated that expertise was the most important dimension of source credibility in a general sense. Amos et al. (2015) carried out a meta-study on numerous requirements for celebrity endorsement. With regard to the requirements of the Source-Credibility Model, they ranked trustworthiness second, expertise third and attractiveness fourth (the greatest importance was ascribed to “negative celebrity information”). The comparably high importance of expertise is also highlighted by the findings of Premeaux (2005, 2009), who argued that, for celebrities, expertise was a particularly crucial requirement that could compensate for weaknesses in terms of trustworthiness. However, the results may be supported by the (general) finding of McGinnies and Ward (1980) that a trustworthy communicator is more persuasive regardless of whether he or she is an expert. Overall, the results show that the requirements are ranked differently for influencers and celebrities. This is an important note for brand managers designing influencer campaigns because, in the absence of models on influencer, they often use models developed for celebrities (Childers et al., 2019).

### 4. Implications

#### 4.1 Implications for management and research

Influencers could refine their objectives in light of the results of this study. Virkkunen and Norhio (2019) found that social influencers estimated that the most important requirements to their success were being accessible, authentic, honest and social. Abert et al. (2019) identified trust, continuity, variation, competence development and network as crucial requirements to success from the perspective of social influencers. Virkkunen and Norhio (2019) as well as Abert et al. (2019) have thus demonstrated that influencers have well recognized the importance of trustworthiness. On the other hand, attractiveness seems to be a requirement that they do not give enough considerations. Finally, influencers seem also to assume that expertise is an imported requirement to success [reflected by competence development in Abert et al.’s (2019) study]. In light of the results of this study, influencers can be advised to care more for attractiveness and less for expertise.

The results could also serve as a decision support for brand managers. A study by Childers et al. (2019) has developed an overall concept about how influencer marketing is handled currently. Brand managers are still struggling with the questions of what influencer marketing is, what its value is and how it should be managed. They partially use traditional advertising models, which obviously produce some limitations with reference to influencer marketing, notably regarding credibility. Overall, huge uncertainty exists among practitioners about the use of social influencers. Credibility has been recognized as a success requirement; however, practitioners are not very comprehensive or clear about how to achieve it (Childers et al., 2019). It should be noted that practitioner-oriented guides and indices of influencers have been developed. These indices regularly focus on requirements related to requirements that can very easily be expressed in figures (e.g. number of followers, engagement rate with the community, number of mentions and the ratio of the number of comments/likes to the number of followers) (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Arous et al., 2020). For example, the social influencer index by Aggrawal et al. (2018) considers engagement, reach, sentiment and growth. Arora et al.’s (2019) index uses 39 requirements stemming from the categories Overall Footprint, Engagements and Outreach, Hourly Engagement Velocity, Daily Engagement, Velocity Audience Sentiment and Posting Rate. However, this set of requirements has been found to be often insufficient (Arous et al., 2020).

Merely adhering to the aforementioned requirements may entice brand managers to make suboptimal decisions. Fred
(2015) found that the size of an influencer’s viewership is negatively related with his or her trustworthiness. Bearing in mind that trustworthiness is a very relevant requirement according to the result of this study, selecting an influencer with a high viewership may hence also have negative consequences for the brand. This pinpoints the necessity of considering and analyzing the “entire picture” of requirements.

Ki and Kim (2019) also argue that practitioners set suboptimal priorities. They provide the example of an influencer who has high expertise in his/her specific field and has amassed a very high number of followers, 50 million, but might nevertheless not deploy the best marketing effects because his/her content is not visually appealing. They suggest that practitioners should instead select another influencer with visually appealing content, even if that influencer has fewer followers.

The results of this study support this line of reasoning and suggest that the two requirements of trustworthiness and attractiveness should be integrated into the set of relevant requirements that should be fulfilled by influencers, particularly in terms of influencer indices (perhaps as antecedent requirement) or suggestions to practitioners on how to achieve credibility. The requirement of expertise can be given less consideration.

The high importance of trustworthiness may actually be good news for social media managers. As selflessness is a major driver of trustworthiness (Walster et al., 1966), social media managers should select influencers who act in a selfless way. Suitable influencers should endorse a product because they are sincerely convinced of its worth and not (merely) because they will be paid. This result means that the best influencers may be those to whom the contracting brand must pay the least money, which represents considerable savings potential. Today, influencer campaigns without financial remuneration are realistic (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018). Moreover, to appear more trustworthy, influencers should always communicate through two-sided messages [consisting of both positives and negatives (Kamins et al., 1989)]. A further driver of trustworthiness in influencer marketing is transparency. It can be achieved by giving full information about products, the formation of opinions and partnerships (Audrezet et al., 2018). In future research, it could be investigated whether language features affect trustworthiness (Larrimore et al., 2011).

The attractiveness of the influencer is a further requirement to which social media managers should pay attention. They can be advised to evaluate influencers’ attractiveness through pretests or scientific algorithms (Bemini-Hodel et al., 2017). Influencers should signal attractiveness to their followers, e.g. by dressing in an advantageous way or by using professional photos that show them at their best (Lou and Yuan, 2019). The relatively high importance of attractiveness may be rooted in the fact that although BOSS is a luxury brand, it is also an entry-range brand offered at an affordable price, which may have led the participants to assume a moderate-involvement situation. Concerning avatars, under moderate-involvement conditions, attractiveness was more persuasive than expertise (Holzwarth et al., 2006). In further research, the importance of attractiveness and expertise could be reappraised under high-involvement conditions. Finally, although attractiveness is commonly equated with facial attractiveness (Patzer, 1983), in the specific case of clothing, other potential expressions of attractiveness, such as body attractiveness or even “inner beauty” (Langmeyer and Shank, 1994), could also be considered.

The close-to-minuscule importance of expertise means that social media managers need hardly be concerned with this requirement. This finding is surprising and counterintuitive against the backdrop of the abovementioned studies’ general findings and findings specifically related to celebrities. Four possible assumptions for the surprisingly low importance of expertise and the lack of support for most of the related hypotheses in the specific context of this research may be provided by the following frameworks, shedding light on the case-dependent relevance of attractiveness and expertise:

- Social adaptation theory (Kahle and Homer, 1985) suggests that the adaptive significance of information determines its impact. Thus, information has adaptive significance in guiding a consumer’s brand evaluation and choice. Kamins (1990) refined social adaptation theory into his attractiveness match-up hypothesis for celebrity endorsers. This implies that the message conveyed by the image of an endorser and the image of the product should converge to create advantageous product- or ad-related effects. Hence, an attractive endorser could serve as an effective source of information for a product that is attractiveness-related. For an attractiveness-unrelated product, the match-up between endorsers’ physical attractiveness and relationship to the attractiveness of the product is not present, and the success of the endorsement thus has to be motivated by other requirements such as expertise (Smith and Hunt, 1978). An unattractive endorser could then even be more advantageous (Bower and Landreth, 2001; Caballero and Solomon, 1984). However, these considerations must be regarded with caution, because Till and Busler (2000) could not empirically support them. Overall, Kamins (1990) attractiveness match-up hypothesis may also be applied in the context of this research as BOSS’ products are attractiveness-related. In future research, an investigation into the case-dependent relevance of attractiveness and expertise might be carried out.

- A further reason for the low importance of expertise might be that consumers might consider an influencer as a “person stemming from the middle of the society” (compared to a traditional celebrity endorser) (Wiedmann et al., 2010). After all, influencers not only endorse products but also communicate about their everyday lives and offer the possibility of personal contact. These characteristics create a feeling of nearness. Hence, consumers might not expect to be provided with an expert endorsement by a professional product tester. Instead, they might expect the influencer’s view to be one of an unprofessional user. This presumption is further substantiated by the findings of Huang and Chen (2006) who argue that consumers rely more on the perceptions of other consumers than on the perceptions of experts.
• Lou and Yuan (2019) assume that influencers are by default attributed a certain degree of expertise; therefore, this requirement would not be a parameter that affects the perceivers’ reactions to their content.

Overall, practitioners should continuously monitor consumers’ perceptions of influencers’ attractiveness and trustworthiness (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Further matters of interest might be the possible interconnections. In terms of celebrities, the findings of Friedman et al. (1978) indicate correlations among all three requirements at different significance levels.

4.2 Conclusion
This investigation has provided practitioners with an overview on which of the requirements of the Source-Credibility Model are relevant for influencers and their hierarchy. Unlike the extant work (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Jin and Muqaddam, 2019), it has focused on the impacts of the requirements on the brand. It was revealed that influencers trustworthiness primarily and attractiveness secondarily can positively affect brand satisfaction, image and trust. Brand satisfaction and image are positively related to purchase intention and price premium. In contrast, the relevance of expertise is almost nil. Social media managers should be aware of this hierarchy.

The results contribute to the clarification of contradictions between extant studies (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Martensen et al., 2018). Overall, it becomes apparent that attractiveness and trustworthiness are relevant requirements that should find their proper place next to traditional, more numeric requirements such as number of followers. As noted, merely using the traditionally established requirements might entice brand managers to make suboptimal decisions.

This study joins the collection of works that have analyzed the Source-Credibility Model in partial or total form for diverse relevant requirements. It shows that in the Source-Credibility Model in partial or total form for diverse relevant requirements are interconnected and whether there are further other types of products (products from industries other than fashion and with different involvement), whether the requirements are interconnected and whether there are further relevant requirements.

References


Peetz, T.B. (2012), Celebrity Athlete Endorser Effectiveness: Construction and Validation of a Scale, PhD Dissertation, University of NV, Las Vegas, NV.


**Further reading**

### Appendix

#### Table A1 Stimulus material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
<th>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin</th>
<th>Barlett’s Test</th>
<th>Average Variance extracted</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a) Attractiveness scale (AT) adapted from Peetz (2012) (five items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_1: [Name of social influencer] is attractive</td>
<td>0.933</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>76.920%</td>
<td>0.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_2: [Name of social influencer] is charismatic</td>
<td>0.790</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_3: [Name of social influencer] is good-looking</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_4: The physical makeup of [name of social influencer] is admirable</td>
<td>0.806</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT_5: [Name of social influencer] is beautiful</td>
<td>0.917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b) Expertise scale (EX) adapted from Peetz (2012) (five items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_1: [Name of social influencer] has a good understanding of fashion and style</td>
<td>0.917</td>
<td>0.910</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>84.526%</td>
<td>0.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_2: [Name of social influencer] is an expert in fashion and style</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_3: [Name of social influencer] is knowledgeable in fashion and style</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_4: [Name of social influencer] is qualified in fashion and style</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX_5: [Name of social influencer] has experience in fashion and style</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c) Trustworthiness scale (TW) adapted from Ohanian (1990) (five items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_1: [Name of social influencer] is dependable</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>86.521%</td>
<td>0.961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_2: [Name of social influencer] is honest</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_3: [Name of social influencer] is reliable</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_4: [Name of social influencer] is sincere</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW_5: [Name of social influencer] is trustworthy</td>
<td>0.938</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d) Brand Satisfaction Scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (two items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS_1: . . . I would be very satisfied with the brand BOSS</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>92.895%</td>
<td>0.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS_2: . . . the brand BOSS would meet l’ expectations absolutely</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e) Brand image scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (two items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI_1: . . . I would like the brand BOSS very much</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>93.111%</td>
<td>0.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI_2: . . . I would find the brand BOSS to be really likable</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>f) Brand trust scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (three items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT_1: . . . I would trust the brand BOSS very much</td>
<td>0.962</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>88.649%</td>
<td>0.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT_2: . . . I would find the brand BOSS to be very good</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT_3: . . . I would rely very much on the brand BOSS</td>
<td>0.904</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>g) Purchase intention scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (three items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI_1: . . . I would be ready to buy products by the brand BOSS in the future</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>0.750</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>88.678%</td>
<td>0.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI_2: . . . I would have the intention to buy products by the brand BOSS in the future</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI_3: . . . I would plan to buy products by the brand BOSS if they have the financial possibility</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>h) Price premium scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (two items)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP_1: . . . I would be willing to pay a higher price to buy a product by the brand BOSS</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>95.717</td>
<td>0.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP_2: . . . the products of the brand BOSS would be worth a higher price than other products to me</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A2  Item table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expertise</th>
<th>Post of the influencer</th>
<th>Commenter</th>
<th>Reply of the influencer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>My review of the BOSS Jeans Red Cast Denim/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans – a great pair of jeans, with small weaknesses</td>
<td>Thank you very much, it is really cool that you report objectively and balanced on the jeans with all the strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>Exactly, I get the products only on loan. It is much more fun to test the products objectively and to discover strengths and weaknesses. If I got the product as a gift, it would be something like bribery to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>My review of the BOSS Jeans Red Cast Denim/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans – Best Jeans ever!!!</td>
<td>Need to get it!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>My review of the BOSS Jeans Red Cast Denim/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans – Best Jeans ever!!!</td>
<td>Thank you very much, are there also negative things about these Jeans?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>My review of the BOSS Jeans Red Cast Denim/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans – Best Jeans ever!!!</td>
<td>Reply of the influencer: No, they are absolutely perfect. Go and get one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About the authors

Klaus-Peter Wiedmann is a Full Chaired Professor of Marketing and Management and the Director of the Institute of Marketing and Management at the Leibniz University Hannover, Germany. His main subjects of research and teaching as well as consulting are societal marketing, strategic marketing, international marketing, innovation & technology marketing, brand & reputation management, corporate identity, corporate culture & change management, consumer behavior, marketing research & controlling and online & mobile marketing. In these fields, Professor Wiedmann has realized numerous research and consulting projects which also helped to publish widely with over 600 academic publications. Some of the publications received an award from important international organizations. Moreover, Professor Wiedmann has been appointed as Editorial Board Member of five international journals.

Walter von Mettenheim is Research Associate and PhD student at the Chair of Marketing & Management at Leibniz University Hannover. His main subjects of research and teaching are celebrity and social influencer marketing, luxury marketing, brand management and B2B marketing. Walter von Mettenheim is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: vonmettenheim@m2.uni-hannover.de

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com