Winter 2020

Keeping Social Media Influencers Influential: Preserving Perceptions of Authenticity While Brand Dropping

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KEEPING SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS INFLUENTIAL:

PRESERVING PERCEPTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

WHILE BRAND DROPPING

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Business Administration – Marketing

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

March 2020

ABSTRACT

Marketers' use of *social media influencers* (SMIs)—individuals who use various social media channels to discuss a particular topic (e.g., fashion, health) or offer entertainment (e.g., comedy) and, in doing so, attract followers—to promote products, known as "influencer marketing," is a widely employed and effective strategic tool (Linqia 2018). In fact, SMIs, who can be conceptualized as *human brands* (Thompson 2006), have a greater audience reach and dialogue generation compared to that of celebrities (Crimson Hexagon 2015). Further, consumers perceive SMIs' content as trustworthy (Scott 2015), which is likely due to them being perceived as highly authentic. According to Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard (2018) SMIs use strategies to remain *passionately authentic* and *transparently authentic.*

Despite their popularity and perceived trustworthiness, SMIs face a challenge when they mention, recommend, or endorse brands within their digital content. Doing so may lead to perceptions that the influencer is *passionately inauthentic*, as consumers may presume these acts to be commercially driven. Thus, by incorporating influencer marketing, SMIs may compromise their perceived *passionate authenticity*.

When SMIs mention brands within their digital content, they sometimes choose to infer whether or not they have a business relationship with the brand via a *disclosure.* SMIs' means of, or choice of wording for *disclosures* varies. Therefore, consumers will likely perceive SMIs as more *transparently authentic* when SMIs disclose unambiguously, since doing so implies complete forthrightness.

SMIs are now required to *disclose,* or explicitly mention when they were paid to promote a brand (Johnson 2017). However, the FTC's rules are somewhat ambiguous and perhaps unfair. Therefore, SMIs may or may not be explicitly disclosing their true relationship with brands they post about due to the sheer uncertainty and/or unfairness inherent in the FTC's endorsement guidance (FTC 2015).

SMIs who explicitly disclose are presumably perceived as possessing high *transparent authenticity*; however, such explicit disclosures presumably result in consumer perceptions of low *passionate authenticity*. This brings about a challenge to SMIs who partner with brands. This dissertation will answer the following question: How can social media influencers manage consumers' perceptions of their human brand authenticity while engaging in influencer marketing?

APPROVAL FOR SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION

DEDICATION

To my mother, Jennifer Dodge Walter, for being a hard-working role model and for her countless sacrifices to ensure my success. For her immeasurable support and understanding. I am so very appreciative. I love you mommy!

And, to Ruby Josephine, Sutton Flynn, and Harrison Jack, for being my most favorite niece and nephews. For your ability to bring a smile to my face in the midst of overwhelming stress. *You are my sunshine… …You'll never know dears, how much I love you…*

And, to my baby brother, Specialist, Jacob Paul Booysen, who proudly serves our country in the United States of America Army. #Merica

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Julie Guidry Moulard, where do I start? Thank you for being such an amazing mentor—thank you for your guidance, wisdom, advice, patience, and friendship; thank you for all of the lengthy discussions—for all the time you devoted to my success (and sometimes, my sanity). For jumping *all-in* and traveling all the way to New York City to attend a practitioner conference just to be sure I was *on the right track*. And for so much more before and after that trip that I'm leaving out. I'm not sure I'll ever be able to thank you enough, but I am forever grateful.

Thank you to Dr. Barry J. Babin. Thank you for serving on my committee and for sharing so much knowledge and insight. You inspire and spark interest throughout your seminar deliveries, and you certainly do make a *really great administrator*[1]. (Your parties weren't too bad either!)

Thank you to Dr. Douglas Amyx and Dr. Gwarlann de Kerviler for serving on my committee as well, and for each of your unique offerings, insight, and assistance throughout the completion of this research.

Thank you to the entire LA Tech Marketing & Analysis Department faculty for guiding me through this extensive learning process. And to all of the COB DBA students, both my seniors and juniors, who are always there to listen and encourage! Extra special thank you to Sabinah Wanjugu. #myfavoriteKenyan #theMouTwo

[1] http://www.fnutl.com/ams/Babin.mp4

Thank you to the following persons for your part in my research and success:

- Dr. Janna Parker, for countless and continued advice and moral support;
- The Louisiana Tech University, Department of Student Activities for awarding my data collection grant (main study);
- Mrs. Christina Lacobee Vogler (@christinadenea) for liking Megan Marie's Instagram posts, to authentically turn the hearts red! (pretest two and main study);
- Scott Moulard for letting me borrow your wife throughout countless, lengthy phone meetings that lasted well beyond the time at which she should have been getting *dressed and ready*! ☺
- Ms. Serena Bethle, MBA & Graphic Designer, for image editing (pretest one) and cat sitting throughout my travels to Louisiana to defend my dissertation;
- And, Dr. Monica B. Fine for hand modeling (pretest one).

Thank you to my family and friends for listening and pretending to understand. As a final reminder, there is no way you are happier than I that this is finally DONE!

Last, but not least, thank you to my beloved felines, Fitzgerald, Fancy, Palomino, and Penny, for withstanding years of near neglect. Momma finally, for real, has a little more time for you. But, you still have to sleep on your side of the bed! #RIPfrank #adoptDontshop #spayAndNeuterYourPets

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Importance and Relevance of Influencer Marketing and Social Media Influencers

> While every blogger has their own concept of what it means to run a business and partner with brands, I pick my sponsorships carefully because authenticity is incredibly important to me. This means collaborating with brands I naturally wear and use – or new ones I've tried and love. It's also about introducing new items that I think you guys would enjoy. Transparency is everything to me, so I always disclose my sponsored posts by placing a very clear disclaimer at the bottom of every sponsored post. I feel that this is the best way to be honest about sponsored content!— Krystal Faircloth, Owner and Operator of *a pinch of Lovely* (a Pinch of Lovely 2018).

One of the latest developments in integrated marketing communications and advertising is the strategic incorporation of social media influencers. *Social media influencers (SMIs)* are individuals that "possess greater than average potential to influence others due to such attributes as frequency of communication, personal persuasiveness or size of—and centrality to—a social network" (Zietek 2016, 9). Social media influencers use various social media channels to discuss a particular topic (fashion, health, etc.) or offer entertainment and, in doing so, attract followers. Many influencers have dramatically increased their audience size in recent years, having the potential power to reach millions around the world within minutes. Vlogger Logan Paul has 16.3 million Instagram followers, and fashion blogger Chiara Ferragni has 17.2 million Instagram followers (Instagram 2019a; Instagram 2019b).

"Social networks are a good option for advertisers because of the advanced targeting options, reliable conversion tracking, and prevalence on mobile" (Marketing Land 2015a). Brand managers are realizing the potential of using social media influencers to reach consumers. For example, Dunkin' Donuts recently paid vlogger Logan Paul $200,000 for one day's worth of work to endorse the donut brand within one of his spontaneous vlogs (Paul and Whitaker 2016). Marketers' use of social media influencers to promote products and services, known as "influencer marketing," is becoming a widely employed strategic tool (Launch Metrics 2015; Zahay and Roberts 2017). Industry studies find that about 85 percent of brands expect to launch campaigns with social media influencers over the next year (Launch Metrics 2015) and that 94 percent of the marketing managers using social media influencer tactics believe such strategies are effective (Linqia 2016).

While brand managers and marketing practitioners recognize the relevance and importance of incorporating *influencer marketing* tactics within their integrated marketing communication channels (Linqia 2016; Linqia 2017; Linqia 2018), marketing academics are lagging. There is very little marketing literature within the realm of influencer marketing. And, research pertaining to *social media influencers* is even more insufficient (Godey et al. 2016; Lim et al. 2017). The marketing discipline must acknowledge influencer marketing as the modern, strategic means of integrated marketing communications and advertising by conducting research to advance our knowledge within this area.

> *It's easy to get jaded sometimes, to hear the hype around digital and social media and chalk it up as the next shiny thing to happen quickly to be replaced by something else. But make no mistake. The tools – the Twitters and the Facebooks and the Snapchats – will come and go. They always do. (Remember, Yahoo dominated search until as recently as 1995).*
> *In spite of that, the character and nature of a real-time, personalized and individually-driven web is with us for good* (Sysomos 2017, 11).

1.2 Gaps in the Literature

Presently, the marketing literature has not at all adequately recognized influencer marketing's vast presence. Influencer marketing tactics, social media influencers, SMI-brand partnerships, SMI-brand campaigns, and strategies for such partnerships/ campaigns are areas ripe with research opportunity. Only very recently has the marketing literature even acknowledged influencer marketing and social media influencers (Woods 2016; Godey et al. 2016; Lim et al. 2017; Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018; Lou and Yuan 2019). That said, the gaps in the literature extend well beyond the scope of this dissertation.

This dissertation focuses on consumer perceptions of social media influencers, more specifically, consumer perceptions of social media influencers' human-brand authenticity. Two distinct types of authenticity— *passionate authenticity* and *transparent authenticity*— are focal constructs throughout this dissertation. Additionally, this dissertation anticipates especially interesting and unique relationships exist between each type of authenticity and social media influencers' mandated obligation to *disclose* commercially driven brand promotions throughout self-created and self-published social media content. This focus is more fully elaborated on within the remainder of this chapter. Table 1 contains a list of recent, (a) academic and (b) non-academic, yet well-known and credible publications within the realm of influencer marketing. The list is limited to those publications that (a) provide an overview of influencer marketing and/ or social media influencers, and (b) are especially relevant to the focus of this dissertation.

Table 1: Recent and Relative *Influencer Marketing* Publications— With a Focus on Social Media Influencers, Disclosures, and Authenticity

INFLUENCER MARKETING PUBLICATIONS		
(a) ACADEMIC ARTICLE PUBLICATIONS		
AUTHORS & DATE OF PUB.	**TITLE OF ARTICLE & JOURNAL**	**FOCAL POINTS & KEY FINDINGS**
Godey et al. 2016	"Social Media Marketing Efforts of Luxury Brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior" *Journal of Business Research*	Social media marketing efforts have a significant positive effect on brand equity and on the two main dimensions of brand equity: brand awareness and brand image (5833).

van Reijmersdal et al. 2016	"Effects of Disclosing Sponsored Content in Blogs: How the Use of Resistance Strategies Mediates Effects on Persuasion" *American Behavioral Scientist*	This article presents two studies **examining the effects of disclosing** online native advertising (i.e., sponsored content in blogs) on people's brand attitude and purchase intentions (abstract).
Lim et al. 2017	"The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intention and the Mediation Effect of Customer Attitude" *Asian Journal of Business Research*	Compelling social media influencers were found to exert a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention (31).
Evans et al. 2017	"Disclosing Instagram Influencer Advertising: The Effects of Disclosure Language on Advertising Recognition, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intent" *Journal of Interactive Advertising*	The authors **examined the effect of disclosure language** in Instagram-based influencer advertising on ad recognition, brand attitude, purchase intention and sharing intention (abstract).
Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard, 2018	"Authenticity Under Threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation" *Journal of Business Research*	Consumers value influencers' intrinsic motivations and noncommercial orientation. Thus, SMI-brand collaborations may result in tensions for SMI authenticity management… …**Two authenticity management strategies emerged from the analysis: passionate and transparent authenticity** (abstract).

(b) NEWS / BUSINESS PUBLICATIONS

AUTHORS & DATE OF PUB.	TITLE OF ARTICLE	PUBLICATION	ELEMENTS OF INTEREST (DIRECT QUOTES; URL REFERENCES PROVIDED)
Shelly Banjo March 2008	***Marketing with Social Media***	*The Wall Street Journal*	Reaching out to bloggers and social-media sites can help small companies build buzz even when marketing budgets are small. These outlets also may be **useful for creating a dialogue** between your company and its customers.

URL: https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB120534841865230991			
Teresa M. Caro August 2013	***Yes, Marketers, You Should Pay Your Influencers***	*Harvard Business Review*	After all, if the influencer loves the brand and the fans love the influencer, then the fans will love the brand, right?... … To better understand the complex nature of the brand-influencer-fan relationship, we derived these guidelines from our research and experience: Don't underestimate an influencer's power; Look for influencers who actually like and use your products; **Don't fake it— To be effective, influencers need to be perceived as independent, *<u>authentic</u>* fans of the brand;** Compensate them.
URL: https://hbr.org/2013/08/yes-marketers-you-should-pay			
Elizabeth Holmes September 2013	***The New Style Influencers Are Digital:*** *Brands Court Stars with Active Audiences to Try Turning Followers into Shoppers*	*The Wall Street Journal*	Influencers with a smaller reach are a big deal. What they lack in audience size they make up for in engagement, meaning a greater share of their readers comment or otherwise interact with their posts. **Many influencers carve out a niche, whether expertise in a product type or a loyal regional following, and are paid with fees or freebies, <u>sometimes without *transparent disclosure*</u>.**
URL: https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-new-style-influencers-are-digital-1378854156			
Ben Zimmer April 2016	***The Growing Influence of 'Influencer'*** *–A social media byword goes back to Chaucer's era*	*The Wall Street Journal*	Social-media sites like Twitter and Instagram are full of lifestyle, fashion and beauty influencers, often joining with brands for "influencer marketing" opportunities. And as The Wall Street Journal recently reported, even stylish dogs can now be social-media influencers, or "dogfluencers," for short.
URL: https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-growing-influence-of-influencer-1461874150			

Brian Sutter April 2016	***What You Need to Know About Marketing with Influencers***	*Forbes*	The real driver of content marketing is to **attract and engage the right audience.** Building an audience usually takes time, but **there is one proven shortcut to building an audience – work with influencers.**
URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/briansutter/2016/04/08/what-you-need-to-know-about-marketing-with-influencers/#7d6a2369167b			
Kyle Sanders June 2016	***What Is the Future of Influencer Marketing?***	*Forbes*	According to Google Trends, interest in "influencer marketing" has steadily grown in the last few years.
URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/06/26/what-is-the-future-of-influencer-marketing/#1f6960d528ca			
Tom Ward June 2016	***This Is the Future of Influencer Marketing***	*Forbes*	**71% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase based on a social media reference.**
URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomward/2017/06/26/this-is-the-future-of-influencer-marketing/#60e7fd70142c			
Amy Callahan July 2017	***Stop Calling the Use of Celebrities "Influencer Marketing"***	*Huffington Post*	**Think about it.** Would you rather buy a product because someone like you used it and enjoyed it, or because someone famous posted an image and two sentence captions on their Instagram about it? **The buck stops here: Influencer marketing and celebrity endorsements are two very different marketing avenues and should be treated as such.**
URL: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stop-calling-the-use-of-celebrities-influencer-marketing_us_596e2131e4b07f87578e6c26			

Robert Haslehurst, Chris Randall and Noor Abdel-Samed August 2017	***How Consumer Brands Can Connect with Customers in a Changing Retail Landscape***	*Harvard Business Review*	**Keep the online conversation going.** If brands don't create a social media presence themselves, customers will create one for them… For instance, L'Oréal signed on 15 social media influencers to review the company's offerings, record video tutorials, and cover behind-the-scenes beauty events.
URL: https://hbr.org/2017/08/how-consumer-brands-can-connect-with-customers-in-a-changing-retail-landscape			
Matthew Dalton December 2017	***Social-Media Stars Are Turning Heads—of Regulators:*** *Regulators say financial rewards to influencers—even if made without explicit demands in return—can run afoul of deceptive-marketing rules*	*The Wall Street Journal*	**Social Media Influencers offer their fans** on Instagram, Facebook and other platforms what might seem like **unscripted glimpses into their daily lives, complete with products and brand mentions—** but sometimes without disclosing that companies have paid them in cash, goods or services. **Regulators say such financial rewards**—even those given to influencers without explicit demands in return—**can run afoul of longstanding rules against deceptive marketing if they aren't disclosed.**
URL: https://www.wsj.com/articles/social-media-influencers-get-noticed-by-regulators-1513342801			
Melissa Todisco December 2017	***Why Influencer Marketing Is Essential for Any Business Looking to Grow***	*Forbes*	Influencer marketing has been on the rise. **In the last 2 years, "influencer marketing" as a search term on Google Trends has risen by 400%.** Companies both big and small are realizing the power of building relationships with influencers.
URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ellevate/2017/12/21/why-influencer-marketing-is-essential-for-any-business-looking-to-grow/#72296d427d48			

Abbey Crain January 2018	***What Happens When You Reach a Million Instagram Followers:*** *The coveted 'M' can bring influencer status and lucrative marketing deals*	*The Wall Street Journal*	**At 1 million followers, "you're at celebrity level when it comes to brand partnerships,"** said Mae Karwowski, founder and chief executive of Obvious.ly, which connects popular social-media users, sometimes called "influencers," with marketers.
URL: https://www.wsj.com/articles/now-you-too-can-get-1-million-instagram-followers-1515599740			
Jayson DeMers April 2018	***7 Predictions on the Future of Influencer Marketing***	*Forbes*	Influencer marketing is the process of leveraging an existing social media influencer—someone who carries a strong reputation with a large number of people in a given niche—by having them endorse your brand, support your content, or co-create content with you and your brand… … **I anticipate many** (7) **changes to come for influencer marketing in the next several years:** **…3. Greater demand for authenticity…** **5. Transparency and regulatory crackdowns.**
URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2018/04/19/7-predictions-on-the-future-of-influencer-marketing/#1af69b51581d			
Suzanne Vranica June 2018	***Unilever Demands Influencer Marketing Business Clean Up Its Act:*** *Consumer-products giant*	*The Wall Street Journal*	A survey of 158 marketers conducted late last year for the Association of National Advertisers found that **75% of those polled use influencer marketing and almost half of them planned to increase their spending on the practice over the next year.**

	won't work with influencers who buy followers and calls for social-media platforms to fix fraud

URL: https://www.wsj.com/articles/unilever-demands-influencer-marketing-business-clean-up-its-act-1529272861

The overview that Table 1 provides intentionally accentuates the modern importance of (a) influencer marketing, as well as, (b) the relevance of social media influencers. Further, this overview highlights the recent discussions of both (a) authenticity and (b) Federal Trade Commission (FTC) mandated *disclosures.* Lastly, Table 1 emphasizes the lack of marketing literature within such an otherwise trending topic and mainstream approach amongst marketing practitioners. **It is worth nothing that credible publications, both business publications (e.g., Harvard Business Review; The Wall Street Journal) and news/media publications (e.g., Forbes; Huffington Post) began to acknowledge influencer marketing and social media influencers over ten years ago**. While the marketing literature has not yet provided much especially relevant research, sub-areas within the marketing literature provide a foundation from which to draw upon. These areas and their relation are presented throughout the next sections, in which the focal constructs (i.e., authenticity, disclosure) are also further elaborated upon.

1.3 Human Brands, Authenticity and Disclosure

Close, Moulard and Monroe (2011) point out that "traditionally, brands have been associated with businesses, products, organizations, or services, but today researchers (Fournier 2010; Hirschman 1987; Thomson 2006) recognize that brands can also be human" (923). Social media influencers can be conceptualized as *human brands,* defined as "any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts" (Thomson 2006, 104). Additionally, "consumers look for brands that are relevant, original, and genuine: they increasingly search for authenticity in brands" (Morhart et al. 2015, 200). Further, consumers perceive social media influencers' content as trustworthy (Scott 2015), which is likely due to them being perceived as highly authentic, particularly compared to celebrities. Social media influencers also have a greater audience reach and dialogue generation compared to that of celebrities (Crimson Hexagon 2015), and they "play a highly significant role in driving product engagement and brand loyalty" more so than celebrities (Lim et al. 2017, 20). Likewise, Linqia (2017) determined that "influencer content is effective because of its authentic nature, which makes influencer marketing programs a strategic content investment in addition to a media channel" (9).

According to Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard (2018) social media influencers use strategies to remain passionately authentic and transparently authentic. *Passionate authenticity* entails a person or a brand being perceived as intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018; Moulard et al. 2014, 2015, 2016). Passionately authentic people and brands are those that are believed to be motivated by their inner thoughts and desires rather than by external rewards (i.e., profits, prestige). Social media influencers presumably appear to have developed their digital content due to their love for the topic (e.g., cooking, cars) or the creative process (e.g., comedy, film making), indicative of their intrinsic motivation. Social media influencers strategically manage their *transparent authenticity* in that they attempt to be honest, transparent, and truthful (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018). Further, consumers have likely formed perceptions of transparent authenticity as they do for passionate authenticity.

Despite their popularity and perceived trustworthiness, social media influencers face a challenge when they mention, recommend, or endorse brands within their digital content, which is coined “brand dropping” herein. Such brand dropping may lead to perceptions that the influencer is *passionately inauthentic*, as consumers may presume that such brand dropping is primarily commercially driven—that the influencer is highly extrinsically motivated. Thus, by incorporating influencer marketing, social media influencers may compromise their perceived passionate authenticity. Consumers likely form perceptions of *transparently authenticity* as they do for passionate authenticity in the sense that certain actions and behaviors are presumably perceived as more or less honest, transparent, and/or truthful. When social media influencers brand drop within their digital content, they sometimes choose to infer whether or not they have a business relationship with the brand via a *disclosure*. Social media influencers’ means of, or choice of wording for *disclosures* varies. Therefore, consumers will likely perceive SMIs as more transparent when SMIs disclose unambiguously, since doing so implies complete forthrightness.

Disclosures have more recently been subjected to regulation requirements. Due to the widespread application of influencer marketing, the Federal Trade Commission recently updated its endorsement guidance in response to social media influencers often failing to expose the true nature of their relationship with brands— SMIs are now required to *disclose*, or explicitly mention when they were paid to promote the brand (Johnson 2017). Payment includes any reward the brand gifts an influencer— from free product(s) and offer(s) to large cash payments for their brand/influencer partnership/campaign. Linqia (2017) refers to the endorsement guidance as “increasingly stringent” and concludes that “marketers are taking these [FTC] guidelines more seriously in the wake of escalating enforcement” (Linqia 2017, 13). However, the FTC’s updated rules are quite ambiguous to say the least. Therefore, SMIs may or may not be explicitly disclosing their true relationship with brands they post about due to the sheer uncertainty inherent in the FTC’s endorsement guidance (FTC 2015).

As mentioned, social media influencers who explicitly disclose are presumably perceived as possessing high *transparent authenticity*; however, such explicit disclosures presumably result in consumer perceptions of low *passionate authenticity*. This brings about a challenge to social media influencers' brand dropping within their digital content. Therefore, this dissertation sets out to determine how social media influencers should manage their consumer-perceived, human-brand authenticity while simultaneously abiding by the FTC's *disclosure* requirements.

1.4 Goals, Objectives, and Contributions

This research intends to focus on influencer marketing and the pertinent concerns relative to social media influencers and their perceived authenticity— passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity. As such, this dissertation sets out to answer the following questions: (1) **How can social media influencers manage consumers' perceptions of their human brand authenticity while engaging in influencer marketing?** (2) **How does a social media influencer's disclosure, or lack thereof, affect consumers' perceptions of the social media influencers' authenticity?** (3) **What construct(s) moderate the disclosure-SMI-authenticity relationship?** (4) **Does the SMI's perceived authenticity affect consumers' attitude toward the influencer?** (5) **Does the SMI's perceived authenticity affect consumers' attitude toward the featured brand?**

Specifically, this dissertation proposes that disclosures have opposing effects on the two authenticity types— that disclosures positively affect *transparent authenticity* yet negatively affect *passionate authenticity*. While many factors may moderate this effect, this research investigates one moderator; that is, brand–influencer fit is proposed to moderate the effect of disclosure on the authenticities. The effect of this moderating variable will be more pronounced when a disclosure is not present than when a disclosure is present. Additionally, the two authenticity types presumably mediate these effects on two particular outcomes— attitude toward the influencer and attitude toward the brand. Lastly, attitude toward the influencer and brand-influencer fit each affect attitude toward the brand.

These hypothesized relationships will be assessed via an online experiment. Resulting implications concerning how social media influencers can manage their own human brand authenticity will be provided. Additionally, this dissertation will offer managerial implications for traditional brands on how to best structure brand-influencer partnerships.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Introduction

Because very little academic research in marketing has addressed *social media influencers*, this literature review covers many related areas' literature—*word of mouth, endorsement,* and *product placement.* Additionally, both the *authenticity* literature and the *disclosure* literature are reviewed per their relation to this particular research. Social media influencers' proposed relation to and noteworthy distinctions from each of the three related areas (i.e., word of mouth) and subareas (i.e., eWOM; sWOM) are discussed throughout. Further, SMIs' human brand authenticity and SMIs' inherent relation to disclosure tendencies are introduced and discussed. Lastly, the proposed conceptual model and accompanying hypotheses are introduced and elaborated upon.

Social media influencers mention brands within their posts for one of two primary reasons— (1) because they *like* the brand, or (2) because they're involved in an influencer-marketing campaign with the brand. Their reasons are not necessarily mutually exclusive; in other words, it is presumed that oftentimes, social media influencers become involved in influencer marketing campaigns with particular brands because they like those brands. For organizational purposes the initial portion of this chapter is arranged and presented based upon the primary relation of one of these two reasons. Table 2.1 depicts the literature review areas and sub-areas discussed within this chapter.

Table 2.1: Literature Review Organization— Relative Academic Research Areas

BASIS OF ORGANIZATION FOR ACADEMIC LITERATURE TOPICS
SMIs mention brands within their posts because they *like* the brand…
2.2 Word of Mouth
2.2.1 Electronic-Word-of-Mouth: eWOM
2.2.1.1 Social-word-of-mouth: sWOM
2.2.2 Interpersonal Influence
2.2.2.1 Referral marketing
2.2.2.2 Relationship marketing
2.2.2.3 Brand relationships
2.2.2.4 Brand attachment
2.2.3 Opinion Leaders
2.2.3.1 Two-step flow model
SMIs mention brands within their posts because they're involved in an influencer marketing campaign with the brand…
2.3 Endorsement
2.3.1 Celebrity Endorsement
2.3.1.1 Celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness
2.3.2 Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness
2.3.2.1 Trust-distrust-credibility model
2.3.3 Celebrities Differentiated from Social Media Influencers
2.3.3.1 Celebrity endorsement differentiated from brand dropping
2.4 Product Placement
2.4.1 Branded Entertainment
2.4.1.1 Advertainment
2.4.2 Product Placement Differentiated from Brand Dropping

First, because social media influencers like the brands they mention, the *word of mouth (WOM)* literature is reviewed, to include sub-areas *interpersonal influence*, *referral marketing*, *relationship marketing*, *brand relationships, brand attachment, opinion leaders, two-step flow model, electronic word of mouth (eWOM),* and *social word of mouth (sWOM).* Second, because social media influencers mention brands due to their involvement in brand-influencer campaigns, the *endorsement* literature is reviewed, to include sub-areas *celebrity endorsement*, *source credibility,* and *source attractiveness.* Third, because social media influencers mention brands due to their involvement in brand-influencer campaigns, the *product placement* literature is reviewed, to include sub-areas *branded entertainment* and *advertainment.* While both the endorsement and product placement literature are relative to social media influencers' involvement in branded campaigns, it is worth noting distinctions between the two sub-disciplines, which will be further discussed within this chapter. Fourth and fifth, the *authenticity* and *disclosure* literatures are reviewed as related to the proposed conceptual model.

2.2 Word of Mouth

When a social media influencer likes a brand so much so that they *brand drop* or mention the brand within a personally owned social media post, the behavior is quite similar and relative to word of mouth (WOM). WOM has been characterized as "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service" (Buttle 1998, 242). Further, "perhaps all that distinguishes WOM [from advertising] is that it is uttered by sources who are assumed by receivers to be independent of corporate influence" (Buttle 1998, 243). SMIs who mention brands based purely upon intrinsic motivations, or simply because they like the brands, do not maintain or possess *corporate influence*—they chose to mention brands with which they particularly like and prefer regardless of any potential relationship with said brand.

Bone (1995) defines WOM as "interpersonal communications in which none of the participants are marketing sources" (213). She examines the impact of interpersonal influence on consumer behavior, or more precisely, on consumer judgments. She presumes that WOM does in fact affect consumer judgment and concludes that interpersonal influence via WOM is powerful enough that product evaluations by other consumers can affect both short-term and long-term judgments

(Bone 1995). Perhaps most interesting, is her finding that the effects of WOM on consumer judgment are unaltered by both the receiver's susceptibility to interpersonal influence and the receiver's product knowledge (Bone 1995).

"WOM has been shown to influence a variety of conditions: awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, behavioral intentions and behavior" (Buttle 1998, 242). Sheth (1971) notes that WOM can be useful for both *informational* and *influential* purposes. While Arndt (1967) concluded that consumers perceive WOM as "exchanges of opinion more than attempts to control purchasing actions" which is consistent with intrinsically motivated brand dropping on behalf of SMIs (295). Keller (2007) boldly claims that WOM is "the most important and effective communications channel… where control rests with the consumer and not the marketer" (448). And, Bone (1995) concludes that WOM has a greater influence "when the WOM communication is presented by an expert" (213). This is especially relevant as SMIs are often communicating within one well-known area of interest, most often a shared interest between SMIs and their social media followers. SMIs' followers likely perceive that the SMI is at least somewhat of an expert within this shared area of interest.

Berger (2014) adopts the Westbrook (1987, 261) definition for WOM: "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers" (587). Berger (2014) argues that WOM is "goal driven and serves five key functions (i.e., impression management, emotion regulation, information acquisition, social bonding, and persuasion)" (586). Further, he presumes that audience and communication channel moderate the weights of each of the proposed five functions. Lastly, Berger (2014) points out that much more research is needed within the context of communication modality and the effects on interpersonal communication. This is especially so for technology based, written (rather than oral) communication such as that within most of the various social media platforms.

2.2.1 Electronic-Word-of-Mouth: eWOM

Hornik et al. (2015) describe especially relevant advice from a consulting firm, Booz & Co. (2012): "make your customer an advocate: shift marketing efforts from sending messages to facilitating conversations with and between consumers" (273). Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram) provide an ideal outlet to facilitate conversations amongst costumers. Additionally, social media influencers, who presumably, oftentimes like the brands they mention, are arguably the ideal customers to start the conversation.

Online or electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 39). Positive WOM within online social networking has been shown to have implications on consumers' behavioral intentions. "Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is an important factor influencing consumer attitude and behavior in electronic commerce activities" (Wang, Peng and Xu 2018, 135; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Godes and Mayzlin 2009). Barreda, Bilgihan, and Kageyama (2015) provide empirical evidence of such. They conclude that online social networking sites are "no longer only platforms for friends to stay connected. These websites have advanced to become a critical part of brand marketing" (31). Consumers rely on other users' comments and reviews prior to purchasing products and services" (Barreda, Bilgihan, and Kageyama 2015, 16).

2.2.1.1 Social-word-of-mouth: sWOM. "sWOM is a new form of eWOM in the emerging context of social media, and is regarded as consumers' effort to share online feedback or opinions with friends, families, and others through social media. Diverging from traditional WOM and eWOM, sWOM has unique characteristics in terms of social risk, identity disclosure, geographic and spatial freedom, and the connections between senders and receivers" (Wang Peng Xu and Luo

2018, 137; Balaji et al. 2016; Eisingerich et al. 2015). For example, the *connection(s) between senders and receivers* is enriched within sWOM as compared to eWOM. The relationship between a consumer (e.g., the receiver) and an SMI (e.g., the sender) that the consumer follows is presumably more meaningful compared to the relationship between a consumer and the random composer of any given online review. Similarly, the composer of an online review (the eWOM sender) presumably takes on much less *social risk* compared to the composer of a promotional Instagram post (e.g., the sWOM sender; i.e., an SMI).

2.2.2 Interpersonal Influence

Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989) discuss the notion that consumers often seek out the opinions of others prior to making decisions of importance, such as purchase decisions. They emphasize the reoccurring notion of interpersonal influence within consumer behavior research models. Despite such, consumer behavior researchers lacked an adequate means in which to measure this reoccurring phenomenon. Accordingly, Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989) found it fruitful to develop a scale in which to measure consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. They define *consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence* as “the need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others” (473).

Susceptibility to interpersonal influencer varies amongst consumers (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989; McGuire 1968). Presumably, consumers who have a greater *susceptibility to interpersonal influence,* likely follow more influencers within their social media accounts compared to consumers with a lesser *susceptibility to interpersonal influence.* Furthermore, consumers who have a greater *susceptibility to interpersonal influence,* are more likely to act upon the persuasion attempts within social media influencer disseminated content.

2.2.2.1 Referral marketing. "*Customer-initiated* referrals originate from current or former customers who have been satisfied or delighted with their experiences. They act as unpaid advocates… whereas *reciprocal* referrals occur when two or more organizations agree to cross-refer customers to each other" (Buttle 1998, 245). Perhaps unpaid, intrinsically motivated brand dropping is similar to referral marketing, whereas brand-influencer sponsored content is aligned with that of reciprocal marketing.

Roelens, Baeckeb and Benoita (2016) empirically examine incentivized referral marketing programs—programs that "encourage existing customers to recommend a firm's services or products to their social network" (26). They note that not only does referral marketing create value for firms, but also that referral marketing leverages the power of word-of-mouth to attract new customers (Roelens, Baeckeb and Benoita 2016).

2.2.2.2 Relationship marketing. "Relationship marketing's six-markets model points out that marketers are concerned with building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships in a variety of domains: customers (which may be end users or intermediaries), suppliers/alliances, employees, influentials, recruitment and referral markets" (Buttle 1998, 243). Buttle (1998) refers to said model to point out that there are many stakeholders within relationship marketing; further, WOM, interpersonal influence, and relationship marketing are not limited to the consumer-to-consumer relationship.

Ballantyne, Christopher and Payne (2003) review much of the relationship marketing literature and provide an agenda for future research based upon "the concept of value exchange" (159).

More specifically, the authors “see the idea of *value exchange* as the foundation stone of relationship marketing” (162). They point out that “new information technologies have enabled better and faster exchange links between firms and data collection about customer behavior on an unprecedented scale” and suggest that a *relationship* rather than *transactional* marketing mindset is suitable for such (161). They too refer to the relationship marketing’s six-markets model. The authors state, “Our preference is to emphasize exchanges of mutual value within a six markets network of relationships” (Ballantyne, Christopher and Payne 2003, 163). They view this framework and outlook as a means to optimize value creation by acknowledging and embracing relationships within all stakeholder divisions. The six markets model distinguishes *influential markets* as a key market domain, which includes customer groups and “user and evaluator groups” (Payne, Ballantyne and Christopher 2005, 861). SMIs fit nicely into this domain, as they are presumably customers of the brands they mention throughout their social media content; furthermore, they often provide detailed evaluations.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) introduce the idea of *brand community*. They define *brand community* as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (412). The authors acknowledge a widely accepted need to expand *brand loyalty* beyond that of *repurchase*. Further, they propose that *brand community* facilitates this need in that *brand community* “widens the relationship with the brand to include the role of other consumers, including community” (427). More precisely, the authors believe that “developing a strong brand community could be a critical step in truly actualizing the concept of relationship marketing” (427). Social media serves as a non-geographically bound community, and SMIs attract more specialized brand communities relative to their niche area.

2.2.2.3 <u>Brand relationships</u>. Fournier (1998) acknowledges a paradigm shift within the marketing discipline—the notion of short-term exchange has been replaced by relationship principles.

According to Fournier (1998), the brand is not "a passive object of marketing transactions but an active, contributing member of the relationship dyad" (344). She suggests that perhaps the most valuable form of relationship marketing, or the core construct within relationship marketing, is the consumer-brand bond. Fournier (1998) argues that "brands can and do serve as viable relationship partners" and "provides a framework for better understanding the relationships consumers form with the brands they know and use" (344). She implies that the strength of the consumer-brand relationship, similar to the strength of consumer-to-consumer relationships, is founded upon deeply held commitments and/or intense feelings of attachment. SMI's likely form strong bonds, ties and attachments to the brands they love, use and promote.

2.2.2.4 Brand attachment. "From the perspective of an individual's relationship with the brand as the attachment object," *brand attachment* is defined as "the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand with the self" (Park, MacInnis and Priester 2006, 195). Park, MacInnis and Priester (2006) propose that "strong brand attachment is created through meaningful personal connections between the brand and its customers" (191). The authors "posit that strong brand-customer attachments derive from the brand's success at creating strong brand self-connections by gratifying, enabling, and/or assuring the self" (192-193). SMIs' presumed attachment to brands they post about within their content likely leads to positive changes regarding consumer brand attitudes.

2.2.3 Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders have been defined similarly yet differently throughout the marketing literature. Opinion leaders are "trusted and informed people who exist in virtually all primary groups. Because they are "models" of opinion, they can be major influencers on a marketing effort through word-of-mouth communication to circles of relatives, friends, and acquaintances" (Corey 1971, 48). Opinion leaders are "individuals who exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others" (Rogers and Cartano 1962, 435; Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman 1996, 138). And, opinion leaders are "individuals to whom others look for information and leadership in "small matters" such as consumption... Opinion leadership is commonly defined as a person's tendency to influence the purchase decisions of others" (Shoham and Ruvio 2008, 281). Social media influencers are often brand dropping products for which are highly related to the influencers' particular area of interest and expertise. Such expertise is presumably similar to that of *leadership* and therefore likely results in commonalities between social media influencers and opinion leaders. Social media influencers, whom "pass along opinions and information to influence members of their social groups" are oftentimes, presumably perceived by consumers to be "regarded as credible and informed individuals regarding specific topics" (Carr and Hayes 2014, 40). Accordingly, social media influencers might be considered or classified as modern, digital characterizations of opinion leaders within each of their niche areas.

2.2.3.1 Two-step flow model. Corey (1971) reiterates the inaugural work of Katz and Lazarsfed (1955) in which the two-step flow model is defined as "a two-step flow of communication—information flows from mass media to mass audiences through the mediation of so-called opinion leaders" (48). Carr and Hayes (2014) summarize the two-step flow model as follows: "the two-step flow model posits that opinion leaders disseminate messages to the broader public, mediating the relationship between companies and their audiences" (40). Similarly, social media influencers mediate messages between consumers and brands. This mediation occurs both via SMIs' promotional social media content as well as via SMIs' engagement (e.g., conversation) with consumers within social media platforms.

2.3 Endorsement

Social media influencers' *brand dropping* or mention of brand(s) within their social media posts due to their involvement in a brand-influencer campaign is similar to the notion of endorsement.

The presumed key differentiation is that social media influencers mention a brand as they see fit whereas endorsement typically infers one read from a predetermined script. Endorsers are also directed by the brand and presumably maintain little control. Social media influencers possess complete creative control within their content, including their means of brand dropping. Such means may include any or all of the modes discussed by McCracken (1989)—explicitly, implicitly, imperatively and/or copresently via association, expertise, or neither such relation (310).

2.3.1 Celebrity Endorsement

McCracken (1989) defines a celebrity endorser as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (310). More recently Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) reviewed the celebrity endorsement literature and propose an updated, modern definition, "a celebrity endorsement is an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity" (644).

2.3.1.1 Celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Ohanian (1990) developed a scale for measuring celebrity endorsers' effectiveness. Ohanian (1990) reports a number of empirical investigations that have examined increased attitudinal and persuasive effects of messages when delivered by spokespersons. These studies credit spokespersons' perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise to positive and/or increased attitudes and persuasion (Ohanian 1990; Anderson and Clevenger 1963; Baker and Churchill, Jr. 1977; Hovland and Weiss 1951; Johnson, Torcivia and Poprick 1968; Kelman and Hovland 1953; Patzer 1983; Simon, Berkowitz, and Moyer 1970; Whittaker and Meade 1968) (39). Furthermore, numerous empirical research projects have proposed scales for source credibility (Applbaum and Anatol 1972; Berlo, Lemert and Mertz 1969; Bowers and Phillips 1967; McCroskey 1966;

Whitehead 1968); unfortunately, each of these scales include varying dimensions and measurement items. And, numerous researchers have developed scales intended to capture the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement (DeSarbo and Harshman 1985; Simpson and Kahler 1980-81; Wilding and Bauer 1968; Wynn 1987), which also vary by number and composition, regarding the dimensions and measurement items. To make matters worse, many of the endorsement effectiveness scales seemingly overlap with those of source credibility, and vice versa. The inconsistent scales combined with inadequate scale development methodologies (e.g., unassessed reliability and/or validity) "partially explains the inconsistencies in the literature regarding the impact of communicator credibility as it relates to attitude formation and attitude change" (Ohanian 1990, 40). Accordingly, Ohanian (1990) set out to create a theoretically and psychometrically sound, reliable and valid, measurement scale for source credibility from which future research can reference and build upon.

Ohanian (1990) hypothesized three dimensions of source credibility: (1) trustworthiness, (2) expertise, and (3) attractiveness (Hovland et al. 1953; McGuire 1958). Ohanian (1990) emphasized the importance of a more detailed measure in which to evaluate communicator trustworthiness. The traditional, trustworthy-untrustworthy dichotomy did not adequately capture such an important measure. *Expertise* is defined as the second dimension of source credibility by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953). "This dimension is also referred to as "authoritativeness" (McCroskey 1966), "competence" (Whitehead 1968), "expertness" (Applbaum and Anatol 1972), or "qualification" (Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz 1969). Adjectives such as "trained-untrained," "informed-uninformed" and "educated-uneducated" commonly have been used to measure this dimension" (Ohanian 1990, 42). Regarding the third dimension, *attractiveness*, prior research suggests that consumers often form initial judgements based upon the outward physical appearance of others (Baker and Churchill 1977; Chaiken 1979; Joseph 1982; Kahle and Homer 1985; Mills and Aronson 1965; Widgery and Ruch 1981). Joseph (1982) concluded that increasing the communicator's attractiveness enhances positive attitude change; several other researchers (e.g., Simon, Berkowitz, and Moyer 1970; Kahle and Homer 1985) have also found this to be true.

Source credibility and its relation to celebrity endorsement gained much attention, perhaps due to the beneficial direct effect or outcomes believed to stem from credible sources. Precisely, more credible sources are perceived to be more persuasive; more credibility is linked to more compliant behavior (Ohanian 1990; Ross 1973; Woodside and Davenport, Jr. 1974, 1976). However, Ohanian (1990) makes a point to empathize the following notion: “highly credible sources are not always more effective than less credible ones” (42).

In summary, despite the vast popularity of source credibility within psychology, communication, marketing, and advertising literature streams, a consensus regarding the definition, measurement, and operationalization for source credibility was nonexistent (Ohanian 1990). In fact, a plethora of opposing measurement options were rampant, none of which possessed adequate means for which to expand upon the source credibility knowledge base. Ohanian (1990) developed a scale using psychometrically accepted procedures for measuring celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—the trifold domain—which proved to be a reliable, valid, and theoretically sound scale for source credibility measurement and operationalization thereon. SMI’s similarities as compared to celebrity endorsers suggest the potential importance and relevance of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—or source credibility. Table 2.2 depicts the semantic differential scale items for source credibility measurement (Ohanian 1990, 50).

Table 2.2: Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Expertise

DIMENSION ITEMS WITHIN DIMENSION
Attractiveness
Attractive—Unattractive
Classy—Not Classy
Beautiful—Ugly
Elegant—Plain
Sexy—Not Sexy
Trustworthiness
Dependable— Undependable
Honest—Dishonest
Reliable—Unreliable
Sincere—Insincere
Trustworthy—Untrustworthy
Expertise
Expert—Not an Expert
Experienced—Inexperienced
Knowledgeable—Unknowledgeable
Qualified—Unqualified
Skilled—Unskilled

2.3.2 Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness

McCracken (1989) differentiates between two useful social psychology models—*source credibility* and *source attractiveness*. According to McCracken (1989) the distinction between the two models is primarily based upon from where the source gains his/her meaning or significance. Source credibility *effectiveness* is based upon *"expertness" and "trustworthiness"* of the source (310) whereas source attractiveness effectiveness is based upon the *"familiarity," "likability," and/or "similarity"* of the source (311).

Source credibility provides the theoretical foundation for the widely accepted notion that consumers' willingness to accept information and ideas is at least partially dependent upon the person or entity presenting such information and ideas (Berlo, Lemert and Mertz 1969). Source credibility is an established theory (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969; Hovland & Weiss, 1952) recognized and implemented across numerous disciplines of academic research. Much of the extant literature incorporating source credibility theory (SCT) is in relation to persuasive communication. SCT explains "how the persuasiveness of a communication is determined in part by the perceived credibility of the source of the communication" (Lowry Wilson and Haig 2014, 63). Fogg's (2003) research extended the principles of SCT to the online context in which he specifies four different channels of credibility that can potentially develop: presumed credibility, reputed credibility, experienced credibility, and surface credibility. Lowry Wilson and Haig's (2014) research focuses on the *surface credibility* channel; furthermore, they investigate source credibility in the realm of digital/internet marketing. Their research provides an "innovative look at how surface credibility can be built into logo and website design. They show that credibility-based logo design and credibility-based site design quickly trigger positive perceptions regarding the credibility of the firm sponsoring the website, which produces trusting beliefs and intentions" (90). Similarly, credibility based content design potentially brings about positive perceptions regarding the credibility of SMI sponsorships with brands (i.e., trusting beliefs and intentions). Lowry Wilson and Haig's (2014) findings regarding "source credibility and its relation to online trust-building constitute a significant forward movement in understanding credibility on the web" (84), as well as a differing, and arguably more modern stance than the aforementioned views and research of Ohanian (1990).

SCT provides understanding for "why some websites, and by proxy their sponsors, are judged more credible than others" (Lowry Wilson and Haig 2014, 63; Cheung et al. 2009; Fogg, 1999, 2003; Fogg et al. 2001a; Fogg et al. 2001b; Robins and Holmes 2008; Tseng and Fogg 1999). It is likely that similar effects carry over to influencer marketing within social media. Specifically, SCT combined with strategically credible social content, could provide SMIs, and by proxy the brands they partner with and promote within their digital content, be judged more credible than others—that is, as compared to other partnerships comprised of SMIs and brand(s) they promote, in which the promotional content lacks credible content design. Lowry Wilson and Haig's (2014) research provides theoretical rationale for such; however, SCT and credible content design has not yet been empirically tested within the SMI/influencer marketing context.

Lowry Wilson and Haig (2014) found that "logos designed to communicate traits of credibility (i.e., expertise and trustworthiness) can trigger positive credibility judgments about the firm's website and that this increase in perceived credibility results in greater trust and willingness to transact with the firm" (63). It is likely that similar effects carry over to influencer marketing within social media. Specifically, it is likely that an SMI's digital content (e.g., Instagram images/captions posted) results in consumer perceptions of credibility or lack thereof. Further, SMIs might determine best practices or strategies (e.g., posting content which exudes expertise and trustworthiness) that result in more positive credibility judgements. The findings of Lowry Wilson and Haig (2014) suggest that this could lead to (a) consumers' perceiving the SMI as trustworthy, as well as (b) increased consumer purchase intentions, regarding the product(s) being promoted within the SMI's social media content. In summary, their findings suggest that the strategic incorporation of credibility via digital content design likely leads to increased consumer purchase intentions for brands promoted by SMIs.

2.3.2.1 <u>Trust-distrust-credibility model</u>. Within the aforementioned research of Lowry Wilson and Haig (2014), the researchers propose the *trust-distrust-credibility model.* Their foundational model is supported by the empirical analyses employed; furthermore, the model has applications to influencer marketing and SMIs.

Trust can be defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al. 1998, 395). McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002) define *trusting beliefs* as a consumer’s belief that an online vendor will act with benevolence, integrity, and competence in transactions with the consumer. *Trusting intentions* “mean the truster is securely willing to depend, or intends to depend, on the trustee” (McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar 2002, 337).

Academic scholars disagree about whether or not *trust* and *distrust* are opposing ends of an individual continuum—of the same, individual construct (Rotter 1971; Schul, Mayo and Burnstein 2008; Stack 1978)—versus whether or not trust and distrust are two distinct, unique constructs (Komiak and Benbasat 2008; Lewicki, McAllister and Bies 1998; McKnight, Kacmar and Choudhury 2004). The trust-distrust-credibility model adopts the two-construct notion, in part based upon recent neural research that suggests that trust and distrust activate two different areas within the human brain (Dimoka 2010).

Similarly, Lowry Wilson and Haig (2014) treat *trust* and *credibility* as two distinct (yet similar) constructs with unique operationalizations within their research and their proposed trust-distrust-credibility model. The trust-distrust-credibility model is depicted within Table 2.3 (Lowry Wilson and Haig 2014, 88).

Table 2.3: The Trust-Distrust-Credibility Model

SOURCE CREDIBILITY THEORY[1]
Disposition to Distrust (McKnight, Kacmar and Choudhury 2004) • Benevolence • Integrity • Competence • Distrusting Stance

Disposition to Trust (McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar 2002)
- Benevolence
- Integrity
- Competence
- Trusting Stance

Source Credibility (Berlo, Lemert and Mertz 1969)
- Trustworthiness
- Expertise
- Dynamism

Distrusting Beliefs (McKnight and Choudhury 2006)
- Benevolence
- Integrity
- Competence

Trusting Beliefs (McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar 2002)
- Benevolence
- Integrity
- Competence

Trusting Intentions (McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar 2002)
- Willingness to Depend
- Follow Advice
- Give Information
- Make Purchases

[1]For the proposed and actual relationships amongst the constructs within this table, see Lowry Wilson and Haig (2014), page 88, which contains the final structural model, inherently relationship illustrative/inclusive

2.3.3 Celebrities Differentiated from Social Media Influencers.

Social media influencers are often classified based upon their following, more specifically, their number of followers; oftentimes referred to as their *reach.* SMIs' follower count may range from 1000 to 25,000 followers (i.e., *micro-influencers*) to millions of followers (i.e., *top-tier influencers*) (WOMMA 2017). SMIs might eventually obtain "celebrity" status, but SMIs are quite different from traditional celebrities.

Many key distinctions differentiate celebrities from social media influencers. SMIs are entrepreneurs–they're self-employed. And, they gain their fame directly from their online, digital content creation and dissemination strategies. SMIs gain their notoriety from digital content creation, expertise within their niche, and shared stylistic preferences, rather than, for example, from acting in movies (Callahan 2017). Also, brand managers control celebrity endorsements. The brand manager, or some other agent working solely for the brand, provides the celebrity with a brand endorsement *script*—celebrities stand in and are told what to say and are directed how to act. Alternatively, social media influencers maintain creative control within their brand dropping messages. SMIs are usually given complete creative control regarding the content in which they promote the brand. Within Instagram for example, this includes not only the caption in which the SMI mentions the brand, but also, the image in which the SMI showcases the brand.

Another distinction involves the likelihood for and/or the realistic occurrence of interaction between the consumer and the celebrity versus the consumer and the SMI. "Rubin and McHugh (1987) note that unlike interpersonal relationships, people's relationships with celebrities are less likely to be truly interactive (e.g., mutual self-disclosure and interrogation are not possible)" (Thomson 2006, 105). Alternatively, consumers often interact and engage in two-way correspondence with SMIs through various social media channels and platforms. In fact, Hornik et al. (2015) highlight the recommendation for a shift from *sending* marketing messages to *engaging* in conversations. This exact recommendation is facilitated via influencer marketing tactics (e.g., SMIs promoting brands while simultaneously engaging in brand-centered conversations with consumers).

It is also worth noting that McCracken's (1989) definition of celebrity endorsers *deliberately* and purposefully *excludes* the "typical consumer" endorser (310). Everyday people now have personal media networks that influence consumer behavior (Solis 2012). The *typical consumer endorser* is meant to exclude those who lack both expertise and association with the brand or product being endorsed. As previously mentioned, this research purports that social media influencers are free to promote from their personal social media accounts via any means they choose—explicitly, implicitly, imperatively and/or copresently, and via association, expertise, or neither such relation (McCracken 1989).

2.3.3.1 Celebrity endorsement differentiated from brand dropping. The key distinctions between celebrity endorsement and brand dropping strategies are closely aligned with the aforementioned distinctions between celebrities and social media influencers. Endorsement is scripted by an agent of the brand, whereas brand dropping is created by the SMI who obtains all creative control for both style and dissemination. Endorsement is filmed in advance and distributed in a means that does not allow consumer engagement; on the other hand, brand dropping takes place within social media platforms inherently designed for consumer engagement and conversation. This allows consumers to engage with the SMI and even inquire about the brands promoted within the SMI's content.

2.4 Product Placement

Social media influencers' *brand dropping* or mention of brand(s) within their social media posts due to their involvement in a brand-influencer campaign resembles the notion of product placement. Russell (2002) defines *product placement* as "the practice of placing branded products in the content of mass media programming" (306). Russell (1998) proposed and theoretically developed product placement as a three-dimensional construct, conceptualized as a Tripartite Typology in which all product placement occurrences can be categorized along the 3-dimensional continuum, consisting of: (1) visual, (2) auditory, and (3) plot connection. This initial work (Russell 1998) foreshadowed many additional prolific academic contributions (e.g., Russell 2002, 2007, 2019; Russell and Belch 2005; Russell and Stern 2006; Bressoud, Lehu and Russell 2010; Russell and Rasolofoarison 2017) within the product placement literature.

Next are the definitions and examples for each of the dimensions within the 3-dimensional medium. Visual placements are seen on screen (e.g., an actor enjoying a purposefully placed Coca Cola throughout his on-screen scene, in which the Coca Cola can/package and the distinguishing packaging/logo are displayed and clearly, easily seen by viewers). Auditory (aka verbal) placements are of course spoken verbally and are initiated from the scripted dialogue (e.g., an actor playing his scripted role, must join a friend for lunch at a restaurant in which his script instructs he initially, clearly and slightly louder than normally, order a Coca Cola beverage). The plot connection dimension refers to the degree in which the placement is woven into the fictional storyline.

Russell (1998) created a theoretical foundation from which empirical analyses could and should be based upon—at that time, empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of product placement had not yet been conducted. Russell (2002) set out to fill this gap in the literature. Results confirm the usefulness for classifying product placements according to the Tripartite Typology. Specifically, Russell (2002) investigated whether or not the presentation of product placement modality—visual versus verbal—as well as the degree of plot connection, effected consumer attitudes and/or consumer memory either directly or interactively. Her findings suggest that the modality and plot connection interact to influence memory and attitude change. More precisely, “memory improves when modality and plot connection are incongruent but persuasion is enhanced by congruency. While congruous placements appear natural, incongruent placements adversely affect brand attitudes because they seem out of place and are discounted” (306).

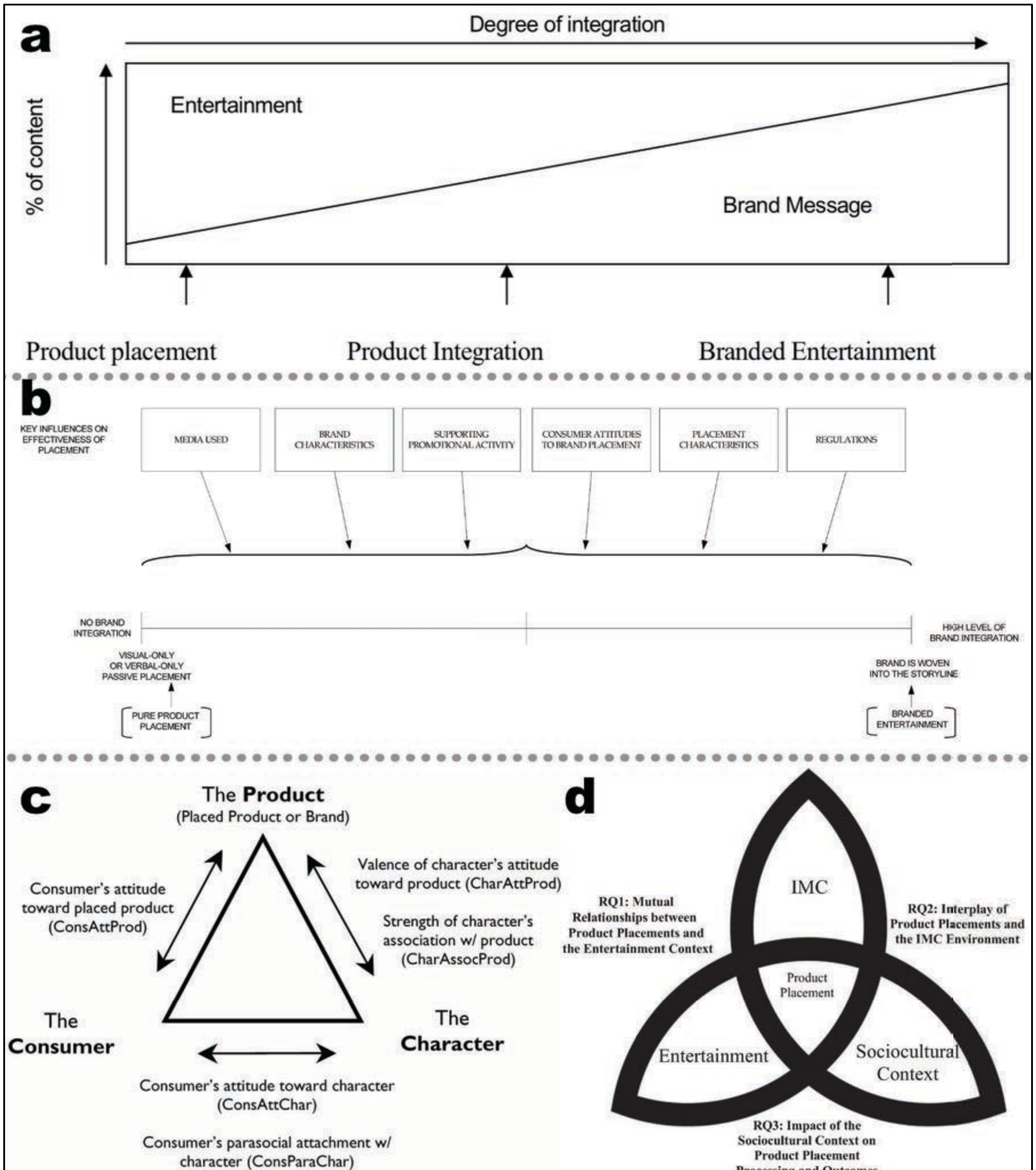
There are some similarities between traditional product placements within TV and movies compared to brand dropping within social media content/platforms. One key resemblance is that both product placement and brand dropping permit the depiction of brands within entertainment vehicles. Furthermore, such depictions are in the context of consumption and/or usage, which allows viewers and/or followers to more easily project themselves using the brands (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018).

Lastly, despite the absence of acknowledgment within the academic literature, it is worth noting on-going technological trends and changes that may lessen the distinctions between brand dropping and product placement over time. Most notably, the television consumption process is seemingly becoming increasingly digital, mobile, and oftentimes even takes place via various social media platforms. This is a consideration worthy of close and continued attention for researchers specializing in many areas within the marketing discipline including but not limited to influencer marketing, social media marketing and product placement. As such, this change in consumption and the potential forthcoming, continued or accelerated changes may bring about many future research opportunities.

2.4.1 <u>Branded Entertainment</u>

Product placement becoming such a popular and successful form of integrated marketing communication is in large part, likely a result of brand managers' realization of the potential negative effects that may potentially arise from human-brand celebrity endorsements (e.g., Tiger Woods/Nike) coupled with consumers' animosity toward advertisement interruptions (e.g., TV commercials) (Russell and Rasolofoarison 2017). Consumers are bombarded with traditional advertising and have grown to oppose traditional means of advertising (e.g., TV commercials, banner ads) so much so that they pay premiums to forgo traditional advertising altogether (e.g., TiVo, AdBlock, ad-free smart-phone applications). Product placements within television and movies require that celebrities deliver the marketing message; however, product placement differs from celebrity endorsement in that within product placement, celebrities are playing a role. By incorporating brands within scripted TV series and movies, brand managers better negate the potential of celebrities behaving badly in a way that celebrity endorsement might tarnish the brand image (as compared to product placement). “Product placements permeate the entertainment world: from books to video games, to movies, TV series, and music videos, as well as within social media content” (Russell 2019). Hudson and Hudson (2006) define branded entertainment as “the integration of advertising into entertainment content, whereby brands are embedded into storylines of a film, television program, or other entertainment medium. This involves co-creation and collaboration between entertainment, media and brands” (492). Branded entertainment brought about a collection of newly coined terms, most notably, *advertainment*; additional details and examples are within the next section.

2.4.1.1 Advertainment. The simultaneous intertwining of advertising and entertainment brought about the notion of advertainment. Russell (2007) coined the term *advertainment,* defined as: “promotional practices that integrate brand communications within the content of entertainment products” (3). “The increased mingling of advertising with the entertainment world has generated a slew of newly coined terms to reflect these trends, such as *hybrid advertisement* or the “Madison and Vine” expression, reflecting the physical intersection of the advertising industry’s New York City hub, on Madison Avenue, and the entertainment hub on Vine Street” (Russell 2007, 3; Balasubramanian 1994; Donaton 2004). Figure 2.1 depicts the evolution of conceptualization amongst product placement, branded entertainment, and advertainment. The images within are duplicated from various seminal works discussed; adequate credit is noted within the figure.



a: Advertainment Typology, p 5
Russell, Cristel Antonia. 2007. *Advertainment: Fusing Advertising and Entertainment*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Yaffe Center for Persuasive Communication.

b: Figure 2: The Product Placement- Branded Entertainment Continuum, p 495
Hudson, Simon, and David Hudson. 2006. "Branded Entertainment: A New Advertising Technique or Product Placement in Disguise?" *Journal of Marketing Management* 22 (5-6): 489-504.

c: Figure 1: Balance Model of Product Placement Effects, p 8
Russell, Cristel Antonia, and Barbara B. Stern. 2006. "Consumers Characters and Products: A Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects." *Journal of Advertising* 35 (1): 7-21.

d: Figure 1: A Triquetra Representation of Product Placement as an Intertext, p 39
Russell, Cristel Antonia. 2019. "Expanding the Agenda of Research on Product Placement: A Commercial Intertext." *Journal of Advertising* 48 (1): 38–48. doi: 10.1080/00913367.2019.1579690.

Figure 2.1: Product Placement, Branded Entertainment and Advertainment—the Evolution of Conceptualization via Imagery

2.4.2 Product Placement Differentiated from Brand Dropping

As compared to WOM and celebrity endorsement, product placement is most comparable to brand dropping within the realm of influencer marketing. Both product placement and influencer marketing take place within the context of mediums primarily intended for entertainment purposes. However, many distinctions between product placement and brand dropping differentiate the two strategies conceptually and practically.

Similar to one of the distinctions between celebrities and SMIs, social media influencers retain complete creative control when brand dropping, whereas this does not hold true within the realm of product placement. Further, social media influencers brand drop from their personal social media accounts. This is especially distinct from product placement, which occurs within television shows or movies for example, and the brand dropping comes from an actor or actress playing a role. Product placement takes place within a fictitious medium (e.g., television; movies) whereas brand dropping is inherently more organic and natural in that the SMI discusses brands in a nonfictional, yet anecdotal and interesting means.

Additionally, the following consideration is especially noteworthy as it suggests yet another key differentiation between brand dropping and product placement. If consumers perceive a product placement as particularly negative for example, the consumer may associate these negative emotions with any of the following parties—the movie's director, the actor, the actor's character, or the brand featured within the product placement? Alternatively, because social media influencers have complete creative control over their brand dropping (or are perceived to have such control) consumers are likely to associate the negative emotions of bad brand dropping with the SMI. In the event that consumers have negative perceptions, SMIs potentially acquire all of the associated risk; at best, they share the risk with the brand.

2.5 Conceptual Model, Construct Definitions, Theoretical Rationale, and Hypotheses

Social media influencers, conceptualized as human brands herein, and their consumer perceived authenticity—passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity specifically—are the spotlight of this dissertation. Moreover, the effect that legally enforced, Federal Trade Commission (FTC) mandated, disclosures have on each of these two types of authenticity is a key focus of this dissertation. Social media influencers and brand managers alike presumably prefer brand dropping seem organic. Further, the inherent ambiguity within the FTC disclosure guidelines amplifies the issue. This research examines how social media influencers can manage consumers' perceptions of their human brand authenticity when engaging in influencer marketing. The relative constructs and the proposed relationships among them are presented in Figure 2.2.

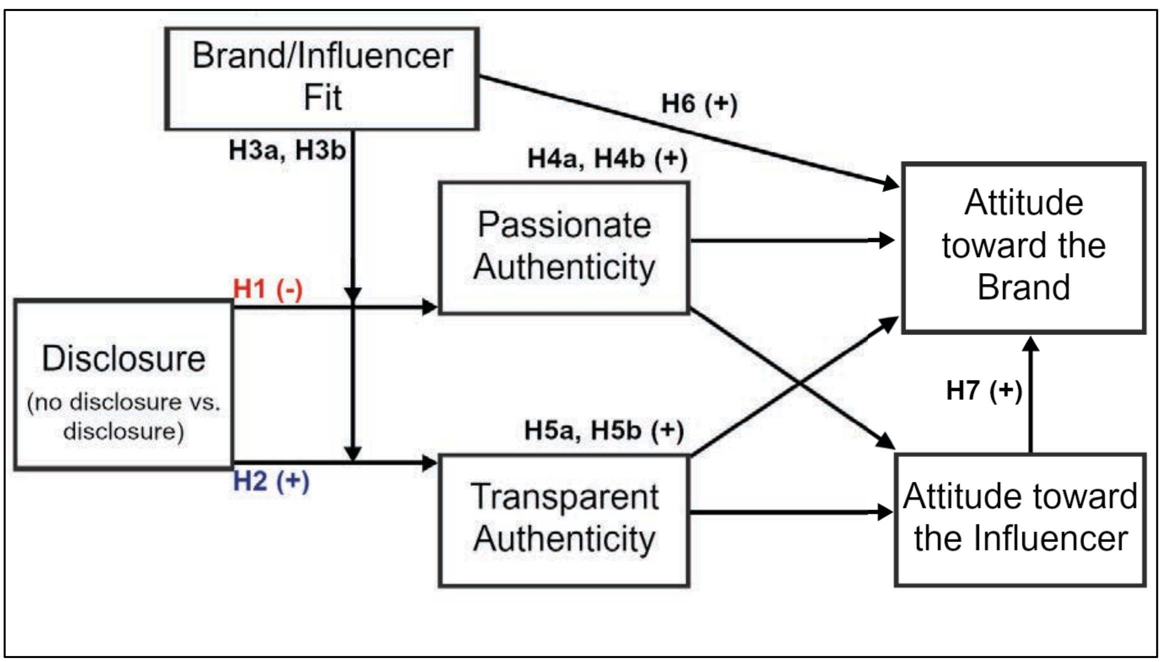


Figure 2.2: Conceptual Model

2.5.1 Disclosure

2.5.1.1 Disclosure literature. Disclosure is presumably a result of the intermingle of entertainment and advertising, or *advertainment.* Additionally, this phenomenon is also referred to as the intermingling of editorial and commercial content, and sometimes *advertorials* (Boerman and VanReijmersdal 2016). As suggested in the previous section, advertising continues to prevail within non-traditional forms of media. As such, new terminology is created to refer to modern forms of media, including but not limited to "sponsored content, embedded advertising, stealth marketing, covert marketing, branded content, product placement, or native advertising" (Boerman and VanReijmersdal 2016, 116). Regarding this modern media phenomenon, Boerman and VanReijmersdal (2016) prefer *sponsored content* as their choice terminology, which they define as "the purposeful integration of brands or branded persuasive messages into editorial media content in exchange for compensation from a sponsor" (116; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens and Smit 2009).

The prevalence of this combinational modern media brings about concerns regarding whether or not consumers are aware of the existence of advertising messages within media which traditionally did not include such; hence, the importance of and recent chatter involving *disclosures.* More formally, "it has been argued that sponsored content violates the right of consumers to know when they are being subjected to advertising" (Boerman and Van Reijmersdal 2016, 117). As such, various regulatory agencies have made efforts to ensure fair communication as well as to mitigate unethical and deceptive embedded advertising attempts (Cain 2011; Kuhn, Hume and Love 2010; Boerman and VanReijmersdal 2016). Disclosures serve to make known sponsored content and therefore alleviate infringement of consumers' rights. As such, in order for disclosures to effectively serve their purpose, they must be conspicuous and explicit. Boerman and VanReijmersdal (2016) conduct a literature review of empirical analyses that focus on disclosures within sponsored content; however, much of the academic literature within this topic is outside the scope of this dissertation—none of the studies are within the context of Instagram, and very few are within the context of any social media platform.

Krouwer, Poels and Paulussen (2017) describe *effective* disclosures as being noticeably or prominently displayed as well as “consciously processed which depends on their position, style, and language” (127). Frequency certainly contributes to noticeability, prominence, and processing as well (Wojdynski and Evans 2014; Wojdynski and Evans 2016). Wojdynski and Evans (2016) describe disclosure as, “labels or visual cues fit broadly into the category of advertising disclosures, which are intended to prevent consumers from being deceived or misled by providing information that allows the most informed decision possible” (158).

2.5.1.2 Disclosures in social media. The FTC’s role within social media regarding sponsored content and accompanying disclosures is especially relevant. The FTC’s recent involvement is summarized within Table 2.4, in which selected publications are listed, some of which are further detailed throughout this section.

Table 2.4: Selected FTC *Disclosure* Publications

Publication Date & Type of Publication		Title of Publication
1	October 5, 2009 Press Release	*FTC Publishes Final Guides Governing Endorsements, Testimonials:* *Changes Affect Testimonial Advertisements, Bloggers, Celebrity Endorsements*
2	2009 Official Guidelines	*Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising*

3	March 12, 2013 Press Release	*FTC Staff Revises Online Advertising Disclosure Guidelines:* *"Dot Com Disclosures" Guidance Updated to Address Current Online and Mobile Advertising Environment*
4	2013 Official Guidelines	*Dot Com Disclosures:* *How to Make Effective Disclosures in Digital Advertising*
5	September 23, 2014 Press Release	*Operation 'Full Disclosure' Targets More Than 60 National Advertisers:* *FTC Initiative Aims to Improve Disclosures in Advertising*
6	2015 *Last Modified*: September 2017 FAQ page for endorsement requirements	*The FTC's Endorsement Guides:* *What People Are Asking*
7	April 19, 2017 Press Release	*FTC Staff Reminds Influencers and Brands to Clearly Disclose Relationship:* *Commission aims to improve disclosures in social media endorsements*
8	September 7, 2017 Press Release	*CSGO Lotto Owners Settle FTC's First-Ever Complaint Against Individual Social Media Influencers:* *Owners must disclose material connections in future posts; FTC staff also sends 21 warning letters to prominent social media influencers*
9	September 7, 2017 Business Blog	*Three FTC actions of interest to influencers*
10	2017 Sample Letter	Sample Letter (sent by FTC to SMIs inquiring whether or not the SMI possessed *material connections* with brands recently featured within Instagram pictures/posts)
11	September 18, 2017 Press Release	*FTC to Hold Twitter Chat on Social Media Influencer Disclosures*

12	November 13, 2018 Business Blog	*Planning a social media marketing campaign? Read this first.*
13	June 7, 2019 Business Blog	FTC-FDA warning letters: Influential to influencers and marketers.

(FTC 2009a; FTC 2009b; FTC 2013a; FTC 2013b; FTC 2014; FTC 2015; FTC 2017a; FTC 2017b; FTC 2017c; FTC 2017d; FTC 2017e; FTC 2018; FTC 2019)

On October 5, 2009 the FTC published a press release titled, FTC Publishes Final Guides Governing Endorsements, Testimonials" (FTC 2009a; FTC 2009b). Throughout the rise of influencer marketing, these endorsement guidelines seemed to be largely misunderstood. MarketingLand.com columnist Rae Hoffman sums up the inherent ambiguity as follows,

> *The Federal Trade Commission disclosure laws are increasingly becoming a point of frustration and confusion for affiliates, bloggers and merchants across the United States.*
>
> *Back in 2009, the FTC started releasing guidelines governing the use of endorsements and testimonials online. The goal of the law was to force disclosure of material connections between advertisers and endorsers, allowing consumers to know when a blogger, affiliate or celebrity stood to gain something from recommending a product to their audience.*
>
> *As new media for disseminating content have developed, and as the FTC has gained an increased understanding of various styles of promotional methods and compensated content online, the guidelines have been updated and expanded multiple times — most notably with the release of its "Dot Com Disclosures[1]" guidelines in 2013 and a comprehensive update of its "What People Are Asking[2]" page in 2015.*
>
> *While the guidelines are increasingly expanding when it comes to endorsements, reviews, sponsored posts, sensational claims and influencer campaigns — complete with multiple examples — the FTC documents only contain a few paragraphs covering affiliate marketing specifically. The lack of direct examples for affiliate marketing has left many affiliates and merchants to navigate what constitutes FTC disclosure compliance by pulling together bits and pieces of disclosure advice aimed at other types of online business models.*
>
> *While the FTC disclosure laws specifically for affiliates are sparse in nature, the spirit of the FTC disclosure guidelines is clear: If you stand to make money or receive a benefit in*

[1] (FTC 2013a; FTC 2013b)
[2] (FTC 2015)

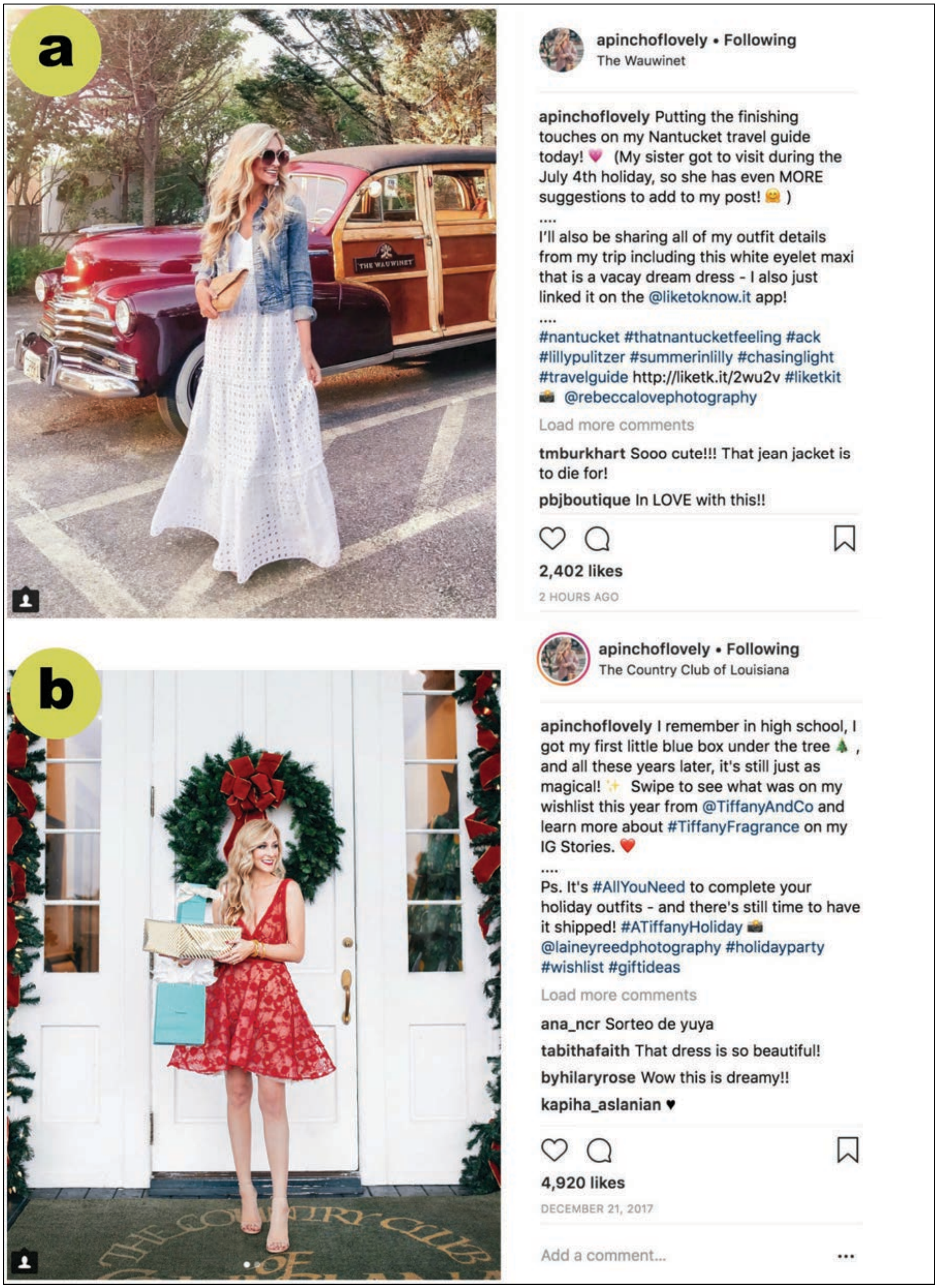
> *any way by recommending or endorsing a product or service, you're required to disclose that fact.*
> *The requirement for disclosure is not affected by whether or not you would be endorsing or promoting the product even if you weren't being compensated. The level of sincerity in your promotion of affiliate links doesn't matter. If you recommend or endorse something using an affiliate link, it must be disclosed. Period.*
>
> *The murky part is how to disclose that relationship in a way that satisfies the FTC requirements* (Hoffman, 2016).

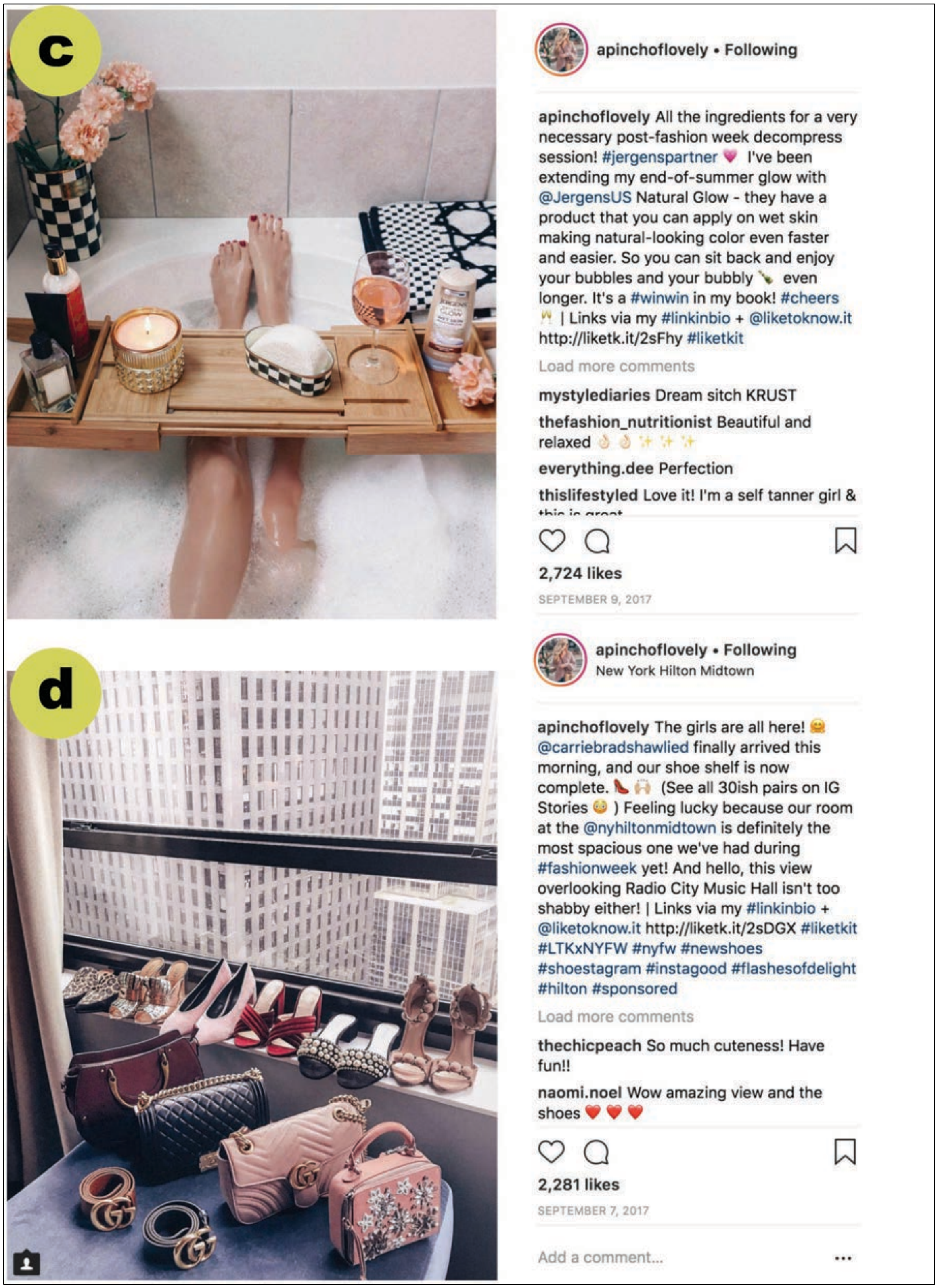
On September 6, 2017, the FTC sent out "warning" letters to twenty-one social media influencers regarding digital content (FTC 2017b). More specifically, the letters were sent in response to Instagram posts referencing or seemingly endorsing brands. None of these Instagram posts contained *disclosures*. The letters brought about many questions concerning the guidelines and ambiguous disclosure requirements therein. In an attempt to clear up the uncertainty, on September 21, 2017, the FTC hosted a *Twitter chat* to answer questions about necessary disclosures required by social media influencers. The aforementioned letters inquired whether or not these individuals possessed *material connections* with brands they had recently featured within their Instagram pictures/posts (Ingram and Bartz 2017).

The Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), recently acquired by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), provides numerous resources (e.g., guidelines, checklists, and measurement standards) that primarily revolve around influencer marketing and disclosure. WOMMA defines *material connection* as "any relationship between a speaker and a company or brand that could affect the credibility audiences give to that speaker's statements or influence how the audience feels about that company or brand; (for example, because of perceived bias); this can include any benefits or incentives such as monetary payment, free product, exclusive or early access, value-in-kind, discounts, gifts (including travel), sweepstakes entries, or an employer/employee or other business relationship" (WOMMA 2017).

The FTC has updated its Endorsement Guide to include social media specific endorsement guidelines. These guidelines imply that social media users, especially those with a particularly high number of followers, explicitly *disclose* any relationship with the brand(s) they promote or mention within social media content (FTC 2015). WOMMA defines *material connection* quite concisely; however, the FTC endorsement guidelines are actually quite ambiguous, which opens the door to creative interpretation. And, despite WOMMA (2017) concisely defining *material connection,* they entertain the ambiguity inherent within the Endorsement Guide. “In all cases the adequacy of the disclosure will depend on the context, i.e. – the nature of the message, the platform on which it is being presented, etc.” (WOMMA 2017).

For the purposes of this dissertation, ***<u>disclosure</u>*** refers to *<u>the degree to which a social media influencer officially and adequately reveals any relationship with any brand mentioned, pictured, and/or promoted throughout the social media influencer’s social media content—to include both pictures and text/captions (e.g., no disclosure versus prominent disclosure)</u>*. As indicated, there are different types of disclosure, or different ways in which to disclose. Figure 2.3 illustrates varying degrees of disclosure. Specifically, screenshot captures from Instagram depict different ways in which two particular social media influencers disclose or fail to disclose. These eight examples (labeled a-h) illustrate the varying degrees of disclosure as seen on Instagram. For example, from least to most explicit, influencers may not disclose at all, or they may include #ad at the very end of the post’s caption, or they may explicitly state within the caption that they have entered into a brand partnership with the featured brand.


a
apinchoflovely • Following
The Wauwinet
apinchoflovely Putting the finishing touches on my Nantucket travel guide today! 💗 (My sister got to visit during the July 4th holiday, so she has even MORE suggestions to add to my post! 🤗)
....
I'll also be sharing all of my outfit details from my trip including this white eyelet maxi that is a vacay dream dress - I also just linked it on the @liketoknow.it app!
....
#nantucket #thatnantucketfeeling #ack #lillypulitzer #summerinlilly #chasinglight #travelguide http://liketk.it/2wu2v #liketkit 📸 @rebeccalovephotography
Load more comments
tmburkhart Sooo cute!!! That jean jacket is to die for!
pbjboutique In LOVE with this!!
2,402 likes
2 HOURS AGO
b
apinchoflovely • Following
The Country Club of Louisiana
apinchoflovely I remember in high school, I got my first little blue box under the tree 🎄 , and all these years later, it's still just as magical! ✨ Swipe to see what was on my wishlist this year from @TiffanyAndCo and learn more about #TiffanyFragrance on my IG Stories. ❤️
....
Ps. It's #AllYouNeed to complete your holiday outfits - and there's still time to have it shipped! #ATiffanyHoliday 📸 @laineyreedphotography #holidayparty #wishlist #giftideas
Load more comments
ana_ncr Sorteo de yuya
tabithafaith That dress is so beautiful!
byhilaryrose Wow this is dreamy!!
kapiha_aslanian ♥
4,920 likes
DECEMBER 21, 2017
Add a comment...


c
apinchoflovely • Following
apinchoflovely All the ingredients for a very necessary post-fashion week decompress session! #jergenspartner I've been extending my end-of-summer glow with @JergensUS Natural Glow - they have a product that you can apply on wet skin making natural-looking color even faster and easier. So you can sit back and enjoy your bubbles and your bubbly even longer. It's a #winwin in my book! #cheers | Links via my #linkinbio + @liketoknow.it http://liketk.it/2sFhy #liketkit
Load more comments
mystylediaries Dream sitch KRUST
thefashion_nutritionist Beautiful and relaxed
everything.dee Perfection
thislifestyled Love it! I'm a self tanner girl &
2,724 likes
SEPTEMBER 9, 2017
d
apinchoflovely • Following
New York Hilton Midtown
apinchoflovely The girls are all here! @carriebradshawlied finally arrived this morning, and our shoe shelf is now complete. (See all 30ish pairs on IG Stories) Feeling lucky because our room at the @nyhiltonmidtown is definitely the most spacious one we've had during #fashionweek yet! And hello, this view overlooking Radio City Music Hall isn't too shabby either! | Links via my #linkinbio + @liketoknow.it http://liketk.it/2sDGX #liketkit #LTKxNYFW #nyfw #newshoes #shoestagram #instagood #flashesofdelight #hilton #sponsored
Load more comments
thechicpeach So much cuteness! Have fun!!
naomi.noel Wow amazing view and the shoes ❤️ ❤️ ❤️
2,281 likes
SEPTEMBER 7, 2017
Add a comment...

apinchoflovely • **Following**
Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & S...

apinchoflovely Take me back to margs by the pool every day please! 🍹 Fresh lime juice, fresh OJ, agave nectar and @blackboxspirits tequila for the perfect skinny margarita EVERY time. 🍊🍋 And because #blackboxspirits come in boxes instead of bottles, they're even easier to throw in your fancy pool bag! 💯
....
For 21+ #ad | Links via the @liketoknow.it app 👉 #ltkswim #swimwear #poolday http://liketk.it/2vACa #liketkit #vacayallday

Load more comments

hannyrene Such a beautiful photo! Love that bikini too 😍😍

orellafab Ohhh i love this place ! I was there a week ago ❤️😘💋

ninawirths such a lovely pic 🖤🖤

5,300 likes

MAY 1

apinchoflovely • **Following**
Tulum, Quintana Roo

apinchoflovely Taming the mane while traveling with @pantene (#hairflip 💁‍♀️) because you can't risk a bad hair day with the hotel shampoo and conditioner y'all! (Unless you're Jordan because he will literally show up on vacay with an empty suitcase. 🙄)
....
Ps. This #Pantene in-shower Foam Conditioner is so light-weight for more bounce in your curls! 💆‍♀️💗
#PanteneFoam #ad
....
Similar suits linked on @liketoknow.it http://liketk.it/2wnbp #liketkit #hairinspo #blondehair #ltkswim #swimwear

Load more comments

3,977 likes

JULY 1

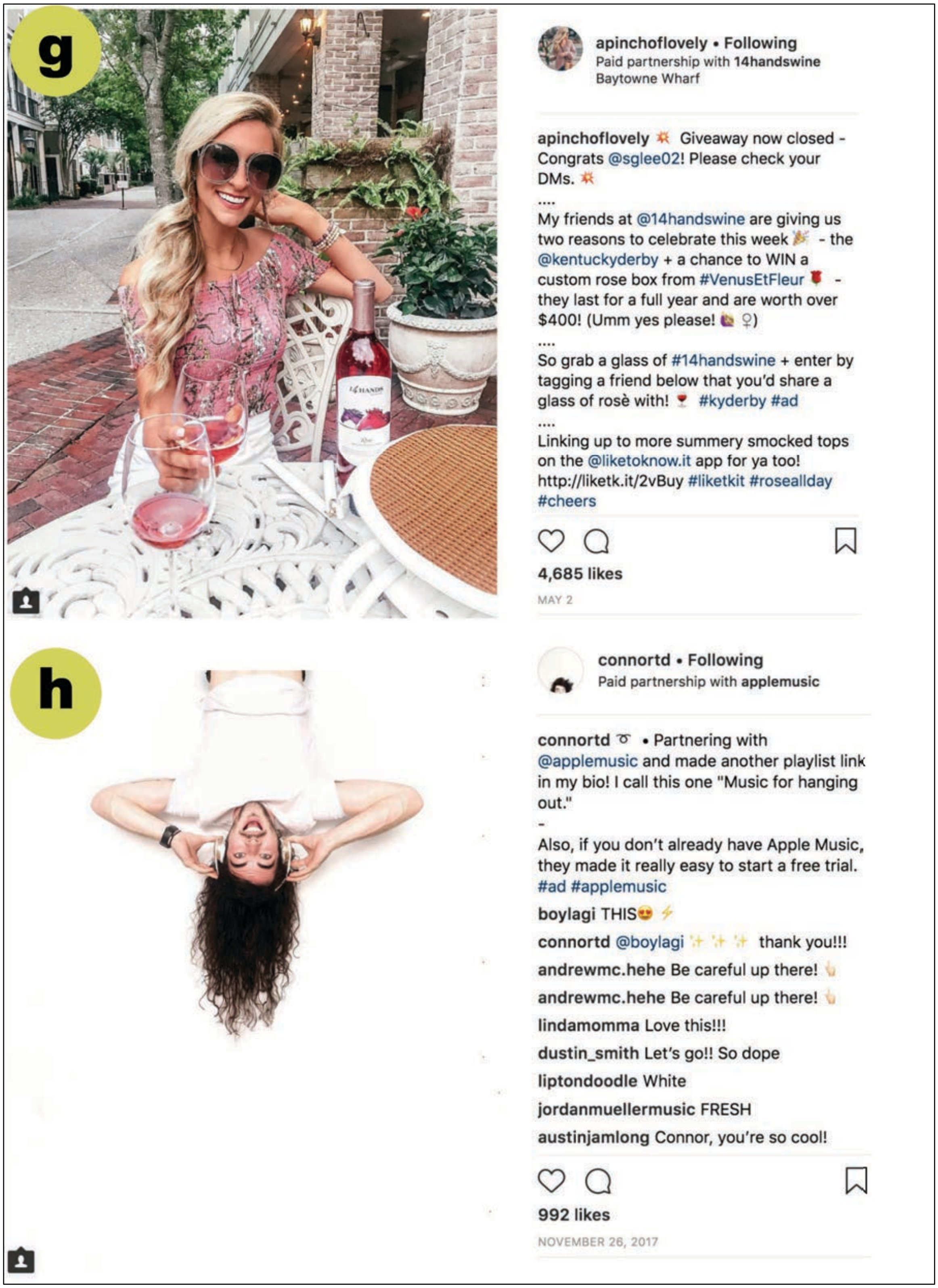


Figure 2.3: Varying Degrees of Disclosure as seen on Instagram

As indicated, Figure 2.3 depicts the varying degrees of disclosure as seen on Instagram. The screenshot-captured images within are labeled a – h. Table 2.5 accompanies Figure 2.3 in that each of the varying degrees of disclosure depicted, and the differences amongst them are detailed and characterized within Table 2.5.

Table 2.5: Descriptive Details of the Varying Degrees of Disclosure as seen on Instagram within Figure 2.3

IMAGE LABEL	DEGREE OF DISCLOSURE	DISCLOSURE DETAILS & CONTENT PUBLICATION DATE	DESCRIPTION
SMI Instagram handle= apinchoflovely Number of Instagram Followers (as of 07/12/18): 308K Blog= A Pinch of Lovely (by Krystal Bennett Faircloth; www.apinchoflovely.com)			
a	*no disclosure*	No #ad, #paid, and/or #sponsored No explicit mention of material connection Yet, *brand prominence*[3] &/or *brand presence*[4] exist. July 10, 2018	In the text caption the SMI mentions the dress she models within the image and uses the hashtag, #lillypulitzer. The dress is verified to be Lilly Pulitzer brand via lillypulitzer.com. Further, the SMI has admittedly worked with Lilly Pulitzer, verified via her blog, under the "brands and media" tab.
b	*minimal*	@brand #brandFamily #brandFamilyTagline #brandSeasonalTagline December 21, 2017	@TiffanyAndCo #TiffanyFragrance #AllYouNeed #ATiffanyHoliday The SMI incorporates the hashtag, #ATiffanyHoliday which was also incorporated by Tiffany & Co.'s official Instagram page within

[3] *Brand prominence* is introduced by Han, Nunes, and Dreze (2010) and is defined as, "the extent to which the product advertises the brand by displaying the mark in a more visible or conspicuous manner (e.g., larger logos, repeat prints)" (19).
[4] *Brand presence* is defined as "how often the brand is mentioned in the native advertisement" and is assessed via wording/ text that may or may not accompany an image (Krouwer, Poels and Paulussen 2017, 8).

b	*minimal*	@brand #brandFamily #brandFamilyTagline #brandSeasonalTagline December 21, 2017	ALL of the content posted throughout the 2017 Christmas holiday season. →This brings about reason to question a potential brand partnership and/or material connection despite the SMI failing to disclose any such relationship/connection. Further, one particular post made by Tiffany & Co. on Instagram (posted December 15, 2017) includes an image of a Tiffany brand perfume bottle in which the caption reads: "#AllYouNeed this holiday is the new #TiffanyFragrance. Shop the link in our bio. #ATiffanyHoliday" →This nearly confirms that the SMI was paid to promote by Tiffany & Co. again, despite lacking disclosure.
c	*minimal*	#brandpartner @brand September 9, 2017	#jergenspartner @JergensUS The SMI attempts to disclose by incorporating #jergenspartner However, this is not deemed adequate and should at least include an additional hashtag such as #ad, #paid, and/or #sponsored And/or, include an explicit disclosure within the text caption.
d	*moderate*	@brand #brand #sponsored September 7, 2017	@nyhiltonmidtown #hilton #sponsored The SMI discloses a material connection with Hilton via #sponsored
e	*moderate*	@brand #brand #ad May 1, 2018	@blackboxspirits #blackboxspirits #ad The SMI discloses via hashtag and brandtag but makes no explicit mention within the text caption to ensure the brand partnership/

			material connection is known and understood by all. Lastly, this image incorporates a tagged location—Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa. This is worth mentioning since image d points out the material connection that exists between the SMI and Hilton. It is quite likely that this location tag was part of the SMI and Hitlon's agreed upon brand partnership, yet no such disclosure regarding the potential agreement exists.
e	*moderate*	@brand #brand #ad May 1, 2018	
f	*moderate*	@brand #brand #brandProduct #ad July 1, 2018	@pantene #Pantene #PanteneFoam #ad Again, SMI discloses via hashtag and brandtag with the addition of the specific brand product featured within the image being hashtagged, but the SMI makes no explicit mention within the text caption to ensure the brand partnership/ material connection is known and understood by all.
g	*sponsored*	This post incorporates Instagram's SMI tool for sponsored content. The feature allows users to disclose more *clearly and conspicuously*; the feature makes content deemed as advertising obviously so with a "Paid partnership with [brand]" tag. May 2, 2018	"Paid partnership with **14handswine**" @kentuckyderby #VenusEtFleur #14handswine #kyderby #ad While the SMI's material connection with 14 Hands Wine is clear, the potential (and probable) connection with Venus Et Fleur is unclear. Seemingly, either a connection exists between the SMI and Venus Et Fleur, or the SMI chose to personally purchase $400 flowers to give away to one of her followers. Lastly, one might also wonder whether or not a material connection with the Kentucky Derby exists.

SMI Instagram handle= connortd (Connor Dwyer) **Number of Instagram Followers (as of 07/12/18): 72.9K**			
h	*sponsored plus*	This post incorporates Instagram's SMI tool for sponsored content. The feature allows users to disclose more clearly and conspicuously; the feature makes content deemed as advertising obviously so with a "Paid partnership with [brand]" tag. November 26, 2017	"Paid partnership with **applemusic**" The SMI explicitly states within the text caption that he is "p*artnering* with Apple Music". He also incorporates #ad.

Throughout the onset of this dissertation, many reasons surfaced for why SMIs might elect *not* to disclose the true nature of brand-partnership promotions within their social media content, despite being paid by the brand they are posting about and despite the FTC rules which require a disclosure for such content. One of these reasons is directly related to product placement. Russell (2002) provides a detailed example from an episode of Friends that serves this discussion perfectly:

> Chandler: (Entering the apartment.) Oh, hey, Rachel, sweetheart? You have got to tell the post office that you have moved. OK? We are still getting all your bills and stuff. (He hands her all of her bills and junk mail.)
>
> Rachel: Oh—oh, Pottery Barn! (She grabs the Pottery Barn catalog and hands the rest back out to Chandler.) You can throw the rest away.
>
> Chandler: I'm not your garbage man. I'm your mailman.
>
> Rachel: Monica, look! Look—look—look! Here is that table that I ordered. (She shows her the picture.)
>
> Monica: You got it from Pottery Barn?
>
> Rachel: Yeah! It's an apothecary table. Does anyone even know what an apothecary is?
>
> Chandler: A pharmacist. (Rachel mocks him.)

The above script is directly quoted from an actual, aired episode of the popular 1990's[5] sitcom, *Friends*. Throughout the less than twenty-two-minute episode "Pottery Barn" is mentioned a total of 19 times[6]. Again, this scenario/script is relative to reasons for why SMIs might elect to ignore FTC mandated rules of disclosure; details regarding the particular reason follow. SMIs might be morally opposed to following the FTC's [ambiguous] rules because the rules seem unfair and unreasonable—specifically, SMIs are perhaps held to unfair rules regarding promotions within their digital content. This is especially so compared to that of actresses and actors who incorporate product-placement(s) within their relative content—television and movies (e.g., *Friends* example). This is presumably and primarily due to the fact that the relative regulation entity does not require the implementor (e.g., actor) to *disclose* material connections (e.g., payment in exchange for the featured product placement). Alternatively, SMI's are required to disclose material connections when SMIs include branded content (e.g., content that SMIs publish in exchange for some sort of material connection; i.e., monetary payment; promotional discounts to offer followers; etc.).

Since the earliest of stages—at the very onset of this research—the commonsense based assumption that SMI's might be morally opposed to implementing disclosures because the rules seem unfair and unreasonable, now seems especially matter-of-fact as the FTC has recently added details relative to this very notion within their online endorsement guide publication. Perhaps the recent addition to the endorsement guide publication is based upon SMIs comparing the product placement disclosure rules (or lack thereof) to the brand dropping disclosure rules. Perhaps such comparisons resulted in complaints that in turn resulted in the additional details within the endorsement guide publication.

---

[5] *Friends* is an American television sitcom, created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman, which aired on NBC from September 22, 1994, to May 6, 2004, lasting ten seasons (Wikipedia 2019).
[6] episode titled, *The One with the Apothecary Table* (Fandom 2019).

In short, it turns out, for unknown, nonsensical reasons, that product placement is mandated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rather than the FTC; hence, the wildly different disclosure requirements between these two contexts (television versus social media). For illustrative, informative purposes the recent addition to the endorsement guide publication follows:

> PRODUCT PLACEMENTS
> What does the FTC have to say about product placements on television shows?
>
> Federal Communications Commission law (FCC, not FTC) requires TV stations to include disclosures of product placement in TV shows.
>
> The FTC has expressed the opinion that under the FTC Act, product placement (that is, merely showing products or brands in third-party entertainment content – as distinguished from sponsored content or disguised commercials) doesn't require a disclosure that the advertiser paid for the placement.
>
> What if the host of a television talk show expresses her opinions about a product – let's say a videogame – and she was paid for the promotion? The segment is entertainment, it's humorous, and it's not like the host is an expert. Is that different from a product placement and does the payment have to be disclosed?
>
> If the host endorses the product – even if she is just playing the game and saying something like "wow, this is awesome" – it's more than a product placement. If the payment for the endorsement isn't expected by the audience and it would affect the weight the audience gives the endorsement, it should be disclosed. It doesn't matter that the host isn't an expert or the segment is humorous as long as the endorsement has credibility that would be affected by knowing about the payment. However, if what the host says is obviously an advertisement – think of an old-time television show where the host goes to a different set, holds up a cup of coffee, says "Wake up with ABC Coffee. It's how I start my day!" and takes a sip – a disclosure probably isn't necessary (FTC 2015).

Even when product placement disclosures are required, they are rarely acknowledged. Disclosures for product placements typically appear within the credits, after the conclusion of the entertainment program (e.g., TV episode; movie). Most people do not even watch this portion—the credits—further, it is very unlikely that consumers pay much attention to such. Even when/if consumers opt to take note of the concluding credits, they are oftentimes displayed so quickly that they disappear before the average person has enough time to read the details. Additionally, product placement disclosure is not required to take place at, or near, the same time as the promotion. Likewise, product placement disclosures are not required to be "clear and conspicuous"— the exact wording used by the FTC to describe the correct way in which SMIs should disclose. It is seemingly indisputable that SMIs are held to unfair disclosure rules and regulations as compared to traditional product placement.

And still, yet another fundamental reason for why influencers might choose to ignore the unfair disclosure rules and regulations remains undiscussed. The FTC rules and regulations are unfair; furthermore, they are not adequately regulated. Articulated broadly, the FTC "protects consumers by stopping unfair, deceptive or fraudulent practices in the marketplace. We conduct investigations, sue companies and people that violate the law, develop rules to ensure a vibrant marketplace, and educate consumers and businesses about their rights and responsibilities" (FTC 2019b). However, recent media publications suggest that consumers have doubts regarding the abilities of the FTC and their capacity to adequately manage all of their responsibility; for example: "the time for vigorous enforcement by the FTC is long overdue" (Pacific Standard 2019). Lastly, when the FTC does regulate and reprimand, the consequences are little to none. The penalty for SMIs being caught the first time—for failing to disclose material connections clearly and conspicuously— is a verbal or written warning, comparable to a *slap on the wrist*. This hardly encourages SMIs to follow the rules, especially when doing so potentially results in negative consumer perceptions. SMIs seem resistant to follow the FTC mandated disclosure rules for all of the aforementioned reasons, primarily likely due to SMIs not wanting to seem like they are betraying their audience—their hard-earned followers.

It is worth noting that television as we know it is seemingly, slowly but surely, being made available via alternative, modern channels that fall within the realm of *social media.* These channels are digital (i.e., accessed via the internet) and are presumably, most often accessed via desktop, laptop, padlet, or mobile device rather than via traditional electronics—rather than via the traditional television. Further, many social media and digital outlets, which are accessed via alternative means as compared to traditional television more often than not have adopted modern trends regarding creating and offering original series (e.g., Netflix Originals, Hulu Originals, Amazon Originals, etc.). This brings about additional confusion and unwarranted unfairness even more so than in the past—even more so than at the onset of influencer marketing. This brings about several relative questions—

- Does the FTC or the FCC obtain the governing role for Facebook TV? IG [Instagram] TV? YouTube?
- Do the members of the FTC (and/or FCC) understand and/or use popular social media platforms?
    - Are they aware of the trends described herein?
- Do the influencer marketing disclosure requirements (e.g., those based upon varying degrees of *material connection*) apply to Facebook and/or Instagram TV?
- Or, do the product-placement disclosure requirements—more appropriately the *lack of* or *non-existent disclosure requirements within product placement*—apply to Facebook and/or Instagram TV?

Recall Russell's (2002) definition of *product placement* is "the practice of placing branded products in the content of mass media programming" (306). As television entertainment and social media channels become more and more intertwined, it will presumably become increasingly difficult to differentiate product placement from brand dropping. Likewise, the governing bodies (i.e., FTC; FCC) and their vastly different rules for disclosure will continue to become increasingly unreasonable, unwarranted and irrelevant, it not blatantly irrational. Moreover, influencer marketing presumably gained success and prevalence based upon notions of authenticity—based upon consumer perceptions of SMIs' authentic social media content.

Therefore, SMIs might decide not to explicitly disclose in order to maintain consumer perceptions of authenticity, since self-proclaimed disclosures might lead consumers to assume the SMI is *selling out.*

2.5.2 Authenticity

2.5.2.1 Authenticity and influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is arguably centered around the notion of *authenticity*—recall Table 1.1 from Chapter 1 for example—authenticity was a focal notion amongst many of the noted publications. More specifically, the latter portion of the table contained fourteen recent, credible *influencer marketing* "news/business" publications especially relevant to the focus of this dissertation. Seven of those fourteen articles place a strong emphasis on authenticity within the realm of influencer marketing. More specifically, these seven articles attribute *authenticity* as the precursor or underlying characteristic for rationalizing the success of influencer marketing entirely, the success of social media influencers, and the rise in brand-SMI partnerships. These seven articles are listed and detailed again, within Table 2.6, for the sake of ease of reference; selected quotes are included within.

Table 2.6: *Influencer Marketing* Publications with *Authenticity* as a Focal Attribute —Featured Selections from Table 1.1

AUTHORS & DATE OF PUBLICATION	TITLE OF ARTICLE	PUBLICATION
Teresa M. Caro August 2013	*Yes, Marketers, You Should Pay Your Influencers*	*Harvard Business Review*
After all, if the influencer loves the brand and the fans love the influencer, then the fans will love the brand, right?... ...To better understand the complex nature of the brand-influencer-fan relationship, we derived these guidelines from our research and experience: *Don't underestimate an influencer's power; Look for influencers who actually like and use your products;* *Don't fake it— To be effective, influencers need to be perceived as independent, authentic fans of the brand; Compensate them.*		

Tom Ward June 2016	*This Is The Future of Influencer Marketing*	*Forbes*
Amy Callahan July 2017	*Stop Calling The Use of Celebrities "Influencer Marketing"*	*Huffington Post*
Robert Haslehurst, Chris Randall & Noor Abdel-Samed August 2017	*How Consumer Brands Can Connect with Customers in a Changing Retail Landscape*	*Harvard Business Review*
Product makers can look to retailers and innovative brands for lessons in ways to balance universal best practices with choices that are authentic to the brand, the evolving consumer purchase process, and the specific channel environment.		
Melissa Todisco December 2017	*Why Influencer Marketing Is Essential for Any Business Looking to Grow*	*Forbes*
The fastest and most straight-forward way to engage an influencer is to pay them to create content. This works best for consumer products looking to work with bloggers, Instagrammers, etc. While you may be compensating them to create content, it is important to give them editorial freedom to ensure that the post they create feels authentic to their audience.		
Abbey Crain January 2018	*What Happens When You Reach a Million Instagram Followers: The coveted 'M' can bring influencer status and lucrative marketing deals*	*The Wall Street Journal*
Jayson DeMers April 2018	*7 Predictions on The Future of Influencer Marketing*	*Forbes*
Influencer marketing is the process of leveraging an existing social media influencer—someone who carries a strong reputation with a large number of people in a given niche—by having them endorse your brand, support your content, or co-create content with you and your brand… I anticipate many changes to come for influencer marketing in the next several years: *3. Greater demand for authenticity…* *5. Transparency and regulatory crackdowns.*		

It is worth noting that the seven news/business articles presented within Table 1.1, but not within Table 2.6, were purposefully included within Chapter 1 due to their relation to one of two topic-related reasons— (1) basic/elementary, introductory descriptions of social media marketing, influencer marketing, and/or social media influencers, or (2) disclosures. One might assume that these two topic-related reasons are independent of authenticity, hence the lack of *authenticity* therein. However, this dissertation proposes that *disclosures* directly affect consumer perceptions of social media influencers' authenticity.

The main reason influencer marketing has gained such a digital prevalence and has become such a popular strategy amongst brand managers is arguably because consumers perceive SMIs as authentic (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard 2018). Social media influencers presumably appear to have developed their digital content due to their love for the topic (e.g., cooking, cars) or the creative process (e.g., comedy, film making), indicative of their intrinsic motivation (e.g., passionate authenticity, discussed subsequently). Ward (2017), included within the above table, discusses what he refers to as "some changes coming that will change the business [influencer marketing] for years to come." Amongst these changes is *authentic relationships*. He details this change by stating, "in order to be effective, influencers will have to remember what got them to where they are: Endorsing a product because they like it, not because they're being compensated". This notion is aligned with the recent research of Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard (2018) in which the authors acknowledge that social media influencers' followers "value influencers' intrinsic motivations and noncommercial orientation" (1).

2.5.2.2 Authenticity literature. **Especially noteworthy is the focus of authenticity throughout this research. Accordingly, many key factors support the inclusion of transparent authenticity; three key factors in particular are next detailed**. **First,** authenticity is of critical importance to human brands (Fournier et al. 2019). **Second,** influencer marketing is arguably centered around the notion of *authenticity.* Recall that authenticity was a focal notion amongst many noted popular press publications (i.e., Harvard Business Review; Forbes). Many of these popular press publications attribute *authenticity* as the precursor or underlying characteristic for rationalizing the success of influencer marketing entirely, the success of social media influencers, and the rise in brand-SMI partnerships. **And third,** recent academic research suggests that transparent authenticity is the best construct to include. Specifically, Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard's (2018) qualitative research reveals two authenticity management strategies that social media influencers most notably incorporate—strategies pertaining to the self-preservation of (1) passionate authenticity and (2) transparent authenticity (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard 2018). **As such, rather than incorporate the source credibility model, which includes trustworthiness as one of the three components, this research implements the entity referent correspondence (ERC) framework of authenticity as the overarching theoretical framework.**

The definition, meaning, and operationalization of authenticity is widely disputed within the marketing discipline, within other disciplines, and amongst each of the many disciplines incorporating authenticity within their research domain. In fact, on-going research determines there are forty-nine different definitions of authenticity within only the marketing discipline (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper). Authenticity has been referred to as perceptions that something is *true* (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Morhart et al. 2015;), *real* (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Spiggle, Nguyen and Caravella 2012), or *genuine* (Akbar and Wymer 2017; Grayson and Martinec 2004). Marketing researchers do agree that different types or dimensions of authenticity exist; however, the number of authenticity types and/or dimensions, and the conceptual definitions for each type/dimension are disagreed upon amongst marketing academics (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper).

Authenticity is a cornerstone in marketing and has become such an important construct because consumers care about authenticity—consumers desire authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004). Morhart et al. (2015, 200) reiterate Gilmore and Pine's (2007) bold notion that "authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing criterion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability" (5). Further, prior research indicates that authenticity has a positive effect on consumer responses. For instance, Morhart et al. (2015) empirically test and provide evidence that authenticity leads to more positive emotional brand attachment and more positive word of mouth. And, Spiggle, Nguyen and Caravella (2012) find empirical support that consumers have more positive attitudes towards brands that convey notions of authenticity.

Again, marketing researchers do agree that there are many types and dimensions of authenticity; however, there is little agreement regarding the specific types and/or dimensions as well as the number of types and/or dimensions. For example, Grayson and Martinec (2004) distinguish two kinds of authenticity—indexical authenticity and iconic authenticity. The authors describe indexical authenticity as, "the original" and "the real thing" (297). They infer that a comparative judgement takes place in order to determine or assign indexical authenticity. In other words, one must know the defining features of the original or real thing in order to categorize it as indexically authentic versus indexically inauthentic. For example, whether a Louis Vuitton handbag is indexically authentic requires knowledge regarding the key features (e.g., the length of the "tail" on the L within the Louis Vuitton stamp) that distinguish an original, real Louis Vuitton handbag from a counterfeit. Alternatively, Grayson and Martinec (2004) describe iconic authenticity as, "authentic reproduction" or "authentic recreation" (298). Again, a knowledge-based judgment takes place in order to infer the status of iconic authenticity. More precisely, perceivers must have preexisting notions in order to make judgements of iconic authenticity or iconic inauthenticity, in which such notions assist in the creation of a "composite photograph" which depicts the expectations for iconic authenticity (298).

Prior literature is unified in that numerous researchers (Akbar and Wymer 2017; Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008; Morhart et al. 2015; Napoli et al. 2014; Spiggle, Nguyen, and

Caravella 2012) evaluate authenticity being applied to brands. Again however, researchers are in disagreement regarding the type and number of facets believed to comprise authenticity. Further, the meanings for each facet are also disagreed upon. For example, Akbar and Wymer (2017) suggest two dimensions (*originality* and *genuineness*); Napoli et al. (2014) suggest three dimensions (*quality commitment, brand heritage* and *sincerity*); and Spiggle, Nguyen, and Caravella (2012) suggest four dimensions (*maintaining brand styles and standards, honoring brand heritage, preserving brand essence,* and *avoiding brand exploitation*). Some dimensions are conceptually similar; however, others are inconsistent in that they do not have conceptual overlap with any other dimension. For example, Spiggle, Nguyen, and Caravella's (2012) *brand essence* conceptually overlaps with Napoli et al.'s (2014) *brand heritage.* Spiggle, Nguyen, and Caravella (2012) describe *brand essence* as follows: "The soul of the brand and its fundamental values (Beverland 2006) define its essence and identify what it stands for and what makes it unique; a brand extension at odds with its essence compromises its uniqueness—that which makes it what it is—and threatens its authenticity" (970). Similarly, Napoli et al.'s (2014) *brand heritage* is reliant upon past brand actions and offerings—it is these actions and offerings from which perceptions/expectations are identified and fundamental values conceived—the brand's perceived identity is formulated. Alternatively, Morhart et al.'s (2015) *symbolism* does not clearly align with any other known dimensions.

It seems the key issue at hand is that prior research has not recognized an overarching theme that unifies the facets—the types and/or dimensions, their meanings, and the number of types and/or dimensions—of authenticity. Recent research (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper) addresses this issue. Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) lay the theoretical foundation for a unifying set of facets ascribed to authenticity; furthermore, this working framework lays the theoretical foundation for this dissertation.

Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) provide a complete overview of prior authenticity research in which they highlight lack of agreement amongst *all things authentic* within the marketing literature. In other words, and as inferred, there is no consensus within the marketing literature regarding the measurement of authenticity including the number of items and/or dimensions, the actual items and/or dimensions, the reliability and validity of numerous authenticity measures, etc. Moulard, Raggio and Folse's (working paper) research intends to mend such an incompatible area of the literature—authenticity. The authors involved have published research in not only the authenticity domain (Moulard et al. 2014; Moulard, Garrity and Rice 2015; Moulard, Raggio and Folse 2016) of the marketing literature, but also the SMI domain (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018) of the marketing literature, providing additional support for the foundational framework herein.

Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) set out to provide much needed conceptual clarity of *authenticity* to ensure that future academic research within the domain of *authenticity* is meaningful—to ensure an on-going development of knowledge of authenticity. This dissertation adopts the conceptualization of the *entity referent correspondence (ERC) framework of authenticity* proposed by Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) in which they define authenticity as "a consumer's perception of the extent to which an entity corresponds to a referent" (8-9). The researchers provide the following elaboration: "in the most general sense, authenticity is the degree to which an entity in one's environment (e.g., object, person, performance) is perceived to be true to or match up with something else. We label this "something else" a referent—the point of reference to which the entity is compared" (8). Additionally, this on-going research identifies three types of authenticity, and distinct definitions for the three types. And, the on-going research also proposes *nomological nets* of the three authenticity types that explain how consumers form perceptions of each type and how the types affect each other (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper). First, the three types should be further discussed.

As mentioned, Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) propose nomological nets of the three authenticity types that explain how consumers form perceptions of each type and how the types affect each other. Aligned with the ERC framework's general definition of authenticity, each of the three types of authenticity—*true-to-ideal (TTI), true-to-fact (TTF),* and *true-to-self (TTS)*—entails an entity referent correspondence. Alternatively, the types differ in that the type of referent amongst each of the three types is distinct—"they are distinguished by their unique referents: an ideal, a fact, and another's self" (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper, 5). The referent, or the point of reference to which the entity is compared, differs amongst the three types of authenticity. Nonetheless, this framework "provides cohesion to the various forms and contexts of authenticity [previously] offered in the literature" (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper, 4).

Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) define ***<u>true-to-ideal (TTI</u>)*** *authenticity* as "<u>a consumer's perception of the extent to which an entity's attributes correspond with a socially determined standard or exemplar</u>" (10). In other words, TTI authenticity is a consumer's perception of the extent to which an entity corresponds to an *ideal* (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper). The socially construed referent—an ideal—is especially variant for TTI authenticity as ideals vary in numerous ways, such as across cultures and over time.
The TTI referent—or, the ideal— is socially determined. Ideals are social constructions; therefore, they do not exist independently of human thought (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper). In other words, the perception of TTI authenticity, or lack thereof, lies "*in the eye of the beholder"* and may vary from one consumer to the next (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper, 6). For example, when Jennifer picks up her children from school, they squeal in excitement in response to their new favorite country music song being played on the radio. The

children and all of their classmates love the new song and perceive it to be an authentic country song. However, Jennifer and her husband, who have grown up in a different generation, do not at all care for this particular song, and insist that it is not TTI country music, but rather, “pop” music.

Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) define ***true-to-fact (TTF)*** *authenticity* as “a consumer’s perception of the extent to which information stated or implied about an entity corresponds with the actual state of affairs” (15). In other words, TTF authenticity is a consumer’s perception of the extent to which an entity corresponds to a fact (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper). Comparatively, the referent for *true-to-fact (TTF)* authenticity—actual attributes or occurrences (e.g., facts)—are not as variable of an ideal—the referent for TTI authenticity. Actual attributes and/or occurrences are not altered by social constructions (e.g., country of residence/origin; age/generation). In other words, the referent for TTF authenticity is “more static, and less likely to change” (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper, 8). For example, in the midst of mainstream media’s emphasis regarding the negative health hindrances associated with high-fructose corn syrup, Susie opts to forgo any future consumption/purchase of her once favorite, sport’s drink. Months later while grocery shopping, to her delight, Susie spots the formerly coveted sport’s drink with a bright new label, which vividly reads, “new recipe: no high-fructose corn syrup”. She excitedly purchases several bottles of the newly improved sport’s drink. Once at home, after further inspection, Susie finds that “fructose” is listed within the first few ingredients. Susie does some research via Google and comes to find that “fructose” is actually worse than “high fructose corn syrup” (Calton Nutrition 2017)! Since the actual state of affairs—the actual ingredients—are not aligned with the newly implemented labeling, Susie deems this sport’s drink brand to be TTF inauthentic. Perceptions of TTF inauthenticity originate from deception and lying. Alternatively, perceptions of TTF authenticity originate from honesty and transparency—prior research has suggested this notion—Morhart et al.'s (2015) *integrity*, Napoli et al.'s (2014) *sincerity*, and Akbar and Wymer's (2017) *genuineness*.

Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) define ***true-to-self (TTS)*** *authenticity* as "a consumer's perception of the extent to which an entity's behavior corresponds with its intrinsic motivations as opposed to its extrinsic" (17). In other words, TTS authenticity is a consumer's perception of the extent to which an entity corresponds to another's self (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper). The referent for *true-to-self (TTS)* authenticity—a self—is similar to the referent for TTF authenticity in that, "like a fact referent, one's true self is considered a fixed entity rather than a socially constructed one, as laypersons perceive the true self as a collection of immutable, innate attributes (Jung 1953; Rogers 1959). Nonetheless, a self is distinguished from a fact due to its psychological nature" (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper, 10). For example, when an artist gains his claim to fame based upon, abstract grey-tone paintings, consumers perceive that he is selling out and behaving TTS inauthentic, when he suddenly begins to promote a new line of colorful, realistic still-life reproductions of items typically within the realm of grey tone coloring (e.g., slugs). Consumer perceptions of TTS inauthenticity are presumably because the artist seemingly loves the stylistic combination of abstract and gray tones, yet he suddenly switched to more colorful artwork because he presumably thought it would be more appealing to consumers.

Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard (2018) investigate how SMIs manage their own human-brand authenticity. However, their research did not investigate consumers' perceptions of SMIs' authenticity or what factors may influence such perceptions. They determine that SMI management is based upon personal feelings, or the personal need to maintain an authentic self rather than managing consumers'/others' perceptions of the self. Alternatively, yet relatively, this dissertation intends to determine how SMIs' disclosure, or lack thereof, affects consumers' perceptions of social media influencers' authenticity. Further, this dissertation also intends to determine whether or not consumers' perceptions of SMIs' authenticity affects consumers' attitude toward the influencer and/or consumers' attitude toward the featured brand.

2.5.3 The Disclosure–Authenticity Relationships

Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard's (2018) qualitative research determines the means in which SMIs manage their own human brand authenticity while simultaneously capitalizing on paid partnership opportunities with brands. The results reveal two authenticity management strategies that social media influencers most notably incorporate—strategies pertaining to the self-preservation of passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard 2018). As mentioned, the academic literature, within and outside of the marketing discipline, contains many different meanings and applications of *authenticity;* however, this dissertation focuses on the two SMI authenticity types revealed in Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard's (2018) work—*passionate authenticity* and *transparent authenticity*.

Consistent with Moulard, Raggio and Folse's (working paper) definition of authenticity, this dissertation focuses on consumer perceptions of SMIs' authenticity. This dissertation agrees with prior research determining that the main reason influencer marketing has gained such a digital prevalence and has become such a popular strategy amongst brand managers is ultimately because of consumer perceptions of SMIs. More specifically, consumers are attracted to SMIs because they are perceived to be authentic (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard 2018). Furthermore, this dissertation proposes that SMIs possess authenticity that surpasses that of alternative marketing message sources, hence the ongoing rise of influencer marketing.

2.5.3.1 Passionate authenticity. ***Passionate* authenticity** is defined herein as *the extent to which consumers perceive the SMI as intrinsically motivated in that the SMI is passionate about and* *committed to producing his/her creative content based upon inherent excitement and love for the brand(s), product(s), experience(s), and/or overarching genre (e.g., fashion) depicted within* (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard 2018; Moulard et al. 2014). This definition is consistent with Moulard, Raggio and Folse's (working paper) definition of *true-to-self authenticity*. Other researchers have also recognized this form of authenticity. For example, Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink (2008) note that "Authenticity comes from the sense that a passionate creator is involved in making products, and is motivated primarily by their love of craft [i.e., internal motivation], rather than the possibility of financial reward [i.e., external rewards]" (11–12).

***Passionate authenticity* is consistent with TTS authenticity**. For example, suppose Matilda starts an exercise and health blog out of sheer love for health and nutrition. Consumers with aligned interests begin to notice and appreciate Matilda's blog and social media presence. Before long, Matilda has gained a large following, has been offered brand partnerships, and is being referred to as an SMI. While Matilda still feels passionate about health, nutrition and exercise, she has entertained many of the brand partnership offerings and cannot help but enjoy being paid to do what she loves. Now, suppose Chick-fil-A approaches Matilda to form a partnership and to promote their new macaroni and cheese offering. While Matilda finds the partnership to be a great opportunity, her followers may perceive that she is not behaving true to self—true to the self she portrayed when she gained her following. These consumer perceptions bring about feelings of TTS inauthenticity—perceptions that Matilda is *selling out*. Since Matilda has always posted and promoted a healthy lifestyle and green diet, she is perceived as untrue to self. Her actions are perceived as being based purely upon extrinsic (e.g., financial compensation) rather than intrinsic (e.g., love for a healthy lifestyle) motivations.

This dissertation proposes that disclosures negatively affect passionate authenticity. Despite their popularity, social media influencers face a challenge when they brand drop—when they mention, recommend, or endorse brands within their digital content. Such brand dropping may lead to perceptions that the influencer is passionately inauthentic, as consumers may presume that such brand dropping is primarily commercially driven—that the influencer is highly extrinsically motivated. Thus, by incorporating disclosures, social media influencers may compromise their passionate authenticity. That is, disclosures may have a negative effect on passionate authenticity.

2.5.3.2 Transparent authenticity. ***Transparent* authenticity** is defined herein as *the extent to which consumers perceive that the SMI is completely open, honest and forthright regarding the SMIs potential relationship with the featured brand(s) within the SMI's social media content* (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018). Consumers likely form perceptions of transparent authenticity as they do for passionate authenticity in the sense that certain actions and behaviors are presumably perceived as more or less honest, transparent, and/or truthful. Transparent authenticity is consistent with true-to-fact authenticity (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper; Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018). Moulard, Raggio and Folse (working paper) propose that true-to-fact authenticity "entails the extent to which information conveyed or inferred about the entity is perceived to correspond with the entity's actual attributes or with events that actually occurred—i.e., facts" (15). Likewise, SMI's who are actually being paid to promote a brand, and who also convey or infer such information (i.e., disclosure) are seemingly behaving true-to-fact. Therefore, when consumers notice an SMI's explicit, forthright disclosure they are more likely to perceive the SMI as possessing transparent authenticity.

***Transparent authenticity* is consistent with TTF authenticity**. Likewise, consumers' perceptions regarding the extent to which an SMI is disclosing the factual nature of the SMI's relationship with brand(s) within the SMI's digital content will affect consumers' perceived TTF authenticity of that SMI. For example, if consumers perceive that an SMI is being paid to promote the brand within their Instagram post, but the SMI fails to mention such—the SMI fails to mention the actual state of affairs—consumers will presumably perceive that the SMI is TTF inauthentic.

A worthwhile discussion to differentiate and validate *transparent authenticity* follows. Despite being conceptually similar, transparent authenticity is more specific than trustworthiness. Specifically, while trustworthiness includes notions of honesty and reliability, transparent authenticity focuses on consumer's perceptions of honesty, transparency, and forthrightness. Transparent authenticity refers to consumers' perceptions of whether the SMI communicates truthfully, in a matter of fact way. Transparent authenticity is conceptually similar to *trustworthiness*; however, *transparent authenticity* is more specific than *trustworthiness*. The two constructs—transparent authenticity and trustworthiness—are quite similar; however, trustworthiness includes notions of reliability, or whether promises are fulfilled, which makes trustworthiness more specific, or less general, as compared to transparent authenticity. For example, Erdem and Swait (2004) include the following items in their *brand trustworthiness* scale: "(1) This brand delivers what it promises; (2) This brand's product claims are believable; (3) Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less; (4) This brand has a name you can trust; and (5)This brand doesn't pretend to be something it isn't" (Mohart et al. 2015, 214). While the measurement items capture *trust* (i.e., item 2) they also capture notions of reliability (i.e., item 1; item 3).

Further, lack of reliability does not necessarily equate to dishonesty. For example, suppose you promise to arrive to your parent's house for the Christmas holidays, yet you encounter weather delays at the airport that prevent such. The failed promise does not equate to you lying—you made a promise based upon your honest intentions; however, external circumstances interfered. In addition to the external circumstance component of reliability, there is also a competence component of reliability. For example, suppose you promise your boss that you will submit your annual report before Thanksgiving. You work on your report every day and sometimes even after hours at home in order to meet this deadline, but the report composition ends up taking a lot longer than you anticipated. Therefore, you fail to complete the report prior to Thanksgiving. Again, this failed promise does not equate to you lying—you made a promise based upon your honest intentions; however, you were not competently capable of completing the task at hand by the deadline promised.

McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002) devote a lengthy introduction to emphasize the lack of clarification for the definition of *trust* within the academic literature. Next, they provide theoretical foundations for their specific, trust-related research. “Trust is important because it helps consumers overcome perceptions of uncertainty and risk and engage in "trust-related behaviors" with Web-based vendors, such as sharing personal information or making purchases” (McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar 2002, 335). Engaging with an individual within any, if not all, social media platform(s) essentially involves the exchange/sharing of personal information. Likewise, the act of engaging with an SMI within a social media platform (e.g., Instagram; Facebook) is presumably a “trust-related behavior”. Furthermore, consumer perceptions of *transparent authenticity* likely contribute to lessened uncertainty/risk, which, in turn, likely increases perceptions of *trust*. In other words, consumer perceptions of transparent authenticity likely lead to increased levels of trust; although, this notion is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, this line of thought contributes to the conceptual differentiation between *transparent authenticity* and both *trust* and *trustworthiness*.

Schlosser, White and Lloyd (2006) discuss *trust* and the inherent challenges—“the challenge of establishing consumers’ trust in a variety of contexts… computer-mediated environments such as the Internet may be particularly difficult. A common approach is to post explicit statements that assure customers” (Schlosser, White and Lloyd 2006, 133; Naquin and Paulson 2003). Again, the lack of clarity is highlighted via the presentation of various definitions of *trust* from within the academic literature (Schlosser, White and Lloyd 2006). *Trust* has been defined as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpandé 1992, 315; Schlosser, White and Lloyd 2006, 134). *Trust* has been defined as "a generalized expectancy held by an individual that the word, promise, oral or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon" (Rotter 1980, 1; Schlosser, White and Lloyd 2006, 134). Rousseau et al (1998) define *trust* as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (395). This definition includes both intentions and behavior— in other words, Rousseau et al (1998) define *trust* aligned with the reliability component of trustworthiness. And, *trust* has been defined as "a belief in a person's competence to perform a specific task under specific circumstances" (Sitkin and Roth 1993, 373; Schlosser, White and Lloyd 2006, 134). "Reflected in these and other definitions of trust is a cognitive aspect (i.e., trusting beliefs) and a behavioral aspect (i.e., trusting intentions)" (Schlosser, White and Lloyd 2006, 134; Kim et al. 2004; Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpandé 1992).

Research (Wood, Boles, Johnston, and Bellenger 2008) in the context of marketplace exchanges also reveals several relevant findings to further support the validity of transparent authenticity. "Trust is an expectation by the buyer that a seller will engage in actions supporting the buyer's interests in that setting… One way a buyer reaches this conclusion is through assessment of seller qualities such as consistency, competence, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and helpfulness— suggesting that these qualities are antecedents to an overall assessment of trustworthiness… Trustworthiness is modeled as immediately antecedent to trust" (p 264).

Prior research (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018) recognizes *transparent authenticity* as a distinct type of authenticity; specifically, as a means in which SMIs manage their own human brand authenticity. Further, Akbar and Wymer (2017) propose a dimension (one of two dimensions) that is similar to, yet distinct from transparent authenticity—*genuineness*. The authors describe genuineness as "the degree to which a brand is perceived to be legitimate and undisguised in its claims" (25). This definition brings about similar aspects between *transparent authenticity* and *genuineness.* For example, one might wonder if an SMI is *legitimate* and/or *undisguised in its claims*; for instance, claims of brand partnership (i.e., *disclosure)* or lack thereof (i.e., no disclosure). Nonetheless, the definition for *genuineness* does not fully capture the intended meaning of *transparent authenticity* herein. Also similar to transparent authenticity, Morhart et al. (2015) include *integrity* as a dimension of authenticity. First introduced by Holt (2002), *integrity* "signifies the moral purity and responsibility of the brand. To be authentic, brands must be without an instrumental economic agenda, and be disseminated by people who are intrinsically motivated by deeply held values" (203). As compared with most, if not all, constructs with conceptual overlap, *integrity* is much more specific than transparent authenticity. Most noteworthy, regarding the decision not to adopt any prior scales, is that transparent authenticity herein is less specific, more general, and does not include notions of reliability.

While this research purports that *transparent authenticity* is a valid measure that accurately and reliably captures the defined construct herein, the measurement is admittedly imperfect, as is most/all measurement within the social sciences. Distinction is purported, yet similarity with other constructs is not denied. Further, conceptual overlap appears within the literature as an accepted yet unfortunate adversity. For example, within their introduction, Morhart et al. (2015) note "conceptual similarities also exist between *continuity* and *brand heritage* (Merchant & Rose, 2013; Urde et al., 2007; Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt, & Wuestefeld, 2011), as both refer not only to the brand's history and stability over time, but also the likelihood that it will persist into the future" (202). Further, Morhart et al. (2015) admit conceptual overlap within their proposed framework for consumers' perceived brand authenticity (PBA):

> "We could not fully establish discriminant validity between the PBA [perceived brand authenticity] dimension credibility and brand trustworthiness and the brand personality dimension sincerity…
> …The results are most likely due to a conceptual overlap between constructs. Although PBA consists of a specific array of dimensions that capture its content, some of its dimensions are not novel constructs per se; they share conceptual similarities with other brand-related constructs and are based on similar scale items. The contribution of this research lies in bringing together the dimensions that combine into the PBA construct" (205).

Similarly, *transparent authenticity* shares conceptual similarities as noted within the prior paragraphs. The key distinction between *transparent authenticity* and similar constructs (i.e., *trustworthiness*) is that *transparent authenticity* does not include notions of *reliability*. While implementing the source credibility model as the theoretical framework for this research was considered, doing so was not deemed most advantageous to the literature. Including the ERC framework of authenticity (Moulard, Raggio and Folse working paper; Moulard, Raggio and Folse in press; Moulard, Raggio and Folse 2017) as the conceptual foundation ensures a more meaningful, relevant and timely contribution on behalf of this research, despite the acknowledged conceptual overlap.

2.5.3.3 <u>The Disclosure–authenticity hypotheses</u>. Social media influencers are expected to infer, via disclosure, any business relationship or *material connection* with brands they include within their digital content. Given the noted ambiguity within the FTC's Endorsement Guide as well as the Instagram content within Figure 2.3, it is fair to assume that social media influencers' means of disclosure varies. Additionally, SMIs may or may not be explicitly disclosing their true relationship with brands they post about, potentially due to sheer uncertainty regarding the rules for such. While masking or excluding any necessary disclosure might elicit perceptions of passionate authenticity, consumers will likely perceive social media influencers as more transparent when SMIs disclose unambiguously, since doing so implies complete forthrightness.

"From the FTC's perspective, the watchword is transparency. An advertisement or promotional message shouldn't suggest or imply to consumers that it's anything other than an ad" (Marketing Land 2015b). However, such explicit disclosures presumably result in consumer perceptions of low *passionate authenticity*. Alternatively, social media influencers who explicitly disclose are presumably perceived as possessing high *transparent authenticity*. This brings about a challenge to social media influencers' brand dropping within their digital content. **This dissertation proposes that disclosures have opposing effects on the two authenticity types—that disclosures negatively affect passionate authenticity, yet positively affect transparent authenticity**. <u>As such, the following two hypotheses are proposed</u>:

H1 – Disclosure has a <u>negative</u> effect on passionate authenticity. Passionate authenticity will be lower for posts with a disclosure than for posts without a disclosure.

H2 – Disclosure has a <u>positive</u> effect on transparent authenticity. Transparent authenticity will be greater for posts with a disclosure than for posts without a disclosure.

2.5.4 <u>The Moderator of the Disclosure–Authenticity Relationships: *Brand-Influencer Fit*</u>

One particular factor is proposed to moderate the disclosure-authenticity effects—*brand–influencer fit. Brand–influencer fit* is relative to prior work within advertising and endorsement literature streams. Lim et al. (2017) conducted a study in which consumers evaluated social media influencers' credibility in relation to products within the SMIs' digital content. The findings yield a lack of credibility to which the authors ascribe "social media influencers' inadequate expertise knowledge about the endorsed product" (Lim et al. 2017, 29-30). Lim et al. (2017) also mention that consumers need to perceive some type of *affiliation* between the social media influencer and the product or service the SMI brand drops. Perhaps *brand–influencer fit* includes expertise and/or credibility to some extent; however, the latter notion of *affiliation* is better aligned. Additionally, *congruence* between an endorser and the brand, product or service is widely accepted as one of the key criteria necessary for successful advertising campaigns (Carrillat, d'Astous and Lazure 2013; Fleck, Korchia and Le Roy 2012; Gurel-Atay et al. 2010; Lee and Thorson 2008)

Escalas and Bettman (2003; 2005) present findings most relative to the notion of *brand–influencer fit*. The authors propose and conclude that the "symbolic properties of reference groups become associated with the brands those groups are perceived to use" (2005, 378). It is presumed that a social media influencer possesses properties similar to that of a *reference group* in which the SMI's followers associate the SMI with the brands, products and services they use—or, the brands, products and services consumers perceive they use. Such perceptions are based upon the SMI's digital content—upon the brands, products and services the SMI includes within his/her social media posts. Therefore, aligned with Escalas and Bettman (2003; 2005) brand-influencer fit can be conceptualized as the degree to which a consumer views a similarity and connection between the social media influencer's image and that of a particular brand[7]. Formally, ***brand–influencer fit*** is defined herein as *the degree of alignment between the SMI and the featured brand(s) within the SMI's social media content in that attributes between the two—the SMI and the featured brand—are mutually complimentary* (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005; Pracejus and Olsen 2004).

Brand–influencer fit is proposed to moderate the disclosure-authenticity effects—brand-influencer fit is proposed to moderate the negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity and the positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity. Further, the effects of this moderating variable will be more or less pronounced according to the degree of disclosure. As noted, social media influencers' disclosure practices vary. Consumers may or

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[7] Escalas and Bettman (2003; 2005) define *congruence* [self with brand] as *the degree to which a consumer views a similarity and connection between him/her self-image and that of a particular brand.*

may not notice disclosures that are discreet and/or purposefully disguised. When SMIs promote brands that are seemingly aligned with their human brand, it is more likely that consumers will appreciate the content. Perhaps this holds true even if the influencer is perceived as being paid to promote, via explicit disclosure or otherwise, since the brand-influencer fit seems natural—since the SMI is promoting a brand that naturally fits within the SMI's human brand. In other words, when consumers perceive brand-dropping as organic, the negative *selling out* connotation(s) are presumably lessened. Alternatively, when SMIs promote brands that are seemingly unaligned with their human brand, it is more likely that consumers will not appreciate the content. This is especially so when the influencer is perceived as being paid to promote, via explicit disclosure or otherwise, since the brand-influencer fit seems unnatural.

Formally, the effect of this moderating variable will be more pronounced when a disclosure is not present than when a disclosure is present. <u>As such, the following hypotheses are proposed</u>:

H3[a] – *Brand–influencer fit* moderates the negative effect of *disclosure* on *passionate authenticity*. The negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity will be attenuated in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.

H3[b] – *Brand–influencer fit* moderates the positive effect of disclosure on *transparent authenticity*. The positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity will be stronger in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.

2.5.5 <u>The Authenticity–Attitude Relationships</u>

In the midst of celebrity endorsements' prime, Ohanian (1990) argued that "a valid instrument measuring a celebrity endorser's credibility is essential for understanding the impact of using such individuals in advertising. As in other forms of persuasive communication, advertisers' primary goals are to persuade their audience and to induce an attitude change toward their offerings" (42; Walley 1987). Likewise, the best brand-influencer partnerships are those that induce the most positive attitudes toward both the SMI and the brand(s) the SMI promotes. This research proposes a positive effect of the authenticities on *attitude toward the SMI* and *attitude toward the brand* as the final conceptual model outcomes.

Just as traditional brands manage their brand image and/or consumers' perceptions of the brand's associations, social media influencers should carefully manage consumers' perceptions of their SMI human brand image associations (Moulard et al. 2015). SMI human brand management is especially important in that consumers' overarching perception of SMIs likely affects consumers' perceptions of the brands within any given SMI's social media content (Doss 2011; Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta 2010; Moulard et al. 2015; Um, 2013). It is presumed that consumers form opinions about the SMIs they follow—most likely positive opinions given that they are following them within an entertainment medium. Further, consumers' positive perceptions of the SMI presumably bring about more favorable attitudes toward the brands within that SMI's digital content.

Consumers desire authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004). More specifically, consumers are attracted to SMIs because they are perceived to be authentic (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard 2018). Prior research (Moulard et al. 2014) suggests that passionate authenticity positively effects attitude toward the human brand, "which in turn influenced consumers' evaluation of the artist's [human brand's] work and their behavioral intentions" (576). Presumably, transparent authenticity will lead to similar outcomes—e.g., positive attitudinal outcomes (i.e., *attitude to the influencer*, *attitude to the brand*).

Attitude toward the influencer is intended to encompass attitude toward the *human* brand whereas *attitude toward the brand* captures attitude toward the *product/service* brand. Precisely, ***attitude toward the influencer*** is defined herein as *consumers'* comprehensive appraisal—*opinions of,* *feelings towards, and beliefs about—the social media influencer* (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Doss 2011). ***Attitude toward the brand*** is defined herein as *consumers' overall evaluation—opinions of, feelings towards, and beliefs about—the featured brand/product* (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Doss 2011). As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a – Passionate authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

H4b – Passionate authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the influencer.

H5a – Transparent authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

H5b – Transparent authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the influencer.

H6 – Brand–influencer fit has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

H7 –Attitude toward the influencer has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

Table 2.7 provides a summary of all of the proposed hypotheses to be empirically tested throughout the completion of this dissertation.

Table 2.7: Summary of Proposed Hypotheses

PROPOSED HYPOTHESES
H1 – Disclosure has a negative effect on passionate authenticity. Passionate authenticity will be lower for posts with a disclosure than for posts without a disclosure.
H2 – Disclosure has a positive effect on transparent authenticity. Transparent authenticity will be greater for posts with a disclosure than for posts without a disclosure.
H3[a] – *Brand–influencer fit* moderates the negative effect of *disclosure* on *passionate authenticity*. The negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity will be attenuated in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.
H3[b] – *Brand–influencer fit* moderates the positive effect of disclosure on *transparent authenticity*. The positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity will be stronger in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.
H4[a] – Passionate authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

H4[b] – Passionate authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the influencer.
H5[a] – Transparent authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.
H5[b] – Transparent authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the influencer.
H6 – Brand–influencer fit has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.
H7 – Attitude toward the influencer has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

The following chapter, Chapter 3, discusses the research methodology for testing all of the proposed hypotheses. Chapter 4 discusses the analyses and results of the research methodology, and Chapter 5 provides conclusions and discussion based upon the empirical analyses. Contributions to the literature and managerial implications are detailed. Lastly, research limitations of this dissertation and numerous future research suggestions are provided.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This dissertation proposes that *disclosure* has opposing effects on the two authenticity types—that disclosures negatively affect *passionate authenticity* (H1) yet positively affect *transparent authenticity* (H2). While many factors may moderate this effect, this research investigates one moderator; that is, *brand–influencer fit* is proposed to moderate the effect of disclosure on the authenticities (H3a, H3b). The negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity will be attenuated in the high fit group compared to the low fit group. The positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity will be stronger in the high fit group compared to the low fit group. Additionally, the two authenticity types presumably mediate these effects on two particular outcomes— *attitude toward the influencer* and *attitude toward the brand* (H4a, H4b, H5a, H5b). Lastly, *attitude toward the influencer* and *brand-influencer fit* each affect *attitude toward the brand* (H6, H7).

The hypothesized relationships were assessed via an online experiment. Prior to the main study, the manipulations for *disclosure* and the moderating variable, *brand–influencer fit*, were tested within two pretests to ensure the manipulations were perceived as intended (Perdue and Summers 1986). The context of both pretests and the main study was a female fashion blogger's Instagram account. Both pretests and the main study involved each respondent being presented with one particular Instagram post (image and caption) in which the post featured a branded product. The featured brand intended to manipulate either low (non-fashion related SMI–brand partnership) or high (fashion related SMI–brand partnership) *brand-influencer fit*; the caption manipulated degree of disclosure (no disclosure versus disclosure).

3.2 <u>Pretest One</u>

3.2.1 <u>Study Design, Procedures, and Measures</u>

3.2.1.1 <u>Design</u>. This study implements a 2 (degree of disclosure: no disclosure versus disclosure) x 2 (brand–influencer fit: low fit versus high fit) between-subjects experimental design. The online experiment was created within Qualtrics and employed a randomized block design to ensure each of the four conditions was dispersed proportionately amongst participants.

3.2.1.2 <u>Sample</u>. The sample for pretest one comprised Coastal Carolina University (CCU) College of Business, undergraduate students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2019a), CCU enrolls about 10,660 students of which about ninety-three percent are undergraduate students. CCU undergraduate students are largely traditional (rather than non-traditional) indicative of young age, full-time enrollment, financial dependence, and part-time (rather than full-time) work obligations. More specifically, CCU undergraduate students are about ninety-one percent full-time, ninety-three percent under the age of twenty-five, and fifty-four percent female (NCES 2019a). This is indicative of the desired sample— Instagram users— who are predominately between the ages of eighteen to thirty-four (Statista 2019a; Statista 2019b).

Students were given the opportunity to participate in exchange for bonus points. The experiment was available for completion for about four days; student completion concluded on Friday, November 30, 2018. Instagram users are sixty-eight percent female (Omnicore 2018). Further, the pseudo SMI's area of expertise— fashion— is presumably more relative to females than males. Therefore, only participants who self-reported gender identity as *female* were included within the data analyses. Additional sample characteristics are detailed within Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Pretest One— Sample Characteristics[1]

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative %
Gender Identity			
Female	**49**	56.98	56.98
Male	36	41.86	98.84
Prefer not to say	1	1.16	100.00
Age			
18-24 Years	46	93.88	93.88
25-34 Years	3	6.12	100.00

3.2.1.3 Procedure. Fashion social media influencers' typical blog post contain a fashion-related, anecdotal narrative in which numerous photos are displayed throughout the post to assist in keeping the readers' attention as well as for aesthetic purposes. Such photography usually includes the SMI modeling trendy, high fashion clothing, shoes, and/or accessories as relevant to the particular post. The SMI "previews" such blog posts via Instagram by uploading one of the many photos within the blog post with an accompanying caption intended to lure followers to the complete, more descriptive blog post. This sort of preview post is referred to as *microblogging* (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel and Chowdury 2009; Barker et. al. 2017). Microblogs are posted amongst an array of social media platforms; however, this dissertation is limited to consumers' perceptions, preferences, and opinions of only Instagram content.

While social media influencers are active on many social media platforms, this online experiment incorporates Instagram as the choice platform for the experimental scenarios. Linqia (2017) determined that "ninety-two percent of marketers cite Instagram as the most important social

[1] This sample does not include 2 participants who were removed prior to analyses due to completing only the "agree to participate" portion of the experimental instrument.

network for influencer marketing in 2018" (Linqia 2017, 7). Likewise, social media influencers are often referred to as "Instagram influencers."

After agreeing to participate, respondents were presented with the following information:

> *Throughout this survey, you'll view content from Megan Marie Morgan's Instagram account.*
> *Megan Marie is a fashion blogger and social media influencer- she uses various social media channels, primarily Instagram, to discuss her area of expertise- fashion, and to promote her fashion blog.*
> *Megan Marie's Instagram account has gained popularity and she is hoping to get your advice regarding Social Media Marketing planning- more specifically, regarding photography and photographers.*
> *Megan Marie requests your honest opinion regarding content recently shared on her Instagram account.*

Respondents were more or less under the impression that they were casting votes, or ratings, to aid in the determination of the SMI's future Instagram content.

In order to create the most realistic stimuli and manipulations, to ensure generalizability to real-world influencer marketing situations (Cook and Campbell 1979; Lynch 1982; Perdue and Summers 1986) the researcher created an Instagram account from which to upload posts and screenshot images for the online experiment. This account upheld the highest possible privacy settings to ensure it remained unseen and unnoticed. The researcher is quite confident that participants were unaware of the account; furthermore, participants would not have been able to view the pseudo SMI's Instagram content prior to their online experiment participation.

The SMI's role as a fashion blogger was made known via a screen-shot image of the pseudo Instagrammer's profile. Instagram profiles include what is referred to as a "bio" in which users can include personal information detailed to their liking. The SMI's Instagram bio explicitly, yet realistically, revealed the role of fashion blogger. Instagram profile bio text is limited to 150 characters; therefore, the profile is brief, but makes known the role of fashion blogger. Lastly, a

CCU MBA Graduate Assistant and graphic designer edited the screenshot of the SMI's profile to mimic that of actual SMI's— to indicate a high number of followers and posts. The pseudo Influencer's Instagram profile and bio are presented within Figure 3.1.

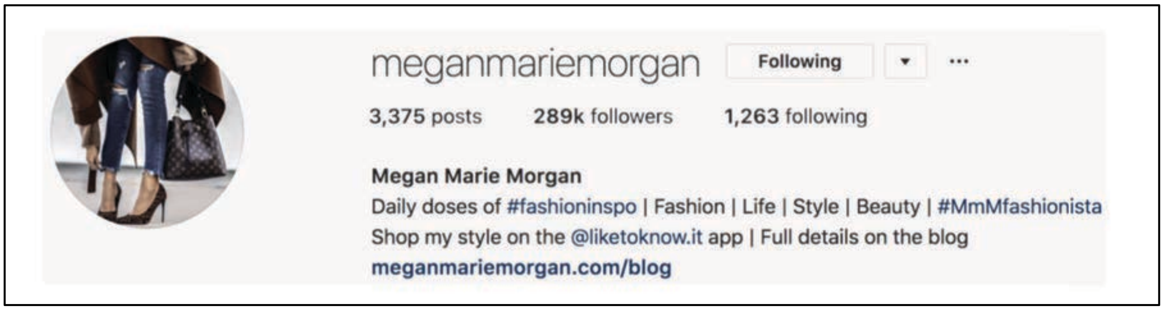

Figure 3.1: SMI Instagram Profile and Bio— Pretests One & Two and Main Study Stimulus

Disclosure (no disclosure/ disclosure) and brand-influencer fit (low fit/ high fit) were manipulated within the pseudo Instagram influencer's posts. Each respondent was exposed to one of the four experimental conditions. Within all four conditions, the post contained a picture with the featured product and the accompanying caption. The researcher staged and took photos to upload to the pseudo SMI's Instagram account. Two images were used amongst four posts, for each of the four conditions. The images depict high and low brand-influencer fit via the pictured products. The disclosure manipulation was operationalized via the caption that accompanies each of the images within the four individual posts/ conditions. Again, a CCU MBA Graduate Assistant and graphic designer edited screenshots of each of the four posts to mimic that of actual SMI posts— to indicate a high number of likes and comments per post.

3.2.1.4 <u>Stimuli and manipulations</u>. Disclosure was manipulated with two varying degrees of disclosure: no disclosure versus disclosure. The disclosure condition attempts to explicitly reveal a material connection between the SMI and the brand the SMI is promoting within the Instagram post's image. Such material connections (i.e., disclosures; e.g., #ad #sponsored) or lack thereof (i.e., no disclosure) were operationalized within the captions for each of the SMI's posts. The no disclosure condition makes no explicit mention of partnership and/or sponsorship within the caption.

Brand-influencer fit was manipulated with two varying degrees of fit: low fit versus high fit. Brand-influencer fit is operationalized via the branded-product featured within the Instagram post's photo. High and low brand-influencer fit are dependent upon consumer perceptions of fashion bloggers in particular. As such, the high condition should be especially fashion-related while the low condition should be especially unrelated to fashion. The chosen products for the high and low fit conditions were a Louis Vuitton handbag and a Chase debit card intended to represent Chase's checking account service offering, respectively. Each of the four conditions are illustrated within Figure 3.2–A and Figure 3.2–B.

Since two different product categories were used to depict low and high *brand-influencer fit,* the wording differed slightly across the fit conditions. Each of the four captions is provided within Table 3.2 for better readability and ease of comparability. Additionally, Table 3.3 provides the number of participants exposed to each of the four conditions. Since all students were given the opportunity to complete the online experiment in exchange for bonus points, and since only female student participants were used within the data analyses, the conditions are not equally dispersed.

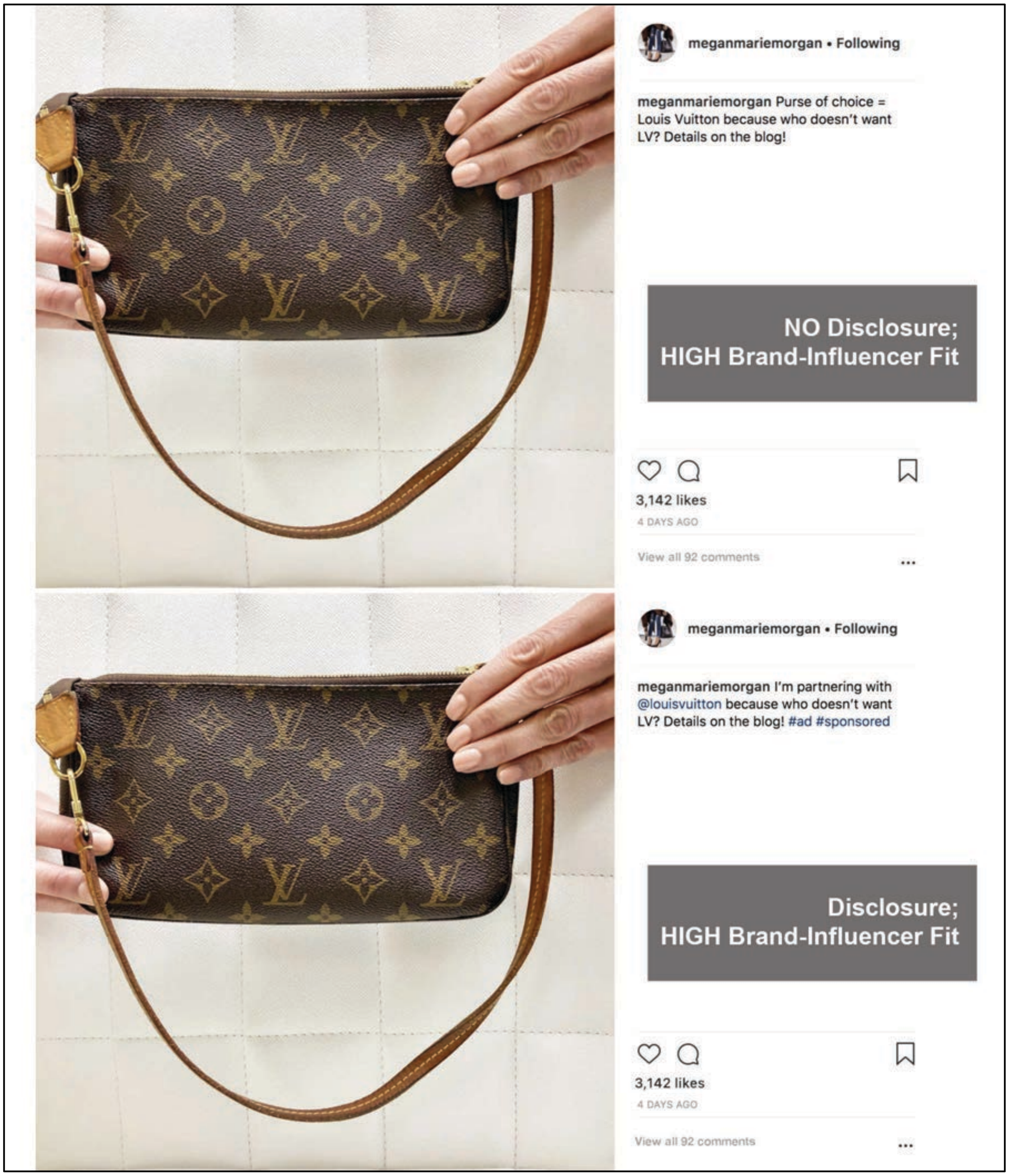

Figure 3.2–A: Pretest One Conditions— Instagram Posts

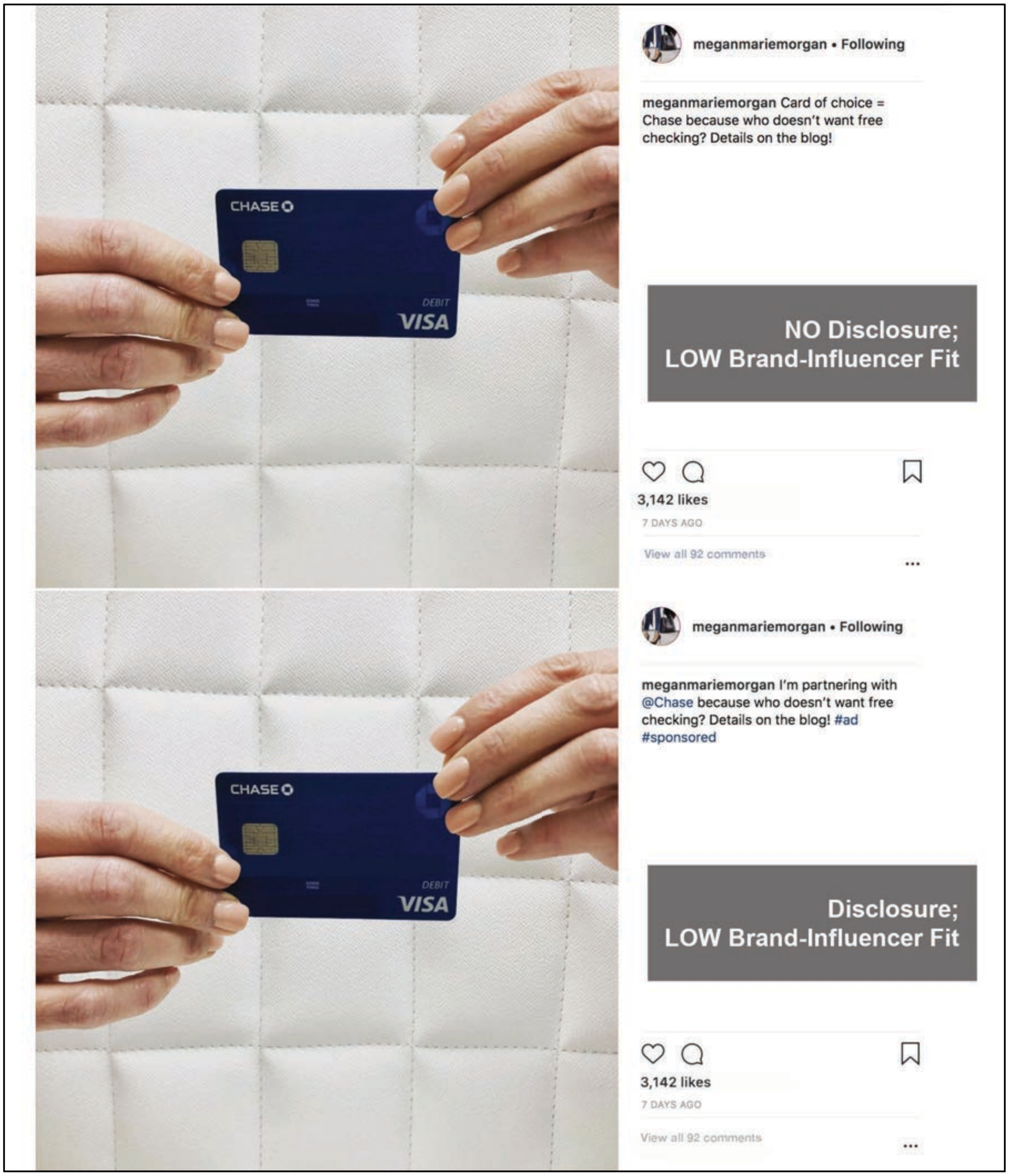

Figure 3.2–B: Pretest One Conditions— Instagram Posts

Table 3.2: Pretest One— Instagram Captions–Disclosure Manipulations

CONDITION	**INSTAGRAM POST CAPTION**
Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	I'm partnering with @Chase because who doesn't want free checking? Details on the blog! #ad #sponsored
NO Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	Card of choice = Chase because who doesn't want free checking? Details on the blog!
Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	I'm partnering with @louisvuitton because who doesn't want LV? Details on the blog! #ad #sponsored
NO Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	Purse of choice = Louis Vuitton because who doesn't want LV? Details on the blog!

Table 3.3: Pretest One— Female Only Selected Sample–Exposure of Conditions

BLOCK & CONDITION DESCRIPTION		**PARTICIPANTS**
BLOCK 1	Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	11
BLOCK 2	NO Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	15
BLOCK 3	Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	12
BLOCK 4	NO Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	11
		n= 49
	CONDITIONS	**PARTICIPANTS**
	NO Disclosure	**26** (53%)
	Disclosure	**23** (47%)
		n= 49
	LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**26** (53%)
	HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**23** (47%)
		n= 49

3.2.1.5 Measures. Table 3.4 lists the scales and items for each of the measures within pretest one. The appropriate prior literature is credited within the *Source* column as needed. All items were measured on a 7-point scale.

Table 3.4: Pretest One— Measurement Items

CONSTRUCTS	ITEMS	SCALE SOURCE
MANIPULATION CHECK MEASURES		
Disclosure	1. The Instagram post implied a partnership between Megan Marie and the featured brand. 2. The Instagram post was sponsored. 3. The Instagram post was labeled as sponsored. 4. Information stating that this Instagram post was a paid sponsorship was prominent within the post. 5. This Instagram post was hiding the fact that Megan Marie was paid by the featured brand.	Adapted from Wojdynski, Evans, and Hoy 2018
Brand–Influencer Fit	1. not a good fit with brand / good fit with brand 2. not compatible with brand / compatible with brand 3. not congruent with brand / congruent with brand 4. inappropriate match with brand /appropriate match with brand	Folse, Grau, Moulard and Pounders 2014 Pracejus and Olsen 2004
DEPENDENT VARIABLE MEASURES		
Transparent Authenticity	1. Megan Marie is telling the truth. 2. Megan Marie is being transparent. 3. Megan Marie is communicating honestly. 4. Megan Marie is behaving sincerely. 5. Megan Marie is presenting factual information. 6. Megan Marie is acting in a forthright manner.	Since no prior literature measures the meaning this construct intends to capture, new items were generated consistent with the conceptual definition[2].

[2] As stated, no prior scales capture the intended meaning of *transparent authenticity*. *Transparent authenticity's* measurement items intend to reflect the conceptual definition presented herein. However, many prior researchers have acknowledged transparent authenticity as a type or dimension of authenticity (e.g., *genuineness* [Akbar and Wymer 2016]; *integrity* [Morhart et al. 2014]; *sincerity* [Napoli et al. 2014]). Most noteworthy regarding the decision not to adopt their scales is that *transparent authenticity* herein does not include notions of *reliability*.

Passionate Authenticity	1. Megan Marie loves the featured brand. 2. It is obvious that Megan Marie is excited about the featured brand. 3. Megan Marie has a true passion for the featured brand. 4. Megan Marie shows a strong dedication to the featured brand. 5. Committed is a word to describe Megan Marie's relationship with the featured brand. 6. Megan Marie enjoys the featured brand.* 7. The featured brand satisfies Megan Marie.* 8. Megan Marie is fascinated by the featured brand.* 9. Megan Marie is enthusiastic about the featured brand.*	Moulard, Rice, Garrity, and Mangus 2014 *Additional items have been added to the original scale in order to capture the intended meaning within this context.[3]
Attitude toward the Influencer *Attitude toward the Brand*	1. positive / negative 2. favorable / unfavorable 3. good / bad 4. likeable / dislikeable	Batra, Rajeev and Olli T. Ahtola 1991

3.2.2 Analyses, Results and Conclusions

3.2.2.1 Analyses and results. The primary goals of the pretest(s) were to (a) ensure adequate measurement and (b) determine whether the manipulations had the intended effect on their associated manipulation checks and whether the manipulations and the interactions of the manipulations had any unintended effects. SPSS was used to analyze the pretest one data.

Disclosure items were adapted (Wojdynski, Evans, and Hoy 2018); *transparent authenticity* items were generated consistent with the conceptual definition; and *passionate authenticity* included additional items as compared to the original scale (Moulard, Rice, Garrity, and Mangus 2014). As such, these three scales possessed the most vulnerability. Despite such, all measured

[3] Items marked with an asterisk were not included within the original scale referenced in the source column. As mentioned, items were added to capture the intended meaning within this context; more specifically, items were added to capture the intrinsic motivations (e.g., enjoyment, satisfaction, etc.) inherent within SMI passionate authenticity.

constructs had acceptable reliabilities ≥ 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Cronbach 1951); however, disclosure (α = 0.706) and transparent authenticity (α = 0.726) indicate room for improvement. Reliabilities for all measured constructs are summarized within Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Pretest One— Reliabilities (α)

CONSTRUCT	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
Brand—Influencer Fit	.950
Disclosure	.706
Passionate Authenticity	.923
Transparent Authenticity	.726
Attitude toward the Brand	.956
Attitude toward the SMI	.978

The MANOVA results, which depict the analysis employed to determine the intended effects of the manipulations and their associated manipulation checks, as well as any unintended effects of the manipulations, are summarized within Table 3.6. As desired, the disclosure manipulation had a statistically significant effect (p < .001; η_p^2= .335; F= 22.641; df= 1) on the disclosure manipulation check, and not on the fit manipulation check (p > .05; η_p^2= .013; F= .575; df= 1). Unfortunately, though, the brand-influencer fit manipulation did not have a statistically significant effect (p > .05; η_p^2= .041; F= 1.934; df= 1) on the brand-influencer fit manipulation check. Additionally, the interaction between brand-influencer fit and disclosure had an unintended, statistically significant effect on the disclosure check (p < .05; η_p^2= .086; F= 4.256; df= 1); although, the effect size was very small.

Table 3.6: Pretest One— MANOVA Results

MANIPULATION	MANIPULATION CHECK	SIGNIFICANCE	PARTIAL ETA SQUARED (η_p^2)
Fit	**Fit**	**.171**	**.041**
	Disclosure	.764	.002
Disclosure	Fit	.452	.013
	Disclosure	**.000**	**.335**
Fit * Disclosure interaction	Fit	.272	.027
	Disclosure	.045	.086

3.2.2.2 Conclusions. The intended and unintended manipulation effects were not satisfactory; therefore, another pretest would be conducted. Analyses revealed two key issues— the reliability for disclosure (α = 0.706) was borderline acceptable and therefore less than ideal, and the product pictured within the posts for the low brand-influencer fit conditions needed improvement. Specifically, the items within the disclosure manipulation did not appear to capture the intended meaning. Additionally, an unforeseen issue with the low brand-influencer fit condition surfaced within the open-ended comments of the online experiment. The aforementioned comment follows, “I think the company [Chase; checking account service] fits to Megan Marie's Instagram account since when you are a fashion blogger you need to buy clothing and therefore you need the financial resources and credit cards”. This comment indicates that participants perceive financial product(s)/ services(s) as at least somewhat relative to fashion bloggers. Therefore, additional thought must be given to improve both the disclosure items as well as the brand-influencer fit conditions, particularly, the low brand-influencer fit condition. Pretest two set out to correct these shortcomings prior to the main study.

3.3 Pretest Two

3.3.1 Study Design, Procedures, and Measures

3.3.1.1 Design. This study implements a 2 (degree of disclosure: no disclosure versus disclosure) x 2 (brand–influencer fit: low fit versus high fit) between-subjects experimental design. The online experiment was created within Qualtrics and employed a randomized block design to ensure each of the four conditions was dispersed proportionately amongst participants.

3.3.1.2 Sample. The sample for pretest two comprised Louisiana Tech University (LA Tech) College of Business, undergraduate and graduate (MBA) students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2019b), LA Tech enrolls about 12,840 students of which about eighty-eight percent are undergraduate students. LA Tech undergraduate students are largely traditional (rather than non-traditional) indicative of young age, full-time enrollment, financial dependence, and part-time (rather than full-time) work obligations. More specifically, LA Tech undergraduate students are about seventy-one percent full-time, eighty-eight percent under the age of twenty-five, and forty-nine percent female (NCES 2019b). About seventy percent of current MBA students at LA Tech either started the program very shortly after undergrad completion, or are categorized as undergrad students who are concurrently taking MBA classes (Dr. Amyx 2019[4]). Therefore, both undergraduate and graduate students within this sample are ideal participants— they almost all fit within the demographics of Instagram users (e.g., age range of daily Instagram users) (Statista 2019a; Statista 2019b).

Students were given the opportunity to participate in exchange for bonus points. The experiment was available for completion for only about 36 hours total; student completion concluded on Saturday, May 18, 2019. Additional sample characteristics are detailed within Table 3.7. Only

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[4] Cassandra Ditt, email to Dr. Douglas Amyx, May 26, 2019.
Dr. Douglas Amyx, email to Cassandra Ditt, May 28, 2019.

participants who self-reported gender identity as *female* and *prefer not to say* were included within the data analyses.

Table 3.7: Pretest Two— Sample Characteristics[5]

	Gender Identity			Totals
Classification	Male	Female	Undisclosed	
Undergraduate	9	23	—	32
Graduate	21	14	1	36
Undisclosed	—	1	—	1
Totals	30	**38**	**1**	69
Sample for Analyses:	**n= 39**			

Sample for Analyses N= 39		**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Cumulative Frequency**
Age				
	18-24 Years	**34**	87.18	87.18
	25-34 Years	**3**	7.69	94.87
	35-44 Years	**1**	2.56	97.44
	45-54 Years	—	0.00	97.44
	55-64 Years	**1**	2.56	100.00

3.3.1.3 Procedure. Resembling pretest one, this online experiment incorporates Instagram as the choice platform for the experimental scenarios. Again, the pseudo social media influencer was presented as Megan Marie, a fashion blogger who uses Instagram to preview her blog posts and share mutually appreciated content (e.g., details regarding the upcoming, annual sale at Nordstrom) with her followers.

[5] This sample does not include 7 participants who were removed prior to analyses due to completing only the “agree to participate” portion of the experimental instrument.

After agreeing to participate, respondents were presented with the following information, which is adapted from pretest one. Specifically, the briefing is shortened to promote full length reading:

> *Throughout this survey, you'll view content from Megan Marie Morgan's Instagram account.*
> *Megan Marie is a fashion blogger and social media influencer- she uses various social media channels, primarily Instagram, to discuss her area of expertise- fashion, and to promote her fashion blog.*
> *Megan Marie's Instagram account has gained popularity.*
> *This survey aims to gather your honest advice regarding Megan Marie's Instagram content as she hopes to discover what, if any, changes she should implement in forthcoming posts*.

Again, respondents were more or less under the impression that they were casting votes, or ratings, to aid in the determination of the SMI's future Instagram content. And again, the SMI's role as a fashion blogger was made known via a screen-shot image of the pseudo Instagrammer's profile and bio within. The profile and bio remained the same throughout both pretests one and two as well as the main study.

Due to subpar manipulations within pretest one, the pseudo SMI's Instagram posts were recreated. Again, the researcher staged and took photos to upload to the pseudo SMI's Instagram account. Two images were used amongst four conditions. The images depict high and low brand-influencer fit via the pictured products. The disclosure manipulation was operationalized via the caption that accompanies each of the images within the four individual posts. The captions within pretest two posts are more similar amongst all four conditions— as similar as possible given the necessary differences to operationalize disclosure versus no disclosure. Further, much thought was addressed to determine better products for the high, and especially, low brand-influencer fit conditions. For pretest two, a freelance graphic designer obtained via www.freelancer.com, edited screenshots of each of the four posts to mimic that of actual SMI posts— to indicate a high number of likes and comments per post.

3.3.1.4 Stimuli and manipulations. As indicated, pretest one participants perceived financial product(s)/ services(s) as at least somewhat relative to fashion bloggers; therefore, this was not an ideal *low* brand-influencer fit manipulation. Accordingly, additional thought was given to improve the brand-influencer fit conditions, particularly, the *low* brand-influencer fit condition. The researcher determined that a pharmaceutical brand category would be a better *low* brand-influencer fit manipulation as compared to pretest one's financial product(s)/ services(s) brand category. To ensure a realistic visual presentation across fit manipulations, both the *low* and *high* brand-influencer fit products were styled within a small purse since both common sense and pretest one are indicative that a purse is aligned with a fashion blogger. Furthermore, both the *low* and *high* brand-influencer fit products were chosen in part, based upon their size— both products would need to be about the same size in order to be styled within the purse, and both products would need to be approximately the same size in order to avoid any potential confounds with the visual presentation. The researcher selected an NYX eyeshadow pallet for the *high* brand-influencer fit product and Pepcid AC acid-reflux medication for the *low* brand-influencer fit product.

The freelance graphic artist removed the original brand names (NYX, and Pepcid AC) from each of the products' packaging within the staged images. In order to avoid potential confounds, a fictitious brand name was chosen. The original brand names were replaced with "Symmetry". *Symmetry* is presumably an appropriate brand name for an eyeshadow pallet, as it is assumed that women intend for their left eye and right eye eyeshadow/ makeup to be visually symmetrical. *Symmetry* is presumably an appropriate brand name for an acid-reflux medication, as it is assumed that the medication provides an internal, physical state of balance, normalcy and symmetry. Therefore, *Symmetry* is presumably a realistic brand name for both products across the *low* and *high* brand-influencer fit manipulations. Each of the four conditions are illustrated within Figure 3.3.

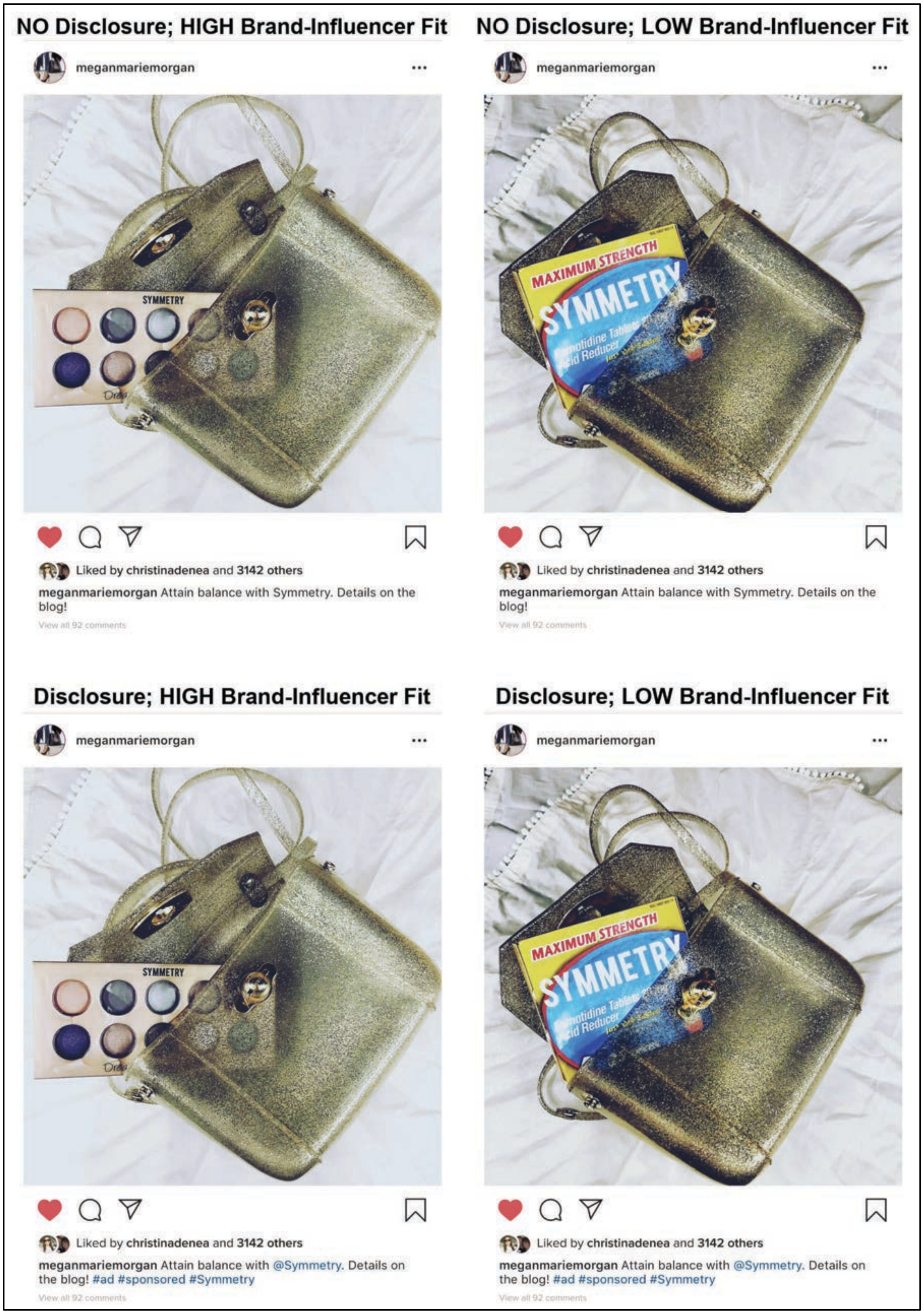

Figure 3.3: Pretest Two— Instagram Posts–Four Conditions

Each of the four captions is provided within Table 3.8 for better readability and ease of comparability. Additionally, Table 3.9 provides the number of participants exposed to each of the four conditions. Since all students were given the opportunity to complete the online experiment in exchange for bonus points, and since only female student participants were used within the data analyses, the conditions are not equally dispersed.

Table 3.8: Pretest Two— Instagram Captions–Disclosure Manipulations

CONDITION	**INSTAGRAM POST CAPTION**
Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	Attain balance with @Symmetry. Details on the blog! #ad #sponsored #Symmetry
NO Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	Attain balance with Symmetry. Details on the blog!
Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	Attain balance with @Symmetry. Details on the blog! #ad #sponsored #Symmetry
NO Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	Attain balance with Symmetry. Details on the blog!

Table 3.9: Pretest Two— Female Only Selected Sample–Exposure of Conditions

BLOCK & CONDITION DESCRIPTION		**PARTICIPANTS**
BLOCK 1	Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	9
BLOCK 2	NO Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	12
BLOCK 3	Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	11
BLOCK 4	NO Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	7
		n= 39
	CONDITIONS	**PARTICIPANTS**
	NO Disclosure	**19** (49%)
	Disclosure	**20** (51%)
		n= 39
	LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**21** (54%)

	HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**18** (46%)
		n= 39

3.3.1.5 Measures. Table 3.10 lists the scales and items for each of the measures within pretest two. Again, all items were measured on a 7-point scale. Neither the attitude measures nor the transparent authenticity measure changed as compared to pretest one. The biggest changes are within the items for disclosure as this construct was the least reliable within pretest one; furthermore, the pretest one *disclosure items* did not seem to capture the intended meaning. A summary of the changes between pretest one disclosure items and pretest two disclosure items are presented within Table 3.11.

Table 3.10: Pretest Two— Measurement Items

CONSTRUCTS	**ITEMS**
MANIPULATION CHECK MEASURES	
Disclosure	1. The Instagram post indicates a partnership between Megan Marie and the featured brand. 2. The caption in the Instagram post points out that this post is sponsored. 3. The Instagram post is labeled as sponsored by Symmetry 4. Megan Marie states that this Instagram post is a paid sponsorship with Symmetry. 5. Megan Marie acknowledges that she was paid by the featured brand. 6. Megan Marie explicitly discloses a paid partnership with Symmetry.
Brand–Influencer Fit	1. not a good fit with Symmetry / good fit with Symmetry 2. not compatible with Symmetry / compatible with Symmetry 3. not congruent with Symmetry / congruent with Symmetry 4. inappropriate match with Symmetry / appropriate match with Symmetry

DEPENDENT VARIABLE MEASURES	
Transparent Authenticity	1. Megan Marie is telling the truth. 2. Megan Marie is being transparent. 3. Megan Marie is communicating honestly. 4. Megan Marie is behaving sincerely. 5. Megan Marie is presenting factual information. 6. Megan Marie is acting in a forthright manner.
Passionate Authenticity	1. Megan Marie loves Symmetry. 2. It is obvious that Megan Marie is excited about Symmetry. 3. Megan Marie has a true passion for Symmetry. 4. Megan Marie shows a strong dedication to Symmetry. 5. Committed is a word to describe Megan Marie's relationship with Symmetry. 6. Megan Marie enjoys Symmetry. 7. Symmetry satisfies Megan Marie. 8. Megan Marie is fascinated by Symmetry. 9. Megan Marie is enthusiastic about Symmetry.
Attitude toward the Influencer *Attitude toward the Brand*	(no changes from pretest one)

Table 3.11: Disclosure Items— Pretest One Versus Pretest Two

DISCLOSURE **PRETEST ONE**
1. The Instagram post ***implied a partnership*** between Megan Marie and the featured brand. 2. The Instagram ***post was sponsored***. 3. The Instagram post was ***labeled as sponsored***. 4. Information stating that this Instagram post was a ***paid sponsorship*** was prominent within the post. 5. This Instagram post was hiding the fact that Megan Marie was ***paid by the featured brand***.

***DISCLOSURE* PRETEST TWO**

1. The Instagram post ***indicates a partnership*** between Megan Marie and the featured brand.
2. The caption in the Instagram post points out that this ***post is sponsored***.
3. The Instagram post is ***labeled as sponsored*** by Symmetry.
4. Megan Marie states that this Instagram post is a ***paid sponsorship*** with Symmetry.
5. Megan Marie acknowledges that she was ***paid by the featured brand***.
6. Megan Marie explicitly discloses a paid partnership with Symmetry.

3.3.2 Analyses, Results and Conclusions

3.3.2.1 Analyses and results. In accordance with Costello and Osborne's (2005) best practices, tests for normality were performed. Normality tests were performed using the SPSS *explore* function. Normal distribution of the data was assessed via the following means: (a) skewness and kurtosis, and (b) Shapiro-Wilk test. Skewness and kurtosis values, and their standard error, for each of the dependent variables, for each group of the manipulations (i.e., disclosure, no disclosure, low brand-influencer fit, high brand-influencer fit) are within Table 3.12.

Table 3.12: Pretest Two— Testing for Normality– Skewness & Kurtosis

DEPENDENT VARIABLE		NO DISCLOSURE STATISTIC (STANDARD ERROR)	DISCLOSURE STATISTIC (STANDARD ERROR)	LOW FIT STATISTIC (STANDARD ERROR)	HIGH FIT STATISTIC (STANDARD ERROR)
Brand–Influencer Fit	skewness	-.027 (.524)	-.017 (.512)	.466 (.501)	-.596 (.536)
	kurtosis	-1.185 (1.014)	-1.295 (.992)	-1.033 (.972)	-.611 (1.038)
Disclosure	skewness	.536 (.524)	-.642 (.512)	.389 (.501)	.371 (.536)
	kurtosis	-.501 (1.014)	.391 (.992)	-.608 (.972)	-1.179 (1.038)

Passionate Authenticity	skewness	-.602 (.524)	.583 (.512)	-.269 (.501)	-.152 (.536)
	kurtosis	-.182 (1.014)	.744 (.992)	-.012 (.972)	-.668 (1.038)
Transparent Authenticity	skewness	-.333 (.524)	-.204 (.512)	-.069 (.501)	.225 (.536)
	kurtosis	.348 (1.014)	-.416 (.992)	-.044 (.972)	-1.144 (1.038)
Attitude toward the Brand	skewness	-.146 (.524)	.475 (.512)	**-.157** (.501)	.147 (.536)
	kurtosis	.332 (1.014)	-.563 (.992)	1.306 (.972)	-.896 (1.038)
Attitude toward the SMI	skewness	-.033 (.524)	.336 (.512)	.147 (.536)	-.169 (.536)
	kurtosis	-.721 (1.014)	-1.105 (.992)	-.896 (1.038)	-.800 (1.038)

The values (skewness and kurtosis values, and their standard error, for each of the dependent variables) within Table 3.12 were used to determine how the data differed compared to a normal distribution and whether or not the data could be described as normally distributed. The calculated z-scores for skewness (skewness z-score= skewness ÷ standard error) and kurtosis (kurtosis z-score= kurtosis ÷ standard error) are provided within Table 3.13. Since conservative statistical significance for skewness and kurtosis is commonly accepted, those with a statistical significance level of .01, which equates to a z-score of $\pm$2.58 are *normally distributed*; therefore, all of the dependent variables were normally distributed amongst each of the four manipulated conditions.

Table 3.13: Pretest Two— Testing for Normality– Skewness & Kurtosis Z-Scores

DEPENDENT VARIABLE		NO DISCLOSURE	DISCLOSURE	LOW FIT	HIGH FIT
		Z-SCORES			
Brand–Influencer Fit	skewness	0.05	0.03	-0.93	1.11
	kurtosis	1.17	1.31	1.06	0.59
Disclosure	skewness	-1.02	1.25	-0.78	-0.69
	kurtosis	0.49	-0.39	0.63	1.14
Passionate Authenticity	skewness	1.15	-1.14	0.54	0.28
	kurtosis	0.18	-0.75	0.01	0.64
Transparent Authenticity	skewness	0.64	0.40	0.14	-0.42
	kurtosis	-0.34	0.42	0.05	1.10
Attitude toward the Brand	skewness	0.28	-0.93	0.31	-0.27
	kurtosis	-0.33	0.57	-1.34	0.86
Attitude toward the SMI	skewness	0.06	-0.66	-0.27	0.32
	kurtosis	1.11	1.11	0.86	0.77

A summary of the Shapiro-Wilk's test for normality is provided within Table 3.14. Brand-influencer fit, disclosure, passionate authenticity, transparent authenticity, attitude toward the brand, and attitude toward the influencer scores were normally distributed between the disclosure manipulations as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$). Disclosure, passionate authenticity, transparent authenticity, attitude toward the brand, and attitude toward the influencer scores were normally distributed between the brand-influencer fit manipulations as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$).

Table 3.14: Pretest Two— Testing for Normality– Shapiro-Wilk's Test

DEPENDENT VARIABLE		STATISTIC	DF	SIGNIFICANCE
Brand–Influencer Fit	no disclosure	0.933	19	0.201
	disclosure	0.924	20	0.117
	low fit	0.913	21	0.063
	high fit	0.873	18	**0.020**
Disclosure	no disclosure	0.914	19	0.088
	disclosure	0.917	20	0.089
	low fit	0.951	21	0.360
	high fit	0.91	18	0.084
Passionate Authenticity	no disclosure	0.956	19	0.503
	disclosure	0.951	20	0.385
	low fit	0.992	21	0.999
	high fit	0.944	18	0.337
Transparent Authenticity	no disclosure	0.961	19	0.587
	disclosure	0.965	20	0.641
	low fit	0.981	21	0.937
	high fit	0.948	18	0.394
Attitude toward the Brand	no disclosure	0.919	19	0.109
	disclosure	0.938	20	0.219
	low fit	0.91	21	0.054
	high fit	0.938	18	0.262
Attitude toward the SMI	no disclosure	0.958	19	0.532
	disclosure	0.924	20	0.116
	low fit	0.934	21	0.164
	high fit	0.95	18	0.431

Again, the primary goals of the pretest(s) were to (a) ensure adequate measurement and (b) determine whether the manipulations had the intended effect on their associated manipulation checks and whether the manipulations and the interactions of the manipulations had any unintended effects. More specifically, pretest two set out to improve the reliability for the *disclosure* measure as well as the effect of the manipulation for *brand-influencer fit*— especially so for the low-fit condition. SPSS was used to analyze the pretest two data.

To recap, pretest one revealed room for improvement for two particular measures—disclosure (pretest one α = 0.706) and transparent authenticity (pretest one α = 0.726). Again, all measured constructs had acceptable reliabilities ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Cronbach 1951). As hoped, the changes within the items for disclosure (pretest two α = 0.928) were successful as the measure's reliability improved. In fact, all measured constructs, with *attitude to the SMI* (pretest one α = 0.978; pretest two α = 0.953) being the only exception, possessed improved reliability within pretest two as compared to pretest one. Reliabilities for all measured constructs for both pretest one and pretest two are summarized within Table 3.15.

Table 3.15: Pretest Two— Reliabilities (α)

CONSTRUCT	**PRETEST ONE CRONBACH'S ALPHA**	**PRETEST TWO CRONBACH'S ALPHA**
Brand—Influencer Fit	.950	.982
Disclosure	**.706**	**.928**
Passionate Authenticity	.923	.952
Transparent Authenticity	**.726**	**.937**
Attitude toward the Brand	.956	.961
Attitude toward the SMI	.978	.953

The MANOVA results, which depict the analysis employed to determine the intended effects of the manipulations and their associated manipulation checks as well as any potential unintended effects of the manipulations, are summarized within Table 3.16. As desired, the disclosure manipulation had a statistically significant effect on the disclosure manipulation check ($p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .507$; F= 35.929; df= 1), and not on the brand-influencer fit manipulation check ($p > .05$; $\eta_p^2 = .016$; F= 0.554; df= 1). As also desired, the brand-influencer fit manipulation had a statistically significant effect on the brand-influencer fit manipulation check ($p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .392$; F= 22.549; df= 1), and not on the disclosure manipulation check ($p > .05$; $\eta_p^2 = .028$; F= 1.011; df= 1). Additionally, the interaction between brand-influencer fit and disclosure did not have a statistically significant effect on either the disclosure check ($p > .05$; $\eta_p^2 = .008$; F= .285; df= 1) or the brand-influencer fit check ($p > .05$; $\eta_p^2 = .001$; F= .032; df= 1).

Table 3.16: Pretest Two— MANOVA Results

MANIPULATION	MANIPULATION CHECK	SIGNIFICANCE	PARTIAL ETA SQUARED (η_p^2)
Fit	**Fit**	**.000**	**.392**
	Disclosure	.322	.028
Disclosure	Fit	.462	.016
	Disclosure	**.000**	**.507**
Fit * Disclosure interaction	Fit	.858	.001
	Disclosure	.597	.008

3.3.2.2 Conclusions. The intended and unintended manipulation effects were much more satisfactory; therefore, no further pretest would be conducted. Pretest one analyses revealed two key issues— the reliability for disclosure (α = 0.706) was borderline acceptable and therefore less than ideal, and the product pictured within the posts for the low brand-influencer fit conditions needed improvement. Specifically, the items within the disclosure manipulation did not appear to capture the intended meaning. Additionally, an unforeseen issue with the low brand-influencer fit condition surfaced within the open-ended comments of the online experiment. Therefore, additional thought was given to improve both the disclosure items as well as the brand-influencer fit conditions, particularly, the low brand-influencer fit condition. The goal of pretest two was to correct these shortcomings. Pretest two was successful in correcting the shortcomings of pretest one. As mentioned, all reliabilities for the dependent variables were acceptable. Further, the manipulations worked as intended and there were no unintended effects.

3.4 Online Experiment— Main Study

3.4.1 Study Design, Procedures, and Measures

3.4.1.1 Design. This study implements a 2 (degree of disclosure: no disclosure versus disclosure) x 2 (brand–influencer fit: low fit versus high fit) between-subjects experimental design. The online experiment was created within Qualtrics and employed a randomized block design to ensure each of the four conditions was dispersed proportionately amongst participants.

3.4.1.2 Sample. Panel aggregator Qualtrics distributed the online experiment to a sample that mimics that of female Instagram users residing within the United States. According to Omnicore (2018) Instagram has 1 billion plus *monthly* users worldwide, of which 500 million users access their Instagram accounts *daily*. The sample includes only respondents within the 500 million daily user-group who identify as female and reside in the US. Additionally, the sample is restrained by age— the online experiment is limited to participants within the following age range: 18–34 years old (Statista 2019a; Statista 2019b). The sample's gender restraint does not significantly limit the desired population as Instagram users are sixty-eight percent female (Omnicore 2018). Further, the pseudo SMI's area of expertise— fashion— is presumably more relative to females than males. Lastly, the sample is limited to US residents due to cultural norms as well as governing bodies (e.g., FTC). Instagram influencers specializing in fashion have varying means in which they express and share their content throughout Instagram from one country compared to another. Furthermore, the governing bodies, such as the FTC, that implement rules, such as those relative to disclosing material connections within social media posts, vary amongst countries; hence, the appropriateness to include only US resident participants within this data collection.

The sample size was determined based upon structural equation modeling (SEM) best practices. Benchmarks range from as few as five participants per number of items to as many as fifteen participants per number of items. This research implements ten participants per number of items (i.e., 35 items); the sample size requested from Qualtrics was 350.

3.4.1.3 Procedure. Again, resembling pretest one and pretest two, this online experiment incorporates Instagram as the choice platform for the experimental scenarios. And, again, the pseudo SMI was presented as Megan Marie, a fashion blogger who uses Instagram to preview her blog posts and share mutually appreciated content with her followers.

3.4.1.4 Stimuli and manipulations. Stimuli and manipulations for the main study reflect that of pretest two. The conditions— both the images (brand-influencer fit conditions operationalized) and captions (disclosure conditions operationalized) for each of the four posts— for the main study reflect that of pretest two. The key change for the main study will be within the analyses in Chapter 4, as the main study will include and report more exhaustive analyses as compared to pretests one and two.

3.4.1.5 Measures. Measures for the dependent variables and manipulations for the main study reflect that of pretest two. Despite evidence of construct reliability[6], a note on construct validity

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[6] Construct reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for transparent authenticity is as follows: pretest one= 0.726; pretest two= 0.937; main study (presented in Chapter 4)= 0.908.

for transparent authenticity might be worthwhile. Transparent authenticity's measurement items intend to reflect the conceptual domain of the definition presented herein. As stated, no prior scales capture the intended meaning of transparent authenticity. However, many prior researchers have acknowledged transparent authenticity as a type or dimension of authenticity. For instance, Akbar and Wymer (2016) include genuineness as one of two proposed dimensions of authenticity; Morhart et al. (2014) include integrity; and, Napoli et al. (2014) include sincerity. Again, transparent authenticity herein is defined as the extent to which consumers perceive that the SMI is completely open, honest and forthright regarding the SMI's potential relationship with the featured brand(s) within the SMI's social media content (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018). Most noteworthy, regarding the decision not to adopt any prior scales, is that transparent authenticity herein does not include notions of reliability. This decision should also contribute to the differentiation between transparent authenticity and similar constructs, particularly, trustworthiness.

Transparent authenticity's face validity—the extent to which a construct's measurement items capture the intended meaning (Babin and Griffin 1998)—was unofficially assessed via the opinion of an accomplished *authenticity* researcher throughout numerous, lengthy discussions. In summary, it is purported that *transparent authenticity* possesses construct validity—both nomological and face validity—and is presumed to be a distinct construct. Prior research (McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar 2002; Schlosser, White and Lloyd 2006; Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018) provides conceptual and theoretical support for such. Table 3.17 includes the dependent variable and manipulation measures, inclusive of only the items retained within the measurement model, presented within Chapter 4.

Table 3.17: Main Study— Measurement Items

CONSTRUCTS	ITEMS
	MANIPULATION CHECK MEASURES
Disclosure (4 items)	1. The Instagram post indicates a partnership between Megan Marie and the featured brand. 2. The caption in the Instagram post points out that this post is sponsored. 3. The Instagram post is labeled as sponsored by Symmetry 4. Megan Marie states that this Instagram post is a paid sponsorship with Symmetry.
Brand–Influencer Fit (4 items)	1. not a good fit with Symmetry / good fit with Symmetry 2. not compatible with Symmetry / compatible with Symmetry 3. not congruent with Symmetry / congruent with Symmetry 4. inappropriate match with Symmetry / appropriate match with Symmetry
	DEPENDENT VARIABLE MEASURES
Transparent Authenticity (5 items)	1. Megan Marie is telling the truth. 3. Megan Marie is communicating honestly. 4. Megan Marie is behaving sincerely. 5. Megan Marie is presenting factual information. 6. Megan Marie is acting in a forthright manner.
Passionate Authenticity (8 items)	1. Megan Marie loves Symmetry. 2. It is obvious that Megan Marie is excited about Symmetry. 3. Megan Marie has a true passion for Symmetry. 5. Committed is a word to describe Megan Marie's relationship with Symmetry. 6. Megan Marie enjoys Symmetry. 7. Symmetry satisfies Megan Marie. 8. Megan Marie is fascinated by Symmetry. 9. Megan Marie is enthusiastic about Symmetry.
Attitude toward the Influencer (4 items)	1. positive / negative 2. favorable / unfavorable 3. good / bad 4. likeable / dislikeable

Attitude toward the Brand (3 items)	2. favorable / unfavorable 3. good / bad 4. likeable / dislikeable

3.4.1.6 Control variables. Numerous control variables were included within the main study instrument: *patronage frequency* (Instagram), *knowledge of disclosure* (subjective), *knowledge of disclosure* (objective), *attitude toward brand dropping*, and *susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Patronage frequency* (Instagram) assesses the "relative number of times a person reports visiting a specified place. Hess, Ganesan, and Klein (2003) referred to the scale as number of past encounters with the organization" (Bruner 2009, 671). The scale was slightly adapted for use within this research; the adapted scale intended to capture *frequency of Instagram use* or *frequency of Instagram access*. In other words, the scale intended to measure how often consumers open the Instagram application, regardless of how time is spent or what actions are performed within.

Knowledge of disclosure (subjective) is most broadly and simply a subjective measurement for knowledge. "The scale is composed of three items that attempt to measure the extent to which a person expresses having knowledge about some object. As used by Gurhan-Canli (2003), the scale measures subjective knowledge for a specified product class. However, the items seem to be flexible for use with a wide variety of applications that might not even directly refer to products, e.g., nutrition, consumer-related legislation, a company's position on an issue, familiarity with a TV series or celebrity, etc." (Bruner 2009, 577). Given the suggested use for consumer-related legislation, the Gurhan-Canli (2003) subjective knowledge scale was chosen as the best means in which to account for *knowledge of disclosure* (subjective) of respondents' self-claimed, awareness of the FTC enforced rules for SMIs. *Knowledge of disclosure* (objective) was measured via seven statements, each with two answer choices: true or false. The true-false-statement items were created based upon the information presented within the FTC's FAQ page, *The FTC's Endorsement Guides: What People Are Asking* (FTC 2015).

Attitude toward brand dropping was adapted from *attitude toward product placement,* which intended to measure a viewer's attitude regarding the use of branded products within the storyline of TV shows (Bruner 2009). Similarly, consumers likely form attitudes regarding the use of branded products within Instagram content, for which the control variable *attitude toward brand dropping* is included. *Susceptibility to interpersonal influence* "measures the degree to which a person expresses the tendency to seek information about products by observing others' behavior and asking for their opinions. Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989) referred to the scale as *consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence* (CSII) and defined it to be a consumer's "willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding the purchase decision" (p. 473)" (Bruner 2009, 920). Presumably, consumers who are more (or less) susceptible to interpersonal influence will likely possess more favorable (or less favorable) attitudes toward both the influencer and the brand. *Susceptibility to interpersonal influence* includes two dimensions, *informational* (8 items) and *normative* (4 items). Details for all measured control variables including scales, items, and prior literature sources are detailed within Table 3.18.

Table 3.18: Main Study— Measurement Items– Control Variables

CONSTRUCTS	ITEMS	SCALE SOURCE
	CONTROL VARIABLES	
Patronage Frequency[7] *(Instagram)* *	**How would you characterize your history with Instagram?** **1. I use Instagram daily.**[8] **2. (1) I have used Instagram many times in the past week.** **3. (2) I am a frequent user of Instagram.** 4. I have never used any social media platform of any kind. (r) 5. (3) I normally choose Instagram amongst social media platforms. * Analyses within Chapter 4 include only the bolded items.	Hess, Ganesan and Klein 2003[9] (Bruner 2009) 7-point Likert scale with anchors: *strongly agree* (7) & *strongly disagree* (1)
Knowledge of Disclosure (subjective)	1. I know a lot about the rules bloggers must follow when posting about brands they've been paid to mention. [strongly disagree—strongly agree] 2. My knowledge of disclosure requirements regarding bloggers and social media influencers is… [inferior—superior] 3. My knowledge of disclosure requirements regarding bloggers and social media influencers is… [very poor—very good]	Gurhan-Canli 2003[10] (Bruner 2009) 7-point semantic differential; paired, polarized adjectives depicted under items.

[7] Scale per Brunner (2009, 671)

How would you characterize your history with this __________?

1. I have visited this __________ many times in the past.
2. I am a frequent visitor of this __________.
3. I normally go to this __________.

[8] The numbers in parenthesis are indicative of the items created by Hess, Ganesan and Klein (2003). The first and fourth items were added to accompany the original three items as well as for comparative purposes— to compare to a screening item to ensure respondents possessed the desired sample characteristics; see chapter 4, table 4.3 for additional details.

[9] Details from the authors' (Hess, Ganesan and Klein 2003) initial use of the scale, quoted from their Appendix follow:

"*Number of Past Encounters With the Organization* (new scale); coefficient alpha = .95

How would you characterize your history with this restaurant? (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

I have visited this restaurant many times in the past.
I am a frequent visitor of this restaurant.
I normally go to this restaurant." (143).

[10] "Only one item was provided in the article by Gurhan-Canli (2003); the other two were provided by her (Gurhan-Canli 2006*). The blank** should be filled with the topic of interest, e.g., TV sets" (Bruner 2009, 577).

Attitude toward Brand Dropping[11]	1. **(1) I hate seeing brand name products in Instagram posts if they are placed for commercial purposes. (r)**[12] 2. **(2) I don't mind if bloggers receive compensation from brands for brand-dropping in their posts.** 3. **(3) It is highly unethical to influence followers by using brand name products in blog/vlog posts. (r)** 4. **(4) Bloggers are misleading followers by disguising branded products as props in Instagram posts. (r)** 5. **(5) The government should regulate Influencers' posts that are sponsored by a brand. (r)** 6. **(9) I don't mind if brand name products appear in Instagram posts.** 7. **(10) Brand-dropping in Instagram posts should be completely banned. (r)** 8. **(10) The placement of brands in blog posts should be completely banned. (r)** 9. (14) Instagram users are subconsciously influenced by the brands they see in others' posts. (r) 10. (15) I often buy brands I see bloggers using or holding on Instagram.	Gupta and Gould 1997; Russell 2002 (Bruner 2009) 7-point Likert scale with anchors: *strongly agree* (7) & *strongly disagree* (1)
* Analyses within Chapter 4 include only the bolded items.		

*Gurhan-Canli 2006 is personal correspondence rather than academic research.
**The underlined portions within Table 3.18 represent the *topic of interest*— the portion which originally was a blank.

[11] Adapted from *Attitude toward Product Placement;* the numbers in parenthesis are indicative of the item number from the original scale per Bruner (2009).
"Fifteen statements are used to measure a viewer's attitude regarding the use (placement) of branded products within the storyline of TV shows. Eight of fifteen items were adapted for the TV context from two scales by Gupta and Gould (1997). The rest of the items were apparently written by Russell (2002)" (Bruner 2009, 61).

[12] "Reverse coding is necessary for some of these items before scale scores are calculated. Identification of which ones should be reverse coded was not noted by Russell (2002). Judgment has been used here to indicate the ones which are likely to require reversal" (Bruner 2009, 61).

Knowledge of Disclosure (objective)	1. The FTC has published rules and regulations governing paid partnerships between social media influencers/bloggers and brands. **[True]** **2. The FTC publishes suggested methods that social media influencers/bloggers should use to clearly and conspicuously disclose sponsored posts; however, such disclosures are optional. [False]** **3. Brands and social media influencers/bloggers are given the option to determine whether or not they inform consumers of potential material connections (e.g., financial compensation) when digital brand promotions are created and posted. [False]** **4. Social media influencers are always required to inform consumers when they have received any type of compensation (e.g., cash payment, free product) from a brand they promote within their social media content. [True]** 5. According to the FTC rules and regulations, free products gifted to bloggers from brands need not be disclosed; however, cash payments made to bloggers from brands are always required to be disclosed. **[False]** 6. #ad #sponsored and/or #paid means that the brand mentioned within the post paid the blogger via cash, free product, or some other means of material connection. **[True]** **7. Once a social media influencer has revealed a paid-partnership with a brand, the consumer should know about this relationship; therefore, the Social Media Influencer is no longer required to disclose the relationship on forthcoming posts. [False]**	FTC 2015 [true or false answer choices for all 7 items]

Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	*Normative* Dimension 1. I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them. **2. It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.** **3. When buying products. I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.** **4. If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.** **5. I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.** **6. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.** **7. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.** **8. I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.** *Informational* Dimension 9. To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using. 10. If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product. 11. I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class. 12. I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.	Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989[13] (Bruner 2009) 7-point Likert scale with anchors: *strongly agree* (7) & *strongly disagree* (1)

* Analyses within Chapter 4 include only the bolded items[14].

[13] "Items #1-#8 and #9-#12 compose the normative and informational dimensions, respectively, as used by Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989)" (Bruner 2009, 922).

[14] "Bearden, Hardesty, and Rose (2001) as well as Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz (2001) and Wooten and Reed (2004) just used the eight items measuring the normative dimension" (Bruner 2009, 922).

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Pretests one and two were conducted to ensure the experimental conditions were manipulated as intended and to ensure there were not any unintended effects. Pretest one revealed less than adequate manipulations for brand-influencer fit. Specifically, the *low* brand-influencer fit manipulation was perceived as a moderately appropriate fit rather than a poor, unrelated to fashion, *low* fit. Additionally, it was determined that the disclosure conditions could and should be more closely aligned. More specifically, the Instagram posts' captions should be as close to identical as reasonably and realistically possible between each of the two opposing disclosure conditions (no disclosure versus disclosure). The disclosure conditions (no disclosure versus disclosure) should maintain as much similarity as possible despite the brand-influencer fit conditions (low fit versus high fit) even with differing product categories depicted within the brand-influencer fit conditions (and therefore within the Instagram posts' images). Pretest two corrected for both of these issues. The brand-influencer fit and the disclosure manipulations were perceived as intended within pretest two. The manipulations were statistically significant with meaningful effect sizes, and no unintended manipulation effects were found. Therefore, the main study was put into motion. The pretest two manipulations were used in the main study.

4.2 Panel Aggregation

Both pretest one, pretest two, and the main study had similar samples in that they were all three comprised of female respondents of similar age to that of daily Instagram users. Additional sample characteristics, as claimed and self-reported, for the main study are detailed within subsequent section(s) of this chapter. However, the data collection for the main study differed from that of the initial pretests. Rather than student samples, the main study sample included participants who were recruited on behalf of panel aggregator Qualtrics, via a third-party sampling company that distributed the researcher's online experiment. Table 4.1 provides details specific to the Qualtrics panel aggregation process (Qualtrics 2019).

Table 4.1: Qualtrics Panels— Project Stages

Stage Name	**Stage Description**
Pre-Launch	*Pre-Launch is the stage before fielding begins and is designed to give us an opportunity to confirm (one last time) the details for the project, program the needed logic, and setup the project on our end to get it ready for fielding.*
Soft Launch	*Soft Launch is the stage where we collect about 10% of the total sample size, though sometimes we will collect fewer (around 50 or 100) if you have a large sample size. Once this is complete, your Project Manager will pause sampling and will send you the data to review. This gives you an opportunity to identify any potential discrepancies or issues before we go live for the Full Launch.*
Full Launch	*Full Launch is the stage where we collect the rest of the sample. Note that the Soft Launch responses do count toward this number, so at this stage, we will resume for the remainder of the completes needed to hit your target sample size.*
Review & Approval	*The Review & Approval stage is after the data has been collected and sent to you. We allow for a 7-day period following collection for you to review the data. In the unlikely case that you find a problem with the data, please let us know within this 7-day period so we can quickly replace any necessary data. After 7 days, the data is considered approved and the participants receive compensation.*

4.2.1 Sample Screening Tactics and Quality Assessments

4.2.1.1 Sample screening. Throughout the data collection process, the quality of the sample was a continuous concern that brought about many issues, not only pertaining to honest answers in reference to the requested sample restraints, but also pertaining to thoughtful answers for each of the items used to measure the variables within the model. The researcher requested respondents who identify as female, who reside within the US, who are between the ages of 18 to 34, and who use Instagram on a daily basis. Additionally, respondents should put forth adequate time and effort to read the information and items presented and provide thoughtful answers. Since Qualtrics, via Lucid (Lucid 2019), provides compensation to panel respondents, the researcher implemented several means in which to hopefully ensure both honest (regarding the demographic restraints) and thoughtful (regarding the measurement items) responses.

Prior research (AAPOR Standards Committee 2010; Cornesse and Blom 2015; Smith et al. 2016; Ford 2017) indicates that savvy respondents attempt to manipulate ways to get around geographic based sample restraints. Further, research (AAPOR Standards Committee 2010; Cornesse and Blom 2015; Smith et al. 2016; Ford 2017) also includes details regarding practices in which savvy respondents learn *how* to respond in order to qualify for and/or fully complete survey instruments, to ensure they earn compensation. Therefore, creativity and originality are helpful in reference to ensuring honest, thoughtful answers that prevent the savviest respondents from successful deception. Thoughtfulness was assessed partially via traditional *attention check* questions (e.g., *Please select agree*). Honesty regarding the restraints was assessed via more creative means which are discussed further throughout the remainder of this section.

Qualtrics obtained the panel via Lucid (Lucid 2019), who purportedly provided the opportunity to participate to those with public profile information indicative of alignment with the researcher's demographic-based sample restraints (e.g., age, gender, and country of residence). Additionally, Table 4.2 depicts the method in which Qualtrics screened respondents according to *daily Instagram use*. Each of the items within the table was measured on a seven-point scale with anchors *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree.* Only those who selected answers *agree, somewhat* *agree,* or *strongly agree* for item number five were given the chance to move forward to complete the bulk of the online experiment. The mean and standard deviation values for each of the screening items is based upon the final sample of 353 respondents.

Table 4.2: *Daily Instagram Use* Screening

	For each of the following statements, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree.	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
1.	I shop for wine on a weekly basis.	3.31	2.114
2.	I spend time on various social media apps on a daily basis.	6.63	0.720
3.	I admire luxury fashion brands.	4.99	1.676
4.	I enjoy camping and all things outdoors.	4.76	1.846
5.	**I use Instagram on a daily basis.**	**6.49**	**0.716**
6.	I consider myself a "handy-man".	3.61	1.675
7.	I frequent home improvement retailers (e.g., Home Depot).	3.99	1.846
8.	The beach is my favorite vacation setting.	5.31	1.578

4.2.1.2 Quality assessments. Qualtrics initially distributed the online experiment on Thursday, May 30, 2019. Later that day, the researcher was given the opportunity to assess the initial ten percent of respondents' worth of data (n=35) to ensure there were not any potential discrepancies and/or issues. At this time, the *Project Manager* stated, "The median time to completion is coming in at 10 minutes, and I have added a speeding check—measured as one-half the median soft launch time—which will automatically terminate those who are not responding thoughtfully"[1]. The researcher did in fact notice potential discrepancies/issues beyond completion time. The researcher noticed indications for potentially low-quality respondents; or, respondents who seemingly lacked honest and/or thoughtful responses. The researcher expressed concerns to which the *Project Manager* stated, "We can certainly replace those who are of obviously low quality" in reference to the remainder of the respondents within the remainder of the data collection sample, which had yet to be completed/collected. The researcher had purposefully implemented items dedicated to detection of this very issue—items dedicated solely to recognition of respondents who lacked honest and/or thoughtful responses—these items are included within Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Quality Assessments— Honest and Thoughtful Response Indicators

ASSESSMENT TYPE	**ITEM(S)**	**ANSWER CHOICES**
HONEST ASSESSMENTS		
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION— US RESIDENT	What is your zip-code?	Open-ended
	What is your time-zone?	1. Central Daylight 2. Mountain Daylight 3. Mountain Standard 4. Pacific Daylight 5. Alaska Daylight 6. Hawaii-Aleutian (7. Eastern Daylight)
GENDER IDENTITY	What gender do you most identify with?	1. male **2. female**[2] 3. other 4. prefer not to say

[1] The researcher found the exact median time to be ten minutes, ten seconds for the first 35 respondents; twelve minutes, four seconds for the final 353 respondents. Pretest one median completion time (n=49)= twelve minutes, twenty-one seconds; pretest two median completion time (n=39)= fourteen minutes exactly.

[2] Per the requested sample restraints, the Qualtrics panel management filtered out respondents who did not indicate gender identity as *female.*

AGE	Which age group do you fit within?	**1. 18-24 years** **2. 25-34 years**[3] 3. 35-44 years 4. 45-54 years 5. 55-64 years 6. 65+ years old 7. Prefer not to say
INSTAGRAM USE—*SCREEN 5* COMPARED TO CONTROL VARIABLE, *PATRONAGE FREQUENCY*	Screen 5: I use Instagram on a daily basis. How would you characterize your history with Instagram?... PF1: I use Instagram daily PF2: I have used Instagram many times in the past week. PF3: I am a frequent user of Instagram. PF4: I have never used any social media platform of any kind. PF5: I normally choose Instagram amongst social media platforms.	7-point Likert Anchors: *Strongly Disagree* & *Strongly Agree*
THOUGHTFUL ASSESSMENTS		
INSTAGRAM PROFILE PRESENTATION — ATTENTION CHECK	Megan Marie is...	1. A health expert and recipe blogger **2. A fashion expert and blogger**[4] 3. A comedian via YouTube
ATTENTION CHECKS	1. Please select “somewhat disagree”. 2. Please select “disagree”. 3. Please select “somewhat agree”. 4. Please select “somewhat agree”. 5. Please select “agree”.	7-point Likert Anchors: *Strongly Disagree* & *Strongly Agree*
BRAND SHOWN WITHIN THE PSEUDO SMI’S INSTAGRAM POST	Megan Marie's Instagram content mentioned which of the following brands?	1. Pepcid **2. Symmetry**[5] 3. NYX 4. Furla Candy

[3] Per the requested sample restraints, the Qualtrics panel management filtered out respondents who did not indicate age as either 18-24 years or 25-34 years.
[4] The Qualtrics panel management filtered out respondents who did not indicate answer choice, *A fashion expert and blogger*.
[5] The Qualtrics panel management filtered out respondents who did not indicate answer choice, *Symmetry*.

MONTHLY SURVEY COMPLETION	On average, about how many surveys do you complete, per month?	**1. less than 10** **2. 10-40** **3. 41-70** **4. 71-100**[6] 5. More than 100: ____ 6. Prefer not to say

The researcher made several attempts to obtain proof of respondents' location and/or address specifics to ensure the respondents were all truly US residents, but was ultimately unable to obtain any accurate certainty. The *Project Manager* provided a map of the US, which includes notations for each respondent's claimed location. These notations are based upon Qualtrics surveys' automated collection and reporting of respondents' latitude and longitude locations. Unfortunately, similar to that of IP Addresses, VPN software, and similar mechanisms, are known to have capabilities that alter latitude and longitude location details. That said, the map provided by Qualtrics is within Figure 4.1.

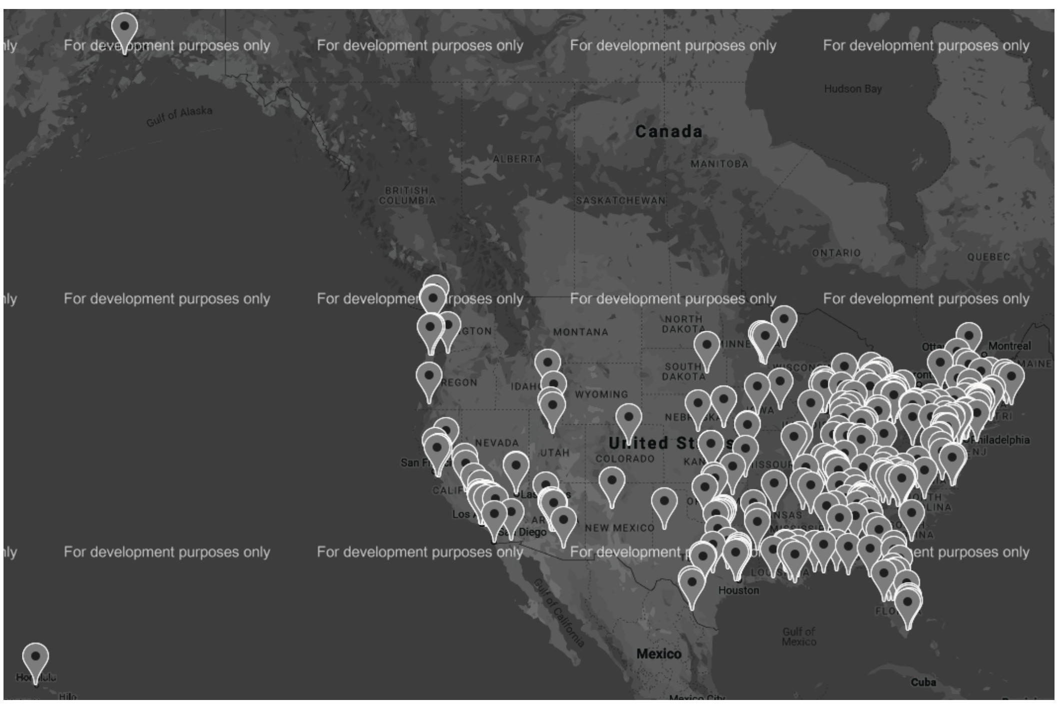

Figure 4.1: Respondents' Location within the US

[6] The final sample (n=353) does not include respondents who chose either *More than 100*, or *Prefer not to Say*.

Note that the Eastern time zone was not included within the online Experiment answer choices. Unfortunately, the researcher accidentally failed to include the Eastern time zone as an answer choice for this quality assessment item. This was realized throughout the researcher reading responses to the online experiment's final (albeit optional) request, "Please provide any general comments you have regarding Megan Marie's Instagram content." in which a respondent provided content-relative comments with the concluding note, "Time zone question did not have all the time zone options my time zone is EST." Upon this realization, the researcher conducted a search amongst all 353 respondents' concluding comments to determine whether or not any additional respondents noted such. Perhaps this sort of notation should not be expected of the respondents. Nonetheless, no other respondent made any note regarding such despite so many of them appearing to be within the Eastern time zone's geographical area.

While this issue originates from a mistake for which the researcher accepts full accountability, it is concerning that only one respondent mentioned the oversight, especially so when considering Figure 4.1. The map is indicative of a moderate, perhaps majority, number of respondents within the Eastern time zone. In conclusion, this yields yet another reason to be concerned with geographic location regarding respondents' incentive to alter such in order to fit within the desired sample and therefore achieve the ability to participate in exchange for compensation.

The researcher made numerous attempts via email and telephone to determine noteworthy details relative to the sample/respondents and data collection methods; however, not all requested information was provided. Qualtrics assigned an individual *Sales Representative* who served the researcher as a key contact person throughout the main study data collection. The researcher requested specifics regarding the panel company from whom the respondents were recruited. The *Sales Representative* reported that respondents were sourced via sampling company Lucid (Lucid 2019). The researcher also requested specifics pertaining to any and all content (e.g., screening questions/items, statements, etc.) the respondents potentially saw prior to the start of the researcher's main study, a Qualtrics online experiment. The *Sales Representative* did not provide any specific details within her email reply. Rather, she later verbalized that respondents each have profiles in which demographic restraints (e.g., age, gender, current residence) are made public, allowing Lucid (Lucid 2019) to recruit participants accordingly; therefore, no content is necessary prior to the start of the researcher's Qualtrics online experiment. The *Sales Representative* also provided a document via email in which the "standard invite message" was included: "Panel members are sent an email invitation or prompted on the respective survey platform to proceed with a given survey. The typical survey invitation is generally very simple and generic. It provides a hyperlink which will take the respondent to the survey as well as mention the incentive offered."

The researcher also inquired regarding the response rate, the incidence rate, and the following claim from within the previously mentioned document that the *Sales Representative* provided via email: "Consumer panel members' names, addresses, and dates of birth are typically validated via third-party verification measures prior to their joining a panel." Unfortunately, in reference to third-party verification measures, the researcher did not hear back from the *Sales Representative*, the *Project Manager*, nor any one of the *Support Project Managers* included within all email correspondence. In reference to the response rate—defined by Qualtrics as, "the percentage of your target that receives a survey invitation and responds to the survey invitation by initiating the survey"—the *Project Manager* stated, "I know that we typically get a response rate of 10%". However, Qualtrics-branded content states, "On average, response rates generally fall between 5%-12%" (Qualtrics, *Everything you need to know when working with your IRB*). No project-specific response rate was made known to the researcher. In reference to the incidence rate—defined by Qualtrics as, "the percentage of people who initiate your survey that are able to pass through your survey screeners and qualify to complete your survey"—the *Project Manager* provided this project's incidence rate was 58%. The exact means in which the incidence rate was calculated was not revealed. Table 4.4 details (a) the fourth project stage, *Review and Approval,* (b) the presumed determination of the incidence rate of 58%, and (c) the many review and approval rounds that took place prior to obtaining the final sample (n= 353).

Table 4.4: Panel Project Stage 4— Review and Approval

ROUND	SAMPLE COLLECTED	RESULTS	MATHEMATICAL COMPUTATIONS
Review & Approval Round 1	n= 368	n=176 deemed *obviously low quality*	368- 176= 192 192/ 368= 52.17%
Notes relative to the mathematical computation: Per Qualtrics-branded content, "We also generally include about 5 percent extra responses to act as proactive replacements should you find any invalid data" (Qualtrics 2019); (350 + 5%= 350 + 18= 368).			
Review & Approval Round 2	n= 368	N/A (details within subsequent paragraph)	
Review & Approval Round 3	n= 368	n=35 deemed *obviously low quality*	176- 35= 141 141/ 176= 80.11%
Notes relative to the mathematical computation: Rounds 1 and 3 yield an overall incidence rate of 57.92% (≈ 58%) for 90.49% (n=333) of the total 368 respondents.			
Review & Approval Round 4	n= 370	n= 17 deemed *obviously low quality*	370- 17= **353 final sample**

Qualtrics panel management was granted access to the researcher's Qualtrics account, which in turn allows panel managers access and permission to make changes as deemed fit and without notice to the researcher; this is standard Qualtrics panel management procedure (Qualtrics 2019). After round one of project stage 4, before round 2, the *Project Manager* added filters within the researcher's experiment. These filters were added to the researcher's five "attention check" questions (e.g., please select agree)—after round one, the online experiment automatically ended for any respondent who did not correctly answer "attention check" question(s). Whether or not such respondents were granted access to start over and complete the experiment during second or third attempts is unknown to the researcher. The *Project Manager* also implemented additional filters prior to round two. This become known after the completion of round two, when the researcher discovered that all round two respondents had failed to complete the latter portion of the experiment. The round-wide incompleteness was due to the *Project Manager* incorrectly implementing filters within the researcher's experiment. After round three, the data now included only respondents who answered all of the traditional attention check questions correctly, per the *Project Manager's* added filters. And, after round three, the researcher obtained only 100% complete responses. Nonetheless, issues relative to thoughtful responses, or lack thereof, remained. Again, the *Project Manager* remedied these issues by way of access to and editing within the researcher's experiment, via even more filters.[7].

4.2.2 Sample Characteristics

Again, all respondents within the main study sample are purportedly females, between the ages of 18 to 34, who reside within the US, who use Instagram daily. Additional sample characteristics and demographics are provided within Table 4.5

After several rounds of project stage four, *Review and Approval*—sample quota met, quality assessments conducted, low-quality respondent replacements communicated, survey redistributed—the conditions were not equally dispersed amongst the pool of complete and

[7] "Filter" is used here to mimic the terminology used by the Qualtrics *Panel Manager,* in reference to features within Qualtrics such as "skip logic" and "display logic" (e.g., if respondent selects answer choice B, skip to the end of the block").
Details specific to the questions and associated filters are within Table 4.3: Quality Assessments— Honest and Thoughtful Response Indicators, and the accompanying footnotes.

Table 4.5: Main Study— Sample Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY N=353	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGE			
18-24 Years	116	32.86	32.86
25-34 Years	235	66.57	99.43
Undisclosed	2	0.57	100
EDUCATION			
Less than a high school diploma	8	2.27	2.27
High school diploma or equivalent (GED)	65	18.41	20.68
Some college, no degree	115	32.58	53.26
Associate degree	32	9.07	62.32
Bachelor’s degree	94	26.63	88.95
Master’s degree	30	8.50	97.45
Professional degree	2	0.57	98.02
Doctoral degree	4	1.13	99.15
Undisclosed	3	0.85	100.00
MARITAL STATUS			
Single	219	62.04	62.04
Married	123	34.84	96.88
Widowed	1	0.28%	97.17
Divorced	5	1.42%	98.58
Separated	2	0.57%	99.15
Undisclosed	3	0.85%	100.00
EMPLOYMENT			
Student	58	16.43	16.43
Employed full time	154	43.63	60.06
Employed part time	51	14.45	74.50
Unemployed & looking for work	24	6.80	81.30

Unemployed & not looking for work	3	0.85	82.15
Homemaker	53	15.01	97.17
Unable to work	4	1.13	98.30
Other	2	0.57	98.87
Undisclosed	4	1.13	100.00
INCOME			
Less than 20,000	78	22.10	22.10
\$20,000 – 34,999	72	20.40	42.49
\$35,000 – 49,999	68	19.26	61.76
\$50,000 – 74,999	75	21.25	83.00
\$75,000 – 99,999	27	7.65	90.65
\$100,000+	15	4.25	94.90
Undisclosed	18	5.10	100.00
ETHNICITY			
Caucasian	245	69.41	69.41
Native American	1	0.28	69.69
African American	39	11.05	80.74
Hispanic/ Latino American	24	6.80	87.54
Asian American	29	8.22	95.75
European	1	0.28	96.03
Other[8]	12	3.40	99.43
Undisclosed	2	0.57	100.00

quality respondents. The fourth and final round within project stage four, *Review and Approval*, set out to replace thirty-five *obviously low-quality* respondents. It was requested that these thirty-five respondents be exposed only to blocks three and four within the condition randomization; further, that block 4 be assigned more so than block 3. Specifically, that twelve of thirty-five

[8] *Other* (n= 12) open-ended answers: (1) Alaskan Native, (2) Asian, (3) south Asian, (4) Biracial, (5) Mixed, (6) Mixed, (7) Mixed race, (8) Multiracial, (9) Norwegian, (10) WHITE, (11) WHITE, and (12) White and Native American

respondents be exposed to block 3, and twenty-three of thirty-five respondents be exposed to block 4.

Upon collection of the final 35 respondents, 370 total responses resulted. Four of the final 35 respondents were not included within the final sample due to duplicate IP addresses. Of the remaining 366 respondents, 13 additional respondents were removed based upon time to complete (combined with additional, minor indications of less than thoughtful responses) yielding the final sample size of 353 respondents. Despite such, the request regarding block 3/block 4 assignment for the final thirty-five responses collected worked fairly well as the final sample is fairly close to equal randomization amongst the 353 total respondents and the four conditions. Additional details regarding such are provided within Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Main Study— Exposure of Conditions

Block & Condition Description		Participants
Block 1	NO Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**91** (26%)
Block 2	Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**88** (25%)
Block 3	Disclosure; HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**89** (25%)
Block 4	NO Disclosure; LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**85** (24%)
		n= 353
	Conditions	**Participants**
	NO Disclosure	**176** (50%)
	Disclosure	**177** (50%)
		n= 353
	LOW *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**173** (49%)
	HIGH *Brand-Influencer Fit*	**180** (51%)
		n= 353

4.3 Measurement Reliability and Manipulation MANOVA

Each of the constructs' reliability was assessed with SPSS via Cronbach's alpha; all measured constructs have acceptable reliabilities ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) (Nunnally 1978; Cronbach 1951) indicative of high interrelation amongst each of the dependent, latent variables' set of indicators (Hair et al. 2010). Construct reliabilities from the main study as well as both of the pretests are summarized within Table 4.7. Pretest one, pretest two, and the main study MANOVA results, which depict the analysis employed to determine the intended effects of the manipulations and their associated manipulation checks, as well as any unintended effects of the manipulations, are summarized within Table 4.8.

Table 4.7: Summary of Construct Reliabilities (α)

	CRONBACH'S ALPHA		
CONSTRUCT (NUMBER OF ITEMS)	**PRETEST ONE N= 49**	**PRETEST TWO N= 39**	**MAIN STUDY N=353**
Brand—Influencer Fit (4)	.950	.982	**.949**
Disclosure (6)	.706	.928	.947
Disclosure (4)	–	–	**.944**
Passionate Authenticity (9)	.923	.952	.951
Passionate Authenticity (8)	–	–	**.945**
Transparent Authenticity (6)	.726	.937	.905
Transparent Authenticity (5)	–	–	**.908**
Attitude toward the Brand (4)	.956	.961	.952
Attitude toward the Brand (3)	–	–	**.934**
Attitude toward the SMI (4)	.978	.953	**.959**

Table 4.8: Summary of MANOVA Results

Manipulation	**Manipulation Check**	**Significance**	**Partial ETA Squared (η_p^2)**
Pretest One N=49			
Fit	**Fit**	**.171**	**.041**
	Disclosure	.764	.002
Disclosure	Fit	.452	.013
	Disclosure	**.000**	**.335**
Fit * Disclosure Interaction	Fit	.272	.027
	Disclosure	.045	.086
Pretest Two N=39			
Fit	**Fit**	**.000**	**.392**
	Disclosure	.322	.028
Disclosure	Fit	.462	.016
	Disclosure	**.000**	**.507**
Fit * Disclosure Interaction	Fit	.858	.001
	Disclosure	.597	.008
Main Study N=353[9]			
Fit	**Fit**	**.000**	**.095**
	Disclosure	.914	.000
Disclosure	Fit	.165	.006
	Disclosure	**.000**	**.210**
Fit * Disclosure Interaction	Fit	.241	.004
	Disclosure	.423	.002

[9] The MANOVA results for the main study reflect only the items retained within the Measurement model, presented later in this chapter.

4.4 Structural Equation Modeling— Direct Effects Assessment and Associated Analyses

The hypothesized conceptual model was evaluated via structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques with IBM, AMOS statistical software. SEM was deemed best equipped for evaluating the proposed conceptual model (and the relative hypotheses) for many reasons. Such reasons include SEM's ability to assess a set of relationships and therefore the entire model at once, including both the direct and indirect relationships within. Additionally, SEM's usefulness regarding multi-faceted, error inherent, latent constructs, such as those measured within the model, (e.g., the dependent variables; i.e., passionate authenticity, attitude toward the brand) further solidified this decision (Babin, Hair and Boles 2008; Hair et al. 2010). Lastly, prior research (Mackenzie 2001; Bagozzi and Yi 1988, 1989, 2012; Bagozzi, Yi and Singh 1991; Russell, Kahn, Spoth and Altmaier 1998; Laroche, Cleveland, Bergeron and Goutaland 2003) provides rationale regarding both the usefulness and appropriateness of analyzing experimental data via structural equation modeling techniques.

The remaining portion of this chapter is organized according to the "six stages of SEM procedures and decisions" (Hair et al. 2010, 635), which are listed within Table 4.9. In accordance with the six stages of SEM procedures and decisions (Hair et al. 2010) definitions for each of the individual constructs are reiterated within Table 4.10 per stage one: *defining individual constructs*.

Table 4.9: The Six Stages of SEM Procedures and Decisions

STAGE	**DESCRIPTION**
1	*Define individual constructs*
2	*Develop and specify the measurement model* • *Determine measured variables and constructs* • *Draw path diagram for measurement model*

3	*Design a study to produce empirical results* • *Assess the adequacy of the sample size* • *Select the estimation method and missing data approach*
4	*Assess the measurement model validity* • *Establish acceptable levels of goodness-of-fit (GOF)* • *Find specific evidence of construct validity*
5	*Specify the structural model* • *Convert measurement model to structural model*
6	*Assess structural model validity* • *Assess GOF and significance* • *Assess direction and size of structural parameter estimates* • *Draw substantive conclusions and recommendations*

Table 4.10: SEM Stage One— Construct Definitions

CONSTRUCT	**DEFINITION**
DISCLOSURE	*the degree to which a social media influencer officially and adequately reveals any relationship with any brand mentioned, pictured, and/or promoted throughout the social media influencer's social media content— to include both pictures and text/captions (e.g., no disclosure versus prominent disclosure; i.e., #sponsored).*
BRAND-INFLUENCER FIT	*the degree of alignment between the SMI and the featured brand(s) within the SMI's social media content in that attributes between the two—the SMI and the featured brand—are mutually complimentary* (Adapted from Pracejus and Olsen 2004).
PASSIONATE AUTHENTICITY	*the extent to which consumers perceive the SMI as intrinsically motivated in that the SMI is passionate about and committed to producing his/her creative content based upon inherent excitement and love for the brand(s), product(s), experience(s), and/or overarching genre (e.g., fashion) depicted within* (Moulard et al. 2014).
TRANSPARENT AUTHENTICITY	*the extent to which consumers perceive that the SMI is completely open, honest and forthright regarding the SMIs potential relationship with the featured brand(s) within the SMI's social media content* (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Moulard 2018).
ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BRAND	*consumers' overall evaluation—opinions of, feelings towards, and beliefs about—the featured brand/product* (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Doss 2011).

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE INFLUENCER	*consumers'* comprehensive appraisal—*opinions of, feelings towards, and beliefs about—the social media influencer* (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Doss 2011).

Stage one is further detailed throughout Chapter 3. More specifically, Table 3.4 (*Pretest One—Measurement Items*) and Table 3.10: (*Pretest Two— Measurement Items*) present the items included to measure each of the constructs within the online experiment in succinct form. Stage two: *Developing the overall measurement model* begins in the most initial phase as depicted within Figure 2.1: *Conceptual Model* and develops more maturely in the following section of the current chapter. Stage three: *Designing a study to produce empirical results* is detailed and elaborated upon within Chapter 3: *Research Methodology* (e.g., *assess the adequacy of the sample size;* i.e., main study sample size of n=353, in accordance with ten respondents per each of the original thirty-five items).

4.4.1 <u>Measurement Model for CFA</u>

In continued accordance with the six stages of SEM procedures and decisions (Hair et al. 2010) the researcher next addressed stage four: *assessing the measurement model validity.* This stage involves both (a) "establishing acceptable levels of goodness-of-fit (GOF) for the measurement model" and (b) "finding specific evidence of construct validity" (Hair et al. 2010, 646). Table 4.11 addresses the initial portion of stage four; Table 4.11 depicts the assessment of the modification indices and the establishment of acceptable levels of GOF.

As explained by Iacobucci (2009), "Modification indices are computed for any place in a matrix (measurement or structural) where a parameter had not been included or estimated in the current model. A modification index is large if the model would fit better had that parameter been estimated" (678). Therefore, large modification indices are indicative of incomplete, inadequate portions of the model. Oftentimes, the model fit is best served by the removal of items linked to

Table 4.11: SEM Stage Four– Establishing Acceptable Levels of Goodness-of-Fit

	HIGHEST M.I.	FIT INDICES χ^2 & DF	CFI	RMR	PNFI	RMSEA	ITEM DELETED
1	**52.044** (e9↔**e10**)	**χ^2= 1085.5** **df= 480** (= 561-81)	**.950**	**.095**	**.831**	**.060**	P_auth_4 **(e10)**
2	**41.143** (e31↔**e32**)	**χ^2= 995.9** **df= 449** (= 528-79)	**.953**	**.095**	**.831**	**.059**	Dis_5 **(e32)**
3	**38.007** (**e23**↔e27)	**χ^2= 892.9** **df= 419** (= 496-77)	**.958**	**.091**	**.833**	**.057**	AttBrand_1 **(e23)**
4	**33.854** (e31↔**e33**)	**χ^2= 785.9** **df= 390** (= 465-75)	**.963**	**.091**	**.833**	**.054**	Dis_6 **(e33)**
5	**32.087** (e17↔**e18**)	**χ^2= 705.9** **df= 362** (= 435-73)	**.966**	**.086**	**.832**	**.052**	T_auth_2 **(e18)**
6	**23.767** (e9↔e11)	**χ^2= 616.3** **df= 335** (= 406-71)	**.972**	**.072**	**.834**	**.049**	*n/a*

especially high modification indices. Likewise, five items (one *passionate authenticity* item, one *transparent authenticity* item, two *disclosure* items, and one *attitude towards the brand* item) were deleted from the measurement model based upon the modification indices. After deletion of five items, the measurement model yields a χ^2 of 616.35 with 335 degrees of freedom (P <

0.001), which produces a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.972, and a Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) of 0.072. The model yields a Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI), which is useful in comparing models (Hair et al 2010; Pounders, Moulard and Babin 2018), of 0.834, and a Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.049. The measurement model possesses appropriate GOF per commonly accepted benchmarks specific to this research—throughout GOF assessment, appropriate consideration was given to the sample size and the complexity of the model. Both the sample size and the number of indicator variables— the number of items within each of the measured constructs— were considered alongside various GOF indices. Hair et al. (2010) provides "characteristics of different fit indices demonstrating goodness-of-fit across different model situations" in which this research falls within the $N > 250$ (N= 353); $12 < m$[10] < 30 (m= 28) category (654). Accordingly, GOF is categorized by CFI above 0.92 (herein CFI= 0.972) and RMSEA values < 0.07 with CFI of 0.92 or higher (herein RMSEA= 0.049). Therefore, the measurement model goodness-of-fit is satisfactory. The measurement model is presented within Figure 4.2.

Table 4.12 reports the standardized loadings of the measured variables on their respective factors, as well as the composite reliability and variance extracted for each construct. The standardized loadings range from 0.762 to 0.946. Composite reliabilities span from 0.909 to 0.959, ranging well beyond Bagozzi and Yi's (1988) recommended benchmark that composite reliabilities exceed 0.60. The average variance extracted values range from 0.667 to 0.854, indicative of another satisfactory criterion, per Fornell and Larcker's (1981) recommended benchmark that variance extracted values exceed 0.50. Accordingly, values depicted within Table 4.12 are indicative of satisfactory convergent validity.

[10] m= number of observed variables

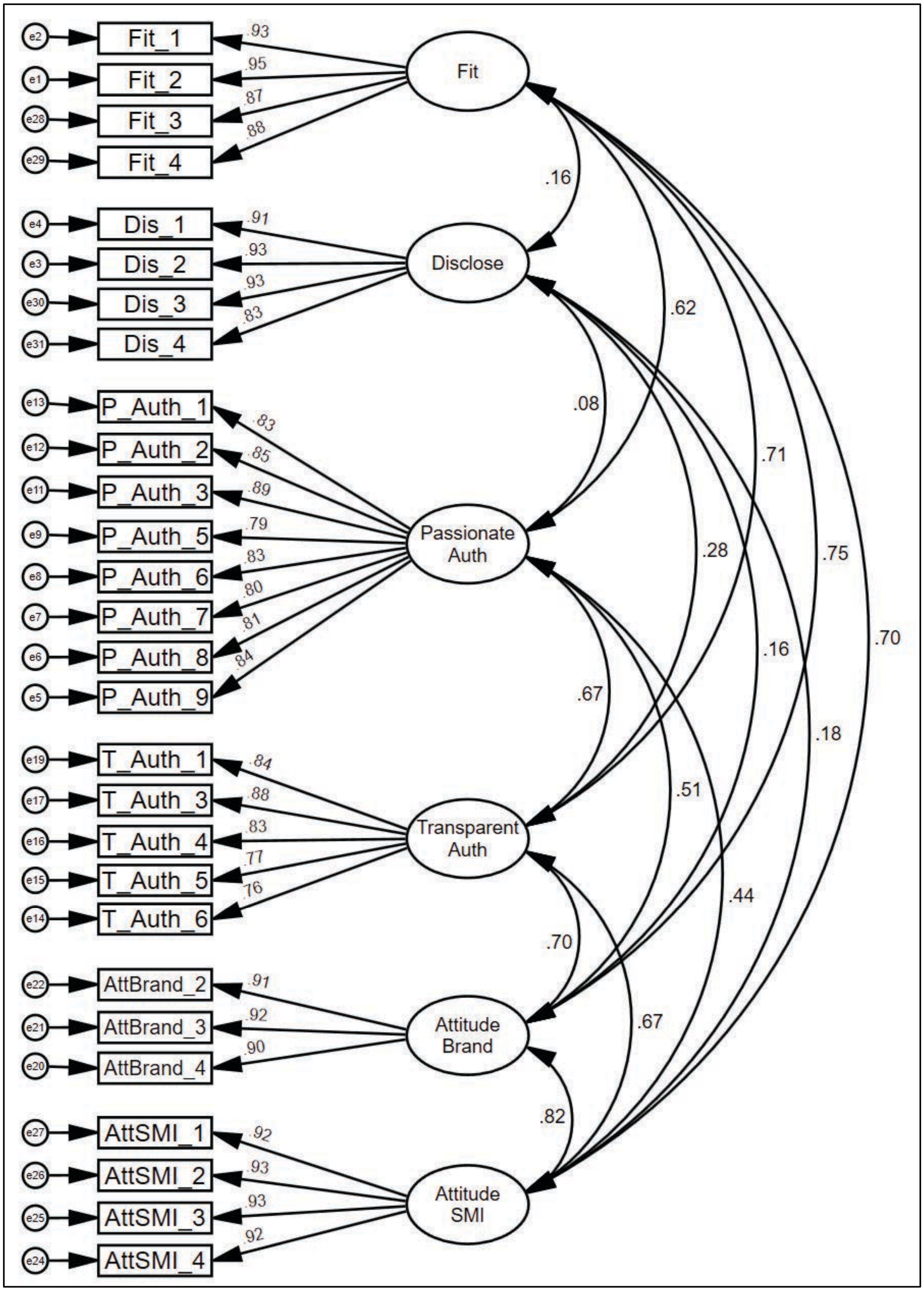

Figure 4.2: Measurement Model

Table 4.12: Main Study— Evidence of Construct Validity– Factor Loadings[a], Composite Reliabilities, and Average Variance Extracted Values

CONSTRUCT – ABBREVIATION ITEM VERBIAGE (ITEM NUMBER)	FIT	DIS	PAUTH	TAUTH	ATTB	ATT SMI
Brand-Influencer Fit – Fit						
Megan Marie is… not a good fit with Symmetry / good fit with Symmetry. (Fit 1)	0.932	–	–	–	–	–
Megan Marie is… not compatible with Symmetry / compatible with Symmetry. (Fit 2)	0.946	–	–	–	–	–
Megan Marie is… not congruent with Symmetry / congruent with Symmetry. (Fit 3)	0.871	–	–	–	–	–
Megan Marie is… an inappropriate match with Symmetry / appropriate match with Symmetry. (Fit 4)	0.882	–	–	–	–	–
Disclosure – Dis						
The Instagram post indicates a partnership between Megan Marie and the featured brand. (Dis 1)	–	0.911	–	–	–	–
The caption in the Instagram post points out that this post is sponsored. (Dis 2)	–	0.927	–	–	–	–
The Instagram post is labeled as sponsored by Symmetry (Dis 3)	–	0.934	–	–	–	–
Megan Marie states that this Instagram post is a paid sponsorship with Symmetry. (Dis 4)	–	0.829	–	–	–	–
Megan Marie acknowledges that she was paid by the featured brand. (Dis 5)	–	b*	–	–	–	–
Megan Marie explicitly discloses a paid partnership with Symmetry. (Dis 6)	–	b*	–	–	–	–

Passionate Authenticity – Pauth						
Megan Marie loves Symmetry. (Pauth 1)	–	–	0.826	–	–	–
It is obvious that Megan Marie is excited about Symmetry. (Pauth 2)	–	–	0.847	–	–	–
Megan Marie has a true passion for Symmetry. (Pauth 3)	–	–	0.885	–	–	–
Megan Marie shows a strong dedication to Symmetry. (Pauth 4)	–	–	b*	–	–	–
Committed is a word to describe Megan Marie's relationship with Symmetry. (Pauth 5)	–	–	0.785	–	–	–
Megan Marie enjoys Symmetry. (Pauth 6)	–	–	0.831	–	–	–
Symmetry satisfies Megan Marie. (Pauth 7)	–	–	0.802	–	–	–
Megan Marie is fascinated by Symmetry. (Pauth 8)	–	–	0.807	–	–	–
Megan Marie is enthusiastic about Symmetry. (Pauth 9)	–	–	0.842	–	–	–
Transparent Authenticity – Tauth						
Megan Marie is telling the truth. (Tauth 1)	–	–	–	0.835	–	–
Megan Marie is being transparent. (Tauth 2)	–	–	–	b*	–	–
Megan Marie is communicating honestly. (Tauth 3)	–	–	–	0.878	–	–
Megan Marie is behaving sincerely. (Tauth 4)	–	–	–	0.828	–	–
Megan Marie is presenting factual information. (Tauth 5)	–	–	–	0.774	–	–
Megan Marie is acting in a forthright manner. (Tauth 6)	–	–	–	0.762	–	–

Attitude towards Brand – AttB Please indicate your attitude toward Symmetry- the brand featured within the Instagram post.						
positive / negative (AttB 1)	–	–	–	–	b*	–
favorable / unfavorable (AttB 2)	–	–	–	–	0.914	–
good / bad (AttB 3)	–	–	–	–	0.918	–
likeable / dislikeable (AttB 4)	–	–	–	–	0.897	–
Attitude towards SMI – AttSMI Please indicate your attitude toward Megan Marie- the fashion blogger.						
positive / negative (AttSMI 1)	–	–	–	–	–	0.917
favorable / unfavorable (AttSMI 2)	–	–	–	–	–	0.926
good / bad (AttSMI 3)	–	–	–	–	–	0.931
likeable / dislikeable (AttSMI 4)	–	–	–	–	–	0.922
	FIT (4)	**DIS (4)**	**PAUTH (8)**	**TAUTH (5)**	**ATTB (3)**	**ATT SMI (4)**
AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED (%)	**82.50**	**81.22**	**68.66**	**66.67**	**82.76**	**85.38**
COMPOSITE RELIABILITY	**0.950**	**0.945**	**0.946**	**0.909**	**0.935**	**0.959**

[a] Loading estimates for all measured variables significant at $p < .001$
[b*] Item deleted due to modification indices

The continuation of stage four, finding specific evidence of construct validity, follows. Discriminant validity was confirmed using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method: the square root of the AVE for both constructs should be greater than the correlation for each construct pair. Likewise, the average variance extracted for both constructs should exceed the pair's squared correlation. Table 4.13 presents the correlation estimates used to conclude satisfactory evidence of discriminant validity. The bolded diagonal values represent the square root of the average variance extracted, which should not exceed any of the non-bolded, correlation matrix values, found just below the bolded values. Given that this holds true, discriminant validity is confirmed. Correlation estimates range between 0.078 and 0.818— these minimum and maximum values are highlighted via blue text within Table 4.13.

Table 4.13: Main Study— Evidence of Construct Validity, continued– Means[a], Standard Deviations[a], and Correlation Estimates[b] of Measured Constructs

Construct Abbreviation (Number of Items)	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**Correlation Estimates** (Pair's Squared Correlations)					
			AttB	**Fit**	**Dis**	**Pauth**	**Tauth**	**Att SMI**
AttB (3)	4.91	1.41	**0.910**					
Fit (4)	5.06	1.50	0.748 (0.560)	**0.908**				
Dis (4)	3.83	1.87	0.156 (0.024)	0.157 (0.025)	**0.901**			
Pauth (8)	5.25	1.10	0.510 (0.260)	0.618 (0.382)	0.078 (0.006)	**0.829**		
Tauth (5)	4.62	1.17	0.700 (0.490)	0.707 (0.500)	0.276 (0.076)	0.670 (0.449)	**0.817**	
AttSMI (4)	5.04	1.40	0.818 (0.669)	0.698 (0.487)	0.182 (0.033)	0.444 (0.197)	0.670 (0.449)	**0.924**
Average Variance Extracted			**0.828**	**0.825**	**0.812**	**0.687**	**0.667**	**0.854**

[a] Based on the average of measurement items comprising the scale for each construct.
[b] All correlations are standardized and significant at $P < 0.001$; n = 353.

4.4.2 Structural Model for SEM

In continued accordance with the six stages of SEM procedures and decisions (Hair et al. 2010), the researcher next addressed stage five: *specifying the structural model* and stage six: *assessing structural model validity*.

4.4.2.1 Control variables. Numerous control variables were included within the online experimental instrument: *patronage frequency* (Instagram), *knowledge of disclosure* (subjective), *knowledge of disclosure* (objective), *attitude toward brand dropping*, and *susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence* includes two dimensions, *informational* (4 items) and *normative* (8 items). Three of the five control variables (Instagram *patronage frequency*, *attitude toward brand dropping*, and *susceptibility to interpersonal influence*) were measured on 7-point Likert scales anchored with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). Subjective *knowledge of disclosure* was measured with three 7-point semantic differential scales that attempt to measure the extent [strongly disagree–strongly agree; inferior–superior; very poor–very good] to which a person expresses having knowledge about the FTC mandated disclosure rules for SMIs and the brands they promote within their social media content.

The measurement for objective *knowledge of disclosure* included seven statements with true or false answer choices. These items were generated from the information within the FTC's FAQ page, *The FTC's Endorsement Guides: What People Are Asking* (FTC 2015). In order to determine a mean value, respondents' answers were coded as follows: a correct answer= 1; an incorrect answer= 0. Each respondent's seven re-coded answers were summed resulting in each respondent being assigned a score ranging from zero to seven (0= got no answers correct; 7= got all answers correct). The mean (4.05) represents the average of all 353 respondents' scores (i.e., 4.05/ 7= 57.79% average correct answers). Alternatively, with only 4 items the mean (1.84) represents a moderately lower score, and therefore lower average of correct answers (i.e., 1.84/ 4= 46.00% average correct answers). Per prior research (Tan 2009) the reliability was calculated via the *alpha* option within SPSS; however, for dichotomous (e.g., dummy-coded) variables this analysis yields the Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) coefficient rather than the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The benchmark values are the same for KR-20 as for Cronbach's alpha (Tan 2009). Reliability ($\alpha = .410$) is unacceptable and validity is unknown. Ultimately, the measurement for this variable is inadequate and therefore unwarranted to be included in any further analyses. The mean and reliabilities for all of the control variables are based upon the complete, final sample of 353 respondents. Table 4.14 provides the mean values and reliabilities (α) for each of the control variables included within the online experiment.

Table 4.14: Main Study— Control Variables– Mean Values & Reliabilities

CONTROL VARIABLE	MEAN
Patronage Frequency *(Instagram)*	
$5\ items;\ \alpha = .619$	6.44
$\mathbf{3\ items;\ \alpha = .906}$	**6.61**
Knowledge of Disclosure *(subjective)*	
$\mathbf{3\ items;\ \alpha = .922}$	**4.12**
Knowledge of Disclosure *(objective)*	
$7\ items;\ \alpha = .329$	4.05
$\mathbf{4\ items;\ \alpha = .410}$	**1.84**
Attitude toward Brand Dropping	
$10\ items;\ \alpha = .807$	4.44
$\mathbf{8\ items;\ \alpha = .851}$	**4.73**
Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	
$8\ normative\ dimension\ items;\ \alpha = .912$	3.12
$\mathbf{7\ normative\ dimension\ items;\ \alpha = .929}$	**3.17**
$4\ informational\ dimension\ items;\ \alpha = .791$	4.55
$\mathbf{3\ informational\ dimension\ items;\ \alpha = .815}$	**4.79**

*Bolded text is representative of the set of items included within subsequent analyses (e.g., the structural model).

Additional exploratory analyses yielded reason to eliminate Instagram *patronage frequency* and the *informational* dimension of *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* from inclusion as control variables within the remaining analyses, (e.g., structural model). The latter elimination is further supported by prior research (Bearden, Hardesty and Rose 2001; Sen, Gurhan-Canli and Morwitz 2001; Wooten and Reed 2004) which also implemented only the *normative* dimension of *susceptibility to interpersonal influence*. And, even the original *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* scale development research (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989) provides support for such: "In a final test, it was predicted that both the normative and informational interpersonal influence scores would be related positively to individual motivations to comply with the expectations of others. Although this relationship should be strongest for the normative dimension, as noted by Miniard and Cohen (1981), normative aspects (e.g., motivation to comply) of the theory of reasoned action also are related to informational interpersonal influence" (479).

4.4.2.2 <u>Theoretical addition</u>. Hair et al. (2010) emphasize the critical role that theory should play throughout each of the six stages of SEM procedures and decisions. It was at this point of the six stages that the researcher realized an originally overlooked relationship amongst the constructs within the proposed model. Current research rationale and thoughtful consideration provide reason to include an additional direct relationship within the structural model (Moulard, Raggio, and Folse working paper). As indicated by Bagazzi and Yi (2012) structural equation modeling "often suggests novel hypotheses originally not considered and opens up new avenues for research" (12). The potential relationship between *transparent* authenticity and *passionate* authenticity warranted empirical assessment.

Perhaps the potential relationship between transparent and passionate authenticity is best illustrated anecdotally. Suppose you follow an influencer specializing in hair, skin and beauty (e.g., cosmetics) product recommendations and tutorials. Now, imagine you recently came to know that this particular SMI was reprimanded by the FTC for failure to disclose material brand connections within several recent posts; the posts contained praises for Calico Cosmetics branded products. Therefore, you perceive that the SMI was not being transparently authentic since she failed to explicitly disclose the existing brand partnership. You likely conclude that the SMI's lack of forthrightness is based upon the SMI's extrinsic motivations (e.g., payment purposes) rather than intrinsic motivations (e.g., genuine admiration for Calico Cosmetics). This line of thought suggests that when consumers perceive that an SMI fails to explicitly disclose within paid-for-promotional posts, the resulting lack of perceived transparent authenticity leads to lacking perceptions of passionate authenticity. Therefore, despite not being included within the original conceptual model and/or the proposed hypotheses, the researcher added this direct relationship, from transparent authenticity to passionate authenticity, within the structural model.

4.4.2.3 Structural model goodness-of-fit. In the structural model, the manipulations were modeled as exogenous variables leading to the manipulation check measures (Mackenzie 2001). Brand-influencer fit (low/high) was represented by a dummy variable (0= low brand-influencer fit; 1= high brand influencer fit) that is modeled as an exogenous latent construct ($\xi 1$) with one indicator set to equal unity and a zero residual error term (Bagozzi and Yi 1989). Disclosure (no disclosure/explicit disclosure) was modeled similarly (0= no disclosure; 1= explicit disclosure), with $\xi 2$ representing the latent construct of disclosure.

The control variables were also modeled as single-item exogenous latent constructs ($\xi 3$ representing *attitude toward brand dropping*; $\xi 4$ representing *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* [normative dimension]; $\xi 5$ representing *knowledge of disclosure* [subjective]), each with one indicator set to equal unity and a zero residual error term (Bagozzi and Yi 1989). The primary reason for including the controls as single item measures is due to the sample size not being adequately large enough to include all of the items used to measure each of the control variables. Additionally, for each control variable, paths were added to all of the endogenous latent factors (passionate authenticity, transparent authenticity, attitude toward the influencer, and attitude toward the brand).

The items within the measurement model were used within the structural model, with the only exceptions being the additions mentioned—the manipulations, control variables[11], and their respective latent factors. The structural model yielded a χ^2 of 994.490 with 473 degrees of freedom (P < 0.001), which produced a CFI of 0.949, an RMR of 0.223, a PNFI of 0.813, and an RMSEA of 0.056. Again, appropriate consideration was given to the sample size and the complexity of the model ($N > 250$ [N= 353]; $m \geq 30$ [m= 33[12]]). Accordingly, GOF is categorized by CFI above 0.90 (herein CFI= 0.949) and RMSEA values < 0.07 with CFI of 0.90 or higher (herein RMSEA= 0.056); therefore, the structural model goodness-of-fit is satisfactory. The structural model is presented within Figure 4.3–A[13].

4.4.2.4 Error variance issue. The fourth item for the *disclosure* manipulation check brought about problems since the error variance value is greater than one. While alternative remedies were considered, ultimately, this item was removed to resolve the issue. The fit statistics for the updated model are as follows. The updated structural model yielded a χ^2 of 923.377 with 442

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[11] Mean composite variables were computed to represent the control variables as single-item measures. As indicated within Table 4.14, exploratory analyses lead to the removal of some items (ξ3 representing attitude toward brand dropping= composite mean of 8, rather than10, items; ξ4 representing susceptibility to interpersonal influence [normative dimension]= composite mean of 7, rather than 8, items; ξ5 representing knowledge of disclosure [subjective]= composite mean of all 3 original items).

[12] 2 manipulations + 8 manipulation check items + 20 DV items + 3 mean control variables =2+8+20+3 =33

[13] For the sake of simplicity, not all paths from the control variables are depicted within Figures 4.3–A and 4.3–B—only the three statistically significant paths are included: ξ4: normative susceptibility to interpersonal influence→ transparent authenticity; ξ4: normative susceptibility to interpersonal influence→ attitude toward the brand; ξ5: subjective knowledge of disclosure→ attitude toward the influencer. However, the model fit statistics are inclusive of all 3 control variables (including all twelve paths from the three of them to each of the four DVs).

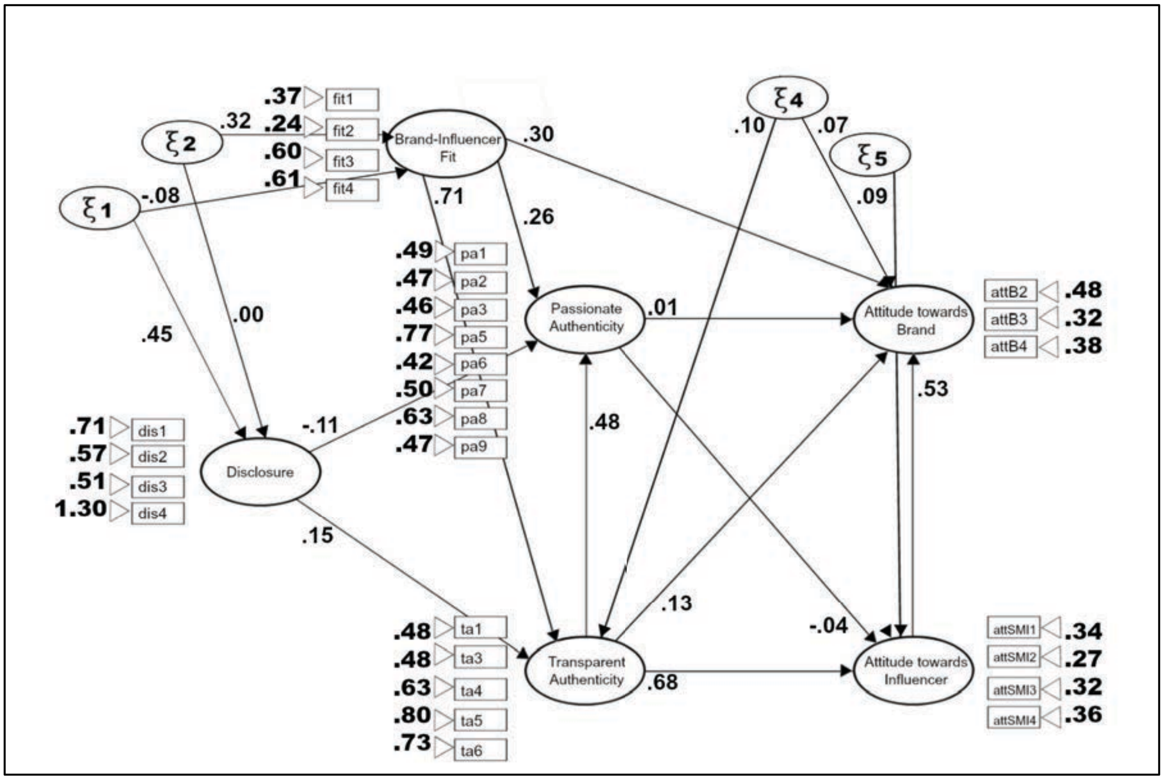

Figure 4.3–A: Structural Model

degrees of freedom ($P < 0.001$), which produced a CFI of 0.951, an RMR of 0.222, a PNFI of 0.812, and an RMSEA of 0.056. Again, appropriate consideration was given to the sample size and the complexity of the model ($N > 250$ [N= 353]; $m \geq 30$ [m= 32[14]]). Accordingly, GOF is categorized by CFI above 0.90 (herein CFI= 0.951) and RMSEA values < 0.07 with CFI of 0.90 or higher (herein RMSEA= 0.056); therefore, the structural model goodness-of-fit is satisfactory. The updated structural model is presented within Figure 4.3–B[15].

[14] 2 manipulations + 7 manipulation check items + 20 DV items + 3 mean control variables =2+7+20+3 =32

[15] For the sake of simplicity, not all paths from the control variables are depicted within Figures 4.3–A and 4.3–B—only the three statistically significant paths are included: ξ4: normative susceptibility to interpersonal influence→ transparent authenticity; ξ4: normative susceptibility to interpersonal influence→ attitude toward the brand; ξ5: subjective knowledge of disclosure→ attitude toward the influencer. However, the model fit statistics are inclusive of all 3 control variables (including all twelve paths from the three of them to each of the four DVs).

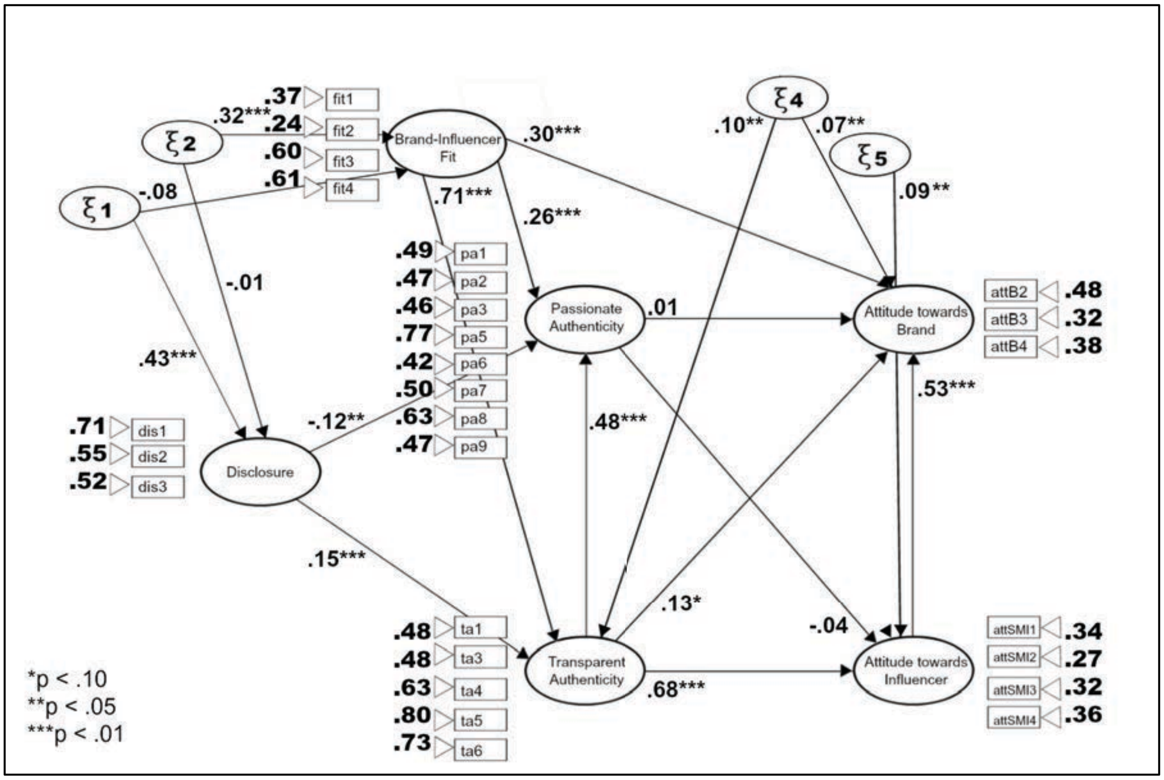

Figure 4.3–B: Structural Model

4.4.3 <u>Direct Effects— Results</u>

4.4.3.1 <u>Control variables</u>. Table 4.15 provides a summary of the three control variables and their paths to each of the authenticities and each of the attitudes—twelve paths total. Only three of these paths were statistically significant. Normative *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* (ξ4) had a statistically significant effect on transparent authenticity (β = .096, p < .05), and on attitude toward the brand (β = .074, p < .05); subjective *knowledge of disclosure* (ξ5) had a statistically significant effect on attitude toward the influencer (β = .088, p < .05).

4.4.3.2 <u>Direct effects</u>. Table 4.16 reports the standardized loadings of the measured variables on their respective factors. The standardized loadings range from 0.749 to 0.948— these minimum and maximum values are highlighted via blue text within Table 4.16. Table 4.17 provides a

Table 4.15: Control Variables–Path Estimates

PATHS	PATH ESTIMATES
ξ3 Attitude toward Brand Dropping	
→ Passionate Authenticity	0.021
→ Transparent Authenticity	-0.028
→ Attitude toward the Brand	-0.003
→ Attitude toward the Influencer	-0.044
ξ4 Normative Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	
→ Passionate Authenticity	0.005
→ Transparent Authenticity	0.096**
→ Attitude toward the Brand	0.074**
→ Attitude toward the Influencer	0.054
ξ5 Subjective Knowledge of Disclosure	
→ Passionate Authenticity	0.064
→ Transparent Authenticity	0.055
→ Attitude toward the Brand	-0.001
→ Attitude toward the Influencer	0.088**

**$p < .05$

summary of the paths involved in the direct effect hypotheses, including the proposed and actual direction of the relative estimates, the size of the relative structural parameter estimates, and a summary of support, or lack thereof, for each of the hypotheses.

Table 4.16: SEM Stage Six—*Assessing the Structural Model*– Factor Loadings[a]

CONSTRUCT – ABBREVIATION ITEM VERBIAGE (ITEM NUMBER)	FIT	DIS	PAUTH	TAUTH	ATTB	ATT SMI
Brand-Influencer Fit – Fit						
Brand-Influencer Fit 1	0.931	–	–	–	–	–
Brand-Influencer Fit 2	0.948	–	–	–	–	–
Brand-Influencer Fit 3	0.868	–	–	–	–	–
Brand-Influencer Fit 4	0.880	–	–	–	–	–
Disclosure – Dis						
Disclosure 1	–	0.913	–	–	–	–
Disclosure 2	–	0.928	–	–	–	–
Disclosure 3	–	0.930	–	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity – Pauth						
Passionate Authenticity 1	–	–	0.824	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity 2	–	–	0.845	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity 3	–	–	0.882	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity 5	–	–	0.782	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity 6	–	–	0.828	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity 7	–	–	0.800	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity 8	–	–	0.804	–	–	–
Passionate Authenticity 9	–	–	0.840	–	–	–
Transparent Authenticity – Tauth						
Transparent Authenticity 1	–	–	–	0.819	–	–

Transparent Authenticity 3	–	–	–	0.864	–	–
Transparent Authenticity 4	–	–	–	0.815	–	–
Transparent Authenticity 5	–	–	–	0.760	–	–
Transparent Authenticity 6	–	–	–	0.749	–	–
Attitude towards Brand – AttB						
Attitude towards Brand 2	–	–	–	–	0.904	–
Attitude towards Brand 3	–	–	–	–	0.908	–
Attitude towards Brand 4	–	–	–	–	0.885	–
Attitude towards SMI – AttSMI						
Attitude towards SMI 1	–	–	–	–	–	0.912
Attitude towards SMI 2	–	–	–	–	–	0.922
Attitude towards SMI 3	–	–	–	–	–	0.925
Attitude towards SMI 4	–	–	–	–	–	0.916

[a] Loading estimates for all measured variables significant at $p < .001$

Table 4.17: SEM Stage Six—*Assessing the Structural Model*– Path Estimates

H	**Paths involved in Direct Effect Hypotheses**	**Path Estimates**	**Hypothesis Supported?**
H1(-)	Disclosure → Passionate Authenticity	-0.116**	✓
H2(+)	Disclosure → Transparent Authenticity	0.151***	✓
H4A(+)	Passionate Authenticity → Attitude to Brand	0.005	✗
H4B(+)	Passionate Authenticity → Attitude to SMI	-0.037	✗
H5A(+)	Transparent Authenticity → Attitude to Brand	0.134*	✓

H5B(+)	Transparent Authenticity → Attitude to SMI	0.675***	✓
H6(+)	Brand-Influencer Fit → Attitude to Brand	0.303***	✓
H7(+)	Attitude to SMI → Attitude to Brand	0.531***	✓
H8EX(+)	Transparent Authenticity → Passionate Authenticity	0.481***	✓

*$p < .10$
**$p < .05$
***$p < .01$

Both hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported: *disclosure* had a negative effect on *passionate authenticity* ($\beta = –0.116$, $p < .05$), yet a positive effect on *transparent authenticity* ($\beta = 0.151$, $p < .001$). The results also supported hypotheses 5a and 5b: *transparent authenticity* had a positive effect on *attitude toward the brand* ($\beta = 0.134$, $p < .10$) and on *attitude toward the influencer* ($\beta = 0.675$, $p < .001$). Additionally, hypotheses 6 and 7 were supported: *brand–influencer fit* and *attitude toward the influencer* had positive effects on *attitude toward the brand* ($\beta = 0.303$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 0.531$, $p < .001$). The final, extra hypotheses was supported as well: *transparent authenticity* had a positive effect on *passionate authenticity* ($\beta = 0.481$, $p < .001$). Alternatively, the results did not support hypotheses 4a and 4b that passionate authenticity would have a positive effect on attitude toward the brand ($\beta = 0.005$, $p > .10$) and on attitude toward the influencer ($\beta = –0.037$, $p > .10$).

4.5 Structural Equation Modeling— Moderating Effects Assessment and Multi-group Analyses

Multi-group analysis was used to test the hypotheses that brand-influencer fit moderates the proposed effects of disclosure on passionate authenticity (H3a) and transparent authenticity (H3b). Specifically, multi-group analysis was conducted on the two brand-influencer fit groups (low, n=173; high, n=180). The structural weights for these relationships were expected to vary across the low and high brand-influencer fit groups, which would suggest moderation. The data were fit to the same structural model as described in the previous sections, except that the brand-influencer fit manipulation was not included within the multi-group analysis.

4.5.1 Multi-group Structural Models

Again, the disclosure manipulation was modeled as an exogenous variable leading to the manipulation check measures (Mackenzie 2001). Since the multi-group analysis set out to test whether or not brand-influencer fit moderates the proposed disclosure-authenticity relationships, the brand-influencer fit manipulation was removed from this structural model. Removing the brand-influencer fit manipulation further served to ensure a positive-definite sample moment matrix, which is required for accurate multi-group data analyses (per AMOS statistical analyses, causal modeling software). The results of the structural model suggest the data fit the model reasonably well: χ^2 = 863.928 (df = 413), CFI = 0.954, RMR = 0.229, PNFI = 0.813, and RMSEA = 0.056 ($N > 250$ [N= 353]; $m \geq 30$ [m= 31[16]]). The multi-group structural models are presented within Figures 4.4[17] and 4.5.

The multi-group analysis intended to assess whether *brand-influencer fit* moderated (H3a and H3b) the negative relationship between *disclosure* and *passionate authenticity* (H1[-]) and the positive relationship between *disclosure* and *transparent authenticity* (H2[+]). Specifically, the expectation was that the regression weights for these relationships would be different (or variant) across the groups (i.e., the weight for the high brand-influencer fit group was expected to be attenuated [passionate authenticity; H3a] or stronger [transparent authenticity; H3b] than the weight for the low brand-influencer fit group). Multigroup analysis involved three models, in

[16] 1 manipulation + 7 manipulation check items + 20 DV items + 3 mean control variables =1+7+20+3 =31
[17] For the sake of simplicity, not all paths from the control variables are depicted within Figures 4.4 and 4.5—only the three statistically significant paths are depicted (similar to Figures 4.3–A and 4.3–B). However, the model fit statistics are inclusive of all 3 control variables (including all twelve paths from the three of them to each of the four DVs).

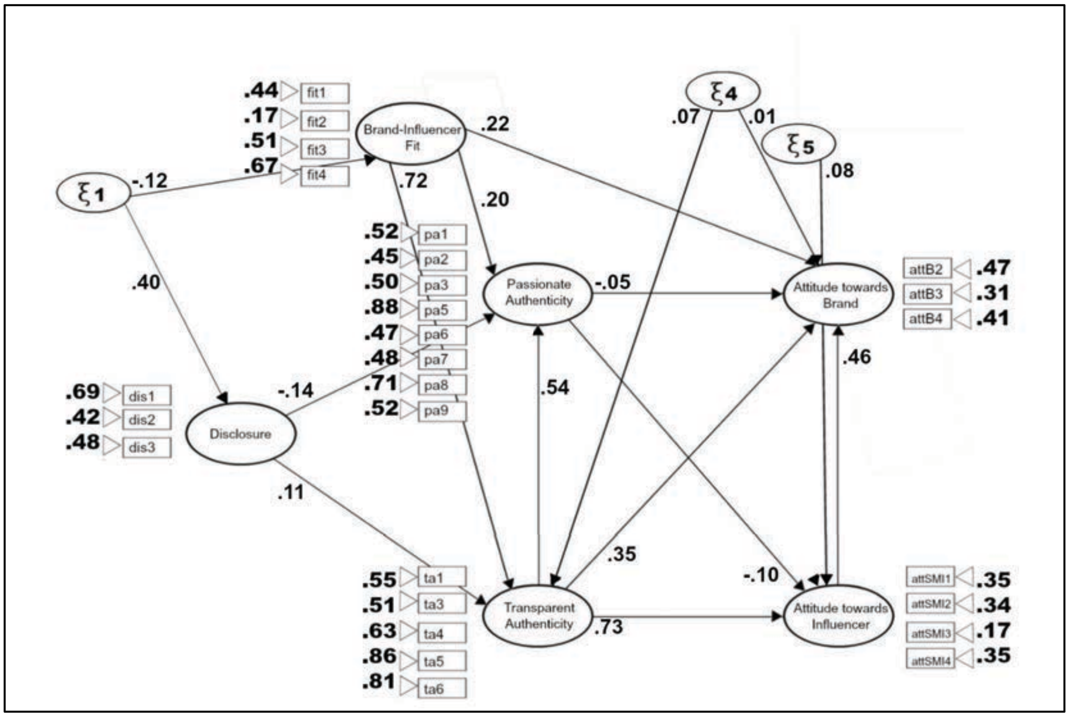

Figure 4.4: Structural Model for **Low** *Brand-Influencer Fit* Group

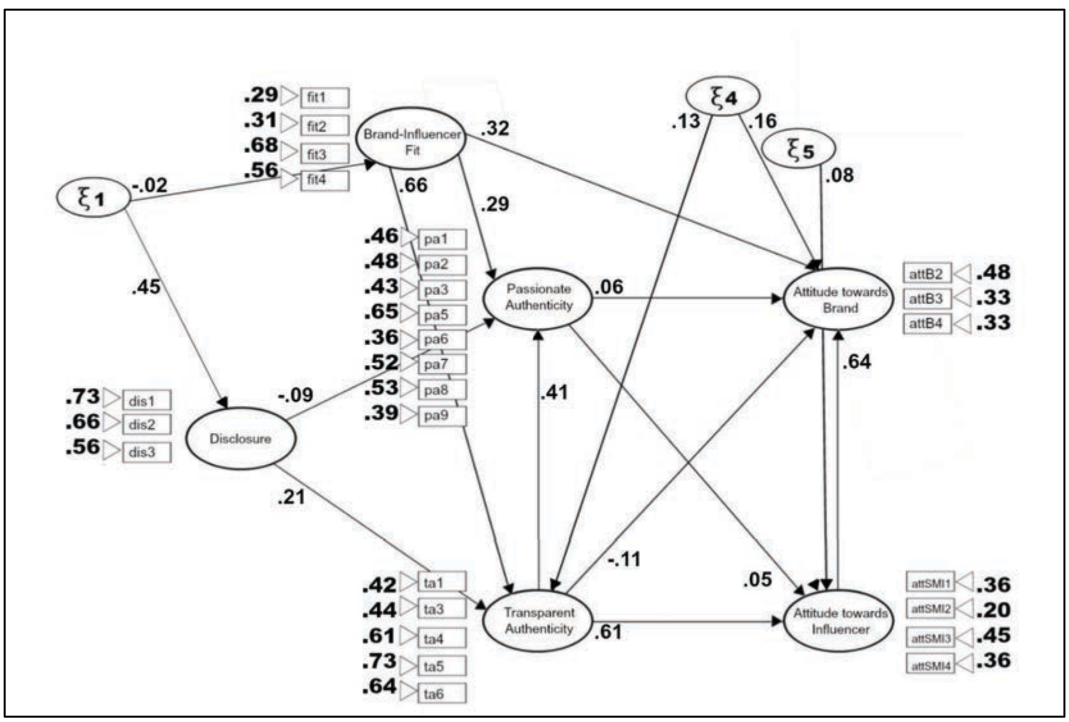

Figure 4.5: Structural Model for **High** *Brand-Influencer Fit* Group

which each of the three models had increasingly more parameters constrained to be equal across the groups. Values used to determine the model fit for each of the model variations are presented within Table 4.18.

Table 4.18: Multi-group Analysis Results for the Moderating Effect of Brand-Influencer Fit—Goodness of Fit for Increasingly Constrained Models

MODEL	**MODEL FIT MEASURES**				
	χ^2	***DF***	***P*-VALUE**	**RMSEA**	**CFI**
Model 1: Unconstrained	1498.942	826	$p < .001$	.048	.931
Model 2: Measurement Weights	1515.011	847	$p < .001$	.047	.931
Model 3: Structural Weights & Measurement Weights	1538.125	872	$p < .001$	.047	.931

Chi-square difference tests of increasingly constrained models were performed. *Global*, or *model* level chi-square difference tests were conducted using an Excel *Stats Tools Package* (Gaskin 2016). Model 2, in which the measurement weights were constrained to be equal across the two groups, was compared to Model 1, in which no parameters were constrained. The non-significant chi-square difference of 16.07 ($df = 21$, $p > .10$) suggested the measurement weights were invariant across the high and low brand-influencer fit groups. Model 3, in which the measurement weights and the structural weights were constrained to be equal across the two groups, was compared to Model 2, in which only the measurement weights were constrained. The non-significant chi-square difference of 23.11 ($df = 25$, $p > .10$) suggested the structural weights were invariant across the high and low brand-influencer fit groups. In summary, the chi-square difference tests revealed that the brand-influencer fit groups were not different at the *model level*. Table 4.19 depicts and summarizes each of the three models with increasingly more parameters constrained to be equal across the groups and the associated chi-square difference tests.

Table 4.19: Multi-group Analysis Results for the Moderating Effect of Brand-Influencer Fit—Chi-Square Difference Tests of Increasingly Constrained Models

MODEL: PARAMETERS CONSTRAINED TO BE EQUAL ACROSS THE GROUPS	χ^2	*DF*	χ^2 DIFFERENCE[a]	*DF* DIFFERENCE[a]	*P*-VALUE	INVARIANT
Model 1: Unconstrained	1498.942	826	–	–	–	–
Model 2: Measurement Weights	1515.011	847	16.069	21	0.766	YES
Model 3: Structural Weights & Measurement Weights	1538.125	872	23.114	25	0.571	YES

[a]The chi-square/df differences reflects the difference between that chi-square/df on that row with the chi-square or degrees of freedom on the above row.

The non-statistically significant chi-square differences suggests that the structural weights as a set are invariant (or equal) across the low and high brand-influencer fit groups. These results provide evidence that brand-influencer fit does not moderate the relationships between disclosure and passionate authenticity and between disclosure and transparent authenticity. Thus, hypotheses 3a and 3b were not supported.

4.5.2 Multi-Group— Results

Table 4.20 provides a summary of the paths involved in the moderation hypotheses, including the proposed and actual direction of the relative estimates, and the size of the relative structural parameter estimates.

Table 4.20: Multi-group Analysis—SEM Stage Six– *Assessing the Structural Model*

H **FIT GROUP**	**PATHS INVOLVED IN MODERATION HYPOTHESES**	**PATH ESTIMATES**	**HYPOTHESIS SUPPORTED?**
H3A(+)	Brand–influencer fit moderates the negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity. The negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity will be attenuated in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.		✗
LOW FIT	Disclosure → Passionate Authenticity	–0.140**	
HIGH FIT	Disclosure → Passionate Authenticity	–0.089	
H3B(+)	Brand–influencer fit moderates the positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity. The positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity will be stronger in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.		✗
LOW FIT	Disclosure → Transparent Authenticity	0.109*	
HIGH FIT	Disclosure → Transparent Authenticity	0.208***	

*$p < .10$
**$p < .05$
***$p < .01$

4.5.3 Revisiting Passionate Authenticity and the Attitudes

4.5.3.1 Removal of transparent authenticity. Additional data analyses and assessment were performed to potentially provide insight into the lack of significant effects between *passionate authenticity* and both *attitude toward the brand* and *attitude toward the influencer. Transparent authenticity* was removed from the structural model; the resulting path estimates and implications are summarized within Table 4.21, and ramifications are elaborated upon beyond the table.

Table 4.21: Dig Deeper—Passionate Authenticity and the Attitudes

H	Paths Involved in Direct Effect Hypotheses	Path Estimates	Hypothesis Supported?
H1(-)	Disclosure→ Passionate Authenticity	-0.042	✗
H2(+)	Disclosure → Transparent Authenticity		
H4A(+)	Passionate Authenticity→ Attitude to Brand	0.049	✗
H4B(+)	Passionate Authenticity→ Attitude to SMI	**0.407******	✓
H5A(+)	Transparent Authenticity → Attitude to Brand		
H5B(+)	Transparent Authenticity → Attitude to SMI		
H6(+)	Brand-Influencer Fit→ Attitude to Brand	**0.359******	✓
H7(+)	Attitude to SMI→ Attitude to Brand	**0.608******	✓
H8EX(+)	Transparent Authenticity→ Passionate Authenticity		

H	Direct Path Involved with Moderation Hypotheses	Path Estimate	Supported?
H3A(+)	Brand-Influencer Fit→ Passionate Authenticity	**0.617******	✓

Formerly Significant ?	Significant Control Variable Paths (5 paths significant of 9 paths total)	Path Estimate
✓	Knowledge of Disclosure→ **Attitude to SMI**	**0.142******
✓	Normative Susceptibility→ Attitude to Brand	**0.085*****
✓	Normative Susceptibility→ Transparent Authenticity	
✗	Normative Susceptibility→ **Attitude to SMI**	**0.134******
✗	Attitude to Brand Drop→ **Attitude to SMI**	**-0.114*****
✗	Knowledge of Disclosure→ Passionate Authenticity	**0.088*****

**$p < .05$ ***$p < .01$

Standardized factor loadings ranged from .78 (passionate authenticity, item 5)–.95 (brand-influencer fit, item 2). The structural model fit is satisfactory: the structural model yielded a χ^2 of 780.577 with 310 degrees of freedom (P < 0.001), which produced a CFI of 0.944, an RMR of

0.312, a PNFI of 0.804, and an RMSEA of 0.066. Again, appropriate consideration was given to the sample size and the complexity of the model ($N > 250$ [N= 353]; $12 < m < 30$ [m= 27[18]]). Accordingly, GOF is categorized by CFI above 0.92 (herein CFI= 0.944) and RMSEA values < 0.07 with CFI of 0.92 or higher (herein RMSEA= 0.066).

This analysis was performed to assess whether or not transparent authenticity was explaining most of the variance within the relationships amongst the attitudes—*attitude toward the brand* and *attitude toward the influencer*, and the dependent variables—*transparent authenticity* and *passionate authenticity.* The results do not entirely suggest such. Even after removing *transparent authenticity* from the model, the direct effect of *passionate authenticity* on *attitude toward the brand* remains statistically insignificant. This suggests that consumer perceptions of passionate authenticity effect *attitude toward the brand* indirectly, via *attitude toward the influencer.*

The blue text within Table 4.21 intentionally highlights details indicative of noteworthy managerial implications—all three control variables have a significant effect on *attitude toward the SMI.* This is noteworthy for practitioners especially, since *attitude toward the SMI* has a strong, significant, direct effect on *attitude toward the brand.* Brand managers should certainly be aware of these relationships/findings. Further, researchers should consider additional factors that potentially affect consumers' *attitude toward the SMI* and therefore, *attitude toward the brand* within future research quests. And, brands must acknowledge the importance to put forth serious, adequate attention to ensure optimal brand-influencer partnerships are selected.

4.5.3.2 Assessment of structure coefficients. Prior research (Guidry 2002; Nathans, Oswald, and Nimon 2012; Thompson 1992; Thorndike 1978; Yeatts et al. 2017) emphasizes a common

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[18] 2 manipulations + 7 manipulation check items + 15 DV items + 3 mean control variables =2+7+15+3 =27

statistical transgression—failure to consider the structure coefficients—amongst social science research and the conclusions drawn within. Oftentimes, especially so in certain scenarios, the structure coefficients provide pertinent information that not only provides a more complete array of information, but also provides improved interpretation and different results. In fact, considering the structure coefficients—an alternative approach discussed herein—in addition to the beta coefficients—the traditional means of assessment—oftentimes leads the researcher to derive much different (and more accurate) conclusions. Prior research (Guidry 2002; Nathans, Oswald, and Nimon 2012; Thompson 1992; Thorndike 1978; Yeatts et al. 2017) illustrates various examples of ill-concluded research published within top journals (e.g., Journal of Marketing). These examples emphasize the importance of considering additional, alternative pieces of information when conducting analyses, interpreting results, and drawing conclusions. This is especially so within explanatory (i.e., theory-testing), social science research comprising latent constructs and general linear model methodologies (e.g., dependence techniques; i.e., multiple regression analyses).

Again, this discussion argues that it is oftentimes sensible to analyze and evaluate not only the beta weights, but also, the structure coefficients (Guidry 2002; Nathans, Oswald, and Nimon 2012; Thompson 1992; Thorndike 1978; Yeatts et al. 2017). This is oftentimes especially so within experimental research involving latent constructs, or, in other words, when numerous independent variables possess problematic levels of multicollinearity—in which correlated independent variables inherently share some amount of the variance explaining the dependent variable (Yeatts et al. 2017). This become problematic in that the beta coefficients alone do not consider such. Instead, all of the shared variance is assigned to only one of the independent variables, which is oftentimes misleading to say the least. Hair et al. (2006) also acknowledge this notion. "Multicollinearity creates "shared" variance between variables, thus decreasing the ability to predict the dependent measure as well as ascertain the relative roles of each independent variable" (Hair et al 2006, 228). Thompson (1992) emphasizes, "We must use analytic methods that honor the complexities of the reality that we purportedly wish to study--a reality in which variables can interact in all sorts of complex and counterintuitive ways" (16).

Accordingly, the structure coefficients were examined to ensure accurate interpretation of the results herein since common sense offers reason to believe that passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity are likely correlated to some extent. Correlation between the two authenticities requires the evaluation of the structure coefficients in order to achieve accurate interpretation of the presumed, yet thus far seemingly nonexistent effects of *passionate authenticity* on *attitude toward the brand* and *attitude toward the influencer.* Structure coefficients were initially evaluated via multiple regression analyses. SPSS version 26 was used to complete the regression analyses.

The first regression analysis includes attitude toward the brand as the dependent variable and passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity as the independent variables; the second regression analysis, attitude toward the influencer as the dependent variable and passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity as the independent variables. As such, the standardized regression equations herein are as follows: $\hat{Y} = \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2$. Yeatts et al. (2017) eloquently describe the often employed, yet inaccurate means of interpreting the role of the predictors within regression equations:

> "[interpretation is] traditionally accomplished by inspecting the β weight of each predictor and interpreting the magnitude of each β weight to determine variable importance. It is generally (and incorrectly) assumed that a larger weight means the predictor variable must have a stronger relationship with $\hat{Y}$. However, the sole interpretation of β weights can lead to serious misinterpretation when predictors are interrelated (i.e., multicollinearity; Cohen et al., 2003; Stevens, 2009), and thus additional information is not only useful but generally necessary when interpreting multiple regression analyses (Nathans et al., 2012)" (84) … … "While β weights indicate how much predictive credit an IV is granted in a regression equation, structure coefficients provide information about how an IV relates to $\hat{Y}$ scores independent of other predictors (Henson, 2002)… …structure coefficients are not affected by multicollinearity because

> they are not influenced directly by the relationships among the predictors (Courville & Thompson, 2001)… …structure coefficients take other predictors into account indirectly because all other predictors in the regression equation are used in calculating Ŷ (Nathans et al., 2012)" (86).

"The context-specific nature of β weights is further exemplified by how they can substantially change with the addition or deletion of predictors or across samples (Courville and Thompson, 2001). This lack of reliability is commonly referred to as the 'bouncing beta' problem" (Yeatts et al. 2017, 85-86; Henson, 2002).

The means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations of all variables within the structure coefficient regression analyses are provided within Table 4.22 for ease of reference—much of this information was already provided in Table 4.13. And, a summary of the output based upon the traditional application of regression is provided within Table 4.23. The analyses yielded statistically significant overall results: with *attitude toward the brand* as the outcome variable, $F(2, 352)= 135.13$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .44$, indicating that the authenticities account for approximately 44% of the variability in *attitude toward the brand*; with *attitude toward the influencer* as the outcome variable, $F(2, 352)= 117.97$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .40$, indicating that the authenticities account for approximately 40% of the variability in *attitude toward the influencer.* Structure coefficients are provided within Table 4.24. Structure coefficients were computed as follows: $r_{sx} = r_{xy}/R$, "where r_{sx} is the structure coefficient of variable X and r_{xy} is the correlation between X and Y" (Guidry 2002, 20). Alternatively, structure coefficients can be computed within SPSS by (1) saving the unstandardized predicted values, and (2) "conducting a simple bivariate correlation between PRE_1 [unstandardized predicted values] and each predictor" in which the resulting correlations are the structure coefficients (Yeatts et al. 2017, 88). "Squaring these values will yield the percentage of variance shared between each predictor and the synthetic Ŷ scores" (Yeatts et al. 2017, 88).

Table 4.22: Descriptives and Pearson Correlations Among all Variables

CONSTRUCT ABBREVIATION (NUMBER OF ITEMS)	MEAN[a]	STD. DEV.[a]	PEARSON CORRELATIONS SUM OF SQUARES & CROSS-PRODUCTS (COVARIANCE)			
			ATTB	**PAUTH**	**TAUTH**	**ATTSMI**
ATTB (3)	4.91	1.41	**1** 703.167 (1.998)	**.484***** 265.871 (0.755)	**.652***** 378.523 (1.075)	**.770***** 537.058 (1.526)
PAUTH (8)	5.25	1.10	**.484***** 265.871 (0.755)	**1** 429.247 (1.219)	**.617***** 280.09 (0.796)	**.426***** 232.256 (0.660)
TAUTH (5)	4.62	1.17	**.652***** 378.523 (1.075)	**.617***** 280.09 (0.796)	**1** 479.443 (1.362)	**.633***** 364.558 (1.036)
ATTSMI (4)	5.04	1.40	**.770***** 537.058 (1.526)	**.426***** 232.256 (0.660)	**.633***** 364.558 (1.036)	**1** 691.896 (1.966)

[a] Based on the average of measurement items comprising the scale for each construct.
*** Correlation is significant at $P < 0.01$ (2-tailed); n = 353.

Table 4.23: Predicting *Attitude toward Brand* and *Attitude toward Influencer* with the Two Authenticities

CONSTRUCT ABBREVIATION (NUMBER OF ITEMS)	R	R^2	b	SE	β
DV= ATTB (3)	**.660**	**.436*****			
PAUTH (8)			**0.168**	**0.065**	**0.132*****
TAUTH (5)			**0.691**	**0.062**	**0.571*****
DV= ATTSMI (4)	**.635**	**.403*****			
PAUTH (8)			**0.073**	**0.067**	**0.057**
TAUTH (5)			**0.718**	**0.063**	**0.598*****

Note: b= unstandardized regression coefficients; SE= standard error of the unstandardized regression coefficients; β= standardized regression coefficients. ***p < .01

Table 4.24: Structure Coefficients

CONSTRUCT ABBREVIATION (NUMBER OF ITEMS)	R^2	r_{xy}	β	r_{sx}	r_{sx}^2
DV= ATTB (3)	**.436*** **				
PAUTH (8)		**0.484**	**0.132*** **	**0.733**	**0.538**
TAUTH (5)		**0.652**	**0.571*** **	**0.988**	**0.976**
DV= ATTSMI (4)	**.403*** **				
PAUTH (8)		**0.426**	**0.057**	**0.672**	**0.450**
TAUTH (5)		**0.633**	**0.598*** **	**0.997**	**0.994**

Note: $r_{sx} = r_{xy}/R$ =structure coefficient of variable X; r_{xy}= the correlation between X and Y; r_{sx}^2= squared structure coefficient of variable X =percentage of variance shared between each predictor and the synthetic Ŷ scores. ***p < .01

Passionate authenticity has similar structure coefficients for both *attitude toward the brand* (r_{sx}= 0.733) and *attitude toward the influencer,* (r_{sx}= 0.672) indicative of similar relationships with each of the two dependent variables. In other words, *passionate authenticity* has a similar contribution to the overall R^2 effect for both *attitude toward the brand* and *attitude toward the influencer* (Yeatts et al. 2017). Likewise, *transparent authenticity* has similar structure coefficients for both *attitude toward brand* (r_{sx}= 0.988) and *attitude toward influencer* (r_{sx}= 0.997), indicative of similar relationships with each of the two dependent variables. In other words, *transparent authenticity* has a similar contribution to the overall R^2 effect for both *attitude toward brand* and *attitude toward influencer* (Yeatts et al. 2017).

To better illustrate the interpretation of the structure coefficients, especially compared to the beta weight interpretation, Table 4.25 follows. Notably, *passionate authenticity*'s effect on *attitude toward influencer*, contains the largest difference ($|\beta - r_{sx}|$= .62) between its β weight (β = .06) and structure coefficient (r_{sx} = .67). Consideration of only the near-zero β (0.057) would indicate that *passionate authenticity* is not a useful predictor of *attitude toward the influencer,* as consideration of only β misleadingly leaves out "credit" for passionate authenticity's relationship with *attitude toward the influencer*. However, the structure coefficient indicates that *passionate authenticity* indeed has a moderate relationship with the Ŷ scores, and the squared structure coefficient shows that this predictor can account for nearly half (45%) of the effect size by itself.

Table 4.25: Consistency in Interpretation?—Structure Coefficients Versus β weights

CONSTRUCT ABBREVIATION	R^2	β	r_{sx}	$\lvert\beta - r_{sx}\rvert$
DV= ATTB (3)	**.436*** **			
PAUTH (8)		**0.132*** **	**0.733**	**0.601**
TAUTH (5)		**0.571*** **	**0.988**	**0.417**
DV= ATTSMI (4)	**.403*** **			
PAUTH (8)		**0.057**	**0.672**	**0.615**
TAUTH (5)		**0.598*** **	**0.997**	**0.399**
***p < .01				

4.5.3.3 Revisiting via regression. Yeatts et al. (2017) point out the rationale for assessing the true relationship of *passionate* and *transparent* authenticities via regression analyses, despite former assessments being conducted via AMOS with SEM techniques—the software and technique are less important than that of obtaining accurate results. Further AMOS/SEM and SPSS/regression analyses provide identical results and conclusions if analyzed and interpreted correctly. This notion is founded upon and further supported by the following, general argument,

> "Because CCA [canonical correlation analysis] is the multivariate GLM and structure coefficients are critical for CCA interpretation, it stands to reason that interpreting other

> GLM analyses would also require structure coefficients. As Huberty (1994) explained, if a researcher is convinced that the use of structure coefficients makes since in, say, a canonical correlation context, he or she would also advocate the use of structure coefficients in the contexts of multiple correlation, common factor analysis, and descriptive discriminant analysis. (p. 263)" (Yeatts et al. 2017, 85).

As a reminder, the values within Table 4.22 originated from Table 4.13 in which the correlations were in fact obtained from SEM; furthermore, regression analyses served as a means to check for accuracy—the values within Table 4.22 were confirmed via SPSS—no discrepancies existed.

In sum, regression analysis was used to assess the structural coefficients to ensure meaningful, sensical interpretation of the correlated independent variables—transparent authenticity and passionate authenticity. Regression analysis served to determine how much of the variation in the dependent variables—attitude toward the influencer and attitude toward the brand—is explained by each of the independent variables. Initially, interpretation was inaccurate as the beta coefficients and their respective indicators of statistical significance assume assignment—assignment of all of the shared variance–the shared variance between the two independent variables—to only one of the two correlated authenticities. Inherently, interpretation of the beta coefficients alone does not allow for variance between two or more correlated variables with shared or overlapping variance to be assigned more than once. Therefore, the overlapping, shared variance is assigned to only one of the two variables. This means of assignment and interpretation provides neither meaningful nor accurate results. The predictive capability of the independent variables in relation to the dependent variables should be interpreted via assessment of both the beta and the structural coefficients.

4.5.4 Overall Results

The structural model provides empirical support for H1(-): *disclosure* has a negative effect on *passionate authenticity*; p*assionate authenticity* will be lower for posts with a *disclosure* than for posts without a *disclosure* (0= no disclosure; 1= explicit disclosure). Empirical analyses also support H2(+): *disclosure* has a <u>positive</u> effect on *transparent authenticity*; *transparent authenticity* will be greater for posts with a *disclosure* than for posts without a *disclosure*. Additionally, the results suggest that H5a and H5b hold true— *transparent authenticity* has a positive effect on *attitude toward the brand* and *transparent authenticity* has a positive effect on *attitude toward the influencer*. The structural model also provides empirical support for H6, that *brand-influencer fit* has a positive effect on *attitude toward the brand*, for H7 that *attitude toward the influencer* has a positive effect on *attitude toward the brand,* and for *H8extra* that *transparent authenticity* has a positive effect on *passionate authenticity*.

Alternatively, structural equation modeling did not provide empirical support for some of the proposed hypotheses. Neither H4a that *passionate authenticity* has a positive effect on *attitude toward the brand*, nor H4b that *passionate authenticity* has a positive effect on *attitude toward the influencer,* were supported by the results. Additionally, the multigroup analysis did not provide support for the brand-influencer fit moderation hypotheses. The negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity was not attenuated in the high fit group compared to the low fit group; the positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity was not stronger in the high fit group compared to the low fit group. Specifically, neither H3a that *brand–influencer fit* moderates the negative effect of *disclosure* on *passionate authenticity*, nor H4b that *brand–influencer fit* moderates the positive effect of disclosure on *transparent authenticity* were supported by the results.

Examining the structural coefficients provided an accurate, more holistic illustration for the relative amount of variation that each of the authenticities contributes to the change in each of the attitudes. In summary, numerous, alternative, appropriate analyses were conducted in an attempt to better explain the relationship between passionate authenticity and both attitude toward the brand as well as attitude toward the influencer.

The following, final chapter, Chapter 5, provides conclusions and discussion based upon the analyses and results herein. Contributions to the literature and managerial implications are also detailed. Lastly, research limitations of this dissertation and numerous future research suggestions are provided.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research; Chapter 2, a thorough literature review and conceptual development; Chapter 3, complete details regarding the research methodology; and, Chapter 4, the data analyses and results. This final chapter concludes with a summary of the empirical findings, a discussion of the conclusions, noteworthy contributions to the academic marketing literature, managerial implications, research limitations, and avenues for relative, future research.

5.1 <u>Discussion and Conclusions</u>

Recall that this dissertation set out to answer the following questions: (1) **How can social media influencers manage consumers' perceptions of their human brand authenticity while engaging in influencer marketing?** (2) **How does a social media influencer's disclosure, or lack thereof, affect consumers' perceptions of the social media influencers' authenticity?** (3) **What construct(s) moderate the disclosure–SMI-authenticity relationship?** (4) **Does the SMI's perceived authenticity affect consumers' attitude toward the influencer?** (5) **Does the SMI's perceived authenticity affect consumers' attitude toward the featured brand?**

The results suggest that disclosure does in fact have opposing effects on the authenticities—disclosure negatively effects passionate authenticity (H1), yet positively effects transparent authenticity (H2). Originally, this presumably would require somewhat of a tricky strategy for which to maintain consumer perceptions of SMI authenticity in general, given the opposing effects. However, the results beyond hypotheses one and two indicate the importance of *transparent authenticity* more so than *passionate authenticity.* In other words, the results indicate the extent to which consumers perceive that the SMI is completely open, honest and forthright regarding the SMIs potential relationship with the featured brand(s) within the SMI's social media content is of the upmost importance. Social media influencers should first and foremost disclose their true relationship with any and all brands for which they have been paid to promote within their social media content.

The results purport that any given SMI's complete forthrightness is not only important, but also, substantial to their success. The results provide evidence indicative of transparent authenticity leading to more positive attitudes toward the featured brand, and more positive attitudes toward the influencer. Alternatively, the research does not provide similar evidence regarding consumer perceptions of *passionate authenticity*. In conclusion, when SMIs partner with brands and promote such brands within their digital content, it seems that it is far more important for SMIs to disclose truthfully and explicitly as compared to the importance for SMIs to have a genuine love or passion for the brand being promoted. In fact, the empirical analyses failed to provide support for passionate authenticity resulting in any significant relationship to not only *attitude toward the brand,* but also, *attitude toward the influencer.* Further, transparent authenticity has a positive effect on passionate authenticity.

5.1.1 Summary of Empirical Findings

Table 5.1 provides answers to the research questions via a summary of the conclusions drawn from the results of the empirical analyses, organized according to the proposed hypotheses.

5.1.1.1 Rationale for the non-significant effects of passionate authenticity. As detailed within the previous chapter, the correlation between *transparent authenticity* and *passionate authenticity*

Table 5.1: Summary of Empirical Findings

HYPOTHESES	EMPIRICAL SUPPORT (OR LACK THEREOF)
H1 – Disclosure has a negative effect on passionate authenticity. Passionate authenticity will be lower for posts with a disclosure than for posts without a disclosure.	✓
H2 – Disclosure has a positive effect on transparent authenticity. Transparent authenticity will be greater for posts with a disclosure than for posts without a disclosure.	✓
H3[a] – *Brand–influencer fit* moderates the negative effect of *disclosure* on *passionate authenticity*. The negative effect of disclosure on passionate authenticity will be attenuated in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.	✗
H3[b] – *Brand–influencer fit* moderates the positive effect of disclosure on *transparent authenticity*. The positive effect of disclosure on transparent authenticity will be stronger in the high fit group compared to the low fit group.	✗
H4[a] – Passionate authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.	✗
H4[b] – Passionate authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the influencer.	✗
H5[a] – Transparent authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.	✓
H5[b] – Transparent authenticity has a positive effect on attitude toward the influencer.	✓
H6 – Brand–influencer fit has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.	✓
H7 – Attitude toward the influencer has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.	✓
H8[extra] – Transparent authenticity has a positive effect on passionate authenticity.	✓

provides rationale for the non-significant effects of passionate authenticity. Additionally, the non-significance is somewhat misleading due to the correlation between the two types of authenticities. When numerous independent variables possess problematic levels of multicollinearity, the correlated independent variables inherently share some amount of the variance explaining the dependent variable (Yeatts et al. 2017). Further, the shared variance is arbitrarily assigned to one of the two correlated variables (i.e., transparent authenticity) rather than split between the two correlated variables; hence, the non-significant effects of passionate authenticity.

Second, it is possible that the insignificant effects of passionate authenticity are due to inaccurate assumptions—due to consumer perceptions that once an SMI posts sponsored content that all forthcoming content is also sponsored, despite the inclusion of an explicit (or not so explicit) disclosure, or lack thereof. This brings about a premature but relative note—perhaps future research should include *consumer cynicism*[1] and/or *skepticism*[2] as a moderating variable in order to better assess the effect of passionate authenticity and the relation to other key variables.

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[1] Measurement items for *consumer cynicism*:

1. Most companies do not mind breaking the law; they just see fines and lawsuits as a cost of doing business.
2. Most businesses are more interested in making profits than in serving consumers.
3. Companies see consumers as puppets to manipulate.
4. Manufacturers do not care what happens once I have bought the product.
5. If I want to get my money's worth, I cannot believe what a company tells me.
6. Most companies will sacrifice anything to make a profit.
7. To make a profit, companies are willing to do whatever they can get away with.
8. Most businesses will cut any corner they can to improve profit margins.

(Helm, Moulard and Richins 2015)

[2] Measurement items for *skepticism*:

1. We can depend on getting the truth in most advertising.
2. Advertising's aim is to inform the consumer.
3. I believe advertising is informative.
4. Advertising is generally truthful.
5. Advertising is a reliable source of information about the quality and performance of products.
6. Advertising is truth well told.
7. In general, advertising presents a true picture of the product being advertised.
8. I feel I've been accurately informed after viewing most advertisements.
9. Most advertising provides consumers with essential information.

(Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998)

Perhaps passionate authenticity did not have a significant effect because some consumers (perhaps highly cynical consumers) may not care about passionate authenticity whereas, other consumers (perhaps low cynical consumers) do care about passionate authenticity. Unfortunately, neither *consumer cynicism* nor *skepticism* were measured within this research. Morhart et al. (2014) provide additional support for such. The authors also claim that "brand authenticity perceptions are influenced by indexical, existential, and iconic cues, whereby some of the latter's influence is moderated by consumers' level of marketing skepticism" (Morhart et al. 2014, 2).

Third, the context of this dissertation, most especially, the intended class and definition of SMIs focused on within, might provide further explanation. While Chapter 1 includes, "Vlogger Logan Paul has 16.3 million Instagram followers, and fashion blogger Chiara Ferragni has 17.2 million Instagram followers (Instagram 2019a; Instagram 2019b)" it should be known that this quote intended to showcase just how popular influencer marketing has become. Further, these examples, intended to illustrate the practical prevalence, or the positioning and importance of influencer marketing via two extreme examples of especially well-known SMIs. This research featured numerous less well-known SMIs as well. In fact, the SMIs (@apinchoflovely[3] and @connortd) within the more thorough examples in Figure 2.3 and Table 2.5 have much more modest follower counts.

SMIs defined herein, who are less "famous" are likely those who are perceived by consumers as intrinsically motivated, or passionate about and committed to producing creative content based upon inherent excitement and love for the brand(s), product(s), experience(s), and/or overarching genre (e.g., fashion) of expertise. Classifications for SMIs are varied and without agreement to say the least. Accordingly, it is fair to assume that some might consider celebrities who are

[3] @aPinchofLovely (featured blogger/SMI) is now @krystal.faircloth

simply active on social media to be *SMIs* especially if such celebrities are using social media as a channel for celebrity endorsement. Again, and as differentiated within Chapter 2, SMIs, as defined herein, are not equivalent to celebrities. Despite such, given the disagreement amongst classifications, it is possible that Qualtrics participants possessed such perceptions—perceptions that celebrities who are simply active on social media are *SMIs*. If so, such respondents likely do not perceive SMIs as *passionate*, hence an anecdotal rationale for the non-significant effects of passionate authenticity.

Fourth and finally, it is also worth noting that within the main study, the measurement items for passionate authenticity included the brand name—the name of the featured brand within the SMI's social media content—Symmetry. Alternatively, the measurement items for transparent authenticity did not include the brand name, Symmetry. This was purposeful, but perhaps not ideal after all.

5.1.1.2 <u>Theoretical rationale for the non-significant moderation of brand-influencer fit</u>. Again, there are several potential reasons that may contribute to why the moderating effect of brand-influencer fit was not significant (H3a and H3b). Each of the presumed reasons are next detailed.

First, brand-influencer fit is presumably explaining most of the variance in the dependent variables. Recall that the researcher selected an NYX eyeshadow pallet for the high brand-influencer fit product and Pepcid AC acid-reflux medication for the low brand-influencer fit product. Further, in order to avoid potential confounds, a fictitious brand name was chosen—*Symmetry* was used as the brand name within both the low and the high brand-influencer fit conditions. Perhaps the low brand-influencer fit condition was too low. That is, the low brand-influencer fit manipulation was too strong. As such, this leads the researcher to wonder, had the low brand-influencer fit condition not been so low, would the interaction between fit and disclosure have surfaced? Alternatively put, had the low brand-influencer fit condition been more moderate, would the interaction between fit and disclosure have surfaced? Since the low brand-influencer fit condition was so strong, it seemingly explained most of the variance in the dependent variables, leaving little variance to be explained by the interaction.

Second, as mentioned within Chapter 2, Lim et al. (2017) conducted a study in which consumers evaluated social media influencers' credibility in relation to products within the SMIs' digital content. The findings yield a lack of consumer perceived credibility to which the authors ascribe "social media influencers' inadequate expertise knowledge about the endorsed product" (Lim et al. 2017, 29-30). In other words, the findings suggest that oftentimes, consumers did not perceive the promoted products to be within the SMIs' area of expertise. Lim et al. (2017) also mention that consumers need to perceive some type of affiliation between the social media influencer and the product or service the SMI brand drops. Likewise, perhaps brand–influencer fit includes expertise and/or credibility to some extent; however, Lim et al.'s (2017) notion of *affiliation* is better aligned with *brand-influencer fit*. While congruence between an endorser and the brand, product or service is widely accepted as one of the key criteria necessary for successful advertising campaigns (Carrillat, d'Astous and Lazure 2013; Fleck, Korchia and Le Roy 2012; Gurel-Atay et al. 2010; Lee and Thorson 2008) it could be that participants perceived the SMI as lacking in regard to expertise and/or credibility. This was presumed to be more likely/especially so within the low brand-influencer fit group; however, the lack of moderation suggests no difference between the groups.

A third and final rationale for the insignificant moderating effect of *brand-influencer fit* is next detailed. It could be that the SMI's captions, which described and endorsed the featured product/brand within the online experiment, were especially short and not realistically detailed. In reality, the captions that successful SMIs accompany their Instagram pictures with are much lengthier. This is usually the case despite the level of affiliation or congruence with the promoted brand—product and/or service. Additionally, captions are typically lengthier than that included within the online experiment, regardless of whether or not the post is paid-for/sponsored. At the bare minimum the captions within real-life SMI Instagram posts possess increased creativity and/or novelty. Due to methodological constraints, the captions within the online experiment were not adequately descriptive or lengthy, nor especially novel—perhaps this is not realistic enough to obtain a difference between the low and high brand-influencer fit groups. Additional consideration for how to incorporate more lengthy, realistic and creative captions with the least potential confounds/methodological issues should be considered within future research.

5.2 Contribution to the Literature

This dissertation provides a firm foundation for researchers to continue to build upon within influencer marketing, particularly regarding social media influencers and their perceived human brand authenticity. The marketing literature had not yet adequately recognized influencer marketing's vast presence. Only very recently had the marketing literature even acknowledged influencer marketing and social media influencers (Godey et al. 2016; Lim et al. 2017; Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard 2018). Influencer marketing tactics, social media influencers, SMI-brand partnerships, SMI-brand campaigns, and strategies for such partnerships/campaigns are areas ripe with research opportunity.

This dissertation focused on consumer perceptions of social media influencers, more specifically, consumer perceptions of social media influencers' human brand authenticity. Two distinct types of authenticity— passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity— were focal constructs throughout this dissertation. The results contribute not only a foundation within this influencer marketing research, but also the importance of transparent authenticity evidenced by empirical analyses.

This dissertation anticipated especially interesting and unique relationships to exist between each type of authenticity—passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity. Specifically, that disclosures would have a negative effect on passionate authenticity, yet a positive effect on transparent authenticity. Further, that each of the authenticities would have positive effects on the attitudinal outcomes—attitude toward the influencer and attitude toward the brand. Not all of these hypotheses held true; however, the results were nonetheless interesting.

Most fascinating is that the results indicate an especially important role for transparent authenticity. As indicated, SMIs might purposefully ignore the FTC mandated rules and regulations for disclosing material connections for many reasons. Primarily, SMIs might ignore these rules as a strategic means in which to manage their own human brand authenticity—especially so, their passionate authenticity. However, the results suggest that complete forthrightness, via explicit disclosure, is of the upmost importance. Furthermore, transparent authenticity positively effects passionate authenticity.

We knew that consumers appreciated authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004). This research contributes the importance of transparent authenticity—the results are suggestive of the importance to which consumers perceive that human brands behave in a completely open, honest and forthright manner—this is presumably generalizable amongst human brands, beyond the scope of social media influencers.

5.3 Managerial Implications

Resulting implications concerning how social media influencers can manage their own human brand authenticity are first provided. The results suggest substantial emphasis be given to transparent authenticity— more specifically, the results are indicative of the importance of SMIs to be perceived as transparent, which is most notably accomplished via the inclusion of explicit and forthright disclosures.

Transparent authenticity plays a substantial role regarding consumer perceptions of SMIs' human-brand authenticity, ***so much so that SMI content which lacks sponsorship and/or material connection of any kind, but which might have any potential to be perceived as having been sponsored, should be strictly avoided***. "Today, it is rare to consume entertainment content without spotting a brand in the content" (Russell 2019, 38); therefore, SMIs must be especially mindful to ensure they aren't wrongly perceived as promoting a product, since it is unlikely that content lacking promotion would include a disclosure. The perception of sponsorship trumps the reality of sponsorship; furthermore, consumer perceptions of sponsored content coupled with a lack of disclosure will certainly result in tarnished perceptions of SMI human brand authenticity— precisely, regarding SMI human brand *transparent* authenticity. The preceding discussion is quite possibly the primary explanation or reasoning for the hashtags included within the Instagram post's caption depicted within Figure 5.1.

In short, this research conveys the great importance that SMIs maintain strategic management of sponsored content; more importantly, consumer perceptions of sponsorship/ sponsored content. Brand-partnerships continue to provide profitable incentives for SMIs, assuming SMIs simply include explicit disclosures. This simple and practical takeaway can be implemented with very little additional effort. The strategic management of consumer perceptions of sponsored content coupled with both the inclusion of explicit disclosure(s), and the resulting positive perceptions of human brand transparent authenticity in turn leads to consumers' more positive attitudes toward both the SMI and the featured brand.

Figure 5.1: Explicitly Organic— an Example

Additionally, this dissertation offers managerial implications for traditional brands on how to best structure brand-influencer partnerships. Brands should request if not demand that SMIs clearly and conspicuously disclose. Not only is this enforced by law, but the results suggest that it is in fact beneficial to consumer perceptions and attitudinal beliefs regarding both the human brand SMI as well as the product/service brand being promoted.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

5.4.1 Limitations

Several improvements might enhance the experimental design; more specifically, the manipulation of the Instagram posts. These improvements came to light via the final item within the online experiment— the request for open-ended comments relative to the pseudo blogger's Instagram posts. The respondents' suggestions and statements lend improvement to the practicality of the Instagram posts, and therefore, the validity of the relative measures, and the overall soundness of the research results and conclusions. These improvements, explanations (as needed), and the relative portion of the comments from which they are each based upon are included within Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Instagram Posts— Practicality Improvements

POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS
IMPROVEMENT 1— MORE LIKEABLE PROFILE PICTURE– RELATIVE COMMENTS:
• Her profile picture should be her face • I don't like the profile pic • put yourself into the image; model the products

Improvement 2— Lengthier Captions– Potential Additions

Details & Explanations	Relative Comment(s)
#linkinbio #linkinbio ≈The link [to my blog], referenced within my post's caption, is within my profile bio Follow me on the @liketoknow.it app for links→ http://liketk.it/mMm #liketkit	• there was no actual information OR EVEN A LINK TO HER BLOG POST ABOUT IT • It should have more detail in the Instagram caption. Most people will only go to the blog if they are compelled by the Instagram caption. • there wasn't much detail about the product. • Not informing • Her captions are short and boring, wish she would put more info about the product in the captions. • She should include more information about the sponsored products in her captions. Ex. 'vegan friendly' 'not tested on animals" etc. • There was not much to go on, you cannot judge an Instagrammer by one sponsored post that had little to no information. • Wish i had more opportunities to look at it/more information. Felt like I didn't get enough info to answer a lot of the questions
#linkinbio #linkinbio ≈The link [to my blog], referenced within my post's caption, is within my profile bio Follow me on the @liketoknow.it app for links→ http://liketk.it/mMm #liketkit	• needs more detail • Not much info there • There should be more details about symmetry product • Saying click the blog for more info was not enough. Instagram posts should still provide SOME information, then followers can click through for more details. I had a hard time figuring out what Symmetry really was, especially with the flash obscuring part of the Symmetry box. • The partnership wasn't very convincing or informative • She was too vague to spark any interest in the product she was advertising • I feel that her captions could be a little more explanatory. And it wouldn't hurt to use more hashtags • She needs better captions to hook people into caring about the brand she's promoting. • It was very bland and I did not know what the product was, how she felt about it, or anything else.

The first theme involves the pseudo SMI's profile picture. Research suggests that consumers relate better to human face profile pictures, even within brand-owned social media accounts; therefore, the pseudo SMI's profile pictures' lack thereof is a limitation of this research (Barker et. al. 2017). The second theme involves the captions for each of the Instagram posts; more specifically, the length and details provided, or lack thereof. The researcher should consider ways in which to add length and detail to the captions while still maintaining as much similarity as reasonably possible amongst the four conditions. Additional comments not within Table 5.2 (e.g., "I love make up ads because it helps keep me in the know. However I hate to see brands being sponsored that the celebrity doesn't really use or like as much as they are claiming. Like be honest in the ad." said a respondent exposed to the high fit; explicit disclosure condition) suggest that the pseudo SMI's authenticity (especially passionate authenticity, but potentially transparent authenticity too) might be damaged due to lacking details (and therefore length) within the caption.

Additionally, as mentioned within Chapter 4, the researcher accidentally forgot to include the Eastern time zone as one of the multiple-choice options within the relative location-based quality assessment question. Unfortunately, this mistake prevented the researcher from performing a planned data-quality assessment check.

The main study data analyses were conducted using structural equation modeling in which the proposed, presented measurement and structural models possessed appropriate goodness-of-fit levels, indicative of the data collection's evidentiary fit with the proposed theory. However, alternative models might prove to be equally, or even beyond equally, as good a fit. Therefore, substantial, additional thought should be given to such potential, competing, alternative model(s).

Lastly, the student samples within pretest one and pretest two were predominately Marketing majors, especially those within pretest one. This may have resulted in biased perceptions between the pretests as compared to the sample within the main study. It is likely that many of the students have taken *Marketing Research* class(es), especially those (the majority) who are Marketing majors. This characteristic is quite unlikely to hold true for the sample used within the main study; therefore, this is another limitation of this research.

5.4.1.1 Panel inherent issues and bias. Again, the sample for the main study consisted of a panel obtained through Qualtrics, via Lucid (Lucid 2019). Several unforeseen issues relative to panel research and/or sampling distribution via Qualtrics arose. The use of a panel brings about many unique methodological considerations in addition to those relative to traditional survey methods (Pfeffermann and Rao 2009; AAPOR Standards Committee 2010). For instance, Qualtrics *Project Managers*, beyond and in addition to the primary manager in communication with the researcher throughout the project stages of the study, are granted access to the researcher's Qualtrics account. This allows for Qualtrics *Project Managers* to make changes to the researcher's survey without the researcher's specific approval and/or awareness of such. Numerous indications of changes of this nature were made known to the researcher via the data downloads/data analyses throughout stage four— *review and approval*— of the panel process (e.g., assessment of quality responses).

As also mentioned within Chapter 4, throughout the fourth and final project stage, *review and approval*, the researcher is given the chance to determine any respondents who are of *obviously low quality.* Any such respondents are replaced in order to achieve the agreed upon target sample size, with all *quality* respondents. Throughout several *review and approval* rounds, the researcher's project manager deleted data for those respondents who were deemed *obviously low quality.* Since this data is no longer available, the researcher cannot provide any information regarding such. Again, the researcher's email request to receive the response rate was unsuccessful. The Qualtrics Panel Manager provided an incidence rate of 58%; however, the way in which the incidence rate was calculated was not revealed.

Additionally, there are at least minimal concerns regarding both respondent misidentification and respondent duplication (Miller 2015; AAPOR Standards Committee 2010). Prior to the onset of the data collection, the Qualtrics *Sales Representative* claimed the following,

> *The majority of our samples do come from traditional, actively managed market research panels. As a panel aggregator, our clients are aware that we are leveraging third-party panels. We ensure that all panel partners employ continuous monitoring and quality control checks. Qualtrics maintains the highest quality by using Grand Mean certified sample partners. To exclude duplication and ensure validity, Qualtrics checks every IP address and uses a sophisticated digital fingerprinting technology. In addition, every strategic panel partner uses deduplication technology to provide the most reliable results and retain the integrity of the survey data.*

Despite these claims, as mentioned within Chapter 4, prior to data analyses, the researcher found and removed four respondents due to duplicate IP Addresses. This is one example of many occurrences in which the researcher was told one claim yet experienced otherwise. The researcher's lack of information combined with reliance upon Qualtrics employees for such is an additional, noteworthy limitation in itself. On the other hand, the main study sampling procedure served as a useful learning experience for future research projects.

Additionally, whether or not any of the previously deleted low-quality respondents re-attempted the online experiment, in which case they may have (a) determined how to answer in order to achieve completion and personal compensation or (b) luckily guessed how to answer in order to achieve completion and personal compensation, cannot be determined. Therefore, it is possible that such respondents are included within the final sample. This is a potential concern regarding the introductory screening questions within Table 4.2 as well. Overall, these concerns are problematic for numerous reasons, including both the integrity and accuracy of the results, as thoughtful (and certainly *honest*) answers for any *duplicate* respondents are unlikely at best. Lastly, a number of respondents completed the screening questions from within Table 4.2 yet did not agree to move forward despite being qualified to do so. It is presumed that this decision was based upon their reading the project's title, purpose and summary, which brings about issues of self-selection bias (Paltridge and Phakiti 2015; AAPOR Standards Committee 2010).

5.4.2 Future Research

Since marketing academics have only just begun to study social media influencers, future research avenues are seemingly endless. This section proposes several ideas for future academic research pertaining to SMIs, focusing on those especially relevant to this dissertation and the key constructs within. Additional future research suggestions follow in which they are grouped into three main categories: (1) various unrelated future research avenues, (2) future research avenues pertaining to alternative moderating variables, (moderating variables in addition to/beyond *brand-influencer fit*) and (3) future research avenues pertaining to *animal/ pet influencers.*

5.4.2.1 Various future research avenues. This dissertation evaluates the conceptual model and proposed hypotheses within the context of Instagram. Further, the content presented within the online experiment, from the pseudo bloggers' Instagram account is static (e.g., still images or text within the caption) as compared to fluid content (e.g., recorded or *live* videos). This brings about an especially relevant avenue for future research. Given the recent rise in popularity for not only social media video content, but also social media *live* video content, researchers are encouraged to evaluate brand dropping effectiveness within this trending context. Brand dropping effectiveness within Instagram video posts, within video only platforms (e.g., YouTube), and/or within other verbal social media contexts such as podcasts, are all areas ripe with opportunity.

Lu, Chang and Chang (2014) discuss brand-influencer partnerships in the context of blog posts. *Attitude toward sponsored recommendation post* is one of the key constructs within their research. Slight modifications to the scale items[4] they used to measure this construct would

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[4] Measurement items for *attitude toward sponsored recommendation post*
1. I think this article tells the truth.
2. I don't believe in what the blogger wrote in this article. (R)
3. I can learn the real product information from this article.
4. After reading this article, I have been accurately informed about the product information (Lu, Chang and Chang 2014, 265).

permit future research in the realm of micro-blogging within Instagram, similar to the context of this research, as well as other social media platforms/channels. The measurement for this construct could also be adapted and implemented within the trending realm of live, recorded video, vlog, and podcast contexts of social media—SMIs are active within all of these social media platforms and channels.

Prior research (Carlson, Bearden and Hardesty 2007; Carlson, Vincent, Hardesty and Bearden 2009; Moulard, Babin and Griffin 2015), within various contexts (e.g., wine knowledge; pricing knowledge) which compares consumers' objective and subjective knowledge suggests future research opportunities dependent upon the creation of a reliable and valid measure for objective *knowledge of disclosure*. This might serve fruitful given the current existence of an adequate measure for subjective *knowledge of disclosure*. Adequate measures for both objective and subjective *knowledge of disclosure* potentially provide a comparative means from which to explore conceptually. The constructs have potential to derive meaningful conclusions, especially so, given the ambiguity regarding the FTC rules for disclosure.

Lastly, the FTC mandated disclosure requirements may continue to change and update for reasons described at length within prior chapters. In short, as television becomes less traditional and more intertwined within social media, it seems the FTC and the FCC will certainly need to delegate the governing of disclosure to one of the two parties rather than between both of them. Additionally, this delegation presumably requires a simultaneous creation of a single set of rules regarding when social media content requires a clear and conspicuous disclosure— a single set of rules applicable to both product placement and brand dropping. This is due to the continued trend of interweaving between television (in its traditional format) with social media platforms. In short, the lines are already becoming blurred—that is, the lines of distinction between product placement and brand dropping. It is impossible to know now how this will play out. However, future research should adjust and accommodate accordingly once substantial changes take place. For example, in the event that the assignment of all regulation powers are assigned to the FTC (rather than FCC). Marketers might presume the disclosure rules remain the same, or that they experience only small changes in the event that the FTC is granted full governance. Alternatively, marketers might presume much more lenient, nonchalant disclosure rules in the event that the FCC is granted full governance. Either way, it seems clear that consumers desire honest and forthright disclosures.

5.4.2.2 Additional moderating variables. Several additional factors presumably moderate the disclosure-authenticity relationships. As mentioned, consumer cynicism and skepticism are potential moderators worthy of consideration within future research. Two additional moderators are of particular interest; specifically, *identification with the influencer*, and *brand prominence*. Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) examine the evolution of consumer–brand relationships in which they describe the notion of *self-connection*. Very closely aligned is, ***identification with influencer***, defined here as *the degree to which a consumer relates with a social media influencer and believes the social media influencer's image fits well with his/her own self-concept*.[5]

Brand prominence is introduced by Han, Nunes, and Dreze (2010) and is defined as, "the extent to which the product advertises the brand by displaying the mark in a more visible or conspicuous manner (e.g., larger logos, repeat prints)" (19). Brand prominence is assessed via images or pictures that serve to promote or endorse a brand (e.g., a traditional print/ magazine ad, an Instagram photo). Whether or not the images or pictures are accompanied by text/wording is irrelevant in the assessment of *brand prominence.* Alternatively, and not to be confused with brand prominence— *brand presence*, is defined as "how often the brand is mentioned in the

[5] Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) define *self-connection* as *the degree to which a customer relates with a brand/company and believes its image fits well with his/her own self- concept*.

native advertisement" and is assessed via wording/ text that may or may not accompany an image (Krouwer, Poels and Paulussen 2017, 8). Han, Nunes and Dreze (2010) investigate *brand prominence* via the size of the logo on a particular product; however, it is presumed that this notion can be assessed via the size of any branded product within an Instagram post.

Future research which investigates proposed moderators *identification with influencer* and/ or *brand prominence* is not meant to be limited, but instead suggestive of a starting point. The potential of additional moderating variables beyond those mentioned herein should be given considerable thought. Similar to brand–influencer fit, *identification with influencer* and *brand prominence* presumably moderate the disclosure-authenticity effects. Further, the effects of these additional moderating variables will likely be more or less pronounced according to the degree of disclosure.

As emphasized throughout this dissertation, social media influencers' disclosure practices vary. Consumers may or may not notice disclosures that are discreet and/or purposefully disguised. Formally, the effects of these moderating variables are presumably more pronounced when a disclosure is not present than when a disclosure is present. This brings about an additional aspect of future research— varying degrees of disclosure. This dissertation manipulates only two degrees of disclosure— *no disclosure* versus *disclosure* in which the disclosure is moderately obvious. As illustrated within Chapter 2, in practice there are many additional means in which SMIs disclose, which again lends an additional aspect for future research.

5.4.2.3 <u>Pet and animal SMI's</u>. In recent years, animal and pet SMI's have become a popular phenomenon within the realm of influencer marketing. Perhaps the first well-known animal influencer is *Grumpy Cat* (Izea 2018). Pet Influencers have been featured in The New York Times as well as other mainstream media. "Pet influencers outperform humans," said Loni

Edwards, 32, the agency's [The Dog Agency] founder. Which is to say their posts go viral more often, and they get more comments and more likes." (New York Times 2017). Table 5.3: Pet and Animal Influencers— Influencer Marketing Future Research, provides numerous examples to emphasize the practical prevalence of pet SMIs. Pet and animal SMI's comprise an area ripe with future research opportunities as the marketing literature has yet to adequately acknowledge this aspect of influencer marketing.

Table 5.3: Pet and Animal Influencers— Influencer Marketing Future Research

Pet / Animal SMI Website Location	**Instagram Handle & Followers**[6]	**Selected Brand Partnerships**
Grumpy Cat		
www.grumpycats.com Phoenix, AZ	@realgrumpycat 2.7M	Random House Children's Books— a Little Golden Book Friskies ("spokescat") Lifetime (featured in movie) Honey Nut Cheerios BOBS by Sketchers
Notes: At the time of her death[7], she had more than 8.3 million followers on Facebook, 2.5 million followers on Instagram and 1.5 million followers on Twitter. Some rankings estimate Grumpy Cat made $100 million from her film, media appearances, sponsorship deals and merchandise sales. An official online shop sells nearly 900 items with her face on it. So, although the face that launched a thousand memes is gone, it's likely the cat's image isn't going anywhere (AdAge 2019).		
Loki the Wolfdog		
lokithewolfdog.com Colorado	@loki 2M	Mercedes Benz Toyota 4Runner Grounds & Hounds Coffee Co.
Notes: Loki the Wolfdog has been featured on Red Bull Adventure, BuzzFeed, Huffington Post, The Weather Channel, Bored Panda, People Magazine, Country Living, Daily Mail, USA Today, as well as several other mainstream media outlets (Loki the Wolfdog 2019).		

[6] Follower count is as of Tuesday, June 18, 2019.
[7] *Grumpy Cat's* date of death was May 14, 2019; RIP Grumpy Cat!

HANK (PIG)

mybestfriendhank.com	@mybestfriendhank	Sacramento Kings Windsor Court Hotel
New Orleans, LA	421K	House of Blues

Notes: The researcher inquired regarding brand partnerships; Here's *Hank's* Instagram message reply, "what we love to do with hank is "meet and greets." it's always in line with hank's branding to say that he wants to meet his friends, and he loves the attention! if there's a company, especially local, that wants to get some people in the door, it becomes a win-win -- they get some visibility, and hank gets to socialize and meet people. those "meet and greets" aren't always paid; sometimes we just take him out because we are invited. but if they are paid, we include a post promoting the meet and greet.

hank also loves to travel, be goofy, and explore -- so that's another thing we can do with him easily: visit someplace, have hank goof around, and make a post about it. **if we can't make a sponsorship fit into the narrative of hank's normal content, we don't do it**. that said, here's a list of some of the bigger brands he's worked with:

Sacramento Kings -- hank was invited to travel to california for a sacramento kings basketball game. the theme for the game was "social media night" and hank was featured in the opening of the game, was interviewed on the sidelines, and made reaction tweets throughout the game on the kings' feed.

Windsor Court Hotel -- we did an overnight stay where hank got to order room service and go to the spa before his meet and greet at the hotel the next day. we were promoting both the hotel's pet friendliness, as well as their meeting space for business events.

House of Blues -- they were hosting a "country throwdown," which hank went to to promote attendance. he had a meet and greet in their courtyard."

PICKLE (PIG)

Greenville, SC	@pickle.the.pig 178K	Far Out Sunglasses

NALA CAT

California	@nala_cat 4.1M	Pet Armor Halo Pets

Notes: Nala Cat was Guinness World Record's recipient for the most popular cat on Instagram with 3.4 million followers as of May 3, 2017 (All cute all the time 2017).

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