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Source Credibility and Persuasive Communication: Effects on Social Media Influencers, Influencer Marketing, and Consumer Attitude Change

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Abstract

Social psychology has long been researching how source credibility influences persuasive communication. With the world transitioning into a society interested in digital consumption, communication, and connection, this paper serves as a literature review of how different characteristics of source credibility can aid influencer credibility through various modes of social media messaging. The examination of three source credibility characteristics: 1) expertise, 2) trustworthiness, and 3) likability showcase how social media influencers can establish credibility with their consumers and build further connections with them. The results underline the importance of source credibility in influencing consumer attitude change and behavior over continued exposure to credible social media content. Influencer credibility is found to strengthen the perceived trustworthiness, connectedness, and identification between influencers and consumers. Ultimately, the paper encourages further research into exploring influencer perceptions held by their consumers, affiliated brands, and comparatively across different social media platforms.

Keywords: source credibility, persuasive communication, social media influencers, influencer marketing, attitude change

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Persuasive communication is a primary method of changing people's attitudes. It is used by advertisers, politicians, scientists, and attorneys, among others. The three components of persuasive communication are (1) the source (who), (2) the content (what), and the audience (to whom). This paper will explore the research on the source and what makes a source effective. Source effectiveness is influenced by credibility and likability. While source credibility is defined as expertise and trustworthiness, likability is comprised of similarity and physical attractiveness.

Persuasive communication and its components remain relatively unchanged, even though technology has led to changes in their mode of transmission and the breadth of their influence. The recent emergence of social media has completely transformed society's view of consumption. Once reliant on printed media and word-of-mouth, the majority of consumers now rely on the digital realm. Social media offers a space for creative expression, transcontinental communication, and various modes of interaction. By focusing on visual aesthetics and idealized lifestyles, social media platforms, like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, to name a few, have become important environments in which individuals generate content based on their current lives while simultaneously encouraging others to aim for their ideal lives.

The current paper will first examine the theoretical underpinnings of the characteristics that make up social media influencers' credibility when working with brands and messaging. The three characteristics the paper will examine include: 1) expertise, 2) trustworthiness, and 3) likability. After establishing the components and other factors influencing source credibility, the paper will explore applications of each characteristic and the effects an influencer can have on

consumers. Therefore, the paper also answers the question, how do a variety of influencer characteristics aid influencers in establishing credibility with their consumers through social media messaging?

CHAPTER 2

Social Psychology Background of Source Credibility and Attitudes

2.1 Components of Source Credibility

To examine how sources establish credibility with their audiences, it is necessary to look at what makes something or someone credible. Source credibility can be defined in a multitude of ways, based on the components believed to comprise it. Traditionally, source credibility has commonly been thought to be comprised of two main components: 1) expertise and 2) trustworthiness. In more recent years, marketing research has identified a third factor related to credibility, which is likability. Likability is associated with perceived similarity. All three factors work together to shape the attitudes and behaviors of consumers. It is important to distinguish here that, although some researchers have examined all three factors related to credibility, likability is not considered to be a component of credibility. However, likability is a factor that can influence attitude change and is therefore included in the examination of the research literature.

In terms of what makes a source credible, most of the existing literature has tended to focus on investigating the effect source credibility has had on the ways that information is communicated to and received by others. However, little attention has been paid to the effects of source credibility on individual consumers. Previous research has found that a highly credible source is often more persuasive than a low-credibility source, although this is not always true (Kumkale et al., 2010; Powell, 1965). For example, in Kumkale et al.'s (2010) study, researchers were interested in how the source credibility would influence the attitudes of message recipients and to what degree the influence might be affected by prior attitudes. A meta-analysis of 54 data sets taken from 18 independent reports consistently found that a highly credible source was more

persuasive in influencing attitudes than a low-credibility source, but only in cases where there

was an absence of prior attitudes. Message recipients were most influenced by the credibility of

the source when they did not possess either initial attitudes towards the topic or prior knowledge

about the topic (Kumkale et al., 2010). Additionally, Powell (1965) explored how attitude change

was influenced by high and low source credibility when dealing with cases of noncompliance

and voluntary compliance. Among university upperclassmen, low credibility sources were found

to have a larger effect in cases of voluntary compliance. Interestingly, high credibility sources

resulted in greater positive attitude change in cases of non-compliance (Powell, 1965).

While some studies suggested that expertise, trustworthiness, and likability positively

affect social media messaging, there have been conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of

each characteristic of source credibility on other variables (Eisend, 2006; Jones et al., 2003;

Pornpitakpan, 2004). For example, Jones et al. (2003) investigated how the negative framing of

messaging from a credible source could lead to reactance effects, like the rejection of messages

and negative responses from participants. However, in this study, source credibility was not

defined based on expertise or trustworthiness. Instead, the credibility of the sources

communicating the messages was operationalized as educational and professional background

information on the source (Jones et al., 2003). Using participants' intentions to exercise as the

outcome measure of the effect of credible or non-credible sources, the credible source with

positively framed messaging led to the most positive intentions (Jones et al., 2003). These

findings suggested that an individual's impression of, or attitude toward, the source supplying the

messaging could significantly influence the participant's intention to perform a behavior (Jones

et al., 2003). The biggest limitation of this study was the failure to identify which factor of

source credibility most affected participants' impressions of the source.

Eisend (2006) examined a generalized conceptualization of source credibility used in previous psychology and marketing research to create an underlying structure or model that would better define source credibility. The methodological approach Eisend used was a re-analysis of conceptualization studies, in which the researcher replicated the studies involved through a generalized process of rigorous analysis of the source credibility scale based on a diverse number of measurements of previous studies. The intention was to consolidate the diverse characteristics examined by previous researchers (refer to Tables 1 and 2). In addition to using a replication design experiment, Eisend added second-generation criteria, such as additional validity and reliability measures, to previous study designs to overcome methodological weaknesses and improve the procedure of analysis. By assuming source credibility was a multifactorial and unidimensional concept, a list of 64 source credibility items (refer to Table 3) were created for respondents to carefully study and rate each word for familiarity and if it was appropriate to be associated with a communication source (Eisend, 2006). In study two, a second survey was sent out to participants attaching the 64 words identified in study one to different communication sources' credibility (Eisend, 2006). The three sources were a salesperson, a company, and a spokesperson, and results showed that the effectiveness of the dimensions of credibility depended on the type of source presented (Eisend, 2006). For example, the factors that made up the structure of a salesperson's credibility included trustworthiness, competence, and attraction (Eisend, 2006). However, when a company was doing the communicating, its credibility was also composed of trustworthiness and competence, but dynamism, or how active the company was, was valued over attraction (Eisend, 2006).

In Pornpitakpan's (2004) paper, the effect of source credibility on persuasion was collected over the previous five decades, starting from the 1950s. While the definition of source

credibility and its components varied by study, the overarching definition was the degree to which people believed and trusted what other sources of information, such as other people and organizations, told them about a particular product or service (Pornpitakpan, 2004). The combined findings of the studies analyzed over the five-decade period found that a high-credibility source was more persuasive than a low-credibility source in both changing attitudes and gaining behavioral compliance (Pornpitakpan, 2004). A few studies found the opposite effect or found no difference in persuasiveness between high- and low-credibility sources (Pornpitakpan, 2004). The inconsistency of these findings may be a result of differences in methodology, differences in the definitions of expertise, trustworthiness, and likability, measurement errors, and different dependent variables of interests, etc., across the various research studies. Any or all of these factors may have led to the disparate findings in the research on source credibility.

2.2 Attitudes Linked to Credibility and Likability

An early definition of *attitude* was behavior patterns adjusted to designated social situations, in other words, conditioned responses to social stimuli (LaPiere, 1934). Therefore, which attitude is held is influenced by the social situation.

Previous literature has consistently found that source credibility is positively correlated with attitudes (Clark & Maass, 1988; Lafferty et al., 2002). For example, in Clark and Maass' (1988) experiment, an initial attitude assessment was first conducted on 560 undergraduates to select subjects for the main experiment. Researchers developed a 7-point attitude scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disapprove*) to 7 (*strongly approve*) with six items on abortion. For example, one of the items on the 7-point attitude scale was, on what level of approval would participants

rate an abortion if the health of the mother is in danger (Clark & Maass, 1988). 220 out of the

original 560 participants were selected to have moderate attitudes toward abortion and during the

main experiment, participants were simultaneously exposed to sources taking minority and

majority positions on abortion (Clark & Maass, 1988). The credibility of the in-group source was

defined by students who attended Florida State University, the same university as the

participants, versus the out-group source were referred to as students from the University of

Florida (Clark & Maass, 1988). Clark and Maass (1988) found that in-group minorities who

attended the same university were perceived as more credible than were out-group minorities

attending a different university. When the perceived source credibility of the in-group minority

sources was higher, greater attitude change was found toward the abortion arguments of those in

minority positions (Clark & Maass, 1988).

Similarly, marketing research has delved into the relationship between source credibility

and attitudes by looking at how added credibility is expected to enhance or influence consumers'

attitudes toward ads (Aad) (Lafferty et al., 2002; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Earlier research,

such as Krugman et al. (1969), measured attitudes towards ads (Aad) using ratings of *favorable,*

unfavorable, or neither. Participants were also asked to record whether the advertisements by

companies varying in credibility were *annoying, enjoyable, informative,* or *offensive*, such that

"annoying" or "offensive" would relate to unfavorable attitudes and "enjoyable" or

"informative" would relate to favorable attitudes (Krugman et al., 1969).

Furthermore, Lafferty et al.'s (2002) study used a dual credibility model, in which two

levels of corporate credibility and two levels of endorser credibility were constructed to examine

the attitudes and purchase intentions of consumers based on an ad for athletic shoes. Corporate

credibility was defined as the extent to which consumers and other constituents believe in a

company's trustworthiness and expertise (Lafferty et al., 2002). Corporate credibility was

manipulated through descriptions of the fictitious athletic shoe company, where one corporate

history presented a positive image of company community and environmental contributions and

the negative image of corporate history described the company to have poor quality control and

alleged SEC violations (Lafferty et al., 2002). Endorser credibility was defined as the expertise,

trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the communicator (Lafferty et al., 2002). The source

viewed by participants differed based on gender. The high endorser credibility condition for

women featured Florence Griffith-Joyner, an Olympic gold medalist while Tiger Woods was the

source for men (Lafferty et al., 2002). The low endorser credibility condition featured the same

ad with Roseann Barr, an actress, for women and Wayne Knight, an actor, for men, as the source

(Lafferty et al., 2002). Corporate credibility was measured through an eight-item, 7-point Likert

scale with a five-point agree/disagree response format. Four items measured corporate

trustworthiness (e.g., "I trust the *Pride* Corporation.") and four items measured corporate

expertise (e.g., "The *Pride* Corporation has great expertise.") (Lafferty et al., 2002). Endorser

credibility was measured through six, 7-point bipolar adjective scales. Two items for

attractiveness, "attractive/unattractive" and "classy/not classy,"; two items for trustworthiness,

"sincere/insincere" and "trustworthy/untrustworthy,"; and two items for expertise, "expert/not an

expert" and "experienced/inexperienced" (Lafferty et al., 2002). The results of this study

supported that added credibility does influence consumers Aad, and even confirmed that

endorser credibility had a greater impact on Aad than corporate credibility, although both were

significant (Lafferty et al., 2002).

  More recent research on Aad defines the concept as a learned predisposition to respond

favorably or unfavorably to advertising in general (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). For example, in

MacKenzie and Lutz's (1989) study, participants were asked to evaluate a single print advertisement for a fictitious watch, made by a real manufacturer. The advertisement included a body of text, a headline, and a picture, with the main selling point of the ad, was to stress the importance of the watch being water resistant (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Advertising message involvement was manipulated in this study such that participants in the low condition were assured that their opinion of the watch brand was not of interest and to select a product category for the product in question, and in the high condition, participants were asked to examine the ad, form evaluations, and then answer some questions about the ad (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). The ad and brand perceptions of this study were assessed through an open-ended cognitive response question and all other constructs were rated with 7-point semantic differential scales (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). The attitude measures (advertising attitude, advertiser attitude, ad attitude, brand attitude) were defined through MacKenzie and Lutz's (1989) previously mentioned Aad definition and were measured by using three semantic differential scales: *good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant,* and *favorable/unfavorable*. The credibility measures (ad credibility, advertiser credibility, general advertising credibility) were defined as the extent to which the consumer perceived claims made about the brand in the ad, advertiser source, and general advertisements, to be truthful and believable (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Each credibility measure was assessed by asking subjects to indicate how *convincing/unconvincing, believable/unbelievable*, and *biased/unbiased* they felt the ad was (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Results of this study showed that the attitude participants had of advertisers was a strong determinant of their overall attitudes towards ads and high ad credibility led to more favorable brand attitudes (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Overall, MacKenzie and Lutz's (1989) definition and

research of attitudes toward ads are the closest to emphasizing LaPiere's (1934) definition of attitudes.

Some research has combined likability and expertise as characteristics of source credibility, to analyze attitude formation and change. For example, Stone and Eswara (1969) examined how likability and expertise worked together by conducting an experiment where participants enrolled in an undergraduate radio-television class read a response to a nationwide survey on the United States Supreme Court decision of 1965 in the Billie Sol Estes case. The source conveying the message response was introduced as JRB, a respondent in the nationwide survey. At the start of a two-paragraph description, JRB has further introduced as either 1) a television journalist (nonexpert condition) or 2) a lawyer specializing in criminal cases (expert condition) (Stone & Eswara, 1969). To operationalize the likability variable of the experiment, Stone and Eswara (1969) noted that JRB was described as either 1) pleasant, unpretentious, sensitive to the feelings of others, etc., or 2) unpleasant, pretentious, insensitive, etc., otherwise seen as characteristics which would tend to make a person unlikeable though they might be a highly respected expert in their profession. The third manipulated variable was the interest participants had in the topic presented, the courtroom television case (Stone & Eswara, 1969). Although the results of the study showed that the factors of prestige, likability, and expertise did influence attitude change, the results did not conclusively establish that higher prestige sources were more effective than low prestige sources (Stone & Eswara, 1969). Even though a plethora of historical evidence has linked source credibility and likability to attitudes, it was not clear which dimension was more influential in social media-driven contexts.

2.3 Expertise

Expertise is the extent to which a person is perceived to be able to provide the correct information to another (Elaziz & Mayouf, 2017; Hovland et al., 1953; Ismagilova et al., 2020). To determine whether or not someone is an expert in a particular domain, the performance of that person must be assessed as superior to other people within that same domain (Schvaneveldt et al., 1985). While the description of expertise can be viewed as straightforward and easy to understand, it is difficult to measure the expertise in different contexts.

For example, expertise and knowledge are central to defining a profession (Saks, 2012). Expertise is domain-specific, as it reflects knowledge gained in a specific area. Hoffman (1998) brings up the important point that, in certain domains, there are various levels of certifications an individual can obtain attesting to their expertise, the equivalent of licensing in other professions. In Tormala and Petty's (2002) study about how the concept of source credibility, specifically the expertise of a source, can affect attitude certainty, two experiments were conducted in which participants received a counter attitudinal persuasive message, a message that was inconsistent with the participant's attitude on the topic.

In the first experiment, participants were asked to read an advertisement on a new aspirin product called *AspirinForte* and come up with counter-arguments against it (Tormala & Petty, 2002). The advertisements were either communicated by a source that was high or low in credibility, which was operationalized by leading participants to believe the contents of each advertisement had been assembled by either an expert or nonexpert (Tormala & Petty, 2002). Expertise information was at the top of the ad and, in the high-credibility (expert condition), the ad reported that the information was presented by a research team from the American Medical

Association (Tormala & Petty, 2002). In the low-credibility (nonexpert condition), the

information was reportedly collected by a student at a local high school (Tormala & Petty, 2002).

Following the experiment, the manipulation of expertise was successful in affirming the

researcher's prediction, participants perceived the source of the advertisement to have more

expertise in the high-credibility condition than in the low-credibility condition (Tormala & Petty,

2002). This study concluded that participants attributed the credibility of the source, in this case,

those responsible for presenting the advertisement information, to having expertise in the domain

of the product, *AspirinForte* (Tormala & Petty, 2002). Additionally, to examine the potential

differences of people's resistance to the product, researchers developed a quality scale to rate

each counterargument from 1 (*not at all convincing*) to 9 (*extremely convincing*). However, the

results found no differences in the quality of counterarguments across conditions and they failed

to reveal any differences in how people perceived the source credibility of the ads. Overall, the

advertisement supposedly created by the American Medical Association was perceived as

significantly more credible than that of the high school student, nonexpert condition, in this

experiment (Tormala & Petty, 2002).

   To perpetuate the argument that expertise is domain-specific, in Anderegg et al.'s (2010)

study on defining expert credibility in climate change, expertise was operationally defined based

on the number of climate-relevant publications authored or co-authored by each of the 1,372

climate researchers in the study's database. The prominence of each climate researcher, defined

by the number of citations for each of the researcher's four highest-cited papers based on Google

Scholar, was also a way to identify source credibility in the study (Anderegg et al., 2010).

Researchers separated the climate researchers into two groups, those who were convinced by the

evidence (CE) of anthropogenic climate change (ACC) and those unconvinced by the evidence

(UE) of ACC (Anderegg et al., 2010). By examining a subsample of the 50 most-published

(highest-expertise) researchers from each group, results revealed large differences in relative

expertise between the CE and UE groups (Anderegg et al., 2010). The highest-expertise

researchers in the CE group had an average of 408 climate publications while the

highest-expertise researchers in the UE group only averaged 89 publications (Anderegg et al.,

2010). This study indicated that not all experts are equal when it comes to scientific credibility

and expertise, which is an important point to keep in mind when defining source credibility in

different contexts.

2.4 Trustworthiness

The second component of source credibility is trustworthiness. *Trustworthiness* is defined

as the audience's belief in the truth of the information presented honestly by the source

(Ismagilova et al., 2020; McGinnies & Ward, 1980). For example, in Ismagilova et al.'s (2020)

meta-analysis of the effect characteristics of source credibility can have on consumer behavior,

source trustworthiness, the willingness or intention a consumer has to rely on another person,

was found to affect information adoption and consumption in a positive and significant way.

Source trustworthiness was defined Out of the 20 studies used for the meta-analysis, source

trustworthiness was analyzed through the four dependent variables, 1) usefulness, 2) information

adoption, 3) intention to buy and 4) information credibility. Depending on the individual study,

each of these four variables was defined and measured differently.

To highlight one of the studies Ismagilova et al. (2020) cited in their meta-analysis by

Cheung et al. (2008), researchers looked at how the source credibility, dependent on the

consumer's perception of the integrity and expertise of a message source, affected information

adoption on online consumer opinion platforms, the process in which people purposefully

engage in using information. Two of Cheung et al.'s (2008) hypotheses predicted that, if

participants perceived a message source to have higher perceived expertise and perceived

trustworthiness, they would perceive the message to have higher information usefulness, defined

as the individual's perception that using the new technology of online opinion platforms would

enhance or improve the participant's experience. The measurement of source credibility

(expertise and trustworthiness), relevance, timeliness, accuracy, comprehensiveness of a source's

message, information usefulness, and information adoption were all based on a 7-point Likert

scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*) (Cheung et al., 2008). Although

results showed that the components of source credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness did not

significantly impact information usefulness, they did influence consumer decisions to adopt

information within online communities (Cheung et al., 2008).

McGinnies and Ward's (1980) study actually looked at whether trustworthiness was more

effective than the expertise of a source. To assess the main effects and interactions of expertise

and trustworthiness across four different countries, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the

United States, researchers used an experimental booklet that explained that the purpose of the

study was to find out how college students reacted to certain problems of international affairs

(McGinnies & Ward, 1980). The expertise of the booklet's author was manipulated by two

different descriptions of the extension of Gambia's maritime boundaries, which preceded the

message in the booklet. The expert source was described as a West German authority whose

remarks had first appeared in the "International Law Review" (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). In the

nonexpert condition, the source was identified as a journalist from Western Germany whose

remarks had first appeared in a recent issue of "The Daily Press" in Germany (McGinnies &

Ward, 1980). In the trustworthy condition, the author was described as honest, sincere, and trustworthy (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). In the untrustworthy condition, the author was described as having a reputation for being devious, calculating, and inclined to place personal gain above public welfare (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). On average, across the four countries, trustworthiness was valued more than expertise, as it was consistently more influential in revealing favorable attitudes toward the extension of maritime boundaries (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). The most favorable condition for persuasion in America and New Zealand was when the source was described as both expert and trustworthy (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). In Australia and Japan, the trustworthy source was more effective regardless of the degree of expertise (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). Although results showed that expertise aids the establishment of source credibility, McGinnies and Ward's (1980) experiment indicated that trustworthiness might be more important than expertise in certain cultures and under certain circumstances.

2.5 Likability and Similarity

In comparison to the expertise and trustworthiness components of source credibility, likability is based on similarity and is not considered a source credibility characteristic, even though it might affect attitude change. *Likability* is defined as the affection for the source as a result of the source's physical appearance and behavior (Stone & Eswara, 1969). Since the 1970s, similarity has been researched as a source effect, of which credibility is one example. Similarity has been associated with physical attractiveness, perceived connectedness, and, most recently, the identification between the source and the consumer. *Similarity,* as a subset of likability, is defined as the shared attitudes, values, interests, and attraction between the source

and the consumer (Feldman, 1984). As was found in the Stone and Eswara (1969) study,

likability and similarity can influence behavior and attitudes.

As similarity has been tied to physical attractiveness, Gillen's (1981) study reported that

females with higher physical attractiveness were perceived to possess greater femininity, and

males with higher physical attractiveness to possess greater masculinity. The perception of others

is especially important in determining how physically attractive a person is considered to be.

Those perceived as more intelligent, warm, friendly, and interesting were more likely to be

considered physically attractive (Clifford & Walster, 1973; Smits & Cherhoniak, 1976). Clifford

and Walster (1973) looked at the effect of children's physical attractiveness, a measure of

likability, on fifth-grade teachers' expectations and judgments of the child. The researchers

hypothesized that the more attractive the child, the more biased, in their favor, teachers were

expected to be (Clifford & Walster, 1973). Each fifth-grade teacher was given a report card with

an attached photo of varying attractiveness and an opinion sheet consisting of four items: 1) the

child's IQ from 1 (*96-100*) to 7 (*126-130*), 2) child's social potential from 1 (*very bad*) to 5 (*very

good*), 3) parent's attitude toward the school from 1 (*strong indifference*) to 6 (*strong interest*),

and 4) child's potential for future education from 1 (*2 years of high school*) to 7 (*Ph.D.*) (Clifford

& Walster, 1973). Results were as expected, attractive or more likable children appeared to have

a large advantage over unattractive ones, in terms of the teacher's perception of the child's

educational potential (Clifford & Walster, 1973). On all four items, teachers perceived the more

attractive and likable children to have higher educational potential (items 1, 3, and 4) and social

potential (item 2) than their less attractive counterparts (Clifford & Walster, 1973).

In a study of adults, Smits and Cherhoniak (1976) asked 36 male participants to read two

autobiographical descriptions, each approximately 210 words long, written by two young

women. The "friendly" statement was presented by someone active in social relations, who

expressed satisfaction in those relationships as well as in life in general (Smits & Cherhoniak,

1976). The "unfriendly" statement described a person who rejected social contacts and felt

dissatisfied with other people and the condition of her life (Smits & Cherhoniak, 1976). The

physical attractiveness of the two women varied based on how warm or cold their face looked

and the likability generated by their physical attractiveness was operationalized based on how

much the participant believed they would enjoy the woman's company, how friendly they

perceived her to be, and the participant's desire to date the woman (Smits & Cherhoniak, 1976).

Results were consistent with previous statements about how physical attractiveness aids the

likability of a person, such that the photo of the warm and friendly woman was rated higher on

physical attractiveness and higher on the participants' desirability to date her (Smits &

Cherhoniak, 1976).

In looking at the influence of similarity between the source and the consumer, Feldman's

(1984) study aimed to determine the impact similarity and expertise had on the nutrition behavior

and attitudes of high school students, based on an 80-item questionnaire that examined snack and

dessert preferences. The similarity was defined based on a list of similarity characteristics

participants were asked to rate about themselves and nutrition expertise was defined based on the

rating of occupations related to nutrition (Feldman, 1984). Expertise was defined through the

level of education school health educators. Then participants were randomly assigned to one of

four groups, each group receiving nutrition messages from a high-, medium-, or low-similarity

source and a source of high-, medium-, or low-level of expertise (Feldman, 1984). The results of

the study showed that the greater the perceived similarity between the high school students and

the sources, the greater the influence the source had on the nutrition behavior and attitudes of the

participants (Feldman, 1984). The source that was perceived to be both low in similarity and high in expertise was the least influential communicator which emphasized that similarity was seen as more influential than expertise and the implications of the study showed how health programs in schools could be developed to enhance influence and effectiveness over students (Feldman, 1984).

Furthermore, although it might be assumed that the physical attractiveness of a source played an important role in increasing the perceived likability and similarity between a source and consumer, a lot of the previous research showed little or no effect of attractiveness on influence. For example, Maddux and Rogers' (1980) found no main or interactional effects of physical attractiveness in enhancing a message when 106 female undergraduates were asked to assess personalities from photographs, descriptions, or opinion statements. The extent to which Maddux and Rogers' described their source was based on a photograph, one that was deemed physically attractive and the other, unattractive. The researchers did not elaborate further as to what made the sources of the photographs "attractive". Similarly, in Joseph's (1977) experiment, both male and female participants listened to and watched as a female source provided her opinion about multiple-choice versus essay exams in a mock film, where expertise and physical attractiveness were manipulated. Expertise was manipulated through three levels, high expertise, low expertise, and no expertise. The high expertise source described the source as a senior in business administration who had considerable authority and experience to speak on the subject of examinations. The low expertise source had the same background except she was introduced as a freshman who admitted her only experience with essay tests in college was for a course in English composition. Physical attractiveness was manipulated through a 15-item interpersonal attraction scale, with 5-items per subscale of social attraction (e.g. "I think she would be a friend

of mine"), physical attraction (e.g. "I think she is quite pretty"), and task attraction ("She would

be a poor problem solver"). Results showed that physical attractiveness made little difference in

participants' exam type preference when the source was an expert. However, participants were

influenced more by the high- than the medium- or low-attractiveness sources when the source

was not an expert. The results presented in Joseph's (1977) study were pulled from an

unpublished doctoral dissertation so there may be limitations in its methodology, findings, and

generalizability.

Overall, the research on the influence of similarity and likability of sources across social

psychology can also apply to the rise of social media influencers and the importance of

influencer marketing. Further research into how influencer-consumer relations have revealed

likability and similarity to be factors in increased connection will be explored in Chapter 2. By

applying similarity and likability to social media influencers and influencer marketing may result

in the development of identification between consumers and influencers who create branded

content for products and services that may be beneficial to the consumers (Lin & Xu, 2017; Pick,

2021; Schouten et al., 2019). This identity development may be related to the consumer's

perception of similarity with the influencer, and the potential to partake in parasocial interactions

with that influencer. *Parasocial interactions* are defined as the desire social media users have to

see influencers in a friendly or trustworthy manner, which then leads them to engage in

interactions where followers are willing to replicate the behaviors of influencers and adopt

similar values (Lin et al., 2021). The desire to have parasocial interactions is not typically

reciprocated by influencers as the relationship between the two parties does not operate like

traditional social interactions (Lin et al., 2021). Altogether, the application of the factors related

to source credibility to social media, influencers, and the overall effectiveness of influencer

marketing is new to marketing research and must be further explored.

CHAPTER 3

Applying Source Credibility to Influencer Credibility

It is possible to apply the social psychological concept of source credibility to the characteristics that make up a social media influencer's credibility related to brands and messaging. Credibility and its components, expertise, and trustworthiness, have been extensively studied in the social psychological literature. Likability has been studied in both social psychology and marketing research and is primarily related to the identification processes between influencers and consumers. Applications of the three characteristics: expertise, trustworthiness, and likability can be examined, in assessing the effects an influencer can have on consumers. This answers the question of how a variety of characteristics aid influencers in establishing credibility with their consumers through social media messaging and applies to the rise of influencer marketing and how it has changed the attitudes of consumers when it comes to trust, engagement, and potential purchasing behavior.

With so many social media users expressing themselves on social platforms, it is important to look at the factors of source credibility that allow people to connect with, and develop trust in, each other online. Concerning influencers, *source credibility* is a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the consumer's acceptance of a message (Ohanian, 1990). Ohanian developed a 15-item semantic differential scale to build a source credibility model, measuring celebrity endorsers' credibility along with the two themes of source credibility and source attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). In Ohanian's (1990) definition, source credibility was comprised of two main factors, expertise, and trustworthiness, while source attractiveness was dependent on the source's familiarity, likability, similarity, and attractiveness to the consumer. Although Ohanian's source-credibility scale spearheaded the majority of the

existing literature's research into the effects of source credibility on celebrity endorsements, the original article was not available to detail Ohanian's specific research findings in building the source credibility scale.

3.1 Defining Social Media and Influencers

Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the World Wide Web and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). *User-generated content*, otherwise known as *social media content*, describes the various forms of media material, such as images, videos, and text, that are publicly available and created by social media users. As the digital economy and the dominance of the internet grow, social media, influencers, and marketing have converged at an intersection with consumers. For example, social media has become the preferred source for the consumption of media and access to information (refer to Figures 1 and 2). Some examples of social media platforms that are widely used by society include, but are not limited to, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter. One of the most prominent social media platforms, Instagram, enables users to share images and videos about their everyday lives with other users. It also allows people to accumulate followers and to connect with others through shared information and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In Djafarova and Rushworth's (2017) article on how the source credibility of Instagram social media influencers' profiles affects purchasing decisions in young females. Online information sharing is identified as a shared and mutually-accessible resource from which members of the public may use (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Through eWOM, a network, or interactive group, of consumers with shared interests can form strong social connections with each other and inevitably disperse

more information, relying on the credibility of other social media users (Djafarova & Rushworth,

2017). This reliance on source credibility that Djafrarova and Rushworth (2017) refer to is based

on the consumer's perception of the source based on attractiveness, trustworthiness, and

expertise in the area of the endorsed product, based on Ohanian's (1990) source-credibility scale.

However, some users, termed social media influencers, are taking advantage of the

increased preference for social media platforms and eWOM. *Social media influencers* (SMIs) are

users of shared Internet applications who have used their social media platforms, systems for

sharing information with a select group, to generate a large social presence and network of

followers by capitalizing on branded social content, the images, videos, text material that an

influencer makes for a company or brand (Freberg et al., 2010). The *social presence* that SMIs

rely on can be defined as the visual and physical contact between or among communication

partners, in the case of social media between the SMI and the social media users they are hoping

to influence (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In other words, social presence can be developed

through the media content SMIs share and how their consumers react to it. For example, if a

social media influencer were to share a post on Instagram, users viewing the post could engage

with the SMI by liking, commenting, or following them on Instagram. A social media

influencer's social presence can also be measured through *customer brand engagement*, which is

defined as a customer's motivation for, and positive state of mind, when interacting with brands,

in this case, the social media influencer's self-brand (San et al., 2020; Solem, 2016). The ideal

self-brand of an influencer is a consistent and continuous stream of personal information that

creates a distinct and recognizable online identity (Whitmer, 2019). As social presence is gained,

larger social influence corresponds to the larger impact of SMIs on their consumers' behavior

through the changing of attitudes and the development of parasocial relations (Kaplan &

Haenlein, 2010).

Social media has empowered users to build and manage a network of followers, other

social media consumers, who are interested in the ideas, images, and videos they can provide.

Brands and companies have also realized that social media influencers have persuasive power

over their network of followers, and as a result, companies are allocating a larger amount of their

advertising budget to working with social media influencers (Taillon et al., 2020). Most of the

"work" social media influencers partake in is creating large amounts of the user-generated

content previously mentioned, as images, videos, text posts, and more. When working with a

company, this user-generated content becomes *branded content* or a *branded campaign*

connected to a company or product, as the SMI works collaboratively with a company that is

incentivizing their content creation through monetary compensation or free products.

Before delving into the different applications of expertise, trustworthiness, and likability

to social media influencers, it is first important to distinguish how social media influencers

compare to traditional celebrities. In some studies, researchers fail to distinguish how the

celebrities they analyzed were defined. The fame garnered by social media influencers is

different compared to traditional celebrities who are famous from other forms of media such as

film, music, and TV (Khamis et al., 2016). Those who have risen to fame through social media

operate in a realm where users can build personal narratives and showcase online identities to

attract other users through social interaction and aesthetical presentation of social content

(Abidin, 2016). Because SMIs have crafted new ways of claiming status through social media,

consumers tend to perceive them as being very personable because they were once 'regular

people' too (Driel & Dumitrica, 2021). The magnitude of influence an SMI has can lead them to

be labeled "famous" based on the number of their followers on the platform where they appear

(e.g. Instafamous, TikTok famous, etc.) (Jin et al., 2019). The increased levels of closeness that

consumers may feel with influencers may have led consumers to attribute higher levels of

perceived trustworthiness, connectedness, and authenticity to social media influencers (Tran &

Strutton, 2014; Driel & Dumitrica, 2021). By capitalizing on the increased positive perceptions

consumers have of them, social media influencers have used their platforms to kickstart their

dream careers through content creation and social media.

3.2 Influencer Marketing

The popularity of the social media influencer phenomenon has allowed influencer

marketing to work in conjunction with brand-influencer relationships. In Campbell and Farrell's

(2020) article, researchers describe the roots of influencer marketing and the various tiers of

influencers that exist. *Influencer Marketing* is a subset of traditional marketing where a brand

utilizes and compensates social media influencers to market its products or services to its

consumer following (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Grafström et al., 2018; Piehler et al., 2021).

Research into the influencer marketing sector has revealed that consumer attitudes are linked to

influencer marketing based on influencer-brand fit and source credibility. For example, in Piehler

et al.'s (2021) study on the effect social media influencers have on the purchase intentions of

other social media users, researchers conducted a between-subjects online experiment in Russia.

The study compared whether original SMIs ('Instafamous' celebrities) or non-original SMIs

(traditional celebrities) had a more positive effect on the purchase intentions of social media

users with low self-esteem (Piehler et al., 2021). Researchers manipulated the SMI's origin of

fame based on having a large number of followers, Russian origin, gender consistency, and a

similar look and physical stature to the recruited participants (Piehler et al., 2021). The

researchers used the self-esteem of participants as a moderator for their purchase intentions and

were measured on Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale which is a 10-item, 5-point scale with

reverse-coded items, such that for all items, higher scores indicated greater self-esteem (Piehler

et al., 2021). An example of an item on Rosenberg's self-esteem scale is "On the whole, I am

satisfied with myself" and then a rating between *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree*

(Rosenberg, 1965). The results of Piehler et al.'s (2021) showed that participants with higher

self-esteem found the SMIs origin of fame, or influencer characteristics, to be effective in

changing the users' brand attitudes. Yet results found that original SMIs seemed more effective

in triggering potential purchasing intentions in social media users with high self-esteem, whereas

non-original SMIs were more effective for social media users with low self-esteem (Piehler et

al., 2021). Nevertheless, the development of consumer attitudes is shown to be linked to research

focused on social media influencers through studies like this one, examining potential purchase

intentions.

Another example is in Grafström et al.'s (2018) study, where a research experiment was

conducted to learn how attitudes are affected by influencer marketing. The attitudes of focus

groups of millennial participants in Sweden were evaluated using semi-structured interviews.

The study's results found that millennials' attitudes were affected by influencer marketing based

on alignment to the products an influencer was promoting and the degree of perceived source

credibility derived from the influencer's messages (Grafström et al., 2018). It is important to note

that this study was conducted as part of a thesis, so there may be limitations to the methodology

and findings. Overall, these studies on influencer marketing have identified that a successful

branded campaign must understand how influencers, brands, and consumers interact with one another (Breves et al., 2019; Casaló et al., 2020; Lee & Kim, 2020).

Currently, marketing teams plan either to use influencers in addition to their traditional advertising tactics or instead of them. For example, brands may use notable social media influencers in a video advertisement or ask them to model for a particular product. Influencer marketing is most effective when used in conjunction with social media and Internet advertising, so companies who reach out to and work with, SMIs aligned with their brand values and products are predicted to operate more effectively than companies who partner with unaligned influencers (More & Lingam, 2019). More and Lingam (2019) developed a social influence (SI) model on how to best maximize social media influencer effectiveness. Researchers found that, if influential users in social media are identified, different business strategies can be planned by companies. These business strategies can include plans that will launch and market new products, target potential consumers, and ultimately enable extensive viral marketing through a social media influencer's online network (More & Lingam, 2019). By appealing to newer generations of consumers, social media influencers and influencer marketing have been able to develop a strategy designed to dominate the market and reshape consumer behavior.

3.3 Psychological Differences

Ultimately, the purpose of marketing is to appeal to consumers. The evolution of social media and the Internet has resulted in the market currently evolving at a rate that renders traditional marketing outdated and ineffective. Earlier research has found traditional marketing to be an unsustainable business strategy (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015). Opreana & Vinerean's (2015) study detailed the differences between traditional and digital inbound marketing, a process of

reaching and converting consumers by creating and pursuing organic tactics in online settings, of which influencer marketing is an example (refer to Table 4). Companies that only advertise through traditional messaging platforms, such as magazines, newspapers, and radio, are limited in their ability to foster larger conversations and valuable relationships with their consumers. This is seen as a decrease in customer brand engagement since social media and the Internet can provide limitless opportunities for brands to interact with consumers (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015). By employing social media influencers, with backgrounds related to or aligned with a specific product or service, there is a greater likelihood that a brand could reach its *target audience*, the consumers most likely to purchase their products or services. Therefore, brands who rely solely on traditional offline marketing strategies may miss out on a potentially large segment of their target audience which is drawn to more digitized marketing strategies.

Influencer marketing is also widely successful compared to traditional marketing because consumers find it to be more authentic, attractive, and informative than traditional marketing (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In Audrezet et al.'s (2020) study, the researchers detail how product placement used in the context of social media and social media influencers may be more persuasive than more traditional approaches using books, movies, TV shows, etc. Hartman and Goldhoorn's (2011) study on exploring viewer's experiences of parasocial interactions found that followers of social media influencers tend to develop a perceived connectedness or friendship with the influencers they admire, which may make their interactions seem more authentic and attractive (Audrezet et al., 2020; Hartman & Goldhoorn, 2011).

Furthermore, Lou and Yuan's (2019) study examined a series of hypotheses relating to how the informative and entertainment value of influencer-generated content influenced

followers' trust in influencers' credibility. The study used a survey consisting of questions anchored by five 7-point semantic differential scales *(Ineffective/Effective; Unhelpful/Helpful; Not functional/Functional; Unnecessary/Necessary; Impractical Practical)* for informativeness value (expertise) and *(Not fun/Fun; Dull/Exciting; Not delightful/Delightful; Not thrilling/Thrilling; and Unenjoyable/Enjoyable)* for the entertainment value (attractiveness and similarity). Trust in influencer-generated posts was measured through twelve 7-point semantic differential scales anchored such as (e.g. *Dishonest/Honest, Phony/Genuine, Unethical/Ethical).* Results of this study found that both informative and entertainment value, along with the source credibility characteristics of expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity positively affected consumers' trust in influencers and their branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Overall, influencer marketing enables consumers to aspire to fulfill their dreams. With the Gen Z and millennial generations primarily consuming media, content, and information through digital means, social media influencers and influencer marketing can provide consumers with access to desirable products and services. By shaping digital consumption, as a method by which consumers achieve some semblance of fulfilling their fantasies, influencer marketing works more effectively in selling products or services than its traditional counterpart. Therefore, influencer marketing, done well, can change opinions, attitudes, and behavior by motivating consumers to purchase products or services. Such marketing uses alignment with brand values and perceived trustworthiness in influencer messaging, consistent with where they want to be or who they inevitably want to become (Grafström et al., 2018).

3.4 Maximizing Influencer-Brand Fit Through Expertise

Because expertise is domain-specific and reflects the knowledge gained in a specific area, the relevant professional domain for influencers must be established. Since the profession of a social media influencer relies on a transactional relationship with brands seeking their content creation abilities, influencers should be knowledgeable about the industries to which those brands are attached. For example, it would be logical for a social media influencer who primarily posts content on fast fashion, to have expertise or experience in fast fashion rather than dental hygiene.

Effectively applying an influencer's expertise to a specific brand prioritizes the *influencer-brand fit*, also known as *product-endorser fit*. The concept of *influencer-brand fit* is based on the "match-up hypothesis" originally developed by Kahle and Homer in 1985 based on the social adaptation theory. This theory implies that the adaptive significance of information will determine its impact. The match-up hypothesis predicts that the message conveyed by the image of the celebrity and the message of the products must converge to achieve advertisement effectiveness (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Researchers looked at how celebrity-source physical attractiveness, celebrity-source likability, and participant product involvement would lead to changes in attitudes and purchase intentions. For example, Till and Busler (2000) examined both the role of attractiveness and expertise of athletes, as the source for product endorsement, while employing the match-up hypothesis. Expertise was considered as the independent variable while the product and endorser type were manipulated using athletes, non-athletes, and an energy bar (Till & Busler, 2000). Results showed that the athlete, who was the expert endorser in this study, was the most effective endorser for the energy bar and increased the positive attitude towards the

brand for participants (Till & Busler, 2000). Therefore, for influencers, the challenging aspect of *influencer-brand fit* or *product-endorser fit* is deciding which brands best fit with their *self-brand* as presented on their social platforms.

For brands, the decision brand managers face is choosing the influencer best-suited to, and most effective for. the product and content they have in mind (DeVeirman et al., 2017). To maximize effectiveness, the influencer should be knowledgeable about the brands they choose to work with, and their previous work should be relevant to those brands. If an influencer chooses not to prioritize the *influencer-brand fit* or *product-endorser fit* of their work, their credibility as a source of expert information, messaging, and advertising for a brand may elicit negative attitudes from a consumer (Breves et al., 2019).

3.5 Building Consumer Trust Through Self-Branding

As a further application of source credibility, consumers perceive influencers as trustworthy through a presentation of honesty and integrity. Central to the trustworthiness of influencers is self-branding, which as with commercially branded products, can benefit from a unique selling point or identity that is responsive to the needs and interests of their consumers (Khamis et al., 2016). In a recent study by Brooks et al. (2021), 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with five high-profile influencers; seven agents from prominent talent agencies; five executives from three multinational brands; 17 practitioners from six global public relations and digital analytics agencies; and six other experts in the influencer industry, such as reporters. The study was designed to gain a better understanding of influencer advertising and practices. In an interview, influencer Blair Fowler, a YouTuber with 1.6+ million subscribers and an Instagram following of 475,000, discussed how she believed her dedication to her consumers has been the

largest component in establishing herself as a credible and trustworthy influencer (Brooks et al., 2021). Fowler defines her dedication through examples like writing scripts for her videos, responding to fan comments, and engaging with fellow influencers, as a way for her to gain *perceived trustworthiness* and loyalty from her consumers. This dedication and its resulting trustworthiness have slowly developed as an expectation of her self-brand (Brooks et al., 2021). In addition, Fowler's ability to navigate the influencer space in a personable and engaging way demonstrates why SMIs are perceived to be more trustworthy than traditional celebrities. The discrepancy between the perceived trustworthiness consumers attribute to social media influencers and traditional celebrities are based on consumers feeling more socially distant from traditional celebrities than from SMIs. Thomson (2006) found that increased social distance or perceived differences and relative unfamiliarity between consumers and influencers lead to the decreased appeal of the celebrity. Therefore, SMIs who prioritized closeness to followers or the narrowing of social distance by creating stronger emotional attachments with them, as Blair Fowler did, would be expected to increase consumer trust (Thomson, 2006).

3.6 Similarity and Likability Moderating Closeness and Identification

Identification stems from both actual and perceived similarity, defined by Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) as the desire to be like the other person, in this case, a consumer's desire to be like the influencer. It is important to note that, when it comes to social media influencer endorsements, previous research indicates that consumer identification comes from wishful identification, or the consumer's aspiration to be like the celebrity (Kamins et al., 1989).

In Schouten et al.'s (2019) study, the researchers expected consumer identification with influencers to be determined by perceived similarity rather than wishful identification. Schouten

et al. (2019) conducted two experiments investigating how celebrity and influencer endorsers compared on good versus poor fit with products, to establish differences in advertising effectiveness based on identification (perceived similarity and wishful identification) and credibility (trustworthiness and expertise) mediator (Schouten et al., 2019). Endorser trustworthiness was measured on five 7-point semantic differential scales (*Undependable/Dependable, Dishonest/Honest, Unreliable/Reliable, Insincere/Sincere,* and *Untrustworthy/Trustworthy)* (Schouten et al., 2019). Expertise was also measured with five 7-point semantic differential scales (*Not an expert/Expert, Inexperienced/Experienced, Unknowledgeable/Knowledgeable, Unqualified/Qualified*, and *Unskilled/Skilled*) (Schouten et al., 2019). Both wishful identification and perceived similarity were measured with four items on a scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*) (Schouten et al., 2019). An example of one of the items includes the statement: "Sometimes I wish I could be more like [name of endorser]". An example of an item on the perceived similarity scale was: "[name of endorser] thinks like me" (Schouten et al., 2019). Advertising effectiveness was measured as participant attitudes towards the advertisement, the product, and intent to purchase (Schouten et al., 2019). The results of the study showed that participants identified more with influencers, to whom they felt increased similarity and trust than with traditional celebrities (Schouten et al., 2019). The combination of perceived similarity and trust led to the emergence of the role of identification between influencers and consumers and with more research researchers predict an expedited change in attitudes from consumers (Schouten et al., 2019).

Additionally, in recent marketing-related research, the likability and physical attractiveness of an influencer has been useful in understanding the level of closeness that develops between consumers and influencers, in addition to positively predicting attitude change

towards influencers. Both Lin and Xu (2017) and Taillon et al. (2020) cite McGuire (1985) in their definition of likability as the affection a consumer has for another person based on their physical appearance, behavior, and other characteristics. In a study of reviewer trustworthiness, Lin and Xu (2017) conducted an internet-based study where participants reviewed a mock Yelp page for Hampton Inn. They were asked to rate the trustworthiness of the reviewer, and their intention of booking at the hotel in the near future. Reviewers were also identified as belonging to one of three different ethnic groups, Caucasian, African American, and Asian American (Lin & Xu, 2017). Results indicated that perceived reviewer trustworthiness was related to the participants' racial/ethnic similarity to the reviewer and was positively associated with post-exposure brand attitudes and post-exposure purchase intention (Lin & Xu, 2017). The researchers discussed whether the racial/ethnic similarities may have resulted in perceived connectedness between the source and participant (Lin & Xu, 2017). In this study, perceived trustworthiness and connection between a source and their consumers influenced the consumer's attitudes towards brands and the source itself.

　　　Perceived trustworthiness and connection were further explored in Pick's (2021) study involving two online questionnaires about two influencer advertisements. The research was designed to better understand the impact source credibility had on purchase intention, Aad, psychological ownership, and the perceived connection between influencers and consumers (Pick, 2021). After viewing the advertisements, participants answered a series of questions about the influencer, product, advertisement, and whether they felt a perceived or actual connection to the influencer (Pick, 2021). The results showed that both expertise and trustworthiness of the source significantly contributed to determining purchase intention and Aad, and served as a persuasive instrument for messaging. Not only did this increase the perceived connection the

consumer had with the influencer but also increased feelings of psychological ownership over the product that was being promoted in the advertisements, positively influencing the consumer's attitudes.

       In Taillon et al.'s (2020) study, researchers conducted an online Qualtrics survey where participants were to define their social media usage (sites and time spent), define a social media influencer, and social media influencers followed. Participants were to provide the name of any influencer they followed and rate them on similarity, likability, attractiveness, and closeness. The similarity variable was measured on a three-item (e.g. "I find that the influencer is like me"), 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Likability was assessed using a four-item (e.g. "cold" to "warm"), 7-point semantic differential scale, in response to the influencer they named in the previous question. Attractiveness was assessed with a five-item (e.g. "not beautiful" to "beautiful"), 7-point semantic differential scale ("Please indicate the strength of the following characteristics of the influencer named above"). Closeness was measured with a single-item pictorial measure where respondents were provided with seven images of two overlapping circles depicting the level of closeness they felt with their named influencer (Taillon et al., 2020). The research found that attractiveness and likability had significant, positive main effects on all three dependent variables (attitude toward the influencer, purchase intentions, and eWOM) while closeness positively moderated the effect of attractiveness on purchase intentions (Taillon et al., 2020).

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions

The source credibility of persuasive communication was analyzed based on its dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, and likability in a review of the social-psychological literature. Applications to the phenomenon of social media and social media influencers clarified the connections between social psychology and marketing research. Opportunities for further expanding the source credibility research to the influencer marketing field were identified. The factors of source credibility and the associated construct of likability have long been considered influential in attitude change and are relevant to the adoption of information by consumers.

The variety of findings from studies on credibility and likability reflect the diversity of thought from the different disciplines, including social psychology, marketing, and social media. The variables have been defined in various ways and measured using diverse instruments, which has contributed to the sometimes-disparate findings. More research will be necessary to determine how companies and communication sources, like social media influencers, can maximize the effectiveness of their messages in generating attitude change, increasing purchase intentions, and building consumer trust. While some of the studies were unpublished, the ideas examined in them may be worth further exploration.

Future research may need to explore the actual perceptions of influencers held by their followers and their affiliated brands and how they are or are not related. It is conceivable that social media users may very well hold different attitudes towards influencers and influencer marketing than those predicted due to a variety of factors. For example, although the existing research has looked at the cross-cultural effects of source credibility on social media influencers, SMI's user-generated content variations across different social media platforms have not been

researched. Future studies could examine how influencer marketing is applied on specific social media platforms and a comparative analysis of each platform could be used to establish a strategy that maximizes the effectiveness of influencer endorsement of products.

Furthermore, the experimental findings of the majority of studies covered in this paper highlighted the positive effects of source credibility on building perceived trustworthiness, connectedness, and identification between influencers and consumers. Additional research needs to be done to explore how source credibility might apply to the negative attributes of influencers. For example, how the source credibility of social media influencers may have negative effects on brand authenticity, consumer awareness, and potential purchase intentions.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Previous factor model studies of source credibility

No.	Study	Concept specification	# Dimensions
1	Baudhuin & Davis 1972	ethos (similar source)	4
2	Baudhuin & Davis 1972	ethos (dissimilar source)	2
3	Berlo et al. 1969	source credibility	3
4	Bowers & Phillips 1967	source credibility	2
5	Deimling et al. 1993	'Glaubwürdigkeit von Fernsehanstalten'	2
6	Falcione 1974	source credibility	4
7	Gaziano & McGrath 1986	media credibility	1
8	Lee 1978	(inter)national newspaper news credibility	4
9	Lee 1978	(inter)national TV news credibility	3
10	Lee 1978	local/state newspaper news credibility	4
11	Lee 1978	local/state TV news credibility	3
12	Markham 1968	television newscasters credibility	3 (major)
13	McCain et al. 1977	televised source credibility	4
14	McCroskey 1966	ethos	2
15	McCroskey et al. 1974	teacher credibility	5
16	McCroskey & Jenson 1975	mass media news source image	5
17	Meyer 1988	credibility of newspapers	2
18	Mosier & Ahlgren 1981	information presentation credibility	4
19	Newell 1993 Goldsmith et al. 1999 Newell & Goldsmith 2001	corporate credibility	2
20	Ohanian 1990	celebrity endorsers' credibility	3
21	Raman & Haley 1997	organizational source credibility	3
22	Salwen 1987	credibility of newspaper opinion polls	4
23	Simpson 1976 Simpson & Kahler 1980/81	source credibility in the selling context	4
24	Singletary 1976	news source credibility	6
25	Tuppen 1974	communicator credibility	5
26	VandenBergh et al. 1981	advertiser credibility	7
27	White 1990	newscaster credibility	6
28	Whitehead 1968	source credibility	4

Source: Eisend, 2006.

Table 2. Empirically derived dimensions of source credibility (Study #s refer to Table 1)

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Accuracy																		x										
Affiliation w. t. community															x													
Articulation																								x				
Attraction																								x		x		
Attractiveness																			x									
Authoritativeness	x	x											x															
Availability																												
Believability																x	x				x							
Believability/honesty									x									x										
Bias										x																		
Character													x	x	x	x												
Charisma																									x			
Clarity																	x			x								
Competence			x		x								x		x	x									x		x	
Competitiveness																									x			
Composure													x		x	x												
Co-orientation																									x			
Credibility						x																						
Dynamism		x						x	x		x										x			x			x	x
Dynamism/expertness												x																
Emotional stability					x																							
Esteem	x																											
'Ethik'					x																							
Expertise																		x	x		x			x				
Expertness							x															x						
Extroversion					x										x	x												
Familiarity																									x			
Good dimension																				x								
Hostility																								x				
Immediacy-intimacy												x																
'Informationsqualität'					x																							
Interpers. attractiveness	x	x																										
Intimacy							x	x	x																			
Knowledge ability																								x				
Likeability/attractiveness																									x			
Objectivity																					x						x	x
Personal integrity	x																											
Presentation																										x		
Prestige																									x			
Qualification		x																										
Reliable/logical factor														x														
Role model dimension																				x								
Safety			x		x																							
Smart dimension																				x								
Sociability													x		x	x						x						
Stability																								x		x		
Taste/progressive/fulfilling																									x			
Trustworthiness		x					x				x						x		x		x			x	x	x	x	x
Trustworth./authenticity										x	x																	

Source: Eisend, 2006.

Table 3. Final list of 64 credibility items

1	Sincere/insincere	33	Skilled/unskilled
2	Unobtrusive/obtrusive	34	Constructive/destructive
3	Exciting/dull	35	True/false
4	Honest/dishonest	36	Organized/chaotic
5	Appealing/unappealing	37	Unselfish/selfish
6	Qualified/unqualified	38	Frank/reserved
7	Simple/complex	39	Accurate/inaccurate
8	Active/passive	40	Open minded/closed minded
9	Appropriate/inappropriate	41	Practical/impractical
10	Authentic/not authentic	42	Involved/indifferent
11	Unbiased/biased	43	Believable/unbelievable
12	Expressive/inexpressive	44	Positive/negative
13	Dynamic/static	45	Competent/incompetent
14	Good/bad	46	Nice/awful
15	Experienced/inexperienced	47	Trained/untrained
16	Helpful/unhelpful	48	Useful/useless
17	Attractive/unattractive	49	Likely/unlikely
18	Concerned/not concerned	50	Profound/superficial
19	Friendly/unfriendly	51	Liked/disliked
20	Important/unimportant	52	Objective/subjective
21	Smart/stupid	53	Trustworthy/not trustworthy
22	Reliable/unreliable	54	Realistic/unrealistic
23	Dignified/undignified	55	Resolute/hesitant
24	Fair/unfair	56	Right/wrong
25	Interesting/uninteresting	57	Pleasant/unpleasant
26	Reasonable/unreasonable	58	Professional/unprofessional
27	Natural/artificial	59	Comprehending/uncomprehending
28	Informative/uninformative	60	Powerful/powerless
29	Successful/unsuccessful	61	Rational/irrational
30	Founded/unfounded	62	Unprejudiced/prejudiced
31	Expert/inexpert	63	Convincing/not convincing
32	Just/unjust	64	Clear/unclear

[a] Since the items were retranslated from German to English, the most appropriate translation for the German items was given.

Source: Eisend, 2006.

Table 4. Differences between traditional and digital inbound marketing

	Traditional Marketing	**Digital Inbound Marketing**
Basis	Interruption	Organic
Focus	Finding customers	Getting found by potential, existing and aspirational consumers
Aim	Increased sales	Creating long lasting relationships by reaching and converting qualified consumers
Target	Large audiences	Interested prospects
Tactics	Print advertisements, TV advertisements, Outdoors advertising, Cold calling, Trade shows, Email lists	Blogs, Ebooks, Whitepapers Videos on YouTube, Vimeo, etc. Search engine optimization tactics Infographics Webinars Feeds Social media marketing tactics

Source: Opreana & Vinerean, 2015
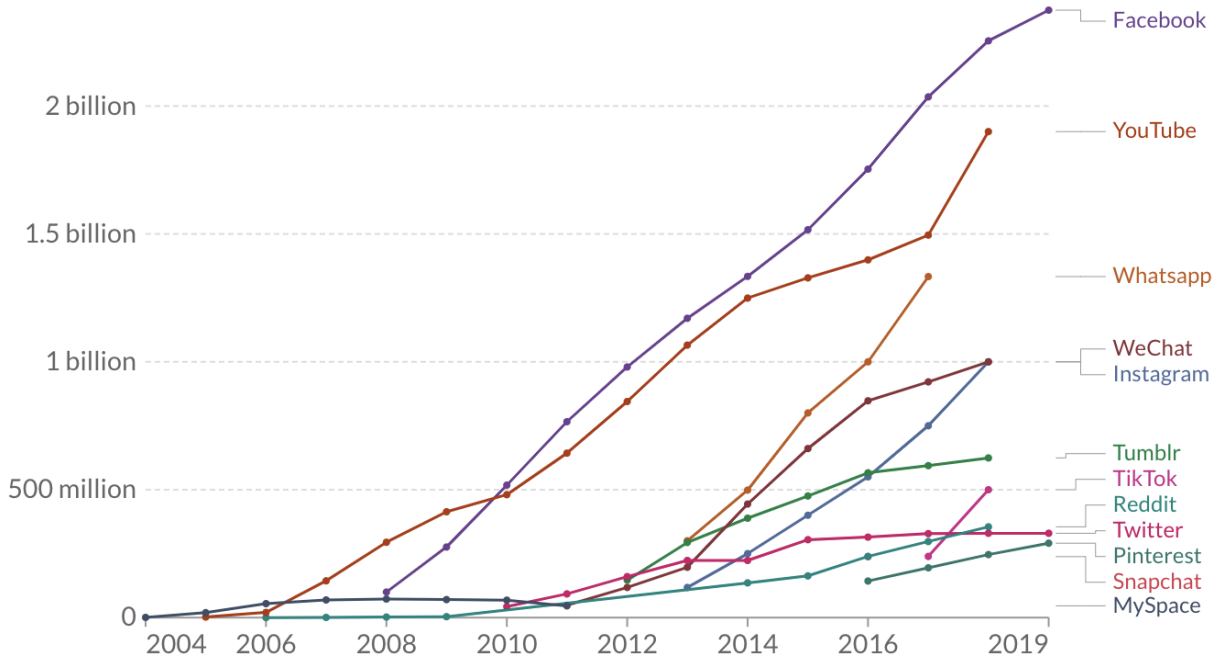
Appendix B

Figure 1. Increase in Social Media Usage, 2004-2019

Number of people using social media platforms, 2004 to 2019

Estimates correspond to monthly active users (MAUs). Facebook, for example, measures MAUs as users that have logged in during the past 30 days. See source for more details.
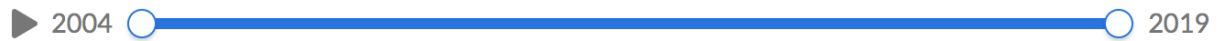
Our World in Data

➕ **Add data**

Facebook
YouTube
Whatsapp
WeChat
Instagram
Tumblr
TikTok
Reddit
Twitter
Pinterest
Snapchat
MySpace

2 billion
1.5 billion
1 billion
500 million
0

2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016 2019

Source: Statista and TNW (2019)   CC BY

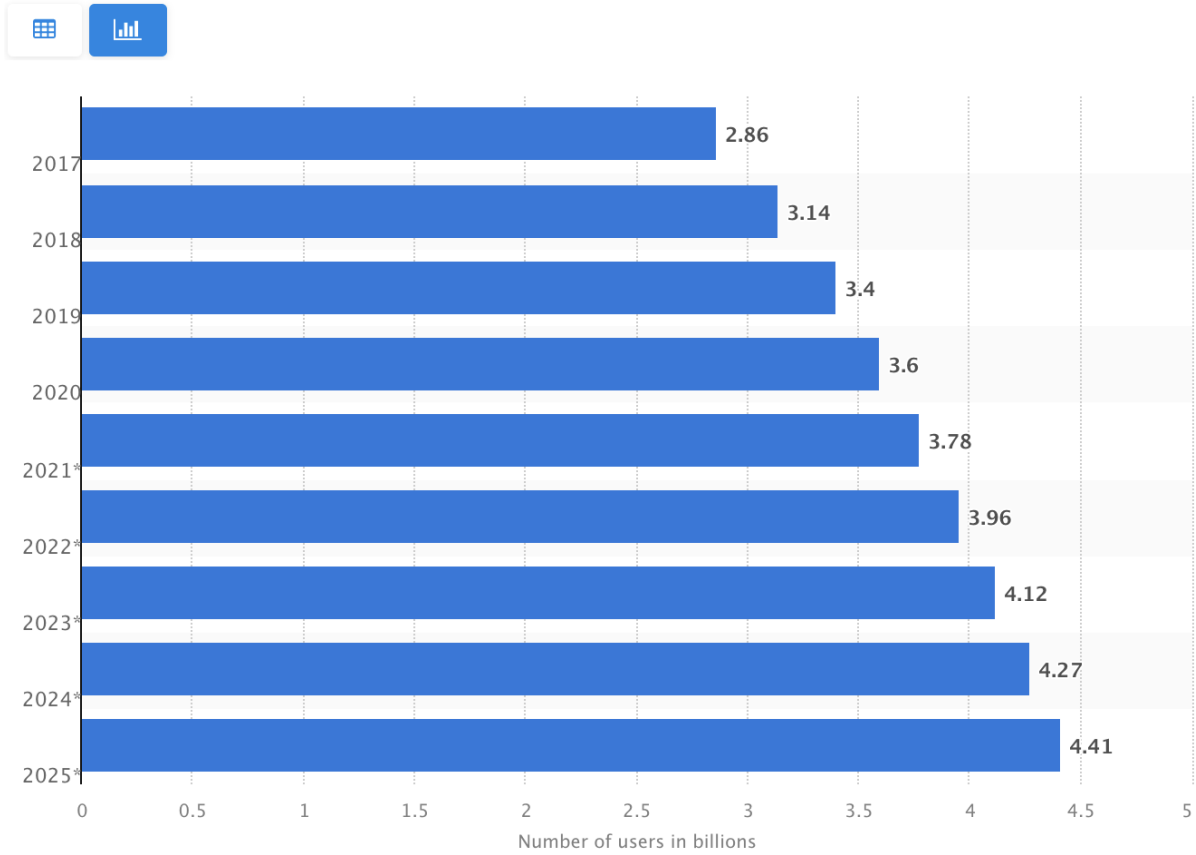▶ 2004 ⭕────────────────────────────⭕ 2019

Source: Ortiz-Ospina, 2019

Figure 2. Proposed Increase in Social Media Users, 2017-2025

Number of social network users worldwide from 2017 to 2025
(in billions)

| | ⊞ | � |

Year	
2017	2.86
2018	3.14
2019	3.4
2020	3.6
2021*	3.78
2022*	3.96
2023*	4.12
2024*	4.27
2025*	4.41

Number of users in billions

Details: Worldwide; Statista; 2017 to 2020

Source: Statista, 2021