



Sponsored-influencer marketing: Effects of the commercial orientation of influencer-created content on followers' willingness to search for information

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Sponsored-influencer marketing: Effects of the commercial orientation of influencer-created content on followers' willingness to search for information

Journal of Product & Brand Management

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Despite the increasing popularity of influencer marketing, there exists a lack of understanding of how content created by social media influencers stimulates the pre-purchase behaviour of followers. Based on the stimulus-organism-response framework, this paper aims to address this lacuna by examining how influencer-created content affects the willingness of followers to search for more information related to the posted product.

Design/methodology/approach: A cross-sectional research design utilises a web-based questionnaire among Instagram users in Sri Lanka. Structural equation modelling with AMOS 27 and SPSS PROCESS macro are used for hypothesis testing.

Findings: Findings indicate that the commercial orientation of influencer-created content reduces follower trustworthiness towards them and the perceived credibility of the content. Mediation results demonstrate that the commercial orientation of influencer-created content negatively affects follower willingness to search for more information related to the posted product through trustworthiness and perceived credibility.

Originality/ value: This paper adds to influencer marketing literature by demonstrating the underlying process through which the commercial orientation of influencer-created content impacts follower willingness to search for product-related information.

Practical implications: When adopting influencer marketing to stimulate information search behaviour, marketing practitioners should carefully examine the commercial orientation of the content of the messages posted by social media influencers to maintain high levels of follower trustworthiness towards the influencer and positive follower credibility perceptions of the message.

Keywords: Commercial orientation, Trust, Credibility, Influencer marketing, Influencer-created content, Stimulus-organism-response framework, Information search

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid transformation occurring in social media and the increasing fragmentation of the media landscape, “*influencer marketing*” has emerged as an effective and cost-efficient marketing tool to promote brands to target audiences (Jun and Yi, 2020; Mukherjee, 2020). Social media influencers represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes consumer attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media (Freberg *et al.*, 2011). Influencer-created content concerning brands and products is perceived to have a more authentic and personal appeal to potential customers than conventional marketing communication efforts by companies (Jin and Muqaddam, 2019; Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020). As a result, company investments in influencer marketing budgets have more than doubled in recent years (Jin *et al.*, 2019; Lou and Youn, 2019). For example, 63% of companies increased their marketing budget allocation to influencer marketing during 2020, a rise of 59% compared to the previous year (Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020). Further, more than 90% of marketers deemed influencer marketing strategies more effective, pointing out that such strategies generate 11 times higher return on investment than conventional marketing strategies (Xie and Feng, 2022).

The existing influencer marketing literature is explicitly biased toward selecting the social media influencers with the most relevant traits (i.e., likeability, attractiveness) to promote brands and products. (e.g., De Veirman *et al.*, 2017; Lou and Yuan, 2019). Some other lines of research have focused on the adverse effects of sponsorship disclosure and commercial intent of the influencer-created content (e.g., Kim and Kim, 2021; Lee and Kim, 2020). When a brand is perceived as being behind the content created by the social media influencer, its perceived credibility is negatively affected (Xie and Feng, 2022). Another stream of research has examined

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3 how influencer marketing generates positive attitudes and customer behaviours (e.g., Jin *et al.*,
4 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019).
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8 The three different research streams are conceptually interlinked at a broad level because
9
10 they focus on diverse traits of social media influencers and how these traits generate different
11 customer attitudes and behaviours. However, empirical findings are scattered, and linkages remain
12 understudied (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). Despite recent research indicating that disclosing a commercial
13 intent has a detrimental impact on the perceived credibility of the content created by social media
14 influencers (e.g., Kim and Kim, 2021; Zhou *et al.*, 2021), scholars have largely ignored the effects
15 of such commercial orientation on customers' pre-purchase behaviour such as consumer
16 motivation to search for product-related information. The one exception is Martínez-López *et al.*
17 (2020), who examined direct relationships between the commercial orientation of influencer posts
18 and influencer trust, post credibility, and willingness to search for product-related information.
19 However, these researchers did not examine important interrelationships between these constructs.
20 Investigating the pre-purchase behaviour of followers is important because follower
21 trustworthiness towards the social media influencer and the perceived credibility of the message
22 that is shared might stimulate followers to initiate a product-related information search process
23 (Jun and Yi, 2020; Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020).
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42 To fill this void in influencer marketing literature, grounded in the stimulus-organism-
43 response framework (Jacoby, 2002; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), this research seeks to examine
44 how the commercial orientation of influencer-created content influences the pre-purchase
45 behaviour of followers by answering the following research questions:
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51 (a). How does the commercial orientation of influencer-created content influence follower
52 willingness to search for product-related information?
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3 (b). Do trustworthiness towards the influencer and perceived credibility of the influencer-created
4 content mediate the relationship between the commercial orientation of influencer-created content
5 and follower willingness to search for product-related information?
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10 Influencer marketing via Instagram has become a primary vehicle for branded content
11 (Haenlein *et al.*, 2020; Sashittal and Jassawalla, 2020) and is selected as the research context of
12 this study. Although Instagram has emerged as the most popular outlet for promoting brand-
13 related posts by sponsoring social media influencers (Jin and Ryu, 2020; Pozharliev *et al.*, 2022),
14 such sponsorships give a commercial orientation to Instagram posts and cast doubts in the
15 customers' minds concerning the trustworthiness of influencers' opinions (Boerman and Müller,
16 2022). Except for Jin *et al.* (2019) and Martínez-López *et al.* (2020), there exists a paucity of
17 research examining the effects of sponsorship disclosure on trustworthiness towards the influencer
18 within the context of visual-based social media platforms.
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30 This study makes several significant contributions to the existing literature on influencer
31 marketing. First, based on the improved version of the stimulus-organism-response framework
32 proposed by Jacoby (2002), the research demonstrates the underlying process through which the
33 commercial orientation of content shared by social media influencers affects follower search for
34 product-related information, through the mediating links of trustworthiness towards the influencer
35 and credibility of the social media post. By doing so, the study responds to Vrontis *et al.*'s (2021)
36 call for researchers to examine variables that may act as mediators between social media
37 influencers and desired outcomes, such as pre-purchase and purchase behaviour. The study also
38 responds to Djafarova and Bowe's (2021) call for research to explore the applicability of the
39 stimulus-organism-response framework to examine consumer behavioural responses to different
40 promotional activities endorsed by social media influencers.
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3 The second contribution of this research is methodological. The study explicitly tests the
4 relationship between the commercial orientation of Instagram posts and pre-purchase behaviour
5 by using the double mediation analysis introduced by Hayes (2012). In doing so, the research
6 provides a deeper understanding of how commercial orientation of Instagram posts impacts pre-
7 purchase behaviour through double mediating effects of trustworthiness towards the influencer
8 and perceived credibility of the Instagram post.
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17 The remainder of this paper unfolds as follows. First, it presents the conceptual
18 background, followed by the proposed research model and hypotheses. Next, it discusses the
19 research methodology followed by the study's findings. Finally, it discusses theoretical and
20 practical implications, limitations of the study, and future research directions.
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28 **LITERATURE REVIEW**

29 *Influencer Marketing, Social Media Influencers, and Celebrities*

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31 There is no rigorous theoretical body of literature and a lack of a universally agreed-upon definition
32 for influencer marketing (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021; Ye *et al.*, 2021). Numerous scholars have defined
33 the concept in prior literature from several standpoints (Enke and Borchers, 2019). The most often
34 cited definition of influencer marketing is from Carter (2016), who defined influencer marketing
35 as a “*rapidly growing industry that attempts to promote products or increase brand awareness*
36 *through content spread by social media users who are considered to be influential*” (p.2). This
37 definition implies that influencer marketing and social media concepts are inherently interlinked.
38 Influencers need the exposure provided by social media platforms to get notoriety, and those
39 platforms achieve at least part of their appeal through the content posted by influencers active on
40 them.
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3 Since the influencer marketing literature is still at a nascent stage and is heavily based on
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5 celebrity endorsement literature (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021; Ye *et al.*, 2021), it is important to understand
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7 the intersection between “*social media influencers*” and “*celebrities*”. Unlike celebrities, “*social*
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9 *media influencers*” are ordinary individuals who have amassed many followers on social media
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11 platforms by posting visually attractive content that showcases their lifestyle and purchase patterns
12
13 (Enke and Borchers, 2019). The most often cited definition of “*social media influencer*” is from
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15 De Veirman *et al.* (2017, p. 798), who defined social media influencers as “*people who built a*
16
17 *large network of followers and are considered as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches.*”
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19 As implied in this definition, social media influencers are content generators who have built a
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21 network of followers via the valued content they share on social media and are considered credible
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23 sources of information. Adopting De Veirman *et al.* (2017), this paper defines social media
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25 influencers as social media users who use Instagram to create and disseminate content within their
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27 area of expertise to amass and maintain an engaged audience.
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33 **Influencer marketing literature has delineated a fine line between social media influencers**
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35 **and celebrities regarding the content and source of the message they convey (Lou and Kim, 2019).**
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38 It is argued that social media influencers are those who constantly create useful content to attract
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40 a following via interactive social media platforms, whereas celebrities who are famous for their
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42 theatrical talents (e.g., acting, singing, or sports) often have gained fame through conventional
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44 mass media, such as TV and radio (Cocker *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, some argue that social media
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46 influencers are regarded as more credible than celebrities in terms of influencing followers’
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48 purchasing behaviour, because the former define themselves as ordinary people with a passion for
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50 life, and their product reviews are considered more authentic and relatable by their followers
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52 (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). However, today, many social media influencers have become
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3 “celebrities” in their own right. Although they may not be the traditional musician or actor
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5 celebrity, their huge fandom has brought them all the trappings of celebrity, such as fame, money,
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7 and power. Consequently, some scholars have used the term “microcelebrities” to denote “social
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9 media influencers” (Appel *et al.*, 2020). This has made popular brands and companies sponsor
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11 the content created by social media influencers in recent times (Kim and Kim, 2021; Lee and Kim,
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13 2020).
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19 *Social Media Influencers and Instagram*

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21 Amidst the various social media platforms available today, Instagram has become the most
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23 favoured among social media influencers due to its visual aesthetic and presentation modality (De
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25 Veirman *et al.*, 2017; Pozharliev *et al.*, 2022). Social media influencers have begun to incorporate
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27 a more extensive portrayal of their experience with brands via Instagram to inspire followers and
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29 stimulate their purchase behaviour (Enke and Borchers, 2019). Consequently, companies use
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31 Instagram as a venue to popularise their brands by sponsoring social media influencers to post
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33 brand-related content (Kim and Kim, 2021; Lee and Kim, 2020).
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38 Most Instagram users are female who belong to Generation Z. Generation Z, comprised of
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40 people born between 1995 and the early 2010s (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021), is the first generation
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42 to have grown up surrounded by digital communication media. They give more weight to the
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44 content shared on social media than any other age group, and they spend at least five times a day
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46 reading, liking, and sharing content published on Instagram (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).
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Research Gap

Existing research on influencer marketing has encapsulated several topics. One stream of research has focused on identifying appropriate social media influencers with the right traits to promote brands (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017; Wiedmann and von Mettenheim, 2021). The second stream of research has focused on the adverse effects of sponsorship disclosure and commercial orientations of the content created by social media influencers (Lee and Kim, 2020; Kim and Kim, 2021). The third stream of research has investigated how influencer marketing influences positive attitudes and customer behaviours (Jin *et al.*, 2019). The attractiveness of content and its relevance to followers play a pivotal role in increasing trust in an influencer's post (Lou and Yuan, 2019). As such, although the effects of the credibility of the influencer's message in forming the followers' attitudes and buying intentions have been analyzed in the influencer marketing literature (e.g., Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Taillon *et al.*, 2020), the effects on pre-purchase aspects, such as interest in the message that might stimulate consumers to start a product-related search process, have been largely ignored (Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020).

Pre-purchase information search is one of the most widely investigated topics in consumer behaviour research. Before purchasing, consumers often search for information about the product to reduce the perceived risks associated with purchasing a product/ service (van Rijnsoever *et al.*, 2012). The literature identifies two types of information search: internal and external (van Rijnsoever *et al.*, 2012). The internal search consists of internal memory scans by the consumer for information relevant to a purchase decision. External search refers to consulting external information sources related to the specific purchase under consideration (Kiel and Layton, 1981). Prior literature discerns three main categories of external information sources that can be consulted: interpersonal channels, mass media, and retailers (Kiel and Layton, 1981). Interpersonal

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3 channels (also referred to as word-of-mouth) are defined as “*informal communications directed at*
4 *other consumers about ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services*
5 *and/or their sellers*” (De Matos and Rossi, 2008, p. 578). Mass media are information sources that
6
7 target a broad audience and often contain more technical information than interpersonal channels
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9 (Kiel and Layton, 1981). In contrast, retailers advise consumers as part of their services offered,
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11 and usually, consumers engage in retailer search once they decide upon the products to purchase
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13 (Smith *et al.*, 2021). Prior literature indicates that consumers primarily rely on interpersonal
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15 communication (word-of-mouth) when searching for information as they are easy to access, and
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17 the information drawn from them is considered reliable (van Rijnsoever *et al.*, 2012). The
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19 emergence of the Internet and social media has replaced traditional word-of-mouth with electronic
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21 word-of-mouth (Gamage *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, the social media context allows customers
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23 to control the pre-purchase information search stage, explicitly referring to the content shared by
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25 social media influencers (Boyd *et al.*, 2014; Sharma *et al.*, 2022).
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35 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

36 *Stimulus-organism-response Paradigm*

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38 According to the *stimulus-organism-response paradigm*, humans generate cognitive and emotional
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40 states after being exposed to specific stimuli that lead them to conduct (or not) certain behaviours
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42 (Jacoby, 2002; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Stimuli are the distinct elements that elicit
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44 organismic reactions in individuals (Chang and Thorson, 2004; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982).
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46 When the stimuli are processed by an organism, certain perceptions, and evaluations (i.e.,
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48 cognitive and affective) are generated (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Cognitive states are
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50 characterised as the users’ mental reactions concerning the acquisition, processing, retention, and
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3 retrieval of stimuli (Jacoby, 2002). Affective states are emotions elicited after being exposed to
4 stimuli (Jacoby, 2002). Finally, responses result from organismic reactions to stimuli, i.e., the
5 individual's approach or avoidance behaviours (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982)). When exposed to
6 stimuli, approach behaviour relates to positive activities, whereas avoidance behaviour relates to
7 inaction/evasive action (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). However, several behavioural scholars
8 (e.g., Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Foxall, 2002) have criticized the stimulus-organism-response paradigm
9 suggesting that the distinct elements within it are tightly coupled rather than linear and may even
10 be recursive. Consequently, Jacoby (2022) proposed an alternative view by exploring the
11 interrelationships among the elements of the conventional S-O-R paradigm.
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24 The stimulus-organism-response paradigm has been extensively used to study consumer
25 behaviour over many years (Casaló, *et al.*, 2020). More specifically, many researchers have widely
26 applied this framework to investigate how brand-related content on social media triggers particular
27 consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (e.g., Casaló *et al.*, 2020; Djafarova and Bowes,
28 2021). Recently, a study by Djafarova and Bowes (2021) utilised the conventional stimulus-
29 organism-response paradigm to explore how influencer marketing via Instagram can trigger
30 consumer impulse purchasing behaviour within the fashion industry. These researchers argued that
31 further research is needed using this framework to explore how consumers respond to different
32 promotional activities endorsed by social media influencers. However, to date, no study in the
33 influencer marketing literature has used Jacoby's view of the stimulus-organism-response
34 framework to investigate how the content shared by social media influencers impacts customers'
35 pre-purchase behaviour. This paper attempts to fill this void by proposing a conceptual model
36 delineating the link between the commercial orientation of an Instagram post and followers'
37 willingness to search for information using two mediators, as shown in Figure 1.
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Figure 1 should place here

As shown in Figure 1, in the context of Instagram, online stimuli are the audio-visual content created and shared by social media influencers on their profiles. Follower trustworthiness towards the influencer and the perceived credibility of the Instagram post represent the organismic reactions of followers. Follower willingness to search for more product-related information represents the response behaviour.

Commercial Orientation of the Instagram Post and Trustworthiness towards the Influencer

Many studies on celebrity endorsement emphasise the vital role of trust in conveying the message (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2020; Lou and Youn, 2019). In the celebrity endorsement context, trustworthiness towards the celebrity is often described as the extent to which the audience views the celebrity to be capable of conveying a feeling of integrity, honesty, and credibility through the message generated via a marketing medium (Hussain *et al.*, 2020; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018). Moreover, current literature suggests that trustworthiness towards the celebrity is linked to a more positive attitude towards the message shared (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018). As influencers are considered similar to ordinary people (Cocker *et al.*, 2021; Lou and Yuon, 2017), followers feel they are more relatable than conventional celebrity figures (Boerman and Müller, 2022), thus believing they share their honest opinions about brands and make recommendations. Accordingly, this study defines trustworthiness towards the influencer as the extent to how honest, reliable, and dependable the influencer is perceived.

Social media allows followers to control the information search process by filtering and searching information about products and brands they desire (Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020;

Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017). However, contrary to customers' expectations, many companies today provide social media influencers with content to share, specifying images, hashtags, timing, and keywords. In doing so, they fail to consider the voice and viewpoints of the influencer (Kim and Kim, 2021; Lee and Kim, 2020). However, if a brand/ company is perceived to be behind an influencer's message, followers' responses to any attempt at persuasion for commercial purposes will be negative (Boerman and Müller, 2022; Wellman *et al.*, 2020). It is known that influencers willingly post messages for commercial purposes if paid to do so; consumers, on the other hand, perceive these actions negatively (Martínez-Lópe *et al.*, 2020; Zhou *et al.*, 2021). They expect influencers to show a certain degree of integrity and ethical perspective in their posts and only recommend and comment on authentic and trustworthy brands that they honestly believe to be of interest to their followers (Martínez-Lópe *et al.*, 2020; Zhou *et al.*, 2021). This leads to the first hypothesis.

H1: The commercial orientation of the social media influencer's Instagram post negatively influences the trustworthiness that followers have towards the influencer

Commercial Orientation of the Instagram Post and Perceived Credibility

The effect of the perceived credibility of marketing communication efforts on customers' decision-making process has received a great deal of attention in the marketing literature (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2020; Xie and Feng, 2022). The perceived credibility of a message is described as the extent to which customers believe the message's source is independent, authentic, and fact-based (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2020). As implied, the perceived credibility of a message is related to an individual's perception of the trustworthiness of the message source (Umeogu, 2012; Xie and Feng, 2022).

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3 Followers view social media influencers as independent reviewers who provide sincere and
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5 genuine opinions about products and brands (Vrontis *et al.*, 2021; Ye *et al.*, 2021). Because social
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7 media influencer postings are typically based on their everyday lives, followers tend to trust social
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9 media influencers as they perceive their content as authentic and more conducive than
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11 conventional marketing communication messages biased towards brands/companies (Lee and
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13 Kim, 2020). However, at the same time, followers expect social media influencers to demonstrate
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15 an acceptable level of honesty, integrity, and ethical mannerism while sharing their content
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17 (Woodroof *et al.*, 2020). Most customers want social media influencers to recommend only
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19 genuine and trustworthy brands they genuinely believe their followers will be interested in
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21 (Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020; Müller and Christandl, 2019).
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26 However, today, most companies attempt to control the content created by social media
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28 influencers through sponsorships to minimise the risk of their brand image being tarnished (Kim
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30 and Kim, 2021; Wellman *et al.*, 2020). However, suppose concealment of a commercial
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32 relationship between social media influencers and brands established through sponsorships is
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34 perceived. In that case, it may adversely affect the credibility of both the influencer and the
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36 message. This can happen when there is a mismatch between the content shared by social media
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38 influencers and the customers' interests (e.g., Lee and Kim, 2020) or when customers suspect an
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40 attempt is being made to infiltrate commercial intent into content shared by influencers (e.g.,
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42 Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020; Wellman *et al.*, 2020), which causes them to be skeptical of the
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44 content. When a clear commercial intent behind social media influencers' messages is discovered,
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46 it becomes less authentic and valued, ultimately influencing the perceived credibility of the
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48 message (Kim and Kim, 2021; Müller and Christandl, 2019; Stubb *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this
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50 paper hypothesises that:
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3 *H2: The commercial orientation of the Instagram post negatively influences the perceived*
4 *credibility of the post shared by the social media influencer*
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8 *Trustworthiness towards the Influencer and Perceived Credibility of the Instagram Post*

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10 According to the source-credibility model, the perceived trustworthiness of the sender is a critical
11 determinant of the credibility of the message as perceived by receivers (Lis, 2013). Thus, the
12 perceived credibility of a message (e.g., post) directly relates to its source (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2020).
13 More specifically, the perceived credibility of a message is heavily influenced by the recipient's
14 trust in the message's source and the message's ability to persuade its target audience (Wallace *et*
15 *al.*, 2020; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018).
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24 Prior literature uncovers three different classifications of trust levels relating to the
25 message's source (Gamage *et al.*, 2021; Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017). They identified that the
26 highest level of trust is associated with the content created by the personal circle of followers.
27 Followers generally trust and are convinced by the content shared by their personal circle (Varkaris
28 and Neuhofer, 2017) and find it more valuable and reliable, as it stems from the people they know
29 personally (Halliday, 2016). Moreover, the content originating from social media influencers is
30 identified as the second most trustworthy message source (Gamage *et al.*, 2021) as customers
31 consider them as real and relatable and trust that they always voice honest opinions (Gamage *et*
32 *al.*, 2021; Pop *et al.*, 2021). Concerning the source of the message, however, conventional
33 marketing communication efforts by companies were perceived as the least dependable as it is
34 commercially driven (Halliday, 2016; Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017). **Consequently, companies**
35 **have started using social media influencers trusted by the target audience to increase the credibility**
36 **and acceptance of the messages they share (Enke and Borchers, 2019; Xie and Feng, 2022).**
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54 **Therefore:**
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3 *H3: Follower trustworthiness towards the social media influencer positively influences the*
4 *perceived credibility of the post shared by the influencer*
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9 *Perceived Credibility of the Instagram Post and Willingness to Search for More Information*
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11 Social media influencers have a significant effect on how information is spread and how followers'
12 attitudes and behaviours are shaped (Luo and Yuon, 2019; Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017). This is
13 basically because customers' decision-making process today is largely affected by information
14 created and shared through social media (Enke and Borchers, 2019; Jin *et al.*, 2019).
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20 When making a purchase decision, every customer's initial step is to search for necessary
21 information, whether online or offline. Based on the information they found, they will compare
22 and contrast the alternatives available and then make the final product/ brand choice (Varkaris and
23 Neuhofer, 2017). This information search process is affected not only by personal characteristics
24 of the customers (e.g., previous experience, expertise) but also by situational (e.g., the context in
25 which the purchase decision is made) and external factors (e.g., marketing communication efforts
26 of companies) (Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2018). This has led companies to use
27 social media influencers widely accepted by the target audience to persuade followers to purchase
28 their brands (Jin *et al.*, 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019).
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41 On the other hand, customers might exercise passive control over the information search
42 process by dropping boring or unrelated information (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). As a result, social media
43 influencers today focus more on the credibility of the message they share to entice their followers
44 to search for more information and, ultimately, persuade them to buy the product (Cocker *et al.*,
45 2021; Stubb *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, social media influencers attempt to convince their followers
46 that they share authentic images and honest and genuine product reviews and recommendations
47 about the products, and through that, try to arouse the consumer's interest to initiate the purchase
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3 decision-making process by searching for more information (Stubb *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*,
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5 2018). Therefore, this paper hypothesises that:

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8 *H4: The perceived credibility of the post shared by the social media influencer positively relates*
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10 *to follower willingness to search for more information about the product mentioned in the*
11 *Instagram post*
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14 The final hypothesis tests for mediation, specifically double mediation. Based on the rationale of
15 the improved **stimulus-organism-response paradigm (Jacoby, 2002)**, this study proposes that the
16 commercial orientation of the Instagram post does not directly influence follower information
17 search but that trustworthiness towards the influencer and credibility of the Instagram post act as
18 double-mediators between these variables. Examination of the commercial orientation - follower
19 response relationship must consider the process of follower perceptions and evaluations.
20 Commercial orientation of the Instagram post should infer lower trustworthiness towards the
21 influencer **(Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020)**, and this will reduce the perceived credibility of the
22 Instagram post and encourage lower information search by the Instagram follower **(Stubb *et al.*,**
23 **2019)**. Based on this, it is hypothesised that:
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38 *H5. The negative relationship between commercial orientation of the Instagram post and follower*
39 *willingness to search for more information about the product mentioned in the Instagram is*
40 *sequentially double mediated by trustworthiness towards the influencer and credibility of the*
41 *Instagram post.*
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RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Sample

The study used a web-based survey questionnaire distributed to Instagram followers in Sri Lanka to test the proposed hypotheses. The study participants were female who belong to Generation Z, use Instagram for at least 2-5 hours per week, and follow at least one Instagram influencer related to the beauty care and cosmetics sector. Females are heavy users of Instagram, and Generation Z spend nearly 11 hours reading, liking, and sharing material shared on social media (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Female consumers are also highly involved with beauty and cosmetic product categories (Kittikowit *et al.*, 2018).

Before primary data collection, the questionnaire was pre-tested with three academic experts specialising in social media marketing to assess the wording and framing of the measurement scales. In addition, a pre-test was performed with ten female undergraduates to assess the clarity and understandability of questionnaire items.

Identifying the study participants was difficult due to the lack of a suitable sampling frame and the fact that Instagram is a relatively new phenomenon (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Therefore, a decision was made to select female university students aged between 18-25 as survey participants. The study utilised a combination of purposive and snowball sampling approaches in recruiting the study participants from female students attending a top-ranked state University in Sri Lanka. First, the participants had to answer two filtering questions about their Instagram use and influencer following habits. To help participants comprehend the task, following De Veirman *et al.*'s (2017), social media influencers were defined. These questions helped to filter unqualified participants. The qualified participants were then requested to fill the rest of the survey questions. Before qualified participants answered the survey questions, they were provided with a definition

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3 of the commercial orientation of an Instagram post following Martínez-Lópe *et al.* (2020).
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5 Moreover, the respondents were provided with some examples, such as paid partnership posts.
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7 Respondents were then instructed to view a specific Instagram post with an image of a body lotion
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9 (Refer to Appendix A). When answering survey questions, the respondents were asked to read the
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11 post, including text, and hashtags, in addition to considering the image.
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15 The post was obtained from the account of a real Instagrammer, a micro-influencer who
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17 shares and comments on content related to beauty care and cosmetics products. However, the
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19 decision was made to omit the identity of the Instagrammer to ensure the credibility of the post.
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21 Once the post was seen, the respondents answered the questionnaire, starting with questions related
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23 to their demographic profiles. The survey took approximately 7 minutes to complete.
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27 The study yielded 451 completed surveys for hypothesis testing. As shown in Table I, just
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29 over 90% of those who responded said they were pursuing a bachelor's degree, with most aged
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31 between 20 and 22 years of age (83%). Just under 85% were full-time students.
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33 Table I should place here
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38 *Measurement Development*

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40 The commercial orientation of the Instagram post was measured by using Boles *et al.*'s (2001) 5-
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42 item scale, which was adapted from the selling orientation-customer orientation (SOCO) scale
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44 initially developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982). This same scale was also used by Martínez-López
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46 *et al.* (2020) to assess the commercial orientation of Instagram posts. Trustworthiness toward the
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48 influencer was measured using a 3-item scale recently used by Martinez-Lopez *et al.* (2020), which
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50 was initially proposed by Ohanian (1990) to measure the trustworthiness of celebrity endorsers.
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52 The differential semantic scale initially proposed by Chang and Thorson (2004) was used to
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3 measure the perceived credibility of the Instagram post. The same scale was adapted by Lim *et al.*
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5 (2015) to measure the message credibility. Finally, a 3-item scale used by Wei and Lu (2013) was
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7 used to measure the willingness to search for more information related to the posted product.
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10 Except for the perceived credibility of the post scale, all constructs were measured using a 7-point
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12 Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.
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15 Socio-demographic attributes of the respondents, such as age and income level, were
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17 employed as measurement controls. Age was treated as a ratio measure, while income level was
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19 recorded on an ordinal scale.
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24 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

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26 All perceptual measures were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (principal components)
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28 with oblique rotation. This analysis generated a 4-factor solution based on the eigenvalue and
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30 scree test criteria. Together, these factors collectively explained 73.9% of the variance in item
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32 scores. The first factor explained 37.3% of the variance, suggesting that common method bias
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34 may not be a problem (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The study employed a full collinearity approach
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36 to assessing common method bias (Kock, 2015). At the factor level, the VIF values were less than
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38 3.3, suggesting that the conceptual model is unlikely to be contaminated by common method bias.
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43 Items representing the commercial orientation of the Instagram post, trustworthiness
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45 towards the social media influencer, perceived credibility of the Instagram post, and willingness
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47 to search for more information converged on their respective separate factors. Appendix B
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49 presents the scale items and the internal consistency reliabilities (coefficient α) of the measures.
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51 Reliabilities ranged from .87 to .92 and exceeded the .70 benchmark suggested by Nunnally
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(1978). Table II provides the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the variables used in the study.

Table II should place here

Measurement Model Results

The sample covariance matrix was used as input to AMOS 27 to test the research model. With the exception of one item (item 2 measuring the commercial orientation of the Instagram post), all items exhibited a significant loading on their designated factor. The size of the standardised loadings ranged from .58 to .91, and all t-values were significant at $<.001$. With a standardised loading of .58, item 2 was dropped from subsequent analysis. In the revised model, there was good model fit X^2 ($df = 59$, $N = 451$) = 143.611, $p < 0.00$, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .056, PCLOSE = .174, GFI = 0.95. After examining the standard residual covariance, item 5 measuring commercial orientation of the Instagram post was also deleted. Model fit could not be improved with further item deletion. Fit statistics were: X^2 ($df = 47$, $N = 451$) = 117.680, $p < 0.00$, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .058, PCLOSE = .154, GFI = 0.96. The model explained 23% of the variance in trustworthiness, 64% in credibility, and 29% in information search.

Convergent validity was demonstrated by AVE $>.50$ (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and composite reliability $>.70$ (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994) for all model constructs (see Table III). AVE scores were also compared with the squared correlations among constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) to test discriminant validity. As shown in Table III, discriminant validity was established. The study also employed the procedure detailed by Bagozzi and Heatherton (1994), examining the confidence interval surrounding the correlation between constructs. The highest correlation was between trustworthiness towards the influencer and credibility of the Instagram

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3 post (.72). The associated confidence interval ranged from .67 to .76. Given that the correlation
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5 plus or minus two standard errors do not include one, discriminant validity was supported for all
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7 factor pairs.
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10 Table III should place here
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12 *Hypotheses Testing*

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14 As shown in Figure 2, all hypothesised relationships are statistically significant. The commercial
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16 orientation of the Instagram post has a significant negative effect on trustworthiness towards the
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18 influencer ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .001$), thus supporting H1. Commercial orientation of the post also has a
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20 significant negative effect on the credibility of the Instagram post ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$), thus supporting
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22 H2. Trustworthiness has a significant positive effect on the perceived credibility of the Instagram
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24 post ($\beta = .67$, $p < .001$). H3 is therefore supported. Finally, the perceived credibility of the Instagram
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26 post has a positive effect on the willingness to search for more information ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$), thus
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28 supporting H4.
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33 Control variables did not affect the hypothesised relationships, and they showed no
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35 significant influence on the model constructs.
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38 Figure 2 should place here
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42 In addition to the direct effects reported above, the study tested for mediation effects in the final
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44 hypothesis. Table IV provides estimates of the indirect effects using 95% bias-corrected
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46 bootstrapped confidence intervals for the path estimates. The study followed the recommendations
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48 of Zhao *et al.* (2010) and Preacher and Hayes (2004), using Model 6 to test for mediation. Results
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50 of the mediation analysis confirm the sequencing of both trustworthiness towards the influencer
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52 and credibility of the Instagram post as mediators in the relationship between commercial
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orientation of the Instagram post and willingness to search for more information related to the posted product. Significance is suggested if the confidence interval (CI) does not contain zero (Preacher and Hayes, 2004). As shown in Table IV, all of the CIs for the indirect effects are significant except for the commercial orientation of the Instagram post → trustworthiness towards the influencer → willingness to search for more information path. The direct effects of both commercial orientation of the Instagram post ($\beta=-.01$, $p>.05$) and trustworthiness towards the Influencer ($\beta=.07$, $p>.05$) on the willingness to search for more information related to the posted product are not significant. These non-significant direct effects and the significant indirect effects shown in Table IV suggest full mediation (Zhao *et al.*, 2010) and highlight the importance of a double-mediated relationship between commercial orientation of the Instagram post and willingness to search for more information related to the posted product through trustworthiness towards the Influencer and credibility of the Instagram post. Hypothesis 5 is therefore supported. The total indirect effect of commercial orientation of the Instagram post on willingness to search for more information related to the posted product is negative and significant ($\beta=-.26$, $p<.05$). Out of which 11% indirect effect is due to credibility of the Instagram post and 12% of the mediated relationship is due to trustworthiness towards the influencer and credibility of the Instagram post as combined mediators.

Table IV should place here

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Companies leverage social media influencers to stimulate customers' purchase decision-making process (Alalwan *et al.*, 2017; Appel *et al.*, 2020). However, despite the increasing popularity of influencer marketing in recent years (e.g., Haenlein *et al.*, 2020; Xie and Feng, 2022), little

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3 scholarly attention has been paid to understanding how posts shared by social media influencers
4 create trustworthiness towards them and trigger followers' pre-purchase behaviour. The objective
5 of the current study is to understand how content created by social media influencers stimulates
6 customers' pre-purchase behaviour, particularly the willingness of followers to search for product-
7 related information. Study findings from 451 frequent female Instagram users show significant
8 direct relationships between constructs in the study's conceptual model. Specifically, the
9 commercial orientation of Instagram posts created by social media influencers reduces follower
10 trustworthiness towards them. Trustworthiness towards the influencer has a positive effect on the
11 perceived credibility of the Instagram post, and perceived credibility has a positive effect on the
12 willingness to search for more product-related information (pre-purchase behaviour). In addition,
13 the double mediation analysis demonstrates the underlying mechanism by which the commercial
14 orientation of the Instagram post negatively impacts the pre-purchase behaviour of followers
15 through trustworthiness towards the Influencer and credibility of the Instagram post. The
16 commercial orientation of Instagram posts created by social media influencers reduces follower
17 trustworthiness towards them and this has a negative impact on the perceived credibility of the
18 post, which reduces follower willingness to search for product-related information.

41 42 *Implications for Theory*

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44 Theoretically, study findings extend previous literature on influencer marketing in several
45 important ways. Despite the growing popularity of influencer marketing, research on the subject
46 is still in its infancy (Jin *et al.*, 2019; Kim and Kim, 2021), with the majority of studies focusing
47 on traits of social media influencers (e.g., De Veirman *et al.*, 2017; Lou and Yuan, 2019; Martínez-
48 López *et al.*, 2020). The underlying mechanisms required to make influencer marketing more

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3 compelling and persuasive have yet to be fully understood in the influencer marketing literature
4 (Martínez-López *et al.*, 2020; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). For instance, the right selection of social media
5 influencers and proper content management affect the creation of emotional bonds with customers
6 (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Müller and Christandl, 2019). At the same time, social media influencers
7 may benefit from knowing the consequences of their posts so that they can adjust content and make
8 it more convincing to the target audience (Halliday, 2016; Wallace *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, the
9 trustworthiness followers place on social media influencers and the perceived credibility of the
10 message are considered vital aspects of influencer marketing success. However, to date, these
11 mediators have not been integrated into studies of influencer marketing (Taylor, 2020; Vrontis *et*
12 *al.*, 2021).

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26 Grounded in the improved version of the stimulus-organism-response paradigm as
27 proposed by Jacoby (2002), the study addresses this gap and contributes to emerging research
28 streams on influencer marketing by explaining the mechanisms by which the content created by
29 social media influencers affects customers' pre-purchasing behaviour. More specifically, the study
30 examines the relationship between the commercial orientation of content created by social media
31 influencers and follower willingness to search for product-related information. By doing so, the
32 study responds to Vrontis *et al.*'s (2021) call for further research to adopt the stimulus-organism-
33 response framework to better understand the relationship between social media influencers and the
34 messages they share and followers' pre-purchase behaviour. The study also makes a significant
35 methodological contribution to the existing literature by examining the double mediating effects
36 of trustworthiness towards the influencer and the perceived credibility of the Instagram post.
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Managerial Implications

Social media has created an interactive environment allowing extensive interactions and direct customer engagements, fostering more creative, informal relationships. However, followers have become more skeptical about the commercial intent behind the content created by social media influencers mainly because they are aware that companies use different types of sponsorship compensation such as cash, coupons, or free samples to induce social media influencers to promote and review their products (Stubb *et al.*, 2019; Boerman and Müller, 2022). In line with Stubb *et al.* (2019), the findings of this study indicate that followers penalise posts created by social media influencers with commercial intent, which might consequently have a negative impact on their reactions to such posts. They regard such posts as dishonest and doubtful, probably because they perceive that the social media influencer does not follow their beliefs but instead prioritises economic gains. In such circumstances where social media influencers receive compensation to write a post or review a product or brand, it must be clearly disclosed to protect customers from unfair and deceptive practices in the marketplace and help them make sound evaluations of influencer-created content. More specifically, by including sponsorship compensation justification disclosure in sponsored content explaining what such content entails for all parties involved, social media influencers' can improve customers' credibility assessment regarding sponsored content.

The findings also suggest that customers are persuaded by content created by social media influencers if they are perceived to have lower commercial intent. As such, marketing practitioners should not influence social media influencers to commercialise every post. This does not mean that influencer marketing should wholly avoid framing commercial messages intended toward consumers, such as product/service features and purchase options. But it does indicate that social media influencers should know their audience (Müller and Christandl, 2019), suggesting that

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3 marketing practitioners must give them the freedom to generate creative content of interest freely
4 and naturally, thus avoiding conventional celebrity endorsement formulae. Audiences follow
5 social media influencers and believe their messages because of this creativity. Accordingly,
6 influencers should have the freedom to create content that is most suitable to the profile of the
7 brand's target audience. Companies must facilitate social media influencers to improve interactions
8 with audience inquiries by providing extensive information about their brands, products, and
9 services.

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19 Third, social media influencers should know the correct type of content their audience
20 wants (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Müller and Christandl, 2019) so that they can foster more interactive
21 engagement with their audience in the form of comments, likes, and shares. When selecting social
22 media influencers to be sponsored, marketing practitioners should pay less attention to influencers
23 with a significant follower base. Instead, they need to focus more on the intensity of social media
24 followers' level of engagement with their target audience.

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33 Followers view sponsored posts as more credible when social media influencers deliver
34 genuine and authentic content instead of merely promoting products/services (Müller and
35 Christandl, 2019; Stubb *et al.*, 2019). In such circumstances, when social media influencers offer
36 genuine and unbiased content about products/services, their followers will commence an
37 information search process because they trust the influencer and perceive the credibility of the post
38 in a positive light. As a result, social media influencers can boost follower pre-purchase behaviour,
39 creating interest and brand awareness. Companies can aid customers' pre-purchase behaviour by
40 offering relevant links to social media influencers and requesting them to share these links in their
41 content with their followers.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with every research, this study also has limitations that need to be addressed. First, non-probability sampling was used to select the study participants, mainly females from Generation Z, in a single country context (i.e., Sri Lanka). Although females who belong to Generation Z are highly active on Instagram (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017), with 61.2 % of the selected sample following at least one social media influencer daily, future research may enhance the validity and reliability of the study's findings by utilising a random sample representative of all Instagram users in cross-country contexts.

Second, future research could include other variables such as social media influencer's personality or persuasive power, prior attitude towards the brand and see how such variables broaden the scope of the proposed theoretical model. Third, it is important to acknowledge that other social media platforms have distinct features and personalities. For example, future research could expand influencer marketing research to TikTok which is now used widely by Generation Z. Future research could also consider cross-platform comparisons to validate the conceptual model in this study. Fourth, while the beauty care and cosmetics sector is the most appropriate for performing influencer marketing activities (Kittikowit *et al.*, 2018), future research could examine social media influencers who engage in other industries (e.g., fashion, lifestyle, cuisine) to enhance the generalisability of findings. Fifth, it would be interesting to compare distinct aspects of the Instagram post such as image versus text. Finally, the cross-sectional research design precludes causal inferences. To overcome this issue, future research may employ an experimental or longitudinal design to corroborate causal directions. For example, future research could collect data about the commercial orientation of the Instagram post at time 1, trustworthiness towards the influencer and credibility of the Instagram post at time 2, and finally, willingness to search for

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more information at time 3. Such a cross-lagged panel analysis would allow a more precise understanding of relationships between constructs.

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Appendix A. The Instagram post shown to the respondents



Appendix B. Measures of model constructs and scale reliabilities

Commercial Orientation of the Instagram Post ($\alpha=.88$) [Adapted from Saxe and Weitz (1982), Boles et al. (2001) and Martínez-López et al. (2020)]

1. The influencer's post tries to sell rather than inform
2. The influencer's post presses to buy the product/service#*
3. The influencer's post tries to convince for the purchase, not to satisfy the information needs of the followers
4. The influencer's post focuses on persuading followers to buy instead of their true informational interests
5. The post of the influencer makeup the truth when describing the product/service*

Trustworthiness towards the Influencer ($\alpha=.91$) [Adapted from Ohanian (1990) and Martinez-Lopez et al. (2020)]

1. You can trust this influencer
2. The influencer is honest
3. The influencer is reliable

Perceived Credibility of the Instagram Post ($\alpha=.92$) [Adapted from Chang and Thorson (2004) and Lim et al. (2015)]

1. Not reliable/Reliable
2. Not credible/credible
3. Not believable/believable

Willingness to Search for more Information related to the Posted Product ($\alpha=.87$) [Adapted from Wei and Lu (2013)]

1. I think I would look for information about the product sponsored in this post
2. I think I would seek recommendations from other users about the product sponsored in this post
3. I think I would compare prices on the product sponsored in this post

Note: * items dropped in measurement model evaluation due to insignificant factor loadings

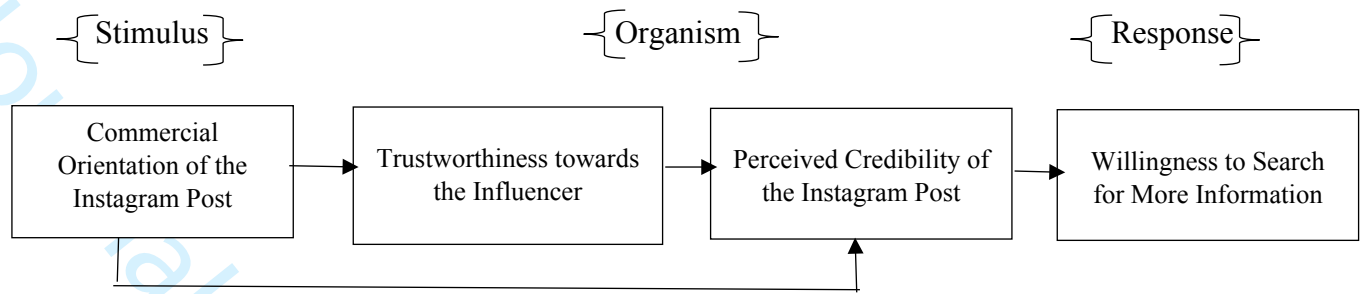


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

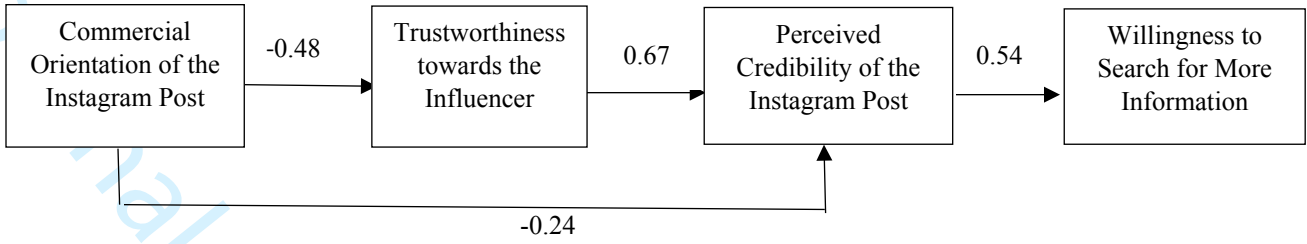


Figure 2: Results: Standardised Path Coefficients

Note: all coefficients significant at $p < 0.001$

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Table I: Sample Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
- Female	451	100
Age		
- 18	19	4.2
- 19	14	3.1
- 20	170	37.7
- 21	131	29.0
- 22	72	16.0
- 23	35	7.8
- 24	10	2.2
Level of education		
- Vocational/ professional qualifications	31	6.9
- Undergraduate	413	91.5
- Graduate	7	1.6
Employment category		
- Self employed	11	2.4
- Non-managerial level employee	57	12.7
- Student	383	84.9
Monthly income (in LKR)		
- No income	383	84.9
- Less than 25,000	45	10.0
- 25,000 to less than 50,000	15	3.3
- 50,000 to less than 75,000	6	1.4
- 75,000 to less than 100,000	2	0.4

Table II: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation among Constructs

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Commercial Orientation of Instagram post	1.00					
2. Trustworthiness towards the Influencer	-.45	1.00				
3. Perceived credibility of the Instagram post	-.52	.72	1.00			
4. Willingness to search for more information	-.26	.39	.49	1.00		
5. Age	-.01	.04	-.00	-.03	1.00	
6. Income	-.07	.06	.05	.01	.02	1.00
<i>Mean</i>	4.58	3.77	3.75	4.78	20.82	1.37
<i>SD</i>	1.36	1.24	1.36	1.42	1.22	0.90

Notes. *SD* = Standard Deviation. The bold numbers on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted. Off-diagonal elements are correlations among constructs. With the exception of control variables, all correlations are significant at the .01 level.

Table III: Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Commercial orientation of Instagram post	0.92 <u>0.69</u>			
2. Trustworthiness towards the Influencer	0.68 (0.24)	0.91 <u>0.78</u>		
3. Perceived credibility of the Instagram post	0.64 (0.33)	0.58 (0.60)	0.92 <u>0.78</u>	
4. Willingness to search for more information	0.73 (0.10)	0.57 (0.17)	0.50 (0.28)	0.86 <u>0.68</u>

Note. Values in brackets are squared correlations, values in bold are Composite Reliability, values underlined are Average Variance Extracted.

Table IV: Indirect Effects using Bootstrapping

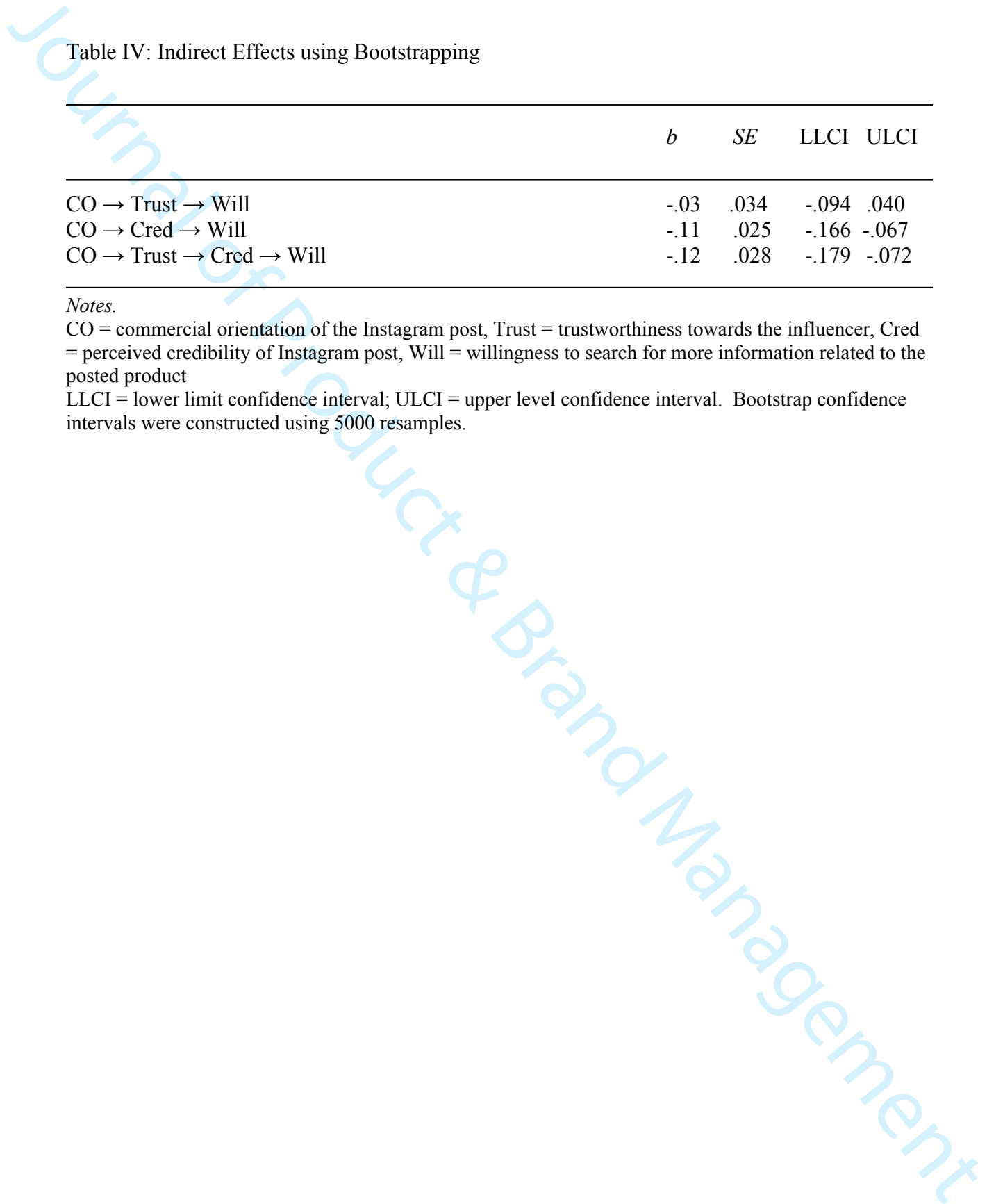
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI
CO → Trust → Will	-.03	.034	-.094	.040
CO → Cred → Will	-.11	.025	-.166	-.067
CO → Trust → Cred → Will	-.12	.028	-.179	-.072

Notes.

CO = commercial orientation of the Instagram post, Trust = trustworthiness towards the influencer, Cred = perceived credibility of Instagram post, Will = willingness to search for more information related to the posted product

LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper level confidence interval. Bootstrap confidence intervals were constructed using 5000 resamples.

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Response to Editor and Reviewer Comments

Comments	Our Response
Editor's Comments	
<p>I carefully read the reviewers comments and I looked at the submission. My comments have as follows:</p>	<p>We thank the Editor for the opportunity to revise the manuscript. We agree that the constructive reviews have provided an excellent roadmap to improve the paper. We would also like to thank the three reviewers for their insightful recommendations to strengthen the paper's novelty, positioning, and readability. We have carefully considered each point, and we trust that the revisions are acceptable so that the manuscript can be considered for publication in the <i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>.</p> <p>Additional and revised commentary is highlighted in yellow throughout the manuscript.</p>
<p>The reviewers have recommended publication, but also suggest some minor revisions to your manuscript. In particular Reviewer 3 comments on the expression used that affects the generalisability of these findings, and I think that it will be very useful to consider this comment and amend the text.</p>	<p>We thank the Editor for this constructive comment. Reviewer three recommended that the academic contribution of this paper be strengthened. The theoretical contribution of our paper is highlighted and discussed on page 5 of the manuscript, and in the sub-section "Implications for Theory" on pages 24 and 25.</p>
<p>At places there is no support from the literature. As an example, look at the total lack of theoretical support for H5.</p>	<p>Thank you very much for this feedback. Accordingly, in the revised manuscript, we draw upon additional literature to support the theoretical foundation for H5.</p>
<p>The writing needs revisiting at places. Please make sure that each paragraph clearly contributes in the storyline and this is clear in its topic sentence. Having paragraphs starting with statements such as "Lou and Kim (2019) have delineated..." is not helpful, since this is author-based argumentation that does not explain how this paragraph fits in this work's storyline.</p>	<p>We thank the Editor for this constructive feedback. We have made changes in the manuscript so that the argumentation is more idea/construct/argument based.</p>
<p>As already highlighted in the example in the previous point, a lot of the argumentation is author based (i.e. According to author X..), rather than idea/construct/argument based, making the conceptual development look</p>	<p>See response above.</p>

<p>more like an annotated bibliography rather than a critical and engaging literature review. Please remove this kind of argumentation as much as possible and make sure that the storyline is supported fully from the text. Providing text that does not clearly support the arguments for this PARTICULAR piece is not helpful.</p>	
<p>Some paragraphs are not self-contained - for example they start with statements such as "As noted above..." or "As implied above...".</p>	<p>Thank you for this feedback. We have made structural changes to the revised manuscript by removing statements such as "As noted above..." or "As implied above...", thus ensuring that the paragraphs are self-contained.</p>
<p>I can see the proof of consent in the submission and thank you for providing it. Does this consent also cover the photograph content? If the photograph is not public then there might be a problem.</p>	<p>Thank you for seeking clarification on this issue. The written consent obtained from Instagrammer covers the photograph's content and its caption (including the hashtags) used in the manuscript. Further, the Instagram post we have used in the study is a publicly available photograph.</p>
<p>You need to report the references in a consistent manner. At this point some references have the doi address and others do not.</p>	<p>Thank you for this comment. We have carefully revised the reference list to ensure consistency as much as possible.</p>
<p>Make sure that all abbreviations are removed - for example in "CO → Trust → Will" what CO means?</p>	<p>We thank the Editor for this comment. Accordingly, all abbreviations have been removed from the revised manuscript.</p>
<p>The manuscript is longer than 12,000 words, that is the Journal's maximum word limit. In particular, the manuscript has 11,700 words in the body and 8 tables and figures (and 1 photograph in the appendix). According to the submission information, each table and figure counts for 520 words, and they all in total count 4,000 words. The final result is that this manuscript is in total about 15,700 words, that is 30% higher than the maximum allowed limit. Please edit the manuscript keeping in mind the maximum word limit.</p>	<p>In light of the changes made, the manuscript is now 9928 words in the text. The real word count of the four tables and 2 figures constitute 466 (399 for 4 tables and 67 for two figures) words. If we consider the word count for the photograph as 520, then the revised manuscript thus adheres to the Journal's maximum word limit.</p>
<p>Check the literature to see if any recent published or early-cited (pre-published) work is relevant to this study and make sure that this work is cited in the manuscript. It is notable that there is only 1 study published or pre-published in 2022 cited in this draft of the manuscript.</p>	<p>Thank you for this feedback. We have modified the in-text citations and reference list with some relevant articles published in 2022.</p>
<p>Make sure that the quality of written expression is edited to the highest standard. The text should be clear, accurate and concise, and that the</p>	<p>We thank the Editor for this insightful comment. We have thoroughly proofread the revised manuscript to ensure that the</p>

1 2 3 4 5 6	flow of ideas and arguments is logical, well-structured and avoids unnecessary repetition.	manuscript is clear, accurate, and concise and that the flow of ideas and arguments is logical, well-structured, and avoids unnecessary repetition.
7 8 9	Carefully cross-check the references and the citations to see that they totally correspond. I have not spotted any mistakes, but this is an area that often there are some issues.	Thank you for this suggestion. We have carefully cross-checked the references and citations to ensure that they correspond.
10 11 12 13 14	Check all the references and make sure that all the information in these references is correct. By "all the information" I mean all the names of the authors (with any special characters in their surnames) and ALL the other components of the references.	We thank the Editor for this comment. We have rechecked all the references to ensure that all the information provided is correct and we have followed the journal guidelines.
15 16 17 18 19 20 21	Take one last look at the whole manuscript and ensure that ALL submission guidelines are followed (see https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/journal/jpbm).	Thank you very much for this feedback. We have revised the manuscript following the journal's submission guidelines. Accordingly, all the tables and figures have been removed from the main body and submitted as separate files. Further, the position of each figure and table is clearly labelled in the main body of the article using Arabic and Roman numbers.
22 23 24	Please make sure that SHORT CVs of all authors are also included in the submission in a separate file.	Thank you very much for this suggestion. Accordingly, Short CVs for the authors are provided.
25	Reviewer #1 Comments	
26	You have successfully addressed the reviewers' comments. Well done.	Thank you.
27 28 29	Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication? Yes	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.
30 31 32 33 34	Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored? Yes	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.
35 36 37 38 39 40	Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate? Yes	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18	Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper? Yes	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.
19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46	Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper? Yes	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.
	Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Yes	We thank the reviewer for this positive comment.
	Reviewer #2 Comments	
	Excellent work in addressing the reviewers' comments. I have no additional feedback to offer. Best of luck with your research!	Thank you.
	Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication? Yes, the paper is novel and studies an important and growing area of research.	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.
	Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored? The manuscript is improved and the authors have addressed my concerns. I have no further comments.	Thank you for this positive comment.
	Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate? The manuscript is improved and the authors have addressed my concerns. I have no further comments.	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper: The manuscript is improved and the authors have addressed my concerns. I have no further comments.	Thank you for this positive feedback.
8 9 10 11 12 13	Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper: The manuscript is improved and the authors have addressed my concerns. I have no further comments.	Thank you for this positive feedback.
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: The manuscript is improved and the authors have addressed my concerns. I have no further comments.	We thank the reviewer for the positive feedback.
22	Reviewer #3 Comments	
23 24 25 26 27 28 29	The authors argued that this manuscript is meaningful as 'the rule and the regulations' have not yet been established in countries such as Sri Lanka. Still, in my opinion, such arguments of the authors are not persuaded. This is because it is only claimed to be a study applicable only to Sri Lanka. As a way to increase the value of the paper, I suggest that the authors rather look for the academic contribution of this paper.	We thank the reviewer for this constructive comment. The academic contribution of our work has been strengthened in the Introduction (page 5) and in the sub-section called "Implications for Theory" (page 24 and 25).
30 31 32 33	Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication? This manuscript is better than the previous one in terms of originality.	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.
34 35 36 37	Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored? There is not any big problem.	Thank you for this positive feedback.
38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46	Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent	We thank the reviewer for this positive feedback.

<p>intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate? Yes</p>	
<p>Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper? Yes</p>	<p>Thank you for this positive feedback.</p>
<p>Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper? Yes. However, I suggest that the authors look for the academic contributions of this paper.</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for this constructive comment. As per our response above, we have strengthened the academic contribution of our work in the Introduction and the “Implications for Theory” sub-section.</p>
<p>Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Yes, I believe the authors made an effort to correct.</p>	<p>Thank you for this positive feedback.</p>