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Influencer Marketing in Data-Driven World

Rekha Attri

Assistant Professor, Jaipuria Institute of Management, Indore Madhya Pradesh, India,
rekha.attri@jaipuria.ac.in

Jagdish Bhagwat

Assistant Professor, Jaipuria Institute of Management, Indore Madhya Pradesh, India

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Keywords

Influencer marketing, social media, purchase intention, attitude, brand knowledge, brand affection, cognitive, affective, conative, tri-component attitude model

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Rekha Attri*, Jagdish Bhagwat 

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1. Influencer marketing

With a shift in the media consumption habits of present day consumers, the focus of brand managers has also shifted from traditional mass media to social media platforms (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The usage of celebrity or non-celebrity influential opinion leaders having a large number of followers on social media platforms to foster positive attitudinal and behavioral customer responses towards the brand is termed as influencer marketing (Giles & Edwards, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Individuals posting on social media and being compensated for the same are referred to as influencers (Campbell & Grimm, 2019). Since the traditional modes of marketing communications lack the capability of organically engaging with the customers, many brands have started compensating the influencers to market their brands by driving personalized consumer engagement through their posts (Kowalczyk & Ponders, 2016). The return on

investment (ROI) has been reported to be 11 times higher through influencer marketing as compared to other forms of digital marketing (Tapinfluence, 2016).

A study conducted by Association of National Advertisers reported that while 75% of the companies were adopting influencer marketing only 36% of the consumers expressed their agreement on the effectiveness of such tactics over social media (ANA, 2018). With more and more customers getting inclined to and habitual of online purchases owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, practitioners are enthusiastically using influencer marketing to reach out to customers and shape their purchase intentions (Taylor, 2020).

Earlier studies have pointed out the characteristics of influencers (Fink et al., 2019), the impact of different categories of influencers on customer perception and attitude (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017), highlighted the importance of trust and credibility of influencers for promoting brands

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: rekha.attri@jaipuria.ac.in (R. Attri), jagdish.bhagwat@jaipuria.ac.in (J. Bhagwat).

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(Lou & Yuan, 2019), and have compared celebrity versus influencer endorsements in advertising (Schouten et al., 2020). Prior studies have also elaborated on parameters to be studied for evaluating the credibility of the influencer (Ohanian, 1990) and how credibility of an influencer positively affects the brand credibility. Despite increasing popularity of influencer marketing, the knowledge related to the parameters of influencer marketing affecting the brand knowledge and development of customer attitudes is scarce and not sufficiently explored (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Childers et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017). Researchers have proposed that evaluative responses of customers could be classified into the categories of affect, behaviour and cognition (Katz & Stotland, 1959; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). Typically, attitudes which could be favorable or unfavorable; positive or negative; have three components: an affective component (feelings), a behavioral component (the effect of the attitude on behaviour), and a cognitive component (belief and knowledge) (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). We have used the framework of the Tri-component attitude model developed by Rosenberg and Hovland (1960), to study the impact of three parameters of influencer marketing (viz. the influencer's credibility, content of the message and congruence of the influencer with the brand) on brand knowledge, brand affection and purchase intentions. Further we explore whether the brand knowledge mediates the relationship between (a) credibility of the influencer and brand affection, (b) content of the message and the brand affection and (c) influencer's congruence with the brand and brand affection.

2. Literature review

2.1. Influencer marketing & influencer categories

Influencer marketing has been used by numerous brands to reach out to the targeted audience resulting in increased sales (Adweek, 2015; ANA, 2018; Jasrotia et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017). Extant literature on influencer marketing have reported the credibility of the influencer, the content of the message and the congruence of the influencer with the brand as important parameters leading to effectiveness of influencer marketing (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017; Eisend, 2007; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000a, 2000b; Kim & Kim, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019). We postulate that each of these influencer parameters would result in significantly increasing the customer's knowledge and affection for the brand. Based on the authenticity,

expertise, accessibility and follower count, the Association of National Advertisers have categorized influencers as Micro-influencers (50-25,000 followers); Mid-level influencers (25,001–100,000 followers) and Macro-influencers (over 100,000 followers) and have stated that although these influencers can post on any social media platform, the posts on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are most popular (ANA, 2018). Campbell and Farrell (2020) in their study categorized social media influencers as Nano-influencers (0-10 k followers; usually having friends and acquaintances as followers; offer highest perceived authenticity and accessibility); Micro-influencers (10 k-100 k localized followers but are rated as genuine recommenders); Macro-influencers (100 k-1m followers; are extremely famous and have strong engagement rates); Mega-influencers (1 m+ followers; are social media mavens but unknown beyond the set of their followers) and Celebrity-influencers (1 m+ followers; have recognition beyond social media as well).

2.2. Data analytics in influencer marketing

Technological change, driven mostly by rise of social media has resulted in direct engagements between organizations and customers (Jasrotia & Koul, 2020; Pandey et al., 2021; Soni et al., 2009; Sudarsanam, 2018). Many brands face a lot of challenges when planning and implementing their influencer marketing campaigns. There is therefore a need for relevant data, advanced tools and automation to help overcome such challenges efficiently (Sharma, 2020). Mallipeddi et al. (2022) pointed the need to have a data driven framework for identification and selection of influencers who could optimally post a firm's message or advertisement. In their empirical study, Mallipeddi et al. (2022) noted the collective effect of multiple influencers and pointed towards the inclusion of multiple exposure effect and forgetting effect in their model. 84% of marketing professionals find influencer marketing to be highly effective and believe that influencer marketing delivers the best return on investment (ROI) (Barker, 2020). Big data analytics can be used to identify and create new opportunities and maximise ROI of influencer marketing campaigns. According to Barker (2020) a data driven approach can help organizations to:

- Identify those products and services which are gaining maximum traction
- Identify what customers like about the brand
- Identify achievements in terms of web traffic, brand awareness, conversions and revenue

- Identify customer segments which the organization is unable to attract and engage.
- Identify number of new account reached, customer engagement rate and number of new followers, comments and shares.

Data driven insights can thus help set realistic campaign goals and also help identify the right influencers for the campaign. Data driven influencer marketing platforms can assist in finding influencers and narrow down the influencer choice based on location, customer segment demographics, engagement rate and type of products endorsed by the influencer. Influencer vetting which involves evaluating the authenticity of potential influencers is an important dimension which marketers need to be careful about before finalizing the influencer for their product/service. Big data analytics can help in influencer vetting by:

- Identifying the impact of influencer messages on the audience
- Analyzing the quality of the content
- Evaluating the relevance of audience comments on influencer's posts
- Calculating the engagement rate of influencer's posts
- Studying the alignment of the influencer's content with the brand's values
- Identifying the type of content the influencer excels in

Big data analytics can also help to identify the trending topics, keywords searched by customers, type of topics which receive maximum comments and engagement (Gorai, 2018; Misra & Singh, 2016). An intelligent, real-time data-driven approach utilizes the importance of conversion rates to determine not only the right influencer for the brand, but is also capable of suggesting which products will sell well with that particular audience (Maxwell & Khan, 2018). Using data analytics marketers can learn from past campaigns and predict the success of future ones. Data analytics can assist in identifying the right influencer, creating content that perform well and measuring performance and ROI of influencer marketing (Haryacha, 2021; Kalakata et al., 2021). Influencer credibility, content of the message and influencer's congruence with the brand are important parameters influencing the brand knowledge and brand affection (Quilty, 2022).

2.3. Brand knowledge and brand attitude

The tri-component attitude model developed by Rosenberg and Hovland (1960), describes the effect

of various external stimuli on the knowledge, feelings and behaviour of individuals (cognitive-affective-conative). The cognitive component (Brand knowledge) consists of information, beliefs and perceptions formed as a result of exposure to the object or related information from various sources; the affective component measures the individual's feelings or emotions regarding the brand (Brand Attitude) and the conative component measures the behavioural intention (Purchase Intention) or the tendency to act towards a particular brand (Chowdhury & Salam, 2015; Makanyeza, 2014). The tri-component attitude model has been widely used to study the customer attitudes towards fashion products (Zhang et al., 2021), banking organizations (Nasir et al., 2022), purchase of organic food (Sekhar et al., 2022), travel and tourism (Han, 2021; Hashim et al., 2021) and purchase of FMCG brands (Dixit and Maurya, 2021). We aim to study the impact of three parameters of influencer marketing (viz. credibility of the influencer, the content of the message and the congruence of the influencer with the brand) on cognitive (Brand Knowledge), affective (Brand Attitude) and conative (Purchase Intention) dimensions of the tri-component attitude model.

Based on the literature on tri-component attitude model following hypothesis were formulated for our study:

H1: Brand Knowledge (BK) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Affection (BA).

H2: Brand Affection (BA) has a significant impact on the customer's Purchase Intention (PI)

2.4. Influencer credibility (ICRED) on brand knowledge (BK) and brand affection (BA)

Endorser credibility is “the extent to which the source is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject” (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Ohanian, 1990). The credibility of the source has been suggested as a predecessor for formation of attitudes towards advertisements and ultimately leading to effectiveness of the advertisement (Atkin & Block, 1983; Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990). According to credibility theory the customers get persuaded by celebrities owing to their trust in the celebrity being higher than the trust on companies (Erdogan, 1999). Study conducted by Nielsen reported that 92% of the customers trust the recommendations and

suggestions from their reference group comprising of family and friends in comparison to all other forms of advertisements (ANA, 2018). It is for this reason that instead of targeting the market as a whole, influencer marketing aims at reaching out to those individuals who have a strong social media presence in the form of number of followers and through these influencers the companies reach out to the potential customers who find these influencers genuine and therefore trust on what they speak about the brand (Adweek, 2015). The convincing power of the influencer is largely dependent on the degree to which he/she is perceived to be an expert in the subject (Wang et al., 2017). Trustworthiness (in terms of perceived honesty and believability) and attractiveness (in terms of the familiarity and likeability) have also been reported to indicate the credibility of the source (Ohanian, 1990). Weinswig (2016) has noted that in comparison to the supermodels, actors and athletes, the social media influencers are found to be more trustworthy and credible by the consumers. As per the Social Penetration Theory (SPT), human relationships get developed when there is a self-disclosure through voluntary sharing of experiences and feelings by influencers (Kim & Song, 2016). Through identification process there is a vicarious transfer of the emotions and experiences of the protagonist with the brand to the viewers of the content (Chang, 2013). Influencers are able to grab customers' attention through visual narrations of their personal lives, which the customers find very intriguing, leading to development of Brand Affections (De Veirman et al., 2017). The expert power of the influencer because of the detailed knowledge in a particular domain along with the referent power since followers wish to connect with them, provides an explanation of how influencers shape the attitude and purchase intention of customers (Kupfer et al., 2018). Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated for our study:

H3: Influencer's Credibility (ICRED) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Knowledge (BK).

H4: Influencer's Credibility (ICRED) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Affection (BA)

2.5. Content of Message (COM) on brand knowledge (BK) and brand affection (BA)

The level of engagement generated by a post has been reported to be dependent on the content of the message created by the influencer (Lipsman et al., 2012). Further, the sincerity with which different attributes of the brand are communicated by the

influencer leads to an impactful influencer marketing (Feng et al., 2020). Unlike the overtly promotional advertisements created by brands, the less intrusive advertising with subtle message from influencers garner higher consumer attention, engagement and response (Pereira et al., 2014) and are perceived to be candid, real and informative (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). One-sided messages wherein the influencer highlights only the positive aspects of the product and neglects the disadvantages are found to be less credible in comparison to the two-sided messages where the influencer discusses both the positive and negative aspects of the product (Winter & Krämer, 2012). Studies have reported that the inclusion of negative dimensions of the product in the messages results in increasing the credibility of the influencers as they are perceived to be genuine and honest by the customers (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994). Although the influencers hired by brands have the creative freedom to develop and disseminate the content, the agencies hiring them, exert some level of creative control to monitor that the influencer stays on the message (Childers et al., 2019). Posts by influencers where the message communicated by them is found to be largely controlled by the brand have reported reduced effectiveness in terms of diminished follower interest and lower intention to search for more information (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Martínez-López et al., 2020). Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated for our study:

H5: The Content of the Message (COM) by the influencer has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Knowledge (BK).

H6: The Content of the Message (COM) by the influencer has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Affection (BA).

2.6. Influencer's congruence with brand (ICB) on brand knowledge (BK) and brand affection (BA)

Sokolova and Kefi (2019) have noted that successful influencers usually devote themselves to a particular domain of interest such as fashion and beauty, food, health, electronic gadgets etc. and develop expertise in that domain owing to which they get opportunity to endorse the brands in that product category. The trust of the followers in the shared content is heightened if there is a good match-up between the influencer and the brand (Jung et al., 2016; Pang et al., 2016). Positive attitude has been reported for brands when the customers are able to perceive a strong connection between the endorser and the brand since it increases the credibility of the opinion, beliefs and experiences

shared by the influencer (Mathys et al., 2016). Researchers have used the 'match-up' approach to establish the importance of a good overlap of the image of the endorser with the brand resulting into positive attitudinal responses and persuasiveness of the influencer for the brand (McCormick, 2016). The level of cognition along with attitudinal and conative evaluations are enhanced when there is a good fit between the influencer and the brand (Kim & Kim, 2021; Martónez-Lopez et al., 2020). Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated for our study:

H7: Influencer's Congruence with the Brand (ICB) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Knowledge (BK).

H8: Influencer's Congruence with the Brand (ICB) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Affection (BA).

2.7. Brand knowledge as a mediator

We further argue that the influencer marketing parameters (i.e. influencer credibility, content of the message and congruence of the influencer with the brand) leading to brand affection are mediated by consumer's knowledge of the brand. Based on this assumption following additional hypothesis were developed to study the mediating effect of brand knowledge:

H9: Brand Knowledge (BK) will mediate the relationship between Influencer's Credibility (ICRED) and Brand Affection (BA).

H10: Brand Knowledge (BK) will mediate the relationship between Content of the Message (COM) and Brand Affection (BA).

H11: Brand Knowledge (BK) will mediate the relationship between Influencer's Congruence with the Brand (ICB) and Brand Affection (BA).

Fig. 1 shows the path diagram of the proposed conceptual model with the postulated research hypothesis.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

A trend of fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) switching from traditional marketing to digital marketing has been reported and these companies

are taking the advantage of e-commerce and social media platforms to reach to their target audience resulting in higher engagement and conversion rate (Khan, 2021). In the FMCG sector, cosmetics and toiletries have been reported to be performing relatively well in the Indian market (Tyagi, 2021). Recent trends in Indian market indicate a shift in consumer preference from chemical based cosmetic products towards natural toxin free products (Srinivasan, 2020; Tewari, 2020). Mamaearth, a direct to consumer (D2C) brand started in 2016, dealing in natural and toxin free skin care products has witnessed a rapid growth primarily through influencer marketing. The brand became successful by utilizing exhaustive social media campaigns and influencer marketing to reach their target market and within a short span of its existence, the company reported a 6.5 times revenue growth during the fiscal ending March 2020 as compared to March 2019 (Tyagi, 2021). In order to select an influencer of Mamaearth for the study, the listing of influencers of this brand was researched on Qoruz which is the largest database of influencers providing detailed statistics of Indian influencers. Many businesses research about influencers on this platform and reach out to individuals for influencer marketing contracts (Qoruz, n.d.). 1551 profiles were listed by Qoruz for influencers of Mamaearth products. While selecting the influencer we removed famous movie celebrities from the list as this is reported to affect the customer evaluations of the endorser and endorsed brand (Goldsmith et al., 2000).

Based on the classification of influencers by Campbell and Farrell (2020) we shortlisted the influencers to represent the Mega, Macro and Micro Influencer categories for our study. Shehnaaz Gill with was 11.3 million followers on Instagram and more than 2 million subscribers for her Youtube channel was selected to represent the Mega-influencer category. Kritika Khurana with 1 million followers was selected to represent the Macro-influencer category. Finally Kanchan Negi with 90.6 k followers was selected to represent the Micro-influencers category (Refer to Appendix 1).

The link of the post for any mamaearth personal care product by each of the influencer shortlisted for the study was provided in the beginning of the questionnaire. The respondents could choose any one of the three links and were required to view the promotion video posted by the influencer. Post watching the video, the respondents were required to answer questions provided in the survey instrument. Although the items in the questionnaire were

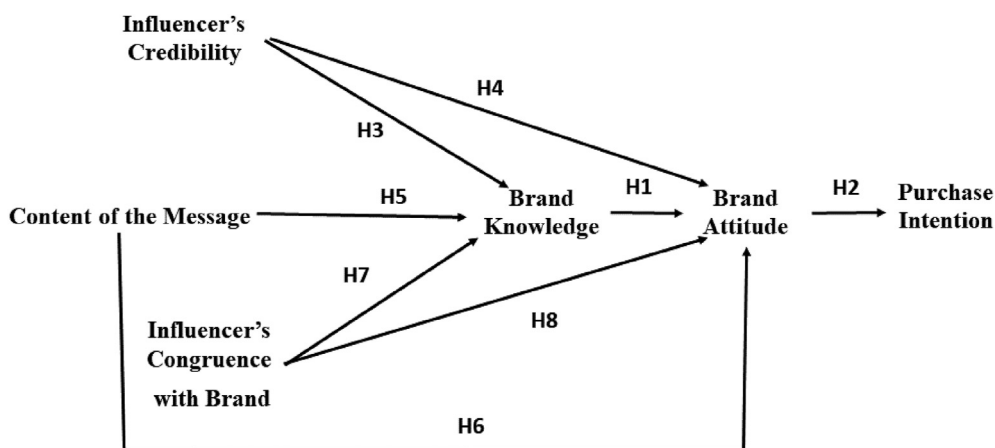


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

selected from standardised scale, we approached 15 academicians from area of marketing and 8 industry professionals having experience in dealing with FMCG goods and digital marketing for validation of questionnaire. The questionnaire was improved in terms of language to suite the present study. All the experts agreed to the content of the questionnaire and its suitability for the study. 30 undergraduate and post graduate students were approached and administered the questionnaire for pilot testing. The results of our pilot test indicated that the constructs of our study are adequately measured. Thereafter, 500 questionnaires were administered in a hybrid mode to collect both online and physical responses from undergraduate and post graduate students of a university, out of which 331 responses were received. After screening for qualified responses and conducting test for multivariate normality, 12 responses were discarded and 319 responses were used for data analysis and hypothesis testing. All study items were measured on a 7- point semantic differential scale and scores on the items were averaged.

3.2. Measures

Widely used standardised scales were adopted for the constructs used for the study owing to the popularity of the instrument in similar studies and a high degree of validity and reliability being reported for these scales.

Influencer's Credibility (ICRED): Influencer credibility was measured using the scale established by (Ohanian, 1990) with fifteen items [“unattractive/attractive”; “Not classy/Classy”, “Ugly/Beautiful or Handsome”, “Plain/Elegant”, “Not Sexy/Sexy” measuring attractiveness (Cronbach's Alpha = .80);

“Undependable/Dependable”, “Dishonest/Honest”, “Unreliable/Reliable” “Insincere/Sincere” and “Untrustworthy/Trustworthy” measuring trustworthiness (Cronbach's Alpha = .92); “not an expert/expert” and “Inexperienced/Experienced”; “Unknowledgeable/Knowledgeable”; “Unqualified/Qualified”, “Unskilled/Skilled” measuring expertise (Cronbach's Alpha = .89)], on a 7-point semantic differential scale with an overall Cronbach's Alpha = .88.

Content of the Message (COM): Content of the message was measured using the scale established by (Boerman et al., 2012) with three items (“Advertising/Not Advertising”; “Scripted/Original” and “Incomplete/Complete”), on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .82).

Influencer's Congruence with the Brand (ICB): Influencer's Congruence with the Brand was measured using the scale established by (Spry et al., 2011) with three items (“Bad fit between influencer and the posted brand - Good fit between influencer and the brand”; “Not logical for the influencer to endorse – Very logical for the influencer to endorse” and “Not appropriate for the influencer to endorse – Very appropriate for the influencer to endorse”), on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .89).

Brand Knowledge (BK): Brand Knowledge was measured using the scale established by (Thomas, 2020) with three items (“Poor Quality/Good Quality”; “Not useful/Useful” and “Over-priced/Value for Money”), on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .92).

Brand Affection (BA): Brand Affection was measured using the scale established by (Sengupta & Johar, 2002) with three items (“Brand is Bad/

Table 1. Construct reliability & validity.

S.No.	Construct	Number of Items	Factor Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Construct Reliability (CR)
1	Influencer's Credibility	15	0.726–0.810	0.904	.749	.898
2	Influencer's Congruence with Brand	3	0.908–0.910	0.915	.927	.974
3	Content of Message	3	0.739–0.99	0.902	.716	.882
4	Brand Knowledge	3	0.89–0.912	0.869	.940	.979
5	Brand Affection	3	0.887–0.978	0.860	.850	.944
6	Purchase Intention	3	0.801–0.980	0.895	.790	.918

Brand is Good”; “Brand is Useless/Brand is Useful” and “Unfavorable Opinion/Favorable Opinion”), on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .890).

Purchase Intention (PI): Purchase intention was measured using the scale established by (Rodgers, 2003) with three items (“Improbable/Probable”; “Unlikely/likely to make a purchase” and “Disinterested/Interested”), on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .898).

3.3. Multivariate normality & common method bias

In order to assess the multivariate normality, we computed outliers by studying Mahalanobis distances. 7 outliers were removed to achieve the normality of the data and 319 responses were used for data analysis and hypothesis testing. We followed suggestion of (Podsakoff et al., 2003) for randomly arranging the items and concealing the purpose and relationships of constructs to minimize common method bias. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted where all items of the research instrument were included. The first factor explained 29.36% of the variance, which is below 50% of threshold. Hence common method bias was ruled out.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Validity & reliability

In order to ascertain that the scale items are measuring the theoretical construct, the construct validity was tested which required testing of

convergent validity as well as discriminant validity. Convergent validity is verified through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values which should be greater than or equal to 0.5 and this condition is satisfied as depicted in calculated in Table 1. Convergent validity was also tested by observing the factor loadings. For convergent validity to be significant the item loadings should be ≥ 0.7 which indicates that about one-half of the item's variance (the squared loading) can be attributed to the construct and this condition too is satisfied as depicted under the factor loading range in Table 1 where the values are greater than or equal to 0.7 indicating towards convergent validity.

In order to achieve the construct reliability, a value of $CR \geq 0.6$ is required. The values of 0.898 for Influencer's Credibility, 0.974 for Influencer's Congruence with Brand, 0.882 for Content of the Message and 0.979 for Brand Knowledge, 0.944 for Brand Affection and 0.918 for Purchase Intention are indicative of Construct Reliability. The Cronbach Alpha values of the constructs are greater than 0.7 which also indicates towards reliability.

The condition for discriminant validity is that the square root of AVE for the construct should be higher than the correlation between the respective constructs. The diagonal values in bold in Table 2 are the square roots of AVE for the constructs while other values are the correlations between the constructs. Since all the diagonal values in bold in Table 2 are higher than the values in its row and column, therefore the discriminant validity was achieved.

Table 2. Fornell- Larcker criterion: Correlations & Discriminant Validity.

	Influencer Credibility	Influencer's Congruence with Brand	Content of Post	Brand knowledge	Attitude towards brand	Purchase Intention
Influencer's Credibility	0.865					
Influencer's Congruence with Brand	0.461*	0.963				
Content of the Message	0.104	.196*	0.846			
Brand Knowledge	0.162*	.218*	.615*	0.970		
Brand Affection	0.082	.227*	.732*	.734*	0.922	
Purchase Intention	0.023	.133*	.290*	.430*	.498*	0.889

Table 3. Model fit summary structural equation model.

Indices	Value	Suggested value
Chi-Square Value	11.581	–
DF	4	–
P Value	0.181	>0.05 (Hair et al., 1998)
Chi-Square value/DF	2.895	<5.00 (Hair et al., 1998)
GFI	0.988	>.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1999)
AGFI	0.938	>.90 (Hair et al., 2006)
NFI	0.984	>.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1999)
CFI	0.989	>.90 (Daire et al., 2008)
RMR	.021	<.08 (Hair et al., 2006)
RMSEA	0.074	<.08 (Hair et al., 2006)

4.2. Measurement model

From Table 3 it is found that the calculated P value is 0.181 (>0.05) owing to which the null hypothesis that the model has a good fit is accepted. The Chi-Square/Degree of Freedom (DF) value is 2.895 (<5); the value of GFI is 0.988 (>0.90) (Hu and Bentler, 1999); AGFI is 0.938 (>0.90); NFI is 0.984 (>0.90) and CFI value is 0.989 (>0.90) all indicative towards a good fit of the model. Finally, the RMSEA value is 0.074 which is less than 0.08 as per the required condition to indicate a good model fit.

Hence, the results fully support the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study. The measurement and structural model demonstrate a good model fit, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity.

4.3. Structural model

4.3.1. Test for multi-collinearity

Multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypothesized effects. Potential multi-collinearity concerns were checked using variance inflation factor (VIF) test. As all VIF values were below the threshold of 10 [VIF (Influencer's Credibility = 1.27); VIF (Influencer's Congruence with Brand = 1.307); VIF (Content of Message = 1.040)] suggesting that

the multi-collinearity effect was not present among independent variables.

4.3.2. Test of hypothesis

As represented in Table 4, the knowledge about the brand (BK) significantly influences the customer's brand affection (BA) thereby supporting H1. Further Brand Affection (BA) has a significant impact on the customer's Purchase Intention (PI) thereby supporting H2. These findings are in line with the proposition of tri-component attitude model. The p value of 0.171 for relationship between influencer's credibility (ICRED) and brand knowledge (BK) and the value of 0.056 for relationship between influencer credibility (ICRED) on brand affection (BA) suggest that the credibility of the influencer does not significantly impact the brand knowledge and brand affection. Hypothesis H3 which states that Influencer's Credibility (ICRED) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Knowledge (BK) and H4 which states that Influencer's Credibility (ICRED) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Affection (BA) are therefore not supported.

The p values of less than 0.01 suggest that content of the message (COM) has a significant impact both on the customer's brand knowledge and brand affection thereby leading to the conclusion that H5 which states that The Content of the Message (COM) by the influencer has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Knowledge (BK) and H6 which states that The Content of the Message (COM) by the influencer has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Affection (BA) are supported.

Similarly, the influencer's congruence with the brand (ICB) has a significant impact on the customer's brand knowledge ($p = 0.042$) and brand affection ($p = 0.044$) indicating that H7 which states that the Influencer's Congruence with the Brand

Table 4. Statistics for hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis Number	Hypothesis	Unstandardised Coefficient	S.E. of B	Standardised Coefficient	t Value	P Value	Decision on Hypothesis
H1	BK→ BA	0.377	0.034	0.456	11.074	***	Supported
H2	BA→ PI	0.633	0.062	0.498	10.228	***	Supported
H3	ICRED→ BK	0.057	0.042	0.068	1.369	0.171	Not supported
H4	ICRED→ BA	−0.051	0.026	−0.072	−1.991	0.056	Not supported
H5	COM→ BK	0.52	0.039	0.594	13.317	***	Supported
H6	COM→ BA	0.321	0.03	0.444	10.861	***	Supported
H7	ICB→ BK	0.062	0.044	0.071	1.416	0.042	Supported
H8	ICB→ BA	0.053	0.027	0.074	2.001	0.044	Supported

Note:*** denotes significant at 1% level.

ICRED= Credibility of Influencer; ICB = Influencer's Congruence with Brand.

COM= Content of Message; BK=Brand Knowledge; BA = Brand Affection;

PI = Purchase Intention.

Table 5. Mediation results.

Hypothesis	Nature of Relationship	Mediation paths	b	S.E	t	p	Lower CI	Upper CI	Mediation
H9	Total	ICRED → BA	0.0573	0.0393	1.4565	0.1462	-0.0201	0.1346	No Mediation
	Direct	ICRED → BA	-0.0268	0.0271	-0.988	0.3239	-0.0802	0.0266	
	Indirect	ICRED → BK → BA	0.0841	0.028			0.03	0.1405	
H10	Total	COM → BA	0.5296	0.0277	19.134	0	0.4751	0.584	Partial Mediation
	Direct	COM → BA	0.3264	0.0298	10.941	0	0.2677	0.3851	
	Indirect	COM → BK → BA	0.2031	0.028			0.1475	0.259	
H11	Total	ICB → BA	0.1646	0.0396	4.1541	0	0.0866	0.2426	Partial Mediation
	Direct	ICB → BA	0.0509	0.0282	1.8036	0.0442	0.0046	0.1064	
	Indirect	ICB → BK → BA	0.1137	0.0309			0.0531	0.1758	

ICRED= Credibility of Influencer; ICB = Influencer's Congruence with Brand.

COM= Content of Message; BK=Brand Knowledge; BA = Brand Affection;

(ICB) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Knowledge (BK) and H8 which states that the Influencer's Congruence with the Brand (ICB) has a significant impact on the customer's Brand Affection (BA) are supported.

4.3.3. Test for mediation

Hayes (2017) PROCESS macro for SPSS was administered to calculate the indirect effect in order to test H9 (Brand Knowledge will mediate the relationship between Influencer's Credibility and Brand Affection), H10 (Brand Knowledge will mediate the relationship between Content of the Message and Brand Affection) and H11 (Brand Knowledge will mediate the relationship between Influencer's Congruence with the Brand and Brand Affection) of our study.

Table 5 depicts the mediation analysis results where coefficients (b), standard error (S.E), confidence level (95%), t and p values of the mediating variables are depicted (Macho & Ledermann, 2011). The results of mediation analysis propose that brand knowledge partially mediates the association between (a) Content of the Message and Brand Affection (H10 is accepted) and (b) Influencer's Congruence with the Brand and Brand Affection (H11 is accepted). The reason for partial mediation is that both the paths (direct and indirect) were statistically significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In order to validate partial mediation, we also calculated variance accounted factor (VAF), which also confirmed the partial mediated effect of brand knowledge on (a) the relationship between Content

of the Message and Brand Affection (VAF 38.35%) and (b) the relationship between Influencer's Congruence with the Brand and Brand Affection (VAF 69.08%). According to (Hair et al., 2010) full mediation occurs when VAF accounts to 100%. While studying the mediation effect of Brand Knowledge between the Influencer's Credibility and Brand Affection, the total effect for this relationship was insignificant. We therefore concluded that the Brand Knowledge does not mediate between Influencer's Credibility and customer's Brand Affection.

5. Conclusion

The results of our study points that the content of the message is very crucial in increasing the brand knowledge of customer and his brand affection. The brand knowledge ultimately leads to formation of positive brand affection and purchase intention. Our study supports the finding of (Lee & Kim, 2020) on influencer marketing that the perceptions about the credibility of the influencer does not significantly affect the perceptions about usefulness of the brand.

Our study however does not support previous studies which used the endorser credibility theory and stated that the credibility of a celebrity plays a significant role in shaping customer perceptions and attitudes towards the brand (Lafferty et al., 2002; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018).

Our study also established a significant positive effect of the congruence of influencer with the brand, on the brand knowledge which is in accordance with previous research on the topic establishing the logic

behind the ‘match-up’ approach wherein a higher congruence with the brand increases the credibility of the opinions and experiences shared by the influencer (Mathys et al., 2016; McCormick, 2016; Pang et al., 2016; Jung et al., 2016). Our study also reports the mediation effect of the brand knowledge between (a) the content of the message and brand affection and (b) the congruence of the influencer with the brand and the brand affection.

6. Implications

6.1. Theoretical implications

The increasing popularity of online media and influencer marketing trends has resulted in brands allocating higher share of their budget to online channels (Dolega et al., 2021). The new investment perspective warrants a deeper understanding of the factors which could lead to increased brand awareness and result in building positive brand attitudes. The current study is among the pioneer studies to evaluate the impact of influencer's credibility, content of the message and congruence of the influencer with the brand on the cognitive, affective and conative dimensions of consumer attitude. We have also investigated the mediation effect of brand knowledge (cognitive part of tri-component attitude model) between each of the three the influencer marketing parameters of our study and brand affection (affective part of tri-component attitude model). This relationship has not been reported in any prior research on influencer marketing. In doing so our research contributes to the not-yet extensively researched impact of parameters of influencer marketing on brand knowledge and affection.

Our study reports that credibility of the influencer does not positively affect the brand knowledge. Apart from the study by (Lee & Kim, 2020) we did not come across studies that have reported that influencer credibility does not affect the brand knowledge. Our study also does not conform to the findings of Atkin and Block (1983) and Goldberg and Hartwick (1990) who proposed that credibility of the source is a predecessor for positive attitude formation. Our results establish that the credibility of the influencer needs to be supported by the brand knowledge in order to garner customer affection for the brand.

The mediation effect of brand knowledge between (a) content of the message and brand affection and (b) congruence of the influencer with the brand and brand affection, established in our study has not been previously reported in research on influencer marketing. In that respect our findings can form a base for identifying mediation effects between other constructs of influencer marketing using the tri-component attitude model.

6.2. Managerial implication

From the managerial perspective, since content of the message and congruence of the influencer with the brand has a significant positive impact on brand knowledge and attitude, it is logical to suggest that brands need to focus on these two parameters while designing influencer marketing. The credibility of the influencer has not been found to significantly impact the brand knowledge and attitude. Marketers have been using both earned influencer marketing (which stems from unpaid influencers interested in spreading the information for their own social growth) and paid influencer marketing techniques which can take the form of sponsorships, pre-roll advertising, testimonials etc. to grab customer attention and increase purchase intentions of customers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Celebrity and mega influencers having large customer following over social media usually charge hefty amount for becoming the influencer for the product. The charges of hiring some mega, macro influencers and celebrities can range from \$10,000 to as high as \$1 million per post (Geyser, 2021). Our study establishes that the credibility of the influencer does not positively affect the brand knowledge and brand affection. Marketers should not be under the impression that sourcing a celebrity or mega influencer would guarantee high conversion rate for their product in terms of purchases. This has also been pointed out by (Hudders et al., 2021) that instead of reaching out to influencers with large reach which in some cases could be fake followers, marketers should be on a lookout for those nano-influencers who have expertise in a niche area and because of their authenticity and relatability can directly address their organic followers albeit small.

Marketers need to pay more attention on the content of the message and the congruence of the influencer

with the brand. The authenticity with which the message is delivered needs to be monitored since it increases the reliability and believability of the message which ultimately influences the attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions.

7. Limitations and scope for future research

Our study was limited to the personal care product in the FMCG sector. Influencers are usually seen advocating for health products, supplements, electronic items, digital products etc. Similar study can be carried out for different product categories and in different sectors to identify the consistency/anomaly of the findings of present study for different categories. These future studies will help in generalizing customer attitude towards influencer marketing for varied product categories. Influencers are usually seen engaged in giveaway contests, event activations, sponsored social posts, pre-release campaign, unboxing videos and also act as brand ambassadors of products. Researchers can carry out comparative studies to understand the impact of influencers and study the characteristics which help the influencers get customer attention and positive attitude.

Further, we limited our study on the university students in the age bracket of 18–27 years belonging to Gen Z. as they have been reported to go for online purchases in comparison to older generation consumers (Jasrotia & Koul, 2020). A similar study can be extended to different age groups also in order to understand whether the influencers are successful in persuading older generation customers as well.

Finally, our study did not include a nano - influencer category since the brand of our study (Mamaearth) primarily used Celebrity, Mega,

Macro and Micro influencers. Future studies can be carried out as a comparative analysis using different category of influencers for a different product category.

Consent for publication

The authors agree to submit the paper in its current form to be considered for publication in the journal.

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Availability of data and materials

The data supporting the conclusions of this article are stated within the article. Any queries regarding the data may be directed to the author.

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of Interest for getting this article published.

Appendix 1. Social Media Profile of Influencers

Influencer category	Mega Influencer	Macro Influencer	Micro Influencer
Influencer name	Shehnaaz Gill	Kritika Khurana	Kanchan Negi
Followers	11.3 m	1 m	90.6 k
Average Likes	1.3 m	72 k	3.1 k
Average Comments	80.5 k	123	357
Average Video Views	3.6 m	171.9 k	43.1 k
Engagement Rate	13.15%	4.57%	3.82%
Youtube	2 m	636 k	310
Link of Mamaearth post	https://www.instagram.com/p/CGRp1_CnCpY/?hl=en	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/c7ojyQjyZM	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/wBqRywej44

Source: Prepared by authors. available on Qoruz (2021) at <http://surl.li/buctp>.

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