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The Role Social Media Influencers Play in a Company's Brand

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The Role Social Media Influencers Play in a Company's Brand

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Abstract

Influencer marketing is a tactic that many companies have had to integrate into their businesses to better communicate with consumers. The purpose of this research is to analyze the role influencer marketing plays in a company's brand. This study assesses the way consumers build trust and relationships with companies through the help of influencers. There are many variables that come into play, for example, emotional attachment, authenticity, and loyalty are just three that have been measured in previous studies. These same variables are used in this research to see if they can also apply to a company that uses influencers versus one that does not. Friestad and Wright's (1994) persuasion knowledge model (PKM) is applied in this study from a theoretical perspective; the theory focuses on how people use their knowledge of persuasion motives and tactics to interpret, evaluate, and respond to influence attempts from marketers. A cross-sectional survey of 105 respondents that use social media was conducted to test six proposed hypotheses. Participants were asked to respond to the survey questions based on at least one company or brand they follow on social media. The findings show that brand attitudes toward a company that uses influencer marketing are not more positive than a company that does not. The amount of time a consumer follows a brand on social media does not have an impact on their brand attitude. The level of authenticity toward a brand has no relationship with influencer marketing and the use of influencer marketing does not affect the emotional attachment toward the brand nor does it contribute to consumer brand trust. Emotional attachment and brand trust increase consumer loyalty, but authenticity does not. It was found that influencer marketing for this sample population is not recommended when attempting to increase the respective variables. This study also provides useful insights about college students and their social media interests.

Keywords: influencer, brand, marketing, trust, communication, emotional attachment, loyalty

The Role Social Media Influencers Play in a Company's Brand

Influencers are taking over social media by storm by not only working for and promoting brands but creating a brand for themselves. According to Influencer MarketingHub, the influencer market grew from \$1.7 billion in 2016 to \$9.7 billion in 2020, and in 2021 it soared to \$13.8 billion (Santora, 2022). These numbers indicate a steady growth within the influencer market, which is attributed to the increased popularity of short video formats on platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. The results of this growth could also be related to the effect of the global pandemic on consumers which increased social media consumption (Santora, 2022). Due to this increase in the influencer market, companies are starting to use them to garner a better relationship with their own audience.

An influencer is paid to use their own social media to promote a brand's offerings, the use of an influencer is called influencer marketing (Belanche et al., 2021). An influencer can be defined as someone who has the power to affect the purchasing decisions of others because of his or her authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with his or her audience, and has a following in a distinct niche, with whom he or she actively engages (Geyser, 2022). Leung et al. (2022) defines online influencer marketing as a strategy in which a firm selects and incentivizes online influencers to engage their followers on social media in an attempt to leverage these influencers' unique resources to promote the firm's offerings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing firm performance. Specific examples of influencers are Kylie Jenner, Aslyn Ovard, James Charles, MrBeast, Addison Rae, and The D'amelio sisters. Each influencer has a specific niche audience and can form close connections through social media. Influencers are used by many big companies today like Adidas, Pepsi, and Dunkin' Donuts. For these companies, the

talents of these well-known individuals provide equity credentials to establish and extend product brands (Fournier and Eckhardt, 2019).

The term “brand” refers to a business and marketing concept that helps people identify a particular company, product, or individual. Brands are intangible, and they help shape people's perceptions of companies, their products, or individuals (Kenton, 2022). Brands are intangible, they cannot be touched or seen, they help shape people's perceptions of companies, their products, or individuals. A company is also intangible and represents one thing, it is a legal entity formed by a group of individuals to engage in and operate a business enterprise in a commercial or industrial capacity (Hayes, 2022). A company and an influencer are two very different things as an influencer is a single individual who interacts with their audience as an occupation and promotes brands who align with their niche. A company is a business organization that makes money by selling products or services and contains many people for it to function properly.

Influencer marketing arguably appeals better to customers than traditional, celebrity-based, mass media advertising because it gives consumers a sense of close relationships and fit with their favorite influencers (Belanche et al., 2021). Brands and companies leverage these close links by having influencers promote their offerings to consumers who already embrace the image or views of those influencers (Belanche et al., 2021). Influencers and companies are different as companies use influencers as an accessory for their brand. An influencer’s job is to promote a brand to their own audience and a company does much more than that, they create a product or service that the public wants or needs. An influencer could be seen as a “middle-man” to attract more customers to a company.

Previous research indicates that it makes sense for a company to pursue influencer marketing as a customer acquisition strategy (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Half of consumers already apply ad blocks, which considerably reduces the effectiveness of many of the usual types of online advertising (Martínez-López et al., 2020). To overcome this growing communication barrier to reaching consumers online, companies seek to make an impact on consumers that is more rooted in content, and this is where influencer marketing fits well (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Martínez-López et al. (2020) conducted research on how consumers react to influencer content and how that information should be used to make marketing decisions. Jun and Yi (2020) completed a study that complements literature on human brands, as well as influencer marketing, by identifying how an influencer brand's equity is formed. Between these two studies, one can see that academia has started finding ways on how to maximize the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Although there are many studies that have examined the role of influencers as brand endorsers, tested the effectiveness of influencer marketing, and analyzed their followers, there are few studies that have investigated the role influencer's play in a company and the effect they have on an audience.

Mass media has evolved since it began, with social media now being one of the main outlets of social sharing and communication. More than half of the world now uses social media (59%), that is 4.70 billion people around the world that now use social media with 227 million new users that have joined online within the last 12 months (Chaffey, 2022). Social media has served as a source of information distribution and place for expression for many people since the start of the 2000's but just within the ten years, more platforms have been created to make it even easier (Chaffey, 2022). With the extreme amount of use and access to social media today, there is a huge impact and influence that is still being explored. Current research on influencers

focuses mostly on what makes individuals trust influencers or how companies utilize influencer marketing as a tool. This study is designed to analyze the effects that influencer marketing has on a company, data will be gathered based on a company that uses influencer marketing versus a company that does not. Assessing the use of influencer marketing by companies will lay a steppingstone for future research to further investigate how influencer marketing is more effective in relationship and trust building than other efforts from a company.

Friestad and Wright's (1994) persuasion knowledge model (PKM) is focused on how people use their knowledge of persuasion motives and tactics to interpret, evaluate and respond to influence attempts from marketers and others. Since consumers interpret and cope with marketers' sales presentations and advertising, consumers develop personal knowledge over time about the tactics used in these persuasion attempts. The knowledge consumers develop helps them identify how, when, and why marketers are trying to influence them and how to adaptively respond to these persuasion attempts to achieve their own goals (Friestad and Wright, 1994). PKM is applied in this study from a theoretical perspective, consumers are typically aware that influencers are used as a way of marketing and findings from this study align with this model.

The purpose of this research is to help answer questions as to why some companies should or should not use influencer marketing and how consumers react to this marketing tactic. In the next section, literature on brand promotion, influencer marketing, and PKM along with other concepts used in the research process are reviewed and hypotheses are presented. Then, hypotheses are tested through a cross-sectional survey and evaluated in the results. This study is then concluded with a discussion of the findings, implications, and future research suggestions.

Literature Review

The following section reviews literature that has studied brand promotion and influencer marketing. Each piece of literature is relevant to this study as they analyze the use and understanding of influencer marketing in the field of communications. Companies that use influencer marketing and those that do not are explored and the reasoning behind that decision is discussed.

The Promotion of Brands

Companies across the world continue to promote their brands in a variety of ways, whether it is through brand ambassadors, general advertising, direct marketing, or social media, they are always looking for ways to connect to their consumers. Brands also use celebrities to endorse their brands, this helps their brand stand out, stay relevant, and seem trustworthy in the consumer's eyes. In many ways, these methods of promotion are effective, but brands have found an easier way to connect with consumers, through influencer marketing. Investment on Instagram at market value has risen from an estimated 1,070 million dollars to 2,380 million dollars in 2019 (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Martínez-López et al. (2020) found that there are two important factors that explain this increase. First, consumers use social platforms extensively to help in their buying-decision processes. Second, they consume more and more content generated by influencers, and they are more reticent about content provided by brands. It has also been found that the adolescent segment is where the greatest confidence in social media influencers is to be found. It is expected that this trend among teenagers will continue into adulthood for future purchases and will also influence their comments and recommendations on products and services (Martínez-López et al., 2020). As the influencer marketing industry grows,

so does the number of companies that support the industry, influencer marketing related companies grew by 26% in 2021 (Santora, 2022).

Influencers have become authoritative through social media, typically by posting their own content and are best at creating an intimate connection between their audience and a brand (Mediakix, 2019). Influencers are seen as credible intermediaries that give consumers the necessary information and guidance (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Influencer marketing has been most popular because of the connection they make, it drives the conversions and sales that brands are seeking. Companies are also trying to regain some control of their brands and the use of influencers is an indirect way of doing that (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Some messages of brands can be seen as intrusive and not very authentic and due to technological advances, consumers can access a large volume of information, making them better informed and less controlled by brands (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Due to this, consumers are now used to having control of their own shopping experiences, and freedom and flexibility in their information search processes (Martínez-López et al., 2020). According to Martínez-López et al. (2020), this evolved context causes communication to become bidirectional and interactive, so the brand is generated through a process of co-creation with customers. This emerging scenario involves companies losing part of the control over their brands, which can be challenging to manage for those that are not culturally prepared to share control of their brands' image and related information flow.

Companies looking to social media influencers to increase engagement and reach consumers is a better way to deal with the prevailing social media context, but they must make efforts to find influencers that align with their brand. Companies are faced with the risk of falling into an image crisis if the chosen person is or eventually becomes associated with any influencer

post or issue that runs contrary to the brand's interests (Martínez-López et al., 2020). For example, in 2019, Proactiv made a public announcement that Kendall Jenner was the new face of their brand. In the video published on Proactiv's YouTube channel, Kendall shared how Proactiv products helped her to treat her skin. However, her followers did not support her statements claiming that before this sponsorship, Kendall talked about how her dermatologist helped her with skin problems, contradicting her support for Proactiv (Yu, 2021). Although incidents like this still happen today, companies are still inclining towards taking more risks, by associating with the more controversial influencers who often have higher engagement levels (Martínez-López et al., 2020). This creates more exposure for the brand and to avoid undesired situations caused by inappropriate messages shared by followers, companies are tempted to control their content (Martínez-López et al., 2020).

As part of trying to take back control of their brand, companies try to encourage positive recommendations from an influencer by sending them free products and offer incentives to stimulate them to generate content on the product (Martínez-López et al., 2020). The study of control or manipulation of online recommendations is still in its early stages, although it is accepted that influence must be exercised without clearly manipulating communications. The widespread use of influencers in some countries has led public institutions to legally oblige companies to use hashtags such as #ad or #sponsored for the consumer to know that the message is promotional (Martínez-López et al., 2020). If influencers fail to abide by this rule it can result in large fines. Influencer Kim Kardashian failed to disclose that she was getting paid to promote the crypto company EthereumMax, resulting in a \$1.26 million fine (Canton, 2022). Likewise, social networks such as Instagram have created standardized formats that enable users to identify this type of sponsored content (Martínez-López et al., 2020). This requirement is beneficial as it

creates more transparency among the brand and consumer, allowing them to make their own purchase decisions.

Influencer marketing can be hugely successful when done correctly. In 2019, the Italian fashion house Gucci used influencer marketing to support the launch of its new fragrance line, Gucci Bloom. Gucci collaborated with 23 artists on Instagram to create highly creative content of the artistic interpretation of the floral universe around the fragrance. The campaign managed to create significant awareness with 135 pieces of content created, reaching nearly 750,000 followers (Haenlein et al., 2020). Gucci even used some of the resulting content on its website and Facebook channel.

Although many companies today are hopping on the influencer bandwagon, some companies choose not to for a variety of reasons. Some companies may not be able to find an influencer that matches their brand, or they cannot afford the advertising fee, or they simply cannot handle the risks associated with working with influencers (Martínez-López et al., 2020). The truth is, influencer marketing may not work for every product, content, industry, or scenario. Influencer marketing is right for a company if they have a product that has mass appeal, a solid design and strategy, a social media presence, and influencers that are for their target audience (Gauchet, 2017).

What We Know About Influencer Marketing

For a long time, celebrities have been used for marketing campaigns, which attempt to transfer the image or value of the celebrity to endorse brands. With the introduction of influencers, they now represent a relatively newer version of this marketing tactic (Belanche et al., 2021). Influencers are known for their connection and relationships with their followers; they gain their followers by creating unique content based on their expertise in a specific field, such

as food, beauty, technology, fashion, games, and sports (Jun & Yi, 2020). Influencer brands are also unique in that they have real-time, direct, rapid, and interactive two-way communication with followers. Through active interactions, followers may think that influencers perceive them as special individuals, and not just anonymous members of a large group of followers. Such interactivity can enhance the emotional attachment of people who are following the influencer brand (Jun & Yi, 2020).

With regards to digital marketing, influencer marketing has become an effective tool that so many companies utilize today (Moreira et al., 2021). In an increasingly connected and interconnected society, the role of influencers is essential to companies, as they bring brands closer to consumers. An approach and connection at this level hardly happens between people and brands. Therefore, brands need influencers to reach their public while influencers need brands to make their business profitable, since the role of digitally influencing consumers has already become an ability (Moreira et al., 2021). Brand marketing managers direct part of their marketing and communication budget towards influencer marketing. This fact is justified by consumers' rejection of traditional communication. The acceptance of messages transmitted by content creators due to their existing relationships, leads companies to readapt their communication strategies (Moreira et al., 2021).

The size of the influencer's online following depends on the size of his/her topic of the niche in which they operate. Some influencers have built a huge following that they achieve celebrity status online. However, it is important to remember that a fundamental difference between influencers and celebrities lies in their source of fame (Leung et al., 2022). Unlike celebrities who have succeeded in some credentialed, institutional setting such as acting, music or sports, influencers are not certified by any formal institutions. Influencers accumulate

followers by actively sharing content on social media, this content allegedly portrays their everyday lives through blogging, vlogging, or generating short-form content (e.g., Instagram, TikTok). They maintain active relationships and regularly respond to and interact with followers. By carefully managing their content, image, and endorsements, influencers aim to create a distinct personal brand. Followers online then self-select to follow influencers whose identity resonates with them the most (Leung et al., 2022).

Companies hire digital influencers with the intention that these individuals produce digital content that contains detailed information on the brand's products or services. Companies want to grasp the attention of consumers and change their opinions and behaviors with this content, so they can then provide a follow-up service. In the process of attracting and retaining customers, influencers end up creating a close relationship with their followers on the many social networks in which they operate, helping companies in their forms of communication. Furthermore, the pursuit of establishing a relationship of trust will cause a positive effect on image and brand awareness (Moreira et al., 2021).

As a part of their obligation to create content to promote the firm's offerings, influencers are compensated with a fee based on their contractual agreement. The fees vary widely across influencers and are determined by a range of factors, such as the size of the influencer's online following, previous engagement rates, the category or industry, and content format. Influencers may also receive non-monetary compensation, such as free products or experiences (Leung et al., 2022).

Previous research shows that influencer interactivity is positively related to influencer authenticity and emotional attachment (Jun and Yi, 2020). Jun and Yi's research specifically found that influencer authenticity mediates the effect of interactivity on emotional attachment

and directly affects brand trust. Their results demonstrate that followers' emotional attachment to influencer brands increases brand loyalty through brand trust (Jun and Yi, 2020). From these findings, it is shown that through emotional attachment, influencers can build trust with their followers in a way that strongly impacts their followers. Based on these findings, this study intends to further explore how influencer marketing impacts a company.

Other research has explored how social media influencers create and leverage followers' attachment to deliver marketing messages. Kim and Kim (2022) conducted a survey study that targeted Millennials and Generation Z who follow social media influencers in 2020. The two author's applied human brand theory and attachment theory and found that homophily, social presence and attractiveness create a greater attachment to influencers. Attachment enhances followers' loyalty to the influencer and advertising credibility and reduces their resistance to advertising, whereas it does not affect advertising perception (Kim & Kim, 2022). Their findings suggest the significance of emotional bonding which explains the industry shift targeting "micro-influencers" and long-term partnerships. The attachment to the influencer leads the followers to become loyal, credit marketing messages and lower the resistance without altering the perception as advertising (Kim & Kim, 2022).

Leung et al. (2022) uncovered why followers have trust in the influencers that they follow. Their study outlines fundamental features of online influencer marketing (OIM) and offer a set of propositions that could spur progress toward a theory of OIM. To do this, they interviewed and collected narratives from practitioners and consumers to gain real-world insights into the phenomenon. They then put forth six novel, testable propositions illustrating four benefits and two potential threats of OIM. They also outlined key OIM management strategies and suggest avenues for further research to stimulate conceptual and empirical explorations in

this emerging marketing domain (Leung et al., 2022). Their study found that influencers are authentic to the extent that they share honest, unbiased opinions. Consumers also consider influencers trustworthy because their relationships with followers are more communal than those with brands. A communal relationship resembles a friendship in which people take care of others' needs and have a genuine concern for their well-being (Leung et al., 2022). These findings show that consumers want a connection that they can rely on and of which they cannot have with a company or brand that they follow on social media. If a company leverages influencers' trust with their followers, the trust benefits are likely to transfer to brand-related outcomes to enhance marketing communication effectiveness (Leung et al., 2022).

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Persuasion Knowledge Model

Previous research has examined the impact of influencers on consumers' perception of corporate brands (Singh et al., 2020). Drawn from the persuasion knowledge theory, it identified issues associated with brands engaging influencers, such as inference of manipulative intent, which negatively affects perceived trustworthiness and corporate reputation (Singh et al., 2020). The way that the persuasion knowledge theory is applied in Singh et al. (2020) research is the same way it will be applied in this study. The persuasion knowledge model (PKM) is used to present a model of how people's persuasion knowledge influences their responses to persuasion attempts (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Persuasion knowledge refers to consumers' knowledge and beliefs regarding marketers' persuasion goals and attempts, as well as their underlying motives and tactics, and how persuasion works (Friestad & Wright, 1994). According to Friestad and Wright (1994), a consumer's primary task is to interpret and cope with marketers' sales presentations and advertising. Due to this, consumers develop personal knowledge over time

about the tactics used in these persuasion attempts. The knowledge consumers develop over time helps them identify how, when, and why marketers are trying to influence them. It also helps them adaptively respond to these persuasion attempts to achieve their own goals (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

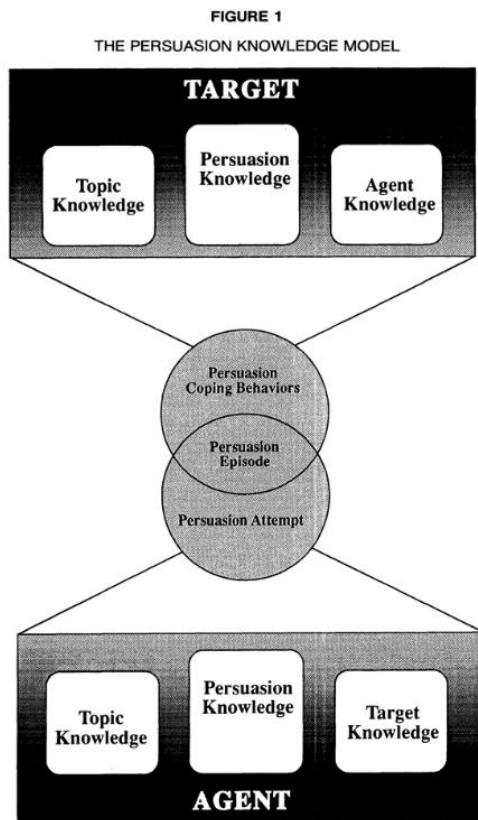


Figure 1 shows the persuasion knowledge model created by Marian Friestad and Peter Wright. They present a conceptualization of persuasion that depicts the phenomenon from the points of view of both parties to the interaction. First, they use the term "targets" to refer to the people for which a persuasion attempt is intended, for example consumers or social media followers. Second, the authors use "agent" to represent whoever a target identifies as being responsible for designing and constructing a persuasion attempt, for example the company responsible for an advertising campaign or an influencer. Third, they use persuasion "attempt" (the

bottom circle in Figure 1), rather than ad, sales presentation, or message, to describe a target's perception of an agent's strategic behavior in presenting information designed to influence someone's beliefs, attitudes, decisions, or actions. This strategic behavior is not limited to what the agent defines as "the message," but includes the target's perceptions of how and why the agent has designed, constructed, and delivered the observable message. From the consumer's perspective, the directly observable part of an agent's behavior is defined in their model as

“persuasion episode.” Accordingly, targets can perceive of a persuasion attempt as including all message deliveries by the agent on the same topic, and it may encompass a single ad or sales/service encounter, or multiple episodes in an orchestrated series of ads or presentations from the same agent (e.g., a pool of TV ads, a multimedia ad campaign, an influencer’s YouTube video of new products they are using).

Jun and Yi (2020) performed a study that examines how followers become loyal to social media influencers. Their research suggests influencer interactivity as a unique feature of influencer brands and investigates how it affects influencer authenticity, emotional attachment, and brand loyalty. Influencer interactivity is defined as two-way communication between influencers and followers, which occurs via continuous comments and feedback on the influencer’s social media account (Jun & Yi, 2020). Their research and concepts are used as a basis in this research to further investigate influencers and their impact within companies today. Jun and Yi’s research differs from this study because it suggests influencer interactivity as a unique feature of influencer brands and investigates how it affects influencer authenticity, emotional attachment, and brand loyalty. For this research, authenticity, emotional attachment, and brand loyalty are three of the five concepts that are used as variables to compare a company that uses influencer marketing to one that does not, interactivity is not applied.

Attitude

Brand attitude is a concept that is discussed in many research articles when it comes to analyzing consumer’s relationship with a brand. Therefore, it seemed important to include brand attitude in this study. Ilicic and Webster (2014) argue that consumer-brand relational authenticity is powerful in predicting attitudes and purchase intentions beyond that of brand attachment. They conducted a study to further the understanding of brand authenticity by conceptualizing and

measuring relational authenticity as brands being true in their relationships with consumers (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Their findings show that consumer-brand relational authenticity enhances consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Due to these findings, attitude and authenticity are used as variables in this study to measure the hypotheses proposed later in this literature.

Brand attitude is the positive or negative feelings and opinions of consumers toward a brand (Idea Group Inc. Global [IGI Global], 2022). Through influencers' social media activities, they can influence the attitudes, decisions, and behaviors of their audience (De Veirman et al., 2017). This ability is becoming crucial when shaping consumer brand attitudes toward the firms' offerings (Nafees et al., 2021). Research by De Veirman et al. (2017) and Nafees et al. (2021), both explain the role social media influencers play on consumer brand attitudes. De Veirman et al. (2017) explains that due to relative newness and the inexperience of consumers to influencer marketing strategies, it is less likely to trigger persuasion knowledge which could render unfavorable attitudes. They also state that due to this, it is important for brands to approach an influencer who is well-liked by their audience to endorse their products (De Veirman et al., 2017). De Veirman et al. (2017) mentions previous research that has found positive associations between attitude towards the celebrity and attitude towards the brand. Based on the previous research mentioned, influencer marketing can have a positive impact on consumers' brand attitudes. For this research, attitude is used as a main variable to measure the following hypotheses:

H1: A company that uses influencer marketing will have more positive attitudes toward the brand than a company that does not.

Social media plays an important role in how consumers discover, research, and share information about brands and products; 60% of consumers researching products through multiple online sources learned about a specific brand or retailer through social networking sites (Nielsen, 2022). Research shows that social media is increasingly a platform consumers use to express their loyalty to their favorite brands and products (Nielsen, 2022). 59% of people around the world use social media today and based on this increase, H2 aims to test whether the length of time a consumer follows a brand on social media has a positive relationship with their attitude towards the brand (Chaffey, 2022).

H2: The number of months a consumer follows a brand on social media has a positive relationship with their attitude toward the brand.

Authenticity

Companies use influencer marketing because influencers can generate trust among followers because they appear more authentic than marketing firms or brands. Authenticity results from a perception that a person behaves according to his or her true self (Leung et al., 2022). Brand authenticity is the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves' (Södergren, 2021). To spark perceptions of authenticity, influencers must demonstrate a genuine passion for a specific topic (Leung et al., 2022). When influencers focus on a specific niche, companies can decide whether that niche aligns with their brand and potentially use that influencer to promote their brand to their audience. Jun and Yi (2020) focus mainly on influencers in their study; therefore, they discuss influencer authenticity as opposed to brand authenticity. They conceptualize influencer authenticity as the extent of followers' inferences that an influencer is devoted to creating content by intrinsic and self-gratifying motivations (Jun

& Yi, 2020). The basis of this conceptualization is derived from two studies, first, Moulard et al. (2016) suggested that consumers infer a high level of brand authenticity when they perceive that the brand's managers are intrinsically motivated and passionate about providing their products. In the case of influencer brands, influencers themselves are brand managers, so consumers can perceive their passion more directly and vividly (Jun & Yi 2020). Second, influencer authenticity is also related to the concept of passionate authenticity suggested by Audrezet et al. (2018). Passionate authenticity can be attributed to the self-gratifying activity that the influencer really enjoys the content creation process (Audrezet et al., 2018). This intrinsic motivation eventually reflects the true self of the influencer, thus improving the authenticity perceived by followers. The influencer authenticity these individuals build with their followers are what companies are striving for today.

Consumers are on the quest for authenticity so brand managers are increasingly confronted with the challenge of being true, genuine, and transparent in relations with consumers (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Researchers are finding that authenticity contributes to consumer's relationships with a company more than they thought, authenticity is a significant predictor of brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Ilicic and Webster (2014) argue that brands are authentic when they are perceived as being fundamentally determined to convey their true identity in their relations with consumers.

Influencer authenticity and brand authenticity are both important concepts to consumers. This research aspires to test the idea that social media influencers contribute to a company's overall authenticity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: A company that uses influencer marketing increases brand authenticity more than a company that does not use influencer marketing.

Emotional Attachment

Emotional attachment is a relationship-based construct between an individual and another consumption entity (e.g., a person, object, or brand) and reflects the emotional bond between them (Jun & Yi, 2020). Thomson et al. (2005) highlighted the emotional dimensions of brand attachment, which reflects the bond between a consumer and a specific brand, and involves feelings toward the brand, including affection, passion, and connection (Thomson et al., 2005). Research on consumer-brand relationships mostly focus on brand attachment (for example, Thomson et al., 2005 and Park et al., 2010). Researchers are recognizing the basic human need for strong emotional attachments to others; attachment is an emotion-laden, target-specific bond between a personal and a specific object (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). There is also research that looks at consumer's emotional attachment to influencers. Jun and Yi (2020) state that although influencers and followers do not necessarily know each other, consumers feel relatedness toward influencers through active two-way communications on social media. An emotional attachment could strengthen when consumers perceive a brand as having human-like characteristics, in the way that people can have a vivid emotional attachment toward a celebrity brand (Jun & Yi, 2020). These findings show that influencer brands, as a type of human brand, enable the most active interaction between a brand and its followers in real-time (Jun & Yi, 2020). Based on these findings, this research will test whether the overall emotional attachment toward a company increases when they use influencer marketing.

H4: A company that uses influencer marketing increases emotional attachment toward the brand more than a company that does not use influencer marketing.

Brand trust

Brand trust refers to the willingness of the average consumer to rely on a belief that a brand will consistently perform a certain level of function (Jun & Yi, 2020). Brand trust reduces consumers' uncertainty when making rational judgments in uncertain situations (Jun & Yi, 2020). At the same time, trust involves an inference regarding the good intention to share values and goals with consumers and to do their best to achieve the desired outcome (Jun & Yi, 2020). Ultimately, consumers incorporate beliefs about reliability, safety, and honesty in the operationalization of brand trust.

Brand trust has become an important factor in every company today, Kantar Millward Brown (2016) found that business-to-business brands that rated high on brand trust grew 80% in brand value in the last decade, while less trusted brands grew only 25%. As another example, Nanda (2014) reported that when it comes to convincing consumers to pay more, brand trust trumps other brand qualities. Given the importance of consumer trust in brands, it is evident that consumers' trust in brands is slipping. Given this data, consumer researchers have recognized the importance of consumers' trust in brands (Rajavi et al., 2019).

People's experience of brand trust in social media marketing increases with their online interactivity (Jun & Yi, 2020). Interactivity means continuous communication with followers, for example, an influencer responding promptly to a small or unimportant comment. Continuous communication helps followers feel that their relationship is safe and stable. This is something that influencers are known for and is not something consumers usually experience when they interact with a company or brand. This research aims to test whether influencer marketing contributes to trust in a company's brand.

H5: A company that uses influencer marketing can increase consumer brand trust more than a company that does not use influencer marketing.

Loyalty

When measuring commitment to a brand, loyalty is another relevant indicator of such commitment. Digital media has become an essential tool to compete in most of the current markets. Companies invest in their proximity to customers, which then contributes to the effectiveness of the loyalty process. The objective of organizations, through the use of digital channels, has become more strategic and aggregated, as customers started to play an active role in creating value and brand reputation (Enke & Borchers, 2019). As a result, customer loyalty has become a central element of relationship management (Moreira et al., 2021).

Consumers expect brands to serve as connectors, whether that means developing a connection with their own customers or bringing together people with different perspectives. In research from Sprout Social, it was found that nearly two thirds (64%) of consumers want brands to connect with them, while just under half (49%) expect brands to bring people together toward a common goal (Sprout Social, 2021). This data proposes a gap in communication between brands and their consumers.

There has been substantial research that has explored the relationship between brand attachment and brand loyalty. Brand loyalty plays a central role among the various components of brand equity and is particularly important in determining the long-term relationships between consumers and brands (Jun & Yi, 2020). Thomson (2006) noted that emotional attachment is a predictive factor of satisfied, trusting and committed relationships between consumers and brands. Prior research has also demonstrated that consumers' emotional attachments positively affect brand attitudes and purchase intentions, along with word-of-mouth (Jun & Yi, 2020). Therefore, emotional attachment could be a significant determinant of loyal behavior (Jun & Yi, 2020). Brand trust can also positively affect brand loyalty, brand trust consists of undoubted

expectations of the brand's reliability and positively impacts brand loyalty (Jun & Yi, 2020). Therefore, this research builds on findings from authors like Jun and Yi to investigate if authenticity, emotional attachment, and brand trust increase consumer loyalty.

H6: Authenticity, emotional attachment, and brand trust increase consumer loyalty.

Influencing happens in many ways, whether that is in real life through family members, friends or on social media where people are paid to promote products. Due to the evolution of mass media, it has been embedded into social media and the way people interact with it. A main reason someone like Kylie Jenner has been able to influence so many people is because social media turned into a place where people do business. Mass media, specifically social media, has evolved into critical business elements to companies. The media has found new ways to reach and market to their audiences, a popular contemporary marketing strategy involves the development of brands that are also real people, a phenomenon variously referred to as human branding, person branding, and celebrity branding (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019).

Ultimately, this research is beneficial to a company that wants to see how consumers feel about the use of influencer marketing. Due to influencers taking over social media, they are becoming much more influential and big company brands are realizing that. As a marketing tactic, large brands try to use influencers to bring the trust they have with their followers to their brand.

Method

For this research, an online self-administered, cross-sectional survey method was employed to collect the data. Qualtrics software was used to create and administer the survey. The survey was live for approximately 4 weeks. The participants were recruited through Rochester Institute of Technology professors and students, the sample consisted of RIT

undergraduate and graduate students. Only those who follow at least one company on social media were allowed to participate in the entire survey. Of the 177 responses received, 105 responses were used after cleaning the data.

Participants were asked to identify a company or brand that they follow on social media and then answered a variety of questions based on that company or brand. Then, participants were presented with five matrix tables, each representing a variable used in each hypothesis (emotional attachment, attitude, brand trust, loyalty, and authenticity). The matrix tables were used to categorize each variable and they used a five-point scale anchored by 1 (“strongly disagree”) and 5 (“strongly agree”). Most items within the emotional attachment, brand trust, authenticity, and loyalty matrix tables were adapted from Jun and Yi’s (2020) research. Items were modified from influencer and follower statements to company and follower statements. Items in the attitude matrix table were developed based on how consumers feel and think about the brand.

Influencer-related questions were also adapted and modified from Jun and Yi’s study (2020) and incorporated into each matrix table except for authenticity and loyalty. The intention behind the influencer-related questions was to compare what participants thought of the influencer’s role in the company. However, display logic was incorporated into the survey, only those who answered ‘yes’ to question four, whether the company or brand they identified uses social media influencers as a way of marketing their products or services, were presented with the influencer-related questions. Those who answered ‘no’ or ‘I am not sure’ were not presented with the influencer questions. Therefore, insights involving the four influencer-related questions were not able to be collected as all participants were not presented with those questions. Finally,

participants were asked to respond with demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and their level of education.

Data analysis was conducted through SPSS Statistics software. First, the data was exported from Qualtrics to SPSS, then the data was cleaned. The only responses that were kept were those who completed the entire survey and those who responded 'yes' to whether they followed a company or brand on social media. Also, survey question 5 asked respondents to specify the number of months they have been following the identified company or brand on social media, some responses were estimations (e.g., 18-21 months). When cleaning the data, a number in the middle of the estimates was chosen and the words were removed so there were only numeric values within the column. Second, a composite score for each matrix table was calculated to create one data point for simplified hypothesis testing (question 8: authenticity of the brand, question 9: attitude toward the brand, question 10: emotional attachment toward the brand, question 11: brand trust, and question 12: loyalty). Not every item within some of the matrix tables were qualified to be used in the composite score as three matrix tables used display logic (attitude toward the brand table, emotional attachment table, and brand trust table). The display logic was only presented to those who answered 'yes' to whether the company or brand they identified used influencer marketing. The exclusion of these items is due to not every participant being presented with them; therefore, they cannot be compared to those who were. Lastly, each hypothesis was analyzed using the necessary test to collect statistical insights.

Analysis and Results

Of the 177 potential respondents that participated in the study, 105 provided complete and valid responses. Overall, 34.3% of the respondents are male and 61.9% are female, with respondents predominantly between 18 and 28 years of age, see Table 7. The type of brands this

sample population follows on social media were examined and it was found that Nike (6), Patagonia (3), Lululemon (3), and Converse (3) were identified by at least three or more participants as a company or brand that they follow on social media. Apple (2), Duolingo (2), Hybe Labels (2), Slim Jim (2), Fenty Beauty (2), Scrub Daddy (2), and Wendy's (2) were all identified by at least two participants as a company or brand that the respondent follows on social media. Nike was the most identified brand that participants follow on social media. The only category that seemed to be mentioned the most is clothing and apparel companies like Nike, Patagonia, and Lululemon. 80% of the respondents said that they use Instagram as the social media platform they use to follow their identified company or brand. Twitter (14%), TikTok (11%), and YouTube (7%) were the next most used social media to follow their identified company or brand. Instagram being the most used social media platform to follow companies is not a surprising insight, however Twitter being the second most used is interesting as the use of TikTok has been on the rise. These results could be attributed to the sample population. Although these findings cannot be generalized, they still provide interesting insights and statistics from this research.

For hypothesis testing, Independent-Samples T-Tests were used for H1, H3, H4, and H5. T-tests were used for data analysis of these four hypotheses because they compare two groups (Group A- those who are following a company that uses influencer marketing, and Group B- those who are following a company that does not use influencer marketing). There was also a third group option, 'I am not sure' that was excluded. These two groups were used as the independent variable and attitudes, authenticity, emotional attachment, and brand trust served as the dependent variables for each hypothesis. The t-test for H1, see Table 1, showed that there was no significant difference for the attitude toward the brand, $t(83) = -1.62, p = .109$, despite

Group B ($M = 4.4$, $SD = .8$) attaining higher scores than Group A ($M = 4.1$, $SD = .7$). After analyzing these results, it was found that H1 is not supported, and these results are not statistically significant. The test for H3, see Table 3, showed that there was also no significant difference for the perceived authenticity toward the brand, $t(83) = -.335$, $p = .738$, despite Group B ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .57$) attaining a slightly higher mean and a slightly lower standard deviation than Group A ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .64$). After analyzing these results, it was found that H3 is not supported, and these results are not statistically significant. For H4, there was no significant difference in emotional attachment toward the brand, see Table 4, $t(83) = -1.082$, $p = .283$, despite Group B ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.1$) attaining a higher score than Group A ($M = 3.2$, $SD = .9$). After analyzing these results, it was found that H4 is not supported, and the results are not statistically significant. Lastly, the t-test for H5, see Table 5, found that the participants in Group B ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .59$), who follow a brand that does not use influencer marketing, demonstrated a higher mean and a lower standard deviation than Group A ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .62$). Therefore, consumers who follow a brand that does not use influencer marketing have slightly higher brand trust. After analyzing these results, it was found that H5 is not supported and the results are not statistically significant, $t(83) = -1.990$, $p = .050$.

For H2 testing, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed, see Table 2, to assess the linear relationship between the number of months a consumer follows a company on social media, the dependent variable, and consumer attitudes toward the company, which was the independent variable. Participants were asked to specify the number of months they have been following the company on social media. It was found that there is no relationship between the two variables and the results are not statistically significant, $r(103) = .05$, $p = .612$. These results indicate that H2 is not supported.

For H6, a multiple linear regression analysis using the enter method was conducted, see Table 6, to examine whether independent variables authenticity, emotional attachment, and brand trust increase the dependent variable, consumer loyalty. The model was significant, $R^2 = .44$, $F(3, 101) = 26.39$, $p < .001$, explaining 43.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, brand loyalty. Emotional attachment ($B = .294$ $t = 3.197$, $p = .002$) and brand trust ($B = .358$ $t = 3.502$, $p < .001$) contributed significantly to the model whereas authenticity ($B = .127$, $t = 1.327$, $p = .188$) did not. These findings show that when the consumer has a high emotional attachment to the company, they have a higher level of loyalty toward the brand. These two variables, emotional attachment, and brand trust, have a small relationship and these results are statistically significant ($B = .294$, $p = .002$). It was also found that when a consumer has high brand trust, they have a higher level of loyalty toward the brand. These variables have a moderate relationship, and the results are statistically significant ($B = .358$, $p < .001$). However, results show that authenticity have almost no relationship with brand loyalty ($B = .127$, $p = .188$) and these results are not statistically significant. Overall, these results indicate that emotional attachment and brand trust toward a company do increase brand loyalty, whereas authenticity does not increase brand loyalty. Therefore, H6 is partially supported.

Discussion

This study aimed to compare companies that use influencer marketing to companies that do not and analyze how this concept contributes to those that use it. Many companies today use influencer marketing to harness a connection with their audience, this research explores this tactic. The results of this study found that influencer marketing does not increase brand attitude, brand authenticity, emotional attachment, or brand trust. The amount of time a consumer follows a brand on social media does not increase consumers brand attitude. It was also found that

emotional attachment and brand trust toward a company do increase brand loyalty, whereas authenticity does not increase brand loyalty.

Although the purpose was different, some of the findings in this article do not support results that were found in similar studies that were previously conducted; five out of six proposed hypotheses in this study were not supported. To find out why this might be, a comparison analysis between this study and previous studies was conducted. It was concluded that sample size and the population targeted in this study are contributing factors. In addition, there was no compensation incentive offered for this study, whereas larger studies there was (e.g. Jun & Yi, 2020). This can influence who decides to take the survey and the size of the sample in this study was much lower. Furthermore, participants were likely aware of the survey topic as they were first asked to identify a company, they follow on social media and whether they use influencer marketing. Too much knowledge of the purpose of the study can alter participant's responses, therefore not providing accurate insights. As discussed earlier, this is similar to how participants use their persuasion knowledge, which refers to consumers' knowledge and beliefs regarding marketers' persuasion goals and attempts, as well as their underlying motives and tactics, and how persuasion works. Persuasion knowledge impacts how consumers react and respond to influence attempts, participants' knowledge of the study subject can impact how they decide to respond to questions. Lastly, a survey method was used for this research as previous studies has performed them as well, for example Jun and Yi (2020) and Kim and Kim (2022). Jun and Yi (2020) conducted a survey, but respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, high vs. low attachment, those in the high-attachment condition were asked to recall a specific influencer whom they were currently following and felt highly attached to and those in the low-attachment condition were asked to recall a specific influencer whom they were

currently following but did not feel attached to. This could have been beneficial in this research to better compare the two groups, those who follow a company that uses influencer marketing and those who follow a company that does not use influencer marketing. Also, these articles looked at the relationship consumers have with influencers, this research focused on how influencer marketing impacts a company. These are two different forms of analysis, which could explain the lack of support in the proposed hypotheses. The variables used in this research from Jun and Yi (2020), may not be as comparable as first anticipated to how influencer marketing impacts a company. Perhaps, the use of a different research method could be better suited for this specific research topic, for example, Leung et al. (2022) conducted interviews and collected narratives from practitioners and consumers to gain real-world insights into the phenomenon. In another study by Leung et al. (2022), they partnered with an international influencer marketing agency to analyze more than 5,800 influencer marketing posts on the popular Chinese social media platform Weibo. These two methods gather deeper insights into the information being analyzed. However, a different and more related set of variables would still make a survey method just as suitable.

Although five out of six proposed hypotheses were not supported, this study still has useful insights and contributes to the field of communication. This research used previous study findings and applied them to a different concept, the comparison of a company that uses influencer marketing to a company that does not use influencer marketing and how that impacts them. For H1, the means were very close between Group A ($M = 4.1$) and Group B ($M = 4.4$), this implies that the attitude toward the company they identified is relatively positive regardless of influencer marketing. This was also true for H3, as the means for Group A ($M = 4.17$) and Group B ($M = 4.22$) were very close, therefore brand authenticity of the company they identified

is relatively positive regardless of influencer marketing. However, H4 showed lower means for Group A ($M = 3.2$) and Group B ($M = 3.4$), meaning that emotional attachment toward the company the participants identified is 'neutral' or 'unaffected' regardless of influencer marketing. For H5, Group A ($M = 3.96$) and Group B ($M = 4.26$) show that those who follow a company that does not use influencer marketing have slightly higher trust in the brand they identified. This could be due to persuasion knowledge; consumers are aware that influencer marketing is used as a persuasion tactic to influence their purchase decisions. Also, although H2 was not supported, it found that the number of months a consumer follows a brand on social media has no relationship with their attitude toward the brand. This finding was interesting as it was first predicted that the amount of time consumers followed the brand would positively impact their attitude due to a longer relationship with that brand on social media. Lastly, H6 was partially supported as it was found that emotional attachment and brand trust increase consumer loyalty whereas authenticity does not. Given these results, there are still statistical contributions for the sample population this study was presented to.

This study also exhibits which companies or brands college students are following on social media, therefore providing insights into what content they are most interested in seeing, why they are interested in that content, and what brought them to be interested in that content. After identifying a company that they follow on social media, participants were asked what brought them to follow the company, see Table 8. Results show that 17.1% of respondents selected advertisements (e.g. Instagram or Facebook Ads), 36.2% of respondents selected that they recently bought their product or service, 12.4% selected that an influencer recommended them, and 8.6% selected that a friend recommended them. The remaining 25.7% of participants selected 'other' and provided their own reasoning for following the company. Frequent

responses included statements like; they enjoy their content or products, they found the brand's products on another platform (e.g. YouTube), the brand posts funny content (e.g. tweets, memes, TikTok), or they align with the companies values (e.g. "their work for the environment makes the news and is so impressive to me"). The data provided was not applicable to the proposed hypotheses, but nevertheless contribute to the overall contributions of this study.

Within this research, there were a few limitations that will be discussed in more detail below. A single limitation that influenced the results of this study was the sample. The sample number was very low, 105 usable responses, whereas in Jun and Yi's (2020) research there was 282 usable responses and Kim and Kim (2022) had 490 responses. A small sample size can impact data to the point that there are no significant results, and in this study, there was almost no significant results and very little difference between Group A and Group B in H1, H3, H4, and H5. Another factor that influenced the sample size was when cleaning the data, many responses had to be eliminated as some participants did not follow any brands on social media, they did not consent to participation, or they did not fully complete the survey. However, H6 was partially supported, results showed that emotional attachment and brand trust do increase consumer loyalty toward a brand and both findings were significant where brand authenticity does not increase consumer loyalty.

Limitations and Future Research

All participants in this study were RIT students, therefore, there is low external validity, and this study does not represent the general population. For convenience purposes, it was distributed to the college and as a result, findings are limited. To avoid limitations, it is recommended that a larger sample is used so findings can be generalized. Also, it is recommended to use a more subtle description of the survey purpose, so participants do not

become fully aware of the purpose of the study and therefore alter their answers. Furthermore, within the survey, there is display logic that only presents certain questions if the participants respond yes to the question “does this company or brand use social media influencers as a way of marketing their products or services?” This restricted the use of those questions when comparing Group A and Group B, for future research it is recommended to avoid using display logic and instead perform an alternate method.

In addition, as proposed in the discussion section, a survey may not have been the best way to approach data collection for this topic. Although a survey method was used in similar previous studies (e.g. Jun & Yi, 2020, and Kim & Kim, 2022), the design of the survey for this study could have been improved to better compare Group A and Group B. Also, Jun & Yi (2020) and Kim & Kim (2022) looked at the relationship consumers have with influencers, this research focused on how influencer marketing impacts a company. These are two different forms of analysis, which could explain the lack of support in the proposed hypotheses as items from their surveys were adapted to this survey. Also, the variables used in this study, adapted from Jun and Yi (2020), may not be as comparable as first anticipated to how influencer marketing impacts a company. Further question development or adaptations from other literature to the survey could have been beneficial.

Future research can conduct an experiment comparing advertisements from companies with and without influencers. However, this would require participants to be familiar with the company and the influencer to effectively gather insights. Also, for future studies, it could be beneficial to include more influencer related questions within the survey to further support the proposed hypotheses and gather more insights. Lastly, adapting items from other studies that

discuss companies using influencer marketing would be beneficial instead of adapting items from articles that focus just on influencers.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of influencer marketing has completely shifted how businesses practice and execute marketing for their brands. Brands have started focusing more on consumer needs and changed how they experience their brand and products. Within this article, insights are utilized from academic research and business trends to assess how influencer marketing works. The fundamental benefits and risks of influencer marketing are explored, and examples of influencer marketing success and failures are discussed. The goal of this research was to test the proposed hypotheses and ultimately observe the difference between a company that uses influencer marketing and a company that does not.

Results show that a company that uses influencer marketing does not increase positive attitudes, consumer brand trust, brand authenticity, or emotional attachment, more than a company that does not use influencer marketing. The length of time a consumer follows a brand on social media has no relationship with their attitude towards the brand. Lastly, it was found that emotional attachment and brand trust toward a company do increase brand loyalty, whereas authenticity does not increase brand loyalty. Findings from these results contribute to the communication field although multiple hypotheses were not supported. Therefore, the following insights were gathered; brand authenticity and consumer attitudes toward a company are relatively positive regardless of influencer marketing, emotional attachment toward a company is unaffected regardless of influencer marketing, and companies that do not use influencer marketing have slightly higher brand trust than those that do. This study also exhibits which companies or brands college students are following on social media, therefore providing insights

into what content they are most interested in seeing, why they are interested in that content, and what brought them to be interested in that content. Nike, Patagonia, Lululemon, and Converse are the most followed brands by this sample population. However, Nike was the most popular. Apple, Duolingo, Hybe Labels, Slim Jim, Fenty Beauty, Scrub Daddy, and Wendy's were also brands that are followed but not nearly as much as the top three. There was only one category that was able to be gathered from the responses, clothing and apparel, deeming it the most popular category among this sample. Instagram is the most used social platform to follow these brands with Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube following closely behind. Instagram being the most used social media platform to follow companies is not a surprising insight, however Twitter being the second most used is interesting as the use of TikTok has been on the rise. These insights are strictly applicable to this sample population only, as they are college students, these insights cannot be generalized. Although these findings cannot be generalized, they still provide interesting insights and statistics from this research.

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Tables**Table 1**

Results of Attitudes Toward a Company That Uses Influencer Marketing vs. One That Does Not

	Does this company influencer marketing?						<i>t</i> (83)	<i>p</i>
	Group A (Yes)			Group B (No)				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>		
Attitude toward the brand	4.1	0.7	62	4.4	0.8	23	-1.62	0.109

Note. $p < .001$, $p < .01$, and $p < .05$

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients for Study Variables*

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2
1. Attitude toward the brand	105	4.2	0.7	1	0.612
2. Number of months	105	21.8	16.7	0.612	1

Table 3

Results of Authenticity Toward a Company That Uses Influencer Marketing vs. One That Does Not

	Does this company use influencer marketing?						<i>t</i> (83)	<i>p</i>
	Group A (Yes)			Group B (No)				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>		
Authenticity	4.17	0.64	62	4.22	0.57	23	-0.335	0.738

Note. $p < .001$, $p < .01$, and $p < .05$

Table 4

Results of Emotional Attachment Toward a Company That Uses Influencer Marketing vs. One That Does Not

	Does this company use influencer marketing?						<i>t</i> (83)	<i>p</i>
	Group A (Yes)			Group B (No)				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N		
Emotional Attachment	3.2	0.9	62	3.4	1.1	23	-1.082	0.283

Note. $p < .001$, $p < .01$, and $p < .05$

Table 5

Results of Brand Trust Toward a Company That Uses Influencer Marketing vs. One That Does Not

	Does this company influencer marketing?						<i>t</i> (83)	<i>p</i>
	Group A (Yes)			Group B (No)				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N		
Brand trust	3.96	0.62	62	4.26	0.59	23	-1.99	0.05

Note. $p < .001$, $p < .01$, and $p < .05$

Table 6*Coefficient^a Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis*

Variable	SE	95% CI		<i>t</i>	Beta	<i>p</i>
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Authenticity	0.086	-0.057	0.286	1.327	0.127	0.188
Emotional Attachment	0.05	0.061	0.258	3.197	0.294	0.002
Brand Trust	0.082	0.125	0.452	3.502	0.358	<.001

Note. ^a Dependent variable: Loyalty. $p < .001$, $p < .01$, and $p < .05$

Table 7
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Women	65	61.9
Men	36	34.2
Education		
Highschool Degree or equivalent	21	20.0
Some college but no degree	54	51.4
Associate Degree	4	3.8
Bachelor's degree	20	19.0
Graduate Degree	5	4.8
Doctorate Degree	1	1.0
Age		
18 years	11	10.5
19 years	25	23.8
20 years	21	20.0
21 years	16	15.2
22 years	14	13.3
23 years	7	6.7
24 years	3	2.9
25 years	3	2.9
27 years	1	1.0
28 years	2	2.0
44 years	1	1.0
57 years	1	1.0
Ethnicity		
White / Caucasian	71	67.6
Hispanic / Latino	10	9.5
Black / African American	10	9.5
Native American / American Indian	2	1.9
Asian Pacific Islander	8	7.6
Asian	1	1.0
South Asian (Indian)	1	1.0
White and Hispanic/Latino	1	1.0
White/ Korean	1	1

Note. *N* = 105. Participants were on average 21.23 years old (*SD* = 4.69)

Table 8*Reasoning for Following the Company on Social Media*

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Advertisements (e.g. Instagram or Facebook Ads)	18	17.1
I recently bought their product / service	38.0	36.2
An influencer recommended me	13.0	12.4
A friend	9.0	8.6
Other (please specify)	27.0	25.7

Note. $N = 105$. ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.47$)