

Synthesizing Insights: A Literature Review on Social Media Influencers and Brand Image

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E-mail : effulgence@rdias.ac.in, Website : www.rdias.ac.in<http://effulgence.rdias.ac.in/user/default.aspx><https://dx.doi.org/10.33601/effulgence.rdias/v23/i1/2025/134-148>**Ms. Shweta Saini¹** ✉**Dr. Rohit Bansal²**

Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive literature review on the relationship between social media influencers and brand image. Through the analysis of scholarly papers, eight key attributes of social media influencers were identified: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, parasocial relationships, information value, influencer-product congruence, self-disclosure, and homophily. These attributes are pivotal in determining the effectiveness of influencers in shaping brand image. The review reveals that attributes such as attractiveness, expertise, and congruence with product offerings significantly enhance brand image, fostering positive consumer perceptions. Additionally, the roles of trustworthiness and parasocial relationships are highlighted as crucial in building strong connections between influencers and their audiences, further reinforcing brand image. The findings have important implications for both academic research and practical applications. This paper contributes to the growing understanding of how social media influencers can effectively shape brand image, offering valuable guidance for both researchers and practitioners in the field.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Brand Image, Literature Review, Credibility.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has experienced remarkable growth in India, rapidly expanding and evolving to become an integral part of everyday life. On average, users spend 142 minutes per day on social networks (Dixcon, 2023). Social media, defined as interactive, computer-assisted technology,

facilitates the creation and sharing of content, information, creative ideas, graphics, and various forms of expression. These platforms have become powerful networks and essential tools for marketers, entrepreneurs, non-profit organisations, consumers, and others (Gurunathan & Lakshmi, 2023). With its ability to reach highly targeted audiences, social media allows sellers to connect with specific groups based on factors such as age, income, marital status,

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interests, and opinions. This enables a more personalized connection between sellers and consumers than ever before.

The influence of social media has significantly increased its impact on communities and society as a whole. Social media serves as a platform where individuals can exchange thoughts, views, knowledge, habits, expertise, lifestyle, and other related content with like-minded people. Those who share their knowledge and expertise and create content in fields such as fashion, lifestyle, food, and travel are known as influencers (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Moreover, the recent literature reveals that the characteristics of social media influencers, for instance: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise are positively interrelated with brand image. Particularly, several scholars emphasized the role of social media influencers. However, more empirical research is required to explore the characteristics of influencers and have impact on brand image. The limited empirical studies on the linkages between the stated concepts and the absence of clear discussions regarding social media influencers and brand image indicate that further research is needed to investigate and describe the presumed association between both constructs. Consequently, the current paper aims to contribute to the literature review on social media influencers and brand image by reviewing past studies on influencers' dimensions and brand image. It further aims to provide directions for future empirical studies on these concepts in line with research gaps identified in the literature. The following section presents the literature review for this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Background of the Study

Influencers are individuals who can sway others through their posts or sponsored advertisements and have a significant following of consumers. Companies use Influencer marketing (IM), a form of social media marketing strategy, by hiring

influencers to promote their products or services to their followers for a fee (Cartwright et al., 2022). This strategy involves partnering with influential online personalities who, in turn, promote a company's brand-related content across their social networks. For content creators, securing paid partnerships with brands has become a profitable opportunity, enabling them to monetize their influence (Potter & Olaoye, 2024). These partnerships enable influencers to work with brands that fit their niche, producing genuine and compelling content that highlights products or services (Bergh et al., 2021). As the influencer marketing sector expands, the opportunities for earning through sponsorships have grown substantially, making it an appealing career choice for many creators and an intriguing subject for researchers.

1.1. Social Media Influencers

An influencer is an individual, group, or organisation capable of shaping the decisions of a specific audience on digital platforms due to their popularity, credibility, expertise, and status with their viewers (Hub, 2021). The widespread accessibility of the internet and its rapid information dissemination allow certain contributors to attract a large following and build a loyal fan base, thereby positioning themselves as social media influencer (SMI) (Freberg et al., 2011).

The use of social media influencers has surged significantly as consumers increasingly move away from traditional TV towards social media and other OTT platforms. The term "social media influencer" has become widely recognized and popular. Instagram, YouTube, Facebook (Meta), and Twitter are among the most influential platforms for influencers as illustrated in Figure 1. Influencers utilise these channels to share aspects of their personal lives while addressing various topics and target audiences, including fashion, gaming, and entertainment (YEC, 2022). As a result, social media influencers are seen as approachable, amiable neighbours who provide unbiased views

(Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). These are a distinct group of digital content creators known for their significant online following, distinctive brand

identity, and strong relationships with commercial sponsors (Duffy, 2020).

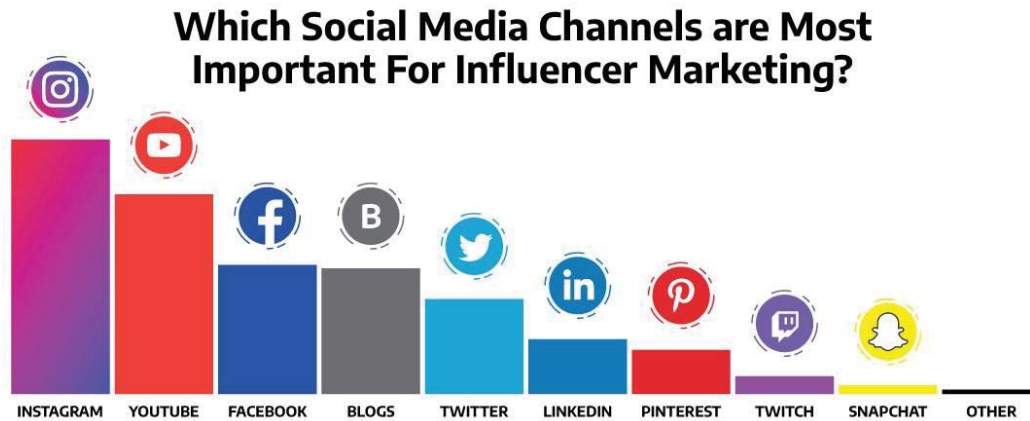


Figure. 1 Social Media Platforms

Source: (Ballis, 2020)

Brands are increasingly seeking genuine and successful influencers to boost product promotion and drive sales. These brand influencers engage in content creation, promotion, and product launches (Zietek, 2016). Influencers are highly valued because they can set trends and motivate their followers to purchase endorsed products. As competition intensifies, identifying authentic influencers with substantial follower bases has become a major challenge for brands and organizations. Influencers either directly or indirectly enhance a brand's appeal on social media. Marketers use "sponsorship" tags in posts to clarify the commercial intent of their communications, helping consumers recognize ads and choose the right products. Influencers share updates and endorse products that resonate with them, thereby influencing consumer attitudes and behaviours (Vonglek 2014). Due to changes in media consumption and the significant amount of time consumers spend on social media, marketers are exploring new advertising techniques to leverage these channels. Influencers have emerged as a popular advertising strategy, with brands leveraging their extensive follower bases to promote their

products and build a positive brand image. Influencers are compensated for their content, recommendations, and credibility, which helps enhance the brand's market presence.

1.2. Brand Image

A brand is composed of a name, word, symbol, design, or a blend of these elements. Brands are a perceived image or position consumers have in their minds, and they hold the place relying on the product's quality, specifications, and inventions (Al-Haddad, 2019). The association that occurs in consumers' memories when the brand of a product is seen, thought of, or imagined is a representation of the brand image and customer trust. It is one-of-a-kind and describes the brand's main benefits to customers (Khan et al., 2023). It is a significant brand element and can be based on fact or fiction, depending upon the consumer's impression of the brand. Brand image (BR_IM) is considered a brand belief and an important phenomenon (Faircloth et al., 2001). The idea people associate with a brand guides their purchase choice as products are not only

purchased due to their functionality but also because of their symbol. A brand’s image is considered the development of particular qualities brought about by intensive consumer-brand-product interaction (including an understanding of, sentiments against, and attitudes toward the brand) compiled in individual memory (Wijaya 2013). Marketers who want a competitive edge must build powerful, favourable, and distinctive associations with consumers' memory. It helps in making a positive association with its customers. It provides confidence to customers in the quality and consistency of products. It helps organisations develop a long-term marketing strategy and a desirable positioning of products (Armenteras et al., 2017).

Building a brand image involves creativity and work because it cannot be done quickly or through a single medium. Instead, it must be done gradually using all available media sustainably and with the help of the right metrics (Bijen 2017). Nowadays, brand image is a critical notion for marketers. People make purchasing decisions based on the image they associate with a brand since things are purchased for their utility and symbol. Ultimately, brands influence perception and, as a result, purchasing

behaviour, making products and services less interchangeable. Brands generate economic value by increasing returns and growth while also limiting risk.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

This study intended to review existing literature on the relationship between social media influencers and brand image.

METHODOLOGY

To develop a thorough understanding of the research topic, an extensive review of existing scholarly literature was conducted. The research articles, books, theses, and other relevant academic sources were collected from a wide range of databases to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The primary databases utilized for this purpose include Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Shodhganga, among others. These databases were chosen for their extensive coverage of high-quality, peer-reviewed academic content across multiple disciplines. The researchers ensured that the literature selected for review was current and relevant to the study's scope.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.1: Summary table

Author (Year)	Objective	Sample Size	Tools & Techniques	Findings
(Khan et al., 2023)	To assess the effects of a few social networking attributes that influence credibility and BR_IM and lead to purchase intention.	272 social media users of Delhi NCR	Structural equation modelling & FsQCA	The study concludes that expertise, information quality and trustworthiness have significant and positive effects on BR_IM.

(Tamara et al., 2021)	To investigate the role of brand image as a mediator in the association between SMI and purchase intention.	Women Gen Z who use cosmetic products.	Structural equation modelling	The findings concluded that brand image significantly and positively mediates the relationship between SMI and purchase intention, indicating that influencers can enhance brand image, which in turn boosts consumers' intentions to purchase the endorsed products.
(Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020)	To explore the attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise requirements for online influencer campaigns and their effect on brand image, brand trust and satisfaction.	319 social media users who have bought Luxury fashion industry	Structural equation modelling	The study revealed that firstly trustworthiness and secondly, attractiveness significantly affect brand image, trust and satisfaction. The relevance of expertise is nil. Brand image and satisfaction positively influence price premium and purchase intention.
(Nurhandayani et al., 2019)	To analyse the effect of SMI and brand image on consumers'	180 beauty and skincare users in Jakarta city	Structural equation modelling	It is concluded that SMI does not affect consumers' purchase intention. It

	purchase intentions.			primarily helps the brand establish a perceived image in consumers' minds, which then influences their consideration to make a purchase.
(Hermanda et al., 2019)	To investigate social media influencers' influence on self-concept, purchase intention, and brand image among cosmetics consumers.	219 cosmetic consumers	Structural equation modelling	The findings revealed a negative influence of both SMI and self-concept on purchase intention. In contrast, brand image was found to positively affect purchase intention. These results highlight the complex interactions between influencer marketing, self-perception, and consumer behaviour in the cosmetics market.
Sande (2019)	To explore the impacts of celebrity influencers on the brand image.	213 sportswear businesses (Nike and Adidas) among Icelandic customers.	In a quantitative study, data were collected from a questionnaire. Data were analysed using ANOVA	No favourable effect of influencers on brand image.

<p>Nathalie & Todd (2019)</p>	<p>To explore the effect of online influencers on consumers' perceptions of COO, brand image and their impact on purchase intention.</p>	<p>200 customers of fashion products & 15 interviews</p>	<p>A mixed method approach and convenience sampling technique were used; data were collected through a survey and semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed through correlation & regression using SPSS 25.</p>	
<p>Trivedi & Sama (2020)</p>	<p>To observe the celebrity versus expert influencer effects on customers' internet buying inclinations. And studied how brand adoration and attitude mediated the relationship between influencer marketing and online purchase intentions.</p>	<p>Data were collected from 438 respondents</p>	<p>Hayes process technique, hierarchical regression analysis, and structural</p>	<p>Results indicated a difference in brand attitude between an attractive celebrity influencer and an expert, affecting brand the relationship between influencer marketing and online purchase intentions.</p>

<p>Afifah et al. (2022)</p>	<p>Analysed and gained a thorough knowledge of the reference group's wom Instagram influencers' combined effects on the brand's image.</p>	<p>Hundred Sam Ratulangi University students</p>	<p>A quantitative approach and multiple linear regression analysis tools.</p>	<p>The study concluded that Instagram influencers and E-WOM contribute to a good business image. Because of this, marketers must take into account customer and influencer reviews of the goods</p>
<p>(Gorgulu, 2019)</p>	<p>To investigate the potential association between digital influencers' trust and brand image.</p>	<p>100 social media users</p>	<p>Data was collected through an online survey of Instagram users and analysed using SPSS.</p>	<p>The findings revealed a positive association between influencer trust and brand image, brand loyalty, and purchase intention. The study highlighted the importance of influencer support in enhancing brand-related characteristics, indicating that trusted influencers can significantly contribute to a brand's presence and reputation on social networks such as Instagram.</p>

(Jaya & Prianthara, 2020)	To measure the influence of influencers, destination image and brand image on the purchase intention of Tourists.	Data were collected from foreign tourists who visited Bratan Lake, Bedugul.	A convenience sampling technique was used. Data were analysed using SEM with PLS software.	The findings concluded that influencers and brand and destination image significantly affect purchase intention. Brand image is highly correlated to destination image about purchasing intent. Influencers positively influence brand image, destination image and purchase intention.
(Bijen, 2017)	To investigate the impact of micro and macro influencers, comments, and product combinations on brand image.	This study mainly focused on fashion and electronic study.	The study was designed as an experiment, and samples were collected through an online questionnaire.	According to the findings, perceived connectivity to a micro-influencer was less likely to be impacted by a product match/mismatch or unfavourable remarks than perceived closeness to a macro-influencer.

(Putri, 2021)	To investigate the impact of social media influencers and brand image on the purchase intentions of online consumers.	The study focused on female respondents who followed Tasya Farasya on Instagram and were familiar with Maybelline products.	Data analysis was conducted via PLS.	The study concluded that SMI does not positively or significantly affect online purchase intentions. In contrast, BR_IM positively affects online purchase intentions. This highlights the critical role of brand image in driving online consumer behaviour, even when influencer impact is minimal.
(He, 2022)	To examine the impact of SMI on perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand image	Malaysian consumers	The study analysed data using SEM	The findings revealed a significant effect of influencers on brand image, while awareness of the brand does not significantly affect brand image.

After analyzing the current state of the literature, the following details were identified by the researchers:

Dimensions of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers are famous for the relationships they have with followers and for specific features that influencers have. The following are the dimensions of social media influencers were found through the literature review:

❖ Attractiveness

People have shown a preference for influencers who are either physically appealing to them or someone who reflects a warm personality, which could not be perceived as rude or disrespectful. Sharing engaging content can increase the interaction with their followers (Choi et al., 2023). An influencer perceived as attractive can be interpreted as more persuasive, successful and having more power.

❖ Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as the endorser's plausibility, honesty, and integrity. Trustworthiness is interpreted as credibility, honesty, integrity, and expertise and denotes an endorser's knowledge, experience, or abilities (Jaeed, 2021). Trustworthiness is also how objectively the recipients evaluate the endorser. One aspect of source credibility is dependability; influencers must be reliable to influence their following. Because they perceive SMI as trustworthy, they are more inclined to accept the products that influencers recommend (AlFarraj et al., 2021).

❖ Expertise

Expertise is a term used to describe a high level of knowledge or competence. This component can also be referred to as the degree to which it is believed that the endorser possesses the knowledge, skills, or experience required to advertise the products. Influencers could have more significant information

than official spokespersons (Choi et al., 2023). Utilising their expertise, the social media influencers accomplished tasks regarding the merchandise. I am capable of creating a solid and unique message for a business or a product that will attract customers. Target groups are more likely to make purchases when influencers are more credible because they are more attractive, trustworthy, and experienced (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020).

❖ Homophily

Homophily is 'the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, social status and the like' "(Eyal & Rubin, 2003)". Inherently, individuals tend to gravitate towards associating and engaging with others who share similar social status and values (Dunkake, 2019). In this context, we differentiate between subjective homophily, which involves individuals perceiving themselves the same as their favourite influencer. Relationships are often maintained based on shared commonalities such as culture, education, social status, and beliefs (Xiang et al., 2016).

❖ Information Value

The informativeness of influencers content can be referred to as its ability to furnish details on products or other informative material, enabling consumers to make purchases that align

with their preferences and maximize satisfaction (Ducoffe, 1995; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The degree of informativeness of content is a pivotal factor influencing whether audiences perceive SMI as opinion leaders (Kim & Kim, 2022). Online platforms enable SMI to engage with their followers and disseminate sought-after information. By sharing content information about products, SMI influence consumers (Lin et al., 2018).

❖ Parasocial Relationships

Interactions of media users with social media

influencers can foster the formation of Parasocial relationships (PR) (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956). In these relationships, individuals perceive these public figures as companions or friends, similar to interactions in face-to-face settings, driven by the innate human desire for connection despite physical distance (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Social media influencers, despite minimal participation in discussions, create an illusion of friendship by inviting consumers to engage (Bond, 2016).

❖ Self-Disclosure

Influencers commonly share personal aspects of their lives, including self-portraits and personal anecdotes (Gannon & Prothero, 2016). Employed as a method for self-branding, self-disclosure enables influencers to exhibit genuine expression, as noted by (Gannon & Prothero, 2016). (Lee et al., 2008) investigated the consequences of voluntary self-disclosure in sponsored blogs, uncovering a beneficial impact on nurturing social bonds with blog followers. This self-disclosure is significant in facilitating PR, thereby granting influencers authority as brand endorsers (Liu, 2022).

❖ Influencer-Product Congruence

Within the vast pool of influencers spanning various interests (Swant, 2016), Consumers possess the liberty to decide whom they want to follow or unfollow at their discretion. Consumers tend to establish a significant relationship with influencers as an idealized version of themselves or share common interests (Boerman, 2020). Consequently, when influencers promote products that match the image they project.

CONCLUSION

This literature review has examined the relationship between social media influencers and brand image, drawing insights from scholarly papers. Through the review, eight key attributes of social media influencers were identified: attractiveness,

trustworthiness, expertise, parasocial relationships, information value, influencer-product congruence, self-disclosure, and homophily. These attributes play a critical role in shaping the effectiveness of influencers in the context of brand image enhancement. The analysis revealed that certain attributes— particularly attractiveness, expertise, and influencer-product congruence—consistently emerge as significant factors in influencing brand image. These attributes contribute to a positive perception of the brand among consumers, enhancing the overall brand image when aligned with the influencer's characteristics. Additionally, the review highlighted the importance of trustworthiness and parasocial relationships, which contribute to deeper connections between influencers and their audiences, further reinforcing the brand's image. Overall, the existing literature suggests that social media influencers have a substantial impact on brand image, with specific attributes of the influencers playing a pivotal role in this dynamic. However, there is a need for further research to explore the interplay between these attributes and their varying degrees of influence across different consumer segments and industries. This review provides a foundation for future studies and offers valuable insights for marketers seeking to leverage social media influencers to enhance their brand image.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this literature review have significant implications for both academics and practitioners in the fields of marketing and brand management.

Academic Implications

For researchers, this review highlights the importance of examining specific attributes of social media influencers when studying their impact on brand image. The identification of key attributes such as attractiveness, expertise, and influencer-product congruence provides a framework for future

studies to explore how these factors interact and influence consumer perceptions across different contexts. Additionally, the review underscores the need for more nuanced research that considers the roles of trustworthiness, parasocial relationships, and homophily in shaping brand image. This could involve investigating how these attributes impact various consumer demographics or exploring their effectiveness in different industries.

Practical Implications

For brand managers and marketers, the insights from this review offer actionable strategies for optimizing influencer marketing campaigns. The significance of attributes like attractiveness, expertise, and product congruence suggests that selecting influencers who align with the brand's identity and target audience is crucial for enhancing brand image. Marketers should focus on building partnerships with influencers who not only possess these attributes but also demonstrate high levels of trustworthiness and the ability to form strong parasocial relationships with their followers. This approach can lead to more authentic and impactful endorsements, ultimately strengthening the brand's image.

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