
Munich Personal RePEc Archive

How social media influencers affect behavioural intentions towards recommended brands: the role of emotional attachment and information value

Sánchez-Fernández, Raquel and Jiménez-Castillo, David

University of Almería (ceiA3). Research Center CIMEDES

2021

Online at https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/123159/
MPRA Paper No. 123159, posted 06 Jan 2025 09:17 UTC

How social media influencers affect behavioural intentions towards recommended brands: The role of emotional attachment and information value[1]

Raquel Sánchez-Fernández[a]* and David Jiménez-Castillo[b]

[a]*Department of Economic and Business, Research Center CIMEDES, University of Almería (ceiA3), Almería, Spain*

Ctra. Sacramento, s/n, 04120 La Cañada, Almería, Spain. Tel: +34 950 015 176. E-mail: raquel.sanchez@ual.es. ORCID: 0000-0002-6462-9807.

[b]*Department of Economic and Business, Research Center CIMEDES, University of Almería (ceiA3), Almería, Spain*

Ctra. Sacramento, s/n, 04120 La Cañada, Almería, Spain. Tel: +34 950 015 103. E-mail: david.jimenez@ual.es. ORCID: 0000-0002-2302-1002

*corresponding author

Raquel Sánchez-Fernández is an Associate Professor of Marketing in the Department of Economics and Business at University of Almería, Spain. Her research interests include consumer behaviour, relationship marketing and experiential marketing. She has published in international refereed journals such as *International Journal of Information Management, Journal of Business Research, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, International Journal of Market Research, Marketing Theory, The Service Industries Journal and British Food Journal*, among others. She reviews papers for a number of leading journals of marketing and management fields.

David Jiménez-Castillo is an Associate Professor of Marketing in the Department of Economics and Business at University of Almería, Spain. His current research interests include market information processing, integrated marketing communication and relationship marketing. He has published in international refereed journals such as *International Journal of Information Management, Information and Management, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Public*

[1] Version accepted for publication. 0268-4012/ © 2021 Westburn Publishers Ltd. Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group. Published in Journal of Marketing Management, 37(11-12), 2021, 1123-1147. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1866648
Link: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1866648

Relations Research, Journal of Environmental Psychology, International Journal of Market Research and Information Research, among others. He reviews papers for a number of leading journals of marketing and management fields.

How social media influencers affect behavioural intentions towards recommended brands: The role of emotional attachment and information value

Despite the current relevance of social media influencers in brand communication strategies, questions remain about the factors that determine their influential power and how this power affects follower behaviour. This research examines the role of emotional attachment and perceived information value in the process of influence that can lead followers to manifest behavioural intentions toward the brands endorsed by influencers. The results show that both factors act as determinants of followers' perceived influence, which in turn predicts followers' positive word-of-mouth (WOM) about recommended brands and purchase intention. In fact, perceived influence plays a mediating role in these relationships. Positive WOM and purchase intention are also significantly related. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature and effects of the persuasive power of social media influencers. Key implications for researchers and practitioners are discussed.

Keywords: social media influencers; emotional attachment; information value; word-of-mouth; purchase intention

Summary Statement Contribution: The main contribution of this research lies in providing evidence that emotional attachment and perceived information value are key drivers of the influential power of social media influencers on their following. It also shows that this perceived influence can affect followers' positive word of mouth and purchase intention toward the brands endorsed by influencers, confirming the relevance and applicability of influencers in the online branding strategy.

Introduction

Social networking sites continue to grow as primary sources of online information search and interaction for individuals. Accordingly, companies have been forced to get involved in a variety of interactive practices related to brand electronic word-of-mouth

(eWOM), such as online brand communities, influencer marketing, blogging, and vlogging (e.g., Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2018; Kapoor et al., 2018; Ladhari, Massa, & Skandrani, 2020). These common ways in which consumers interact with brands have raised the interest of marketing researchers and practitioners over the social media platforms (see Alalwan, Dwivedi, Rana, & Simintiras, 2016, for a review). Specifically, the role of social media influencers as a promotional tool in the process of consumer decision making is the matter of recent studies (e.g., Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). But despite the recent and significant growth of brand spending on social media influencers, doubts about their effectiveness have also been raised, which motivates the need to develop a better understanding of the drivers of influencer marketing success (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019).

Although the literature highlights the role of source characteristics in influencer marketing (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), recent research has evolved to explore the importance of influencer-generated content-related cues to predict online opinion leadership (e.g., Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Ki & Kim, 2019; Lin, Bruning, & Swarna, 2018). These contents can attract followers' attention as they encompass both functional (i.e., branded product features) and personal (i.e., influencer's experience using the product) information (Ki & Kim, 2019). The interest on how followers value influencers' contents has also increased because recent studies question whether influencers' characteristics can in fact persuade followers. For example, influencers have been recognized as relevant online opinion leaders due to their perceived level of credibility (e.g., Childers et al., 2018; Magno, 2017; Xiao, Wang, & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). However, although some studies find that influencers' credibility can boost followers' purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), others show that one

or several credibility factors (i.e., expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) do not predict this outcome (Hughes et al., 2019; Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; van Esch, Arli, Castner, Talukdar, & Northey, 2018) or are not significantly related to engagement (Hughes et al., 2019) or advertising effectiveness (Gong & Li, 2017). This is not surprising since source attributes such as credibility or similarity generally tend to have weak effects on the source's ability to persuade individuals (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). In contrast, the resulting utility from the experience, knowledge and resources that the influencers share could be a decisive factor to capture the attention and persuade followers. This utility can be defined in terms of perceived interest, usefulness, novelty or quality of the influencers' contents (e.g., Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Romero, Galuba, Asur, & Huberman, 2011; Xiao et al., 2018), that is, the perceived value of the information they transmit (Lee, Yen, & Hsiao, 2014). Individuals' perception of a high information value from influencers would be critical to brand endorsement, as the information that individuals acquire from interpersonal sources has a higher impact on consumer decision-making compared with traditional advertising techniques (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Fransen, Verlegh, Kirmani, & Smit, 2015).

On the other hand, the development of emotional connections to influencers can also be relevant in persuading followers (Ladhari et al., 2020). A priori, not only the sense of more accessibility and psychological proximity to influencers that social media facilitates, but also the sense of intimacy that followers may feel to influencers makes people build an emotional connection with or engage in strong feelings toward them (Abidin, 2015; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Indeed, Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) demonstrated the effect of emotional attachment to celebrities on behaviour in the context of social media. Van Eldik, Kneer, Lutkenhaus, and Jansz (2019) also claimed

that the connection to the audience is a critical success factor for social media influencers. Emotional attachment has also been discussed with respect to credibility, concluding that followers value an affective link with the influencer more than the credibility that they perceive (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Actually, perceived credibility is built from the creation of affective and relational bonds with the influencer (Reinikainen, Munnukka, Maity, & Luoma-aho, 2020). Accordingly, emotional attachment should play an important role in explaining the persuasive power of influencers on their following (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi, 2010; Yang & Sia, 2018).

In this study, we focus on examining whether the emotional attachment to influencers and the perceived information value of their messages are related to the influence perceived by followers. Also, we explore how this potential power may impact followers' behavioural intentions toward the brands recommended by influencers. To date, little research has been conducted on how this influential power can shape follower behaviour (e.g., Casaló et al., 2018; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Liu et al., 2015; Magno, 2017). This is critical to assess influencer marketing effectiveness, especially since the observable metrics of the influencers' actions are flawed proxies for perceived influence (e.g., Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Tufekci, 2014). Recent research has proposed conceptual models that explain the effect of influencers on variables such as materialism (Lou & Kim, 2019), trustworthiness (Su, Kunkel, & Ye, 2020) or brand recall (Boerman, 2020), and their influence on behavioural outcomes such as eWOM (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019), purchase intention (e.g., Lou & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Su et al., 2020), social media engagement (Hughes et al., 2019), and online behavioural intentions (Boerman, 2020). The concept of WOM has been widely analysed in virtual environments in terms of eWOM (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019) or

social media WOM (Ki & Kim, 2019). However, few studies have explored how influencers' persuasive power can boost positive WOM communications, conceived as recommendations to other people, relatives and friends through any media (e.g., Casaló et al., 2018). In this study, we suggest that perceived influence predicts followers' positive WOM communication about the brands recommended by influencers and the intention to purchase these brands. We also posit that positive WOM is related to purchase intention.

The conceptual model proposed in this paper was empirically tested in a sample of 280 followers. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using structural equation modelling. The results of this research contribute to the literature on influencer marketing and also provide managerial implications for practitioners. First, this study demonstrates that emotional bonds lead to an increase in the influencer's power on followers. They will also need valuable information to be persuaded and to internalise influencers' messages. In this process, our findings show that emotional attachment to influencers has a stronger effect than information value on perceived influence. Second, this research evidences that the persuasive power of these online opinion leaders positively affects followers' positive WOM communications and increases their intention to purchase recommended brands by influencers. Interestingly, the results confirm the mediating role of perceived influence on the relationship between emotional attachment and perceived information value, and the behavioural outcomes. Hence, firms can use the potential of social media influencers to establish more effective brand communications according to their ability to provide valuable information, create emotional bonds with their followers, and influence their behavioural intentions.

Theoretical background

Influencers and opinion leadership

Social media influencers are ordinary people who have knowledge in some specific areas and become online celebrities as content creators with a social media following (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Indeed, they are referred to as internet microcelebrities, famous to a niche group of people, who show their personal lives and lifestyles through textual and visual narrations and endorse brands to their following for a fee (Abidin, 2015, 2016; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). The origin of the term 'influencer' is based on the traditional concept of opinion leaders but applied to digital environments, where some individuals acquire an important level of public influence to their set of personal connections (Casaló et al., 2018). In addition to this interconnectedness with their audience, another characteristic of influencers is their interest for gaining recognition and prestige by creating and posting contents in social media, sometimes as hobbyists and other times as real professionals (Abidin, 2016; Pedroni, 2016).

Despite their recognition as online opinion leaders in the literature, the study of social media influencers as a marketing tool related to opinion leadership and opinion seeking is an under-researched area (for exceptions, see, e.g., Casaló et al., 2018; De Veirman et al., 2017; Ki & Kim, 2019; Magno, 2017). In practice, companies increasingly incorporate influencers in their eWOM strategy to endorse their brands, which has changed the interaction between firms and potential consumers in online platforms. An interesting advantage for firms is that the potential influential power of influencers is assumed to be independent of the digital platform/s they use or the consumption context (e.g., Abidin, 2015; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). In addition,

followers perceive social media influencers as a more credible source of information than traditional celebrities, and they identify more with and liken themselves more to these online celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019; Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2019). In fact, some companies recruit them as brand ambassadors (Duffy, 2016; Scott, 2015). Consistent with two-step flow communication theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), social media influencers mediate messages because they elaborate on the information they receive and distribute it to other people via eWOM (Magno, 2017). Accordingly, it can be seen as an opportunity for companies to use these online opinion leaders in their marketing strategies for successfully spreading brand-related information through eWOM.

The process of influence

An explanation of how followers may adopt opinions and behaviours derived from social media influencers' action can be found in the social influence theory. In this regard, this study draws on the seminal work of Kelman (1961), as well as that of Kapitan and Silvera (2016), to suggest that both cognitive and emotional processing are key to understanding the influential power of social media influencers on their followers. In essence, Kelman (1961) suggested that individuals can change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours induced by influencing agents through psychological processes. Social influence theory describes that the processes of social influence correspond to patterns of internal responses (i.e., thoughts and feelings) in which the individuals engage as they accept the influence. In particular, emotional attachment and perceived information value fit within Kelman's theoretical perspective about the identification and internalisation processes (Kelman, 1958, 1961).

On the one hand, identification occurs when an individual accepts influence from another person to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to the other (Kelman, 2006). In our context, individuals tend to notice and imitate influencers' beliefs and behaviours because these are associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship. The relationship is self-established and the object of identification (i.e., the influencer) may be completely unaware of this process (Kelman, 1958). Identification moves beyond merely feeling attraction toward influencers; it is an affection-related, emotional process strongly linked to the influencer-follower interaction (Kelman, 1958; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Specifically, a strong emotional connection formed with an influencer builds a close, intimate and satisfying relationship, which may result in empathically reacting in terms of the influencer's expectations or feelings and even in emulating his/her personality and behaviours (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Thomson, 2006; Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). Therefore, the emotional attachment that is generated from interactions can be regarded as a source of influence on followers through the identification process.

As to follower-influencer emotional attachment, we refer to the emotional bonding followers feel toward the influencers that they follow. Emotional attachment is typically defined as an emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object (e.g., influencer), so that stronger attachments are related to stronger feelings of connection and affection (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). These feelings derive from the sense of accessibility and psychological proximity to influencers that individuals perceive (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016).

Consistent with the traditional concept of human brand (Thomson, 2006), an influencer is the subject of marketing communication efforts because he or she creates a "persona" that triggers positive emotional responses in audiences through their ability to

symbolize the lifestyle aspirations of followers and to embody highly self-relevant meanings (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). In particular, followers develop true and intense feelings of affection for the influencers when they feel that influencers share personal information or secrets and/or similarities (i.e., demographic and psychographic characteristics) with them. This is reinforced by the frequency and duration of online encounters, the level of interaction of the influencers with the followers (e.g., likes, comments, shares), and the recall of these exchanges and experiences (Ladhari et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019). These conditions can activate the identification mechanism by which followers seek to feel like they have a real, reciprocal relationship with the influencer or to establish a relationship based on modelling where the follower desires to be like, act like, or to actually be the influencer (Kelman, 2006; Lim, Choe, Zhang, & Noh, 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

On the other hand, internalisation occurs when an individual accepts influence from another to maintain the congruence of actions and beliefs with his or her own value system (Kelman, 2006). Followers will deeply process the influencer message because his or her statements are valuable and congruent with their own values and beliefs. This process implies that individuals adopt the content of the induced behaviour inherent to the message (e.g., to follow the recommendation of an expert) as they find it useful to solve a problem, congenial to their own orientations, or coherent with their own value system (Kelman, 1958, 1961). According to Li (2011), the internalisation process is equivalent to informational influence, which occurs when people accept information from others as trustworthy evidence of reality and change their behaviour based on this information. This trustworthiness of the source information is related to the perception of the quality of the communication by the audience (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The informational influence also occurs when users perceive information as

enhancing their knowledge above that of reference groups (Hsu & Lu, 2004; Kelman, 1961). Thus, in our context, the informative value of influencer-generated content would positively affect followers' perceived trust in influencers' branded content and also their behavioural intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). That is, followers are likely to accept and internalise messages if they perceive these contents as valuable.

With these antecedents, this study assumes that the role of social media influencers as online opinion leaders for brand communication through eWOM depends on meeting followers' emotional and information needs through the processes of influence. Understanding perceived influence as the tendency to accept information from an individual and consider it to be true (Shen, Huang, Chu, & Liao, 2010), we suggest that the effective influence of social media influencers depends on (1) the emotional attachment that followers feel with their followed social media influencers and (2) the perceived value of the information (e.g., usefulness, quality, interest) transmitted by social media influencers. Additionally, we assert that followers manifest the acceptance of influence when they express or adopt the induced opinions/behaviours intrinsic to the social media influencers' brand messages. In this case, we focus on two behavioural outcomes: (1) positive WOM communication about recommended brands (i.e., interpersonal communication behaviour between a communicator, who is extremely likely to recommend the brand, and a receiver); and (2) the intention to purchase these brands. We also claim that perceived influence is a generic mechanism that make it possible to translate followers' perceptions and emotions toward influencers into behavioural outcomes. In this regard, we assume that if followers perceive that the information obtained from influencers can reduce uncertainties and assist decision-making and, consequently, they accept it, they would be likely to adopt the content of the induced behaviour inherent to the influencers' brand-related

messages. Finally, we also examine the relationship between the examined behavioural manifestations. The conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1.

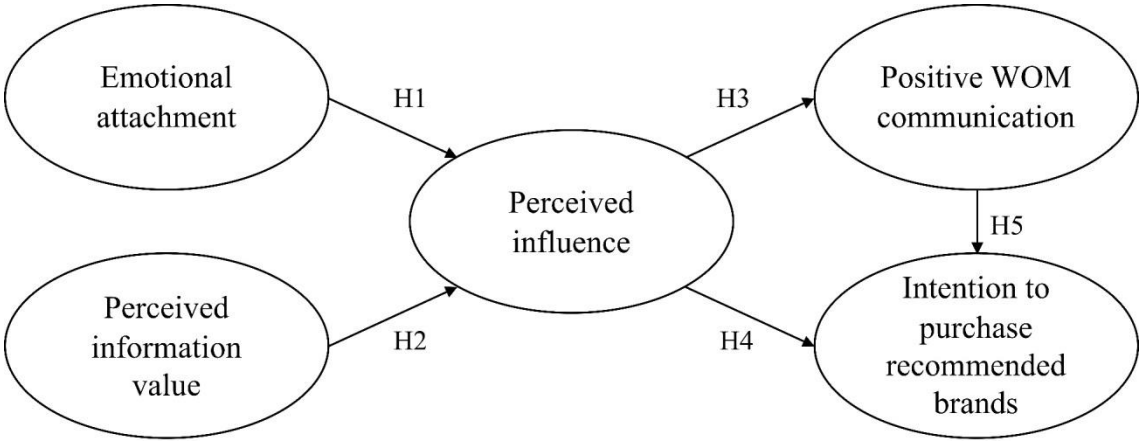

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Note: H6 hypothesises indirect effects of perceived influence.

Research hypotheses

Effects of emotional attachment and perceived information value on perceived influence

Online environments encourage the development of an emotional attachment between the influencers and their followers. According to Wang, Hsu, Huang, and Chen (2015), influencers can elicit positive emotional responses from others, satisfying their audience's need for fantasy, identification, status, affiliation, and attachment. For example, as Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) argued in the case of celebrities using social media, the consistent access to information that they post makes individuals feel closer to them, and at times, relate to them more. Accordingly, as influencers are believed to be more accessible, intimate and easy to relate to than celebrities (Abidin, 2016; De Veirman et al., 2017), a more intense emotional attachment can be expected in the case of social media influencers and their following. In general, if followers feel that

they maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with the influencer based on factors that intensify affective bonds and strengthen ties such as attitudinal similarity and like-mindedness or other psychological or demographic characteristics (Ladhari et al., 2020; Zhang, Barnes, Zhao, & Zhang, 2018), they should more readily accept the influencer's opinions and values proposed (Hsu, Huang, Ko, & Wang, 2014; Wang et al., 2015). Hence, we posit that when social media influencers become inherently important to the followers, that is, they understand and sense the social media influencer deeply and continuously, followers will form a strong emotional attachment. This feeling of connectedness may thus enhance the persuasive power of influencers. Therefore:

H1: Followers who have a higher emotional attachment to social media influencers will perceive higher influence from them.

The concept of information value applied to the context of digital environments is rooted in the original notion of 'perceived value'. This concept has emerged as a key construct to understand consumer behaviour (Gallarza, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2011), and reflects the multiple dimensions or value sources (utilitarian and/or hedonic) that an individual perceives in a consumption experience. Among the utilitarian and functional value dimensions, Lee et al. (2014) identify the concept of information value on the basis of the popular value multidimensional scale by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), and its component of performance/quality. Thus, information value can be defined as the followers' sense of expectation to obtain experience, knowledge, information or resources shared by social media influencers (Lee et al., 2014). In previous studies in virtual environments, terms such as "purposive value" (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004), "pragmatic experience" (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008), "information satisfaction" (Hsu et al., 2014), "informational value" (Lou & Yuan, 2019), or "information value" (Lahuerta-Otero & Cordero-Gutiérrez, 2016; Phua, Jim, & Kim,

2020; Wan, Lu, Wang, & Zhao, 2017; Wang et al., 2015) have been used to explain users' perception of acquiring knowledge, experience and service from others in online platforms. All these works have shown the utilitarian nature of the concept of information value, and some of them have emphasised characteristics such as usefulness (Lee et al., 2014), quality and credibility (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008; Matute, Polo-Redondo, & Utrillas, 2016), and even quantity (Matute et al., 2016) as factors that make users perceive the information provided as something valuable. In particular, social media influencers are perceived as authentic and/or expert because of their valuable opinions and recommendations (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). They have the ability to provide current and advanced information to others (Hsu & Tsou, 2011). This resulting utility can be employed by followers to gain knowledge, innovative information, and interesting news (Lee et al., 2014). Followers can also mediate messages and affect communities in the digital environment through the dissemination of those messages and the generation of a viral effect (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). When there is a high perceived quality or strength of the argument in the influencer's message, followers should more readily believe and internalise the message (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016), that is, they should be willing to cognitively engage with the message content and, in turn, to accept the influencer's opinions. Drawing on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Followers who perceive higher information value from social media influencers will perceive higher influence from them.

Effect of perceived influence on positive WOM communication and intention to purchase recommended brands

An increasing number of studies suggest that the influence that online opinion leaders can exert on individuals and members of virtual communities may have a significant impact on their attitudes and behaviours (e.g., Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Liu et al., 2015; Magno, 2017; Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). Specifically, previous works have demonstrated the potential of influencers in developing marketing strategies, generating ultimately positive WOM communications (Casaló et al., 2018) and purchase intention (Jin et al., 2019; Wang & Yu, 2017; Wu & Lee, 2012). As argued, followers consider virtual environments and online opinion leaders as reliable sources for guiding personal actions such as obtaining buying-related information (e.g., Cosenza, Solomon, & Kwon, 2015; Hsiao, Lu & Lan, 2013). This dependency link can be understood from a social exchange perspective since followers may reciprocate positive thoughts, feelings and behaviours toward the recommended brands when they received a benefit from the relationship with the brand endorser (e.g., to acquire knowledge about a product) (Hollebeek, 2011). Rather than passively receiving and processing messages, individuals may follow influencers' brand recommendations by engaging in reciprocal behaviours such as positive WOM or showing their intention to purchase, which can be considered as manifestations of influence (Hollebeek, 2011; Zhao, Zhan, & Liu, 2018). Accordingly, the greater the perceived persuasive power of the social media influencers, the greater will be the follower's intention to spread positive WOM and to purchase the recommended brands. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3: Followers who perceive a higher influence from social media influencers will have a greater intention to spread positive WOM about the brands they recommend.

H4: Followers who perceive a higher influence from social media influencers will have a greater intention to purchase the brands they recommend.

Effect of positive WOM communication on purchase intention of recommended brands

The concept of WOM is attitudinal in nature and includes emotional and psychological aspects related to the individual's desire to recommend an object (e.g., brand, product) to others (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Srivastava & Kaul, 2016). While research on the impact of WOM transmission on the senders of this WOM is scarce (Chen & Gao, 2019), the studies on this topic generally claim that WOM affects communicators' behaviour (e.g., Helm, 2003). For instance, Garnefeld, Helm, and Eggert (2011) demonstrated that articulating WOM has a positive effect on senders' attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Also, drawing on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), which states that a person's attitudes have causal priority over his/her behaviours, Srivastava and Kaul (2016) empirically showed that attitudinal intentions, like recommending a retailer to others, positively affect behavioural intentions, that is, choosing the retailer in future. In virtual environments, some studies have also demonstrated the effects of consumers' online WOM activities on their own feelings, attitudes and behaviours toward brands (Chawdhary & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2015; Chen & Gao, 2019). For example, in the context of Facebook fanpages, Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, and Füller (2013) found that users' WOM activity has a positive effect on their own purchase intentions.

Following this line of reasoning, we assume a positive relationship between followers' positive WOM communication and brand purchase intention. When followers accept the influence from influencers and, therefore, believe their recommendations to be trustworthy and valuable, they will readily react by actively showing and convincing others of the potential value of the endorsed product or service (e.g., showing a relative the branded content and positively talking about it). Since they

have articulated the recommendation, it is reasonable to believe that this positive WOM will reinforce followers' own cognitive and affective state toward the object of recommendation. This may have a potential effect on their willingness to act toward the brand and, thus, may form an intention to purchase the endorsed product or service. Formally stated:

H5: Followers who are likely to spread positive WOM about brands recommended by influencers will have a greater intention to purchase these brands.

Combining the expected effects of perceived information value and emotional attachment on perceived influence and the potential impact of these effects on positive WOM and intention to purchase, one can assume that perceived influence appears to play a mediating role in the relationships between the antecedents and the follower's intentional behaviours. Indeed, influencers can induce changes in followers' behaviour when followers are susceptible to their influence as a result of engaging in positive interactions by sharing both functional and personal content that attracts public attention and building an intimate and emotional connection (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Ki & Kim, 2019); only influencers who have a high value and efficiency, i.e., that are ascribed more opinion leadership, could increase the message's impact on followers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Ladhari et al., 2020). Thus, it can be proposed that perceived influence serves as the underlying mechanism which explains the relationships between emotional attachment and perceived information value on the outcomes of WOM and purchase intention:

H6: Emotional attachment and perceived information value will increase perceived influence, which consequently leads to higher positive WOM communication and intention to purchase recommended brands.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

The empirical study was conducted in Spain through an online survey. This context was considered to be particularly suitable for this research since 6 out of 10 Spanish users show affinity with influencers and a significant number of them highly appreciate their association with products and brands (Interactive Advertising Bureau –IAB– Spain, 2017). Moreover, there is an increasing use of influencers by digital marketing professionals in Spain in the search for brand awareness and engagement (IAB Spain, 2017).

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants with a minimum age of 18 who were active followers of social media influencers that make brand recommendations. This sampling procedure was considered appropriate for the data collection process (e.g., Alalwan et al., 2016; Al-Debei, Akroush, & Ashouri, 2015), taking into account that the large size and widespread distribution of the population (i.e., individuals who are over 18 years old and are active followers of influencers who recommend brands) makes it difficult to reach the target sample using a probability method (Alalwan et al., 2016; Bhattacherjee, 2012). Also, a non-probability sample is deemed more fitting when the purpose is to test theoretical assumptions (Hulland, Baumgartner, & Smith, 2017), which is the aim of our study. Indeed, previous studies on followers' perception and behaviour that apply multivariate techniques, as in this case, have used a convenience sampling for data collection (e.g., Casaló et al., 2018; Magno, 2017; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Torres, Augusto, & Matos, 2019). This method has been also considered to be useful and suitable for multivariate data analysis purposes (Al-Debei et al., 2015), as is our case.

The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire which was posted on social network platforms. Participation was anonymous and voluntary to avoid social desirability bias. In line with previous studies (e.g., De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008), we asked participants to share the post, that includes the URL to the questionnaire, with their contacts, aiming at creating a snowball effect. Initial instructions were provided for respondents, including a clear definition of social media influencers and an indication to answer the questions with regard to the influencers that they frequently follow. A final sample of 280 respondents was obtained after excluding 22 invalid questionnaires. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the participants. Gender and age rates were similar to recent data provided by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB Spain, 2019), which helps to control the potential effect of selection bias. Respondents were mainly women (64.64%) between 18 and 38 years old (91.43%). 69.64% of the sample has a university-level education. According to Armstrong and Overton's (1977) suggestions, this research adopted the time trend extrapolation approach in order to avoid the non-response bias. Thus, independent T-tests were conducted to compare early and late respondents on key variables. The results revealed an absence of non-response bias since there were no statistically significant differences for any variable.

Table 1. Sample description (*N*=280).

	N	**%**
Gender		
Female	181	64.64
Male	99	35.36
Age		
18-24	196	70.0
25-31	46	16.43
32-38	14	5.0
39-45	8	2.86
>45	16	5.71
Education level		
High school or less	66	23.57
Technical college	19	6.79
University	195	69.64
Occupation		
Student	195	69.64
Employee	59	21.07
Self-employed	15	5.36

Unemployed/homemaker/retired	11	3.93

Measures

Multi-item scales from previous studies were adapted to the current research context to measure the constructs of the proposed conceptual model. Thus, emotional attachment was assessed using a scale based on the instruments developed by Hammitt, Kyle, and Oh (2009), Jun, Kim, Han, Kim and Kim (2016) and Thomson et al. (2005), and perceived information value was measured through the adapted scales from Lee et al. (2014) and Wang and Lin (2011). The scales of Bansal and Voyer (2000) and Wang et al. (2015) were used as a basis to develop a measurement scale for the concept of perceived influence of social media influencers. Finally, positive WOM communication was measured adapting the scales proposed by Brüggen, Foubert, and Gremler (2011) and Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996), and the intention to purchase recommended brands was assessed based on the scales proposed by Cosenza et al. (2015) and Magno (2017). A seven-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (7) was used for all items.

Results

Measurement model evaluation

Structural equation modelling was applied to analyse the data through LISREL 8.8 software (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model before the structural model was tested. After finalizing the item selection process through this technique, a solution consisting of 16 items was retained from an original 21-item pool

(see scales in Table 2). All the model fitness indices were within recommended thresholds. χ^2 (df=94, p=0.00) was equal to 251.01, and the χ^2/df ratio had a value of 2.67, which is below the recommended value of 3.0 for model parsimony (Kline, 2016); the comparative fit index (CFI) value of 0.98 was over the suggested threshold of 0.95, and the non-normed fit index (NNFI) was 0.98, above the recommended cut-off of 0.95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.074, less than the limit of 0.08 (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). The standardized square root mean residual (SRMR) value of 0.035 was under the limit of 0.07 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012).

Evidence of internal consistency for the five constructs of the model is provided by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The estimates for each construct exceeded the suggested cut-offs of 0.70 for coefficient alpha (Nunnally, 1978) and 0.70 for composite reliability (Churchill, 1979). Standardized loading of the constructs and the average variance extracted (AVE) were used to test convergent validity. The estimated factor loadings of each indicator were positive and significant (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) and were greater than the established cut-off point of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The AVE for the model's constructs was greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 presents all of the aforementioned indicators. Discriminant validity was assessed by using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) between the latent variables (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). As shown in Table 3, the HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Kline, 2011), thus discriminant validity can be regarded as established.

The use of self-reported data in survey research can lead to common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To prevent potential common method bias at the research design stage, we carefully designed the questionnaire and

properly ordered the questions by dispersing similar items throughout the questionnaire separated by unrelated items (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). We examined common method bias by using the single common method factor approach discussed in Podsakoff et al. (2003). A single-factor solution indicated a significantly poorer fit with the data as compared to the fitness of the five-factor measurement model proposed in this study (1996.26 $\Delta\chi^2$ increase with additional 10 df, $p<0.001$; CFI=0.84; NNFI=0.81; RMSEA=0.27; SRMR=0.12). This result indicates that our findings are less likely to be affected by common method bias. As stated earlier, we also guaranteed the anonymity of participants to reduce socially desirable responding.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis and scale reliability.

Variables and items	Completely standardized loading	t-value	Reliability
Emotional attachment			
1. I feel emotionally connected to the influencers that I follow.	0.84	16.98	Cronbach's alpha = 0.93 CR = 0.93 AVE = 0.72
2. I feel a bond with the influencers that I follow.	0.90	19.13	
3. I am very attached to the influencers that I follow.	0.90	19.18	
4. The influencers that I follow are special for me.	0.88	18.32	
5. I miss the influencers that I follow when they do not post an entry or I cannot view their posts.	0.75	14.38	
Perceived information value			
1. I accumulate knowledge through the information shared by the influencers that I follow.	0.87	17.96	Cronbach's alpha = 0.91 CR = 0.92 AVE = 0.73
2. I acquire novel information through the influencers that I follow.	0.80	15.87	
3. I get interesting information through the influencers that I follow.	0.86	17.71	
4. The information provided by the influencers that I follow is useful to me.	0.88	18.28	
* Strategic information shared by the influencers that I follow creates competitive advantage.			
Perceived influence			
1. My perceptions often change when I receive information from the influencers that I follow.	0.79	14.96	Cronbach's alpha = 0.78 CR = 0.78 AVE = 0.64
2. I value the opinion of the influencers that I follow as if they were someone close whom I trust.	0.81	15.46	
* If I have little experience with a brand, I often search for related information from the influencers that I follow.			
* The influencers that I follow suggest helpful products or brands to me.			
Positive WOM communication			
1. I am likely to recommend the brands suggested by the influencers that I follow to other people.	0.95	22.94	Cronbach's alpha = 0.95 CR = 0.95 AVE = 0.91
2. I am likely to encourage friends and relatives to buy the brands recommended by the influencers that I follow.	0.96	21.19	
* I am likely to say positive things about the brands recommended by the influencers that I follow to other people.			
Intention to purchase recommended brands			
1. I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the influencers that I follow.	0.92	20.01	Cronbach's alpha = 0.92 CR = 0.92 AVE = 0.81
2. I would follow brands recommendations from the influencers that I follow.	0.85	17.39	
3. In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by the influencers that I follow.	0.91	19.65	
* I would feel comfortable acting upon the brand information given to me by the influencers that I follow.			

Note: Items indicated by (*) were dropped from the final analysis after scale purification through CFA.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional attachment				
2. Perceived information value	0.57			
3. Perceived influence	0.78	0.73		
4. Positive WOM communication	0.60	0.47	0.79	
5. Intention to purchase recommended brands	0.65	0.46	0.78	0.81

Hypothesis testing

The hypothesized relationships that the conceptual framework posits were estimated by using structural equation analysis. The goodness-of-fit statistics indicated the appropriateness of the model for the given dataset (χ^2=264.12, df=98; CFI=0.98; NNFI=0.98; RMSEA=0.074; SRMR=0.042). Figure 2 shows the results of the hypothesis test, path coefficients, and R^2. The model accounts for a significant portion of the variance of dependent variables, specifically, 69%, 57%, and 71% of the variance in perceived influence, positive WOM communication and intention to purchase endorsed brands respectively. The results indicated that the relationship between emotional attachment and perceived influence was positive and significant (γ=0.58, $p<0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, the results showed that perceived information value was positively related to perceived influence (γ=0.36, $p<0.001$). Comparing both results, emotional attachment has the most significant effect on perceived influence, with a coefficient higher than perceived information value. Hypothesis 3, which posited the relationship between perceived influence and positive WOM communication, was also validated (β=0.76, $p<0.001$). Hypothesis 4 was also supported since we found a positive and significant effect of perceived influence on intention to purchase recommended brands (β=0.36, $p<0.001$). These results show that perceived influence has a greater significant effect on positive WOM communication, with a coefficient much higher than intention to purchase recommended brands. Finally, positive WOM communication was positively related to

intention to purchase recommended brands (β=0.54, p<0.001), in support of Hypothesis 5.

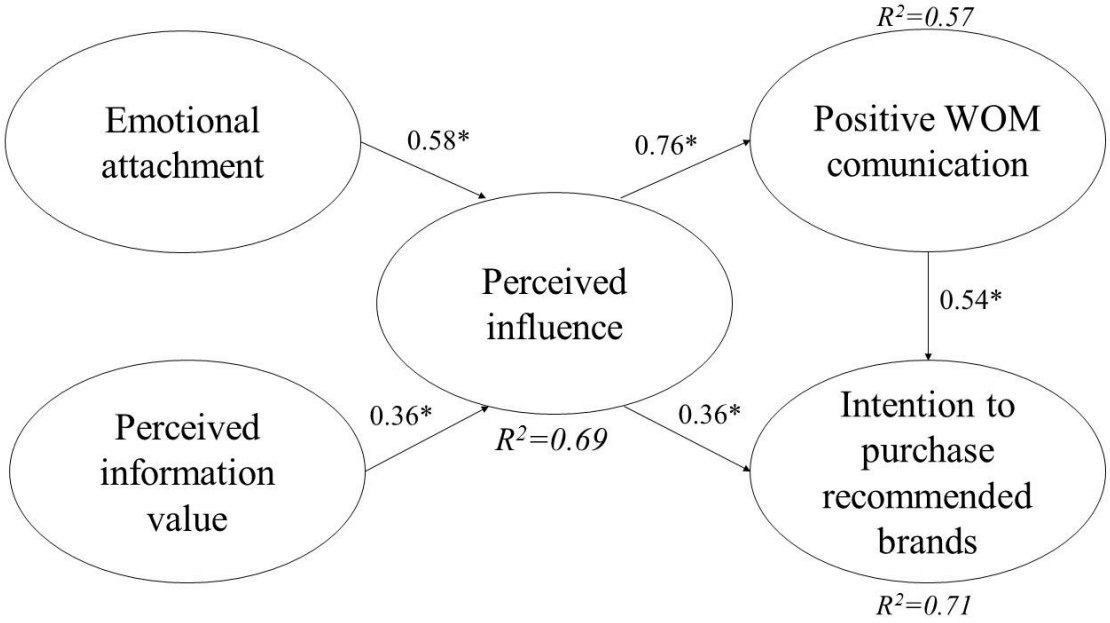

Figure 2. Hypothesis testing results.

Observing these results, emotional attachment and perceived information value may have indirect effects on the two main outcomes of WOM and intention to purchase, mediated by perceived influence, as suggested in Hypothesis 6. Therefore, these potentially mediated relationships were examined. Since there is no direct link between both antecedents and the dependent variables, indirect effects will be equal to total effects. As Table 4 shows, all indirect effects were significant (p<0.001). These results confirm the mediating role that perceived influence plays in associating emotional attachment and perceived information value with the behavioural intentions.

Table 4
Indirect effects.

Indirect effect path	Estimated indirect effect	t value
Emotional attachment → Perceived influence → WOM	0.44	8.48
Emotional attachment → Perceived influence → Intention to purchase	0.44	8.45
Perceived information value → Perceived influence → WOM	0.27	5.92
Perceived information value → Perceived influence → Intention to purchase	0.28	5.91

Discussion

While there is an increasing interest in examining the role that social media influencers play as an eWOM tool for brands, there is still a need to better understand the processes of influence that lead followers to accept and adopt influencers' induced opinions and behaviours inherent to their brand messages. The findings of this study can provide useful insights to the ongoing discussion on the role of social media influencers as opinion leaders and the factors that help increase their influence on their following. The study also sheds light on the effects of their persuasive power on follower behaviour and thus how brands can take advantage of using influencer marketing to promote their product and service offers.

Theoretical contributions

The study contributes to the research on social media influencers in several ways. Overall, the research is one of the first attempts that provides some empirical evidence on the role that two overlooked factors (i.e., emotional attachment and perceived information value) play in contributing to the followers' perception of the influence of influencers. The study describes underlying mechanisms that explain the effects of influencer marketing on potential consumers. In particular, the results confirm the relevance of meeting both followers' emotional and information expectations in the processes of influence. The emotional attachment to influencers and the perceived information value from their messages act as significant factors that activate persuasion processes which, in turn, help develop behavioural intentions.

These results are consistent with and extend previous literature suggesting the essential role of the source and message characteristics in the process of influence (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lin et al., 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The direct connections between

emotional attachment and perceived information value with perceived influence reveal that followers must be not only cognitively (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016) but also emotionally engaged with influencers to accept their influence. Prior research highlights that the sense of intimacy that followers feel towards influencers can build a potential bond with them (Abidin, 2015; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). The finding regarding the relationship between emotional attachment and perceived influence shows that a strong bond can increase the influencer's power on followers and reinforces the growing recognition of emotional characteristics to understand how people react to influencer marketing (e.g., Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ladhari et al., 2020; Yang & Sia, 2018). Such is its scope that, according to our results, emotional attachment to influencers has a stronger effect than perceived information value on perceived influence. This is consistent with and adds support to the relevance of this factor in explaining influencers' power in a broad sense. For instance, Ladhari et al. (2020) report that strong emotional bonds with vloggers are positively associated with perceived popularity. Thus, the finding provides a better understanding of influencers' opinion leadership on followers, extending prior research on its antecedents, which has mainly focused on the account and generated content characteristics or the perceived popularity (e.g., Casaló et al., 2018; De Veirman et al., 2017; Ki & Kim, 2019). In this sense, emotional cues should be considered in influencer marketing research when studying followers' desire to mimic influencers from the identification process perspective.

Although influencers' experience and knowledge are important cues to stimulate consumer behaviour (Bao & Chang, 2014; Hughes et al., 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019), it seems that followers will also need valuable information (e.g., useful, novel, interesting) to be persuaded and to internalise their messages. Previous studies have emphasised that

influencers generate value when they disseminate persuasive messages to their followers that contain useful information for them (Lahuerta-Otero & Cordero-Gutiérrez, 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The findings from this study contribute to this body of literature by showing that perceived information value increases the persuasive power of social media influencers on followers. The results indicate that perceived information value is a significant characteristic of the influencer's message as it leads to increase perceived influence which, in turn, may shape how followers react to specific branded posts. Consequently, this research extends previous studies that have analysed the concept of information value in virtual communities (e.g., Dholakia et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2014) and blogs (Hsu et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015) to the context of influencer marketing. Specifically, this result contributes to the understanding of the relevance of perceived information value in this domain by adding evidence to other studies that demonstrate that the informative value of influencer-generated content positively affects followers' trust in influencers' branded posts (Lou & Yuan, 2019), or that consumers do not show a significant difference in perceived information value if the source type is a celebrity or not (Phua et al., 2020). In sum, these findings add to the literature on social media influencers by confirming that followers and influencers are involved in an exchange relationship where influencers meet followers' emotional and information needs; influencers expect to gain loyal followers that adopt induced opinions and behaviours.

The study also reports the indirect effects of emotional attachment and perceived information value on intentional behaviours (i.e., positive WOM communication and intention to purchase recommended brands) through perceived influence. This finding adds evidence to prior research which underscores the key role of opinion leadership in influencer marketing (e.g., Casaló et al., 2018; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández,

2019; Lin et al., 2018). Opinion leadership and its mediating role are not always evident in the case of social media influencers, as shown in previous studies (e.g., De Veirman et al., 2017; Kay, Browne, & Sugawara, 2020). For instance, De Veirman et al. (2017) did not find a significant indirect effect of the number of followers on likeability via ascribed opinion leadership. By demonstrating the mediating effect of perceived influence in our model, our research contributes more insights on the way in and the conditions under which influencers exert their power on their following. In this sense, we show that the activation of persuasion is a critical underlying mechanism that explains the effects of emotional attachment and perceived information value on followers' reactions, specifically on the adoption of induced behaviours; that is, a follower who feels that he/she has an emotional bond with an influencer and perceives that the influencer provides valuable information content may develop behaviours that have a beneficial impact on the influencer and the recommended brands, as long as the influencer is being perceived as an influential source.

Despite social media influencers being increasingly used by brands in their eWOM strategy, there is scarce research evidence on their effectiveness in achieving followers' behavioural outcomes towards the endorsed brands. Another issue that is worth addressing is the need for valid and reliable results about users' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward social media marketing activities (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017). This research attempts to narrow these gaps by examining the relationship between followers' perceived influence over the influencers and behavioural intentions toward endorsed brands. Unlike other studies using observable metrics of the influencers' activities (e.g., Bao & Chang, 2014; Zhang, Moe, & Schweidel, 2017), this research considers self-reported measures to assess followers' perceptions, which can be a valuable, complementary way to measure the degree of

influential power of influencers together with observable metrics. Our findings suggest that social media influencers can be considered as really being influential, and more importantly that their influential power may positively enhance followers' behavioural intentions. In this regard, perceived influence serves to increase the followers' intention to recommend the endorsed brand to others, and also their purchase intention, benefiting the influencers' interests. This study adds to the existing literature demonstrating the relationship between perceived influence and positive WOM communication in the context of online branding through social media influencers. Findings show that perceived influence has a greater significant effect on positive WOM communication, with a coefficient much higher than intention to purchase recommended brands. Thus, followers are likely to recommend the endorsed brands to third parties (e.g., friends, relatives) or even encourage them to buy these brands due to the influencers' persuasive power. This result reinforces the idea highlighted in prior research that WOM is a significant behavioural outcome derived from the activity of influencers (e.g., Chapple & Cownie, 2017). For instance, Casaló et al. (2018) demonstrated that opinion leadership has a positive effect on users' intention to recommend an Instagram account to friends and relatives. This research thus extends work on the effect of influencer marketing on followers' WOM behaviour and adds to previous research that has exclusively focused on eWOM about sponsored posts published by influencers (e.g., Hughes et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the result regarding the significant effect of perceived influence on purchase intention is consistent with the recent research findings of Casaló et al. (2018), Lou and Yuan (2018) and Sokolova and Kefi (2020), which also confirm the influence of influencer marketing on intention to purchase the recommended products or to follow the influencer's advice. Interestingly, the results show the

effectiveness of the model antecedents in predicting the proposed outcomes since the model explains a substantial part of their variance. Behavioural manifestations of influence are rarely examined in empirical research on social media influencers. This study confirms that followers who have the intention to spread positive WOM communication about the brands recommended by influencers are likely to have the intention to purchase these brands. The result extends to the context of influencer marketing the role of WOM as an antecedent of purchase intention underscored in other settings (e.g., Hutter et al., 2013; Srivastava & Kaul, 2016). In sum, this study advances prior research by enabling a better understanding of how the process of influence works in influencer marketing and also by providing evidence about the effectiveness of influencers in shaping followers' behaviour.

Practical implications

From a practical perspective, this study shows the potential of social media influencers to establish more effective brand communication, which raises the possibility of selecting this tool for social media campaigns. First, this study supports the investment in social media influencers for brand strategies based on their ability to create emotion-laden bonds with their followers. This research demonstrates that the allure of influencers also relies on the way they emotionally engage with their followers, and that emotional attachment is an important factor that explains influencers' persuasive effect on followers. According to our findings, beyond selecting influencers from their number of followers or other observable metrics (e.g., number of likes, posting comments) (see Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani, & Dwivedi, 2019), brands should also consider choosing influencers who have the ability to or have developed a strong emotional attachment with their followers. Consequently, if brand managers wish to develop a

partnership with an influencer, the existence of emotional bonds with his/her followers is an important characteristic they should look for. Thus, it is essential for brand managers to understand that influencers can activate emotions and create bonds with their followers, and this emotional link can be very useful to develop successful online marketing strategies.

In addition, managers should be aware of the potential that influencers who transmit valuable information have in developing promotional actions. They should ensure that the influencers who endorse their brands usually provide value to followers through useful, novel, and/or interesting contents. Thus, companies that are interested in identifying, evaluating and selecting particular influencers for brand promotion purposes (i.e., trial campaigns, generating positive WOM) should examine the extent to which their posts are informative, since our results demonstrate that influencers who fulfil this requirement can be a powerful channel for spreading brand information that enhances the induced behaviour inherent to the message (e.g., brand purchase). This could help brands implement potentially more effective influencer marketing campaigns.

Furthermore, this research highlights the capacity of social media influencers to influence followers' behavioural intentions. In this sense, the results show the influencers' brand prescribing power and their effectiveness as an online communication tool for companies, validating their impact on generating positive WOM communication and intention to purchase endorsed brands. This finding shows how the influencers' prescribing power works, demonstrating that companies should consider investing in influencer marketing as an effective communication tool. Thus, the ability of influencer marketing to spread positive WOM about brands and increase purchase intention could increase the performance results of companies in terms of sales

and market share. Ultimately, companies may benefit from social media influencers to enhance the attractiveness of their online campaigns and the return on investment in social media (Shiau, Dwivedi, & Lai, 2018).

Limitations and future research

The following limitations of the study should be addressed by future research. First, this research used a convenience sampling procedure in view of the large size and widespread nature of the population but satisfying gender and age quota requirements. Future research should use a randomized sampling procedure to generalize our results. Second, the data in this study were cross-sectional, so further research is needed to analyse followers' perceptions and behaviour over time through longitudinal data and cross-lagged analysis. Third, although this study considers that the influential power is independent of the digital platform/s used by influencers (Abidin, 2015; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016), further research can explore this issue to more firmly investigate if followers' attitude and behaviour can be different depending on the social network (Casaló et al., 2018). Fourth, as this study does not distinguish between types of influencers based on the number of followers, future research might examine the proposed relationships considering recent categorisations of influencers based on the number of followers (Kay et al., 2020; Ladhari et al., 2020) or industry (e.g., fashion, beauty, entertainment) (Torres et al., 2019). Fifth, further research is necessary to examine if followers react and behave differently depending on the social media platform that they use to follow influencers (Casaló et al., 2018). Sixth, different follower personalities and characteristics may have affected the results, for example those related to age or educational level. Therefore, future studies might help us

understand how personal characteristics may affect followers' perceptions and behaviours in their interaction with social media influencers.

Finally, although intentions are the main antecedents of behaviours, future research should analyse the influence of social media influencers on actual behaviours (Casaló et al., 2018). Furthermore, other emotional and information antecedents of perceived influence could be examined, for example empathy, exchange outcome satisfaction, attitudinal/behavioural loyalty (e.g. Hsu et al., 2014), positive/negative valence WOM (e.g., Wang & Yu, 2017), or content-user fit (Zhang et al., 2017).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities [National R&D Project ECO2017-82347-P] and by the Andalusian Regional Government [Research Project PAIDI 2018 P18-RT-4663].

ORCID

Raquel Sánchez-Fernández http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6462-9807

David Jiménez-Castillo http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2302-1002

References

Abidin, C. (2015). Communicative intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness. *Ada: A Journal of Gender New Media and Technology*, *8*, 1-16.

Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, *161*(1), 86-100.

Ajzen I., & Fishbein M. (2005). The influence of attitudes on behavior. In D. Albarracín, B.T. Johnson, & M.P. Zanna (Eds.), *The Handbook of Attitudes* (pp. 173-221). N.J.: Erlbaum Mahwah.

Alalwan, A. A., Dwivedi, Y. K., Rana, N. P., & Simintiras, A. C. (2016). Jordanian consumers' adoption of telebanking: Influence of perceived usefulness, trust and self-efficacy. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, *34*(5), 690-709.

Alalwan, A. A., Rana, N. P., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Algharabat, R. (2017). Social media in marketing: A review and analysis of the existing literature. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*(7), 1177-1190.

Al-Debei, M. M., Akroush, M. N., & Ashouri, M. I. (2015). Consumer attitudes towards online shopping: the effects of trust, perceived benefits, and perceived web quality. *Internet Research*, *25*(5), 707-733.

Armstrong, J. S., & Overton, T. S. (1977). Estimating nonresponse bias in mail surveys. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *14*(3), 396-402.

Arora, A., Bansal, S., Kandpal, C., Aswani, R., & Dwivedi, Y. (2019). Measuring social media influencer index-insights from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *49*, 86-101.

Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the evaluation of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *16*(1), 74-94.

Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (2012), Specification, evaluation, and interpretation of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *40*(1), 8-34.

Bansal, H. S., & Voyer, P. A. (2000). Word-of-mouth processes within a services purchase decision context. *Journal of Service Research*, *3*(2), 166-177.

Bao, T., & Chang, T. L. S. (2014). Finding disseminators via electronic word of mouth message for effective marketing communications. *Decision Support Systems*, *67*, 21-29.

Bhattacherjee, A. (2012). *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices (2nd ed.)*. Florida, USA: Anol Bhattacherjee.

Boerman, S. C. (2020). The effects of the standardized Instagram disclosure for micro- and meso-influencers. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *103*, 199-207.

Boon, S. D., & Lomore, C. D. (2001). Admirer-celebrity relationships among young adults: Explaining perceptions of celebrity influence on identity. *Human Communication Research*, *27*(3), 432-465.

Brüggen, E. C., Foubert, B., & Gremler, D. D. (2011). Extreme makeover: Short-and long-term effects of a remodeled servicescape. *Journal of Marketing*, *75*(5), 71-87.

Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2018). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *Journal of Business Research*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.005

Cha, M., Haddadi, H., Benevenuto, F., & Gummadi, K. P. (2010). Measuring user influence in twitter: The million follower fallacy. In *Fourth International AAAI conference on weblogs and social media*.

Chapple, C., & Cownie, F. (2017). An investigation into viewers' trust in and response towards disclosed paid-for-endorsements by YouTube lifestyle vloggers. *Journal of Promotional Communications*, *5*(2), 110-136.

Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, *65*(2), 81-93.

Chawdhary, R., & Dall'Olmo Riley, F. (2015). Investigating the consequences of word of mouth from a WOM sender's perspective in the services context. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *31*(9-10), 1018-1039.

Chen, C., & Gao, T. T. (2019). Sender outcomes of online word-of-mouth transmission. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *36*(1), 197-205.

Cheung, C. M., Lee, M. K., & Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in online customer communities. *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy*, *18*(3), 229-247.

Childers, C. C., Lemon, L. L., & Hoy, M. G. (2018). #Sponsored #Ad: Agency perspective on influencer marketing campaigns. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *40*(3), 258-274.

Churchill Jr, G. A. (1979). A paradigm for developing better measures of marketing constructs. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *16*(1), 64-73.

Cosenza, T. R., Solomon, M. R., & Kwon, W. S. (2015). Credibility in the blogosphere: A study of measurement and influence of wine blogs as an information source. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *14*(2), 71-91. https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2018.1521113

Dhanesh, G. S., & Duthler, G. (2019). Relationship management through social media influencers: Effects of followers' awareness of paid endorsement. *Public Relations Review*, *45*(3), 101765.

De Bruyn, A., & Lilien, G. L. (2008). A multi-stage model of word-of-mouth influence through viral marketing. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *25*(3), 151-163.

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, *36*(5), 798-828.

Dholakia, U. M., Bagozzi, R. P., & Pearo, L. K. (2004). A social influence model of consumer participation in network-and small-group-based virtual communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *21*(3), 241-263.

Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *68*, 1-7.

Duffy, B. E. (2016). The romance of work: Gender and aspirational labour in the digital culture industries. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *19*(4), 441-457.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *18*(1), 39-50.

Fransen, M. L., Verlegh, P. W., Kirmani, A., & Smit, E. G. (2015). A typology of consumer strategies for resisting advertising, and a review of mechanisms for countering them. *International Journal of Advertising*, *34*(1), 6-16.

Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(1), 90-92.

Gallarza, M. G., Gil-Saura, I., & Holbrook, M. B. (2011). The value of value: Further excursions on the meaning and role of customer value. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *10*(4), 179-191.

Garnefeld, I., Helm, S., & Eggert, A. (2011). Walk your talk: an experimental investigation of the relationship between word of mouth and communicators' loyalty. *Journal of Service Research*, *14*(1), 93-107.

Gong, W., & Li, X. (2017). Engaging fans on microblog: The synthetic influence of parasocial interaction and source characteristics on celebrity endorsement. *Psychology & Marketing*, *34*(7), 720-732.

Hammitt, W. E., Kyle, G. T., & Oh, C. O. (2009). Comparison of place bonding models in recreation resource management. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *41*(1), 57-72.

Helm, S. (2003). Calculating the value of customers' referrals. *Managing Service Quality*, *13*(2), 124-133.

Henseler, J., Ringle, C.M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *43*(1), 115-135.

Hollebeek, L. (2011). Exploring customer brand engagement: definition and themes. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *19*(7), 555-573.

Hsiao, K. L., Lu, H. P., & Lan, W. C. (2013). The influence of the components of storytelling blogs on readers' travel intentions. *Internet Research*, *23*(2), 160-182.

Hsu, C. P., Huang, H. C., Ko, C. H., & Wang, S. J. (2014). Basing bloggers' power on readers' satisfaction and loyalty. *Online Information Review*, *38*(1), 78-94.

Hsu, C. L., & Lu, H. P. (2004). Why do people play on-line games? An extended TAM with social influences and flow experience. *Information & Management*, *41*(7), 853-868.

Hsu, H. Y., & Tsou, H. T. (2011). Understanding customer experiences in online blog environments. *International Journal of Information Management*, *31*(6), 510-523.

Hu, L. T., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, *6*(1), 1-55.

Hughes, C., Swaminathan, V., & Brooks, G. (2019). Driving brand engagement through online social influencers: An empirical investigation of sponsored blogging campaigns. Journal of Marketing, *83*(5), 78-96.

Hulland, J., Baumgartner, H., & Smith, K. M. (2017). Marketing survey research best practices: Evidence and recommendations from a review of JAMS articles. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *46*(1), 92-108.

Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S., & Füller, J. (2013). The impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: the case of MINI on Facebook. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *22*(5/6), 342-351.

IAB Spain (2017). *I Estudio de Content & Native Advertising 2017*. Available at: https://iabspain.es/estudio/primer-estudio-de-content-native-advertising/. Accessed 10 Feb 2020.

IAB Spain (2019). *Estudio Anual de Redes Sociales 2019*. Available at: https://iabspain.es/estudio/estudio-anual-de-redes-sociales-2019/. Accessed 10 Feb 2020.

Jiménez-Castillo, D., & Sánchez-Fernández, R. (2019). The role of digital influencers in brand recommendation: Examining their impact on engagement, expected value and purchase intention. *International Journal of Information Management*, *49*, 366-376.

Jin, S. V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2019). Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *37*(5), 567-579.

Jöreskog, K.G, & Sörbom, D. (1996). *LISREL 8: User's Reference Guide (Version 8.8)*. Chicago IL: Scientific Software International.

Jun, M., Kim, C. K., Han, J., Kim, M., & Kim, J. Y. (2016). Strong attachment to heroes: how does it occur and affect people's self-efficacy and ultimately quality of life? *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *11*(1), 271-291.

Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: the impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *36*(3-4), 248-278.

Kapitan, S., & Silvera, D. H. (2016). From digital media influencers to celebrity endorsers: attributions drive endorser effectiveness. *Marketing Letters*, *27*(3), 553-567.

Kapoor, K. K., Tamilmani, K., Rana, N. P., Patil, P., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Nerur, S. (2018). Advances in social media research: Past, present and future. *Information Systems Frontiers*, *20*(3), 531-558.

Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *2*(1), 51-60.

Kelman, H. C. (1961). Processes of opinion change. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *25*, 57-78.

Kelman, H. C. (2006). Interests, relationships, identities: Three central issues for individuals and groups in negotiating their social environment. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *57*, 1-26.

Ki, C. W. C., & Kim, Y. K. (2019). The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: The role of consumers' desire to mimic. *Psychology & Marketing*, *36*(10), 905-922.

Kline, R. B. (2011). *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling, 3rd ed.*, Guilford Press, New York.

Kline, R. B. (2016). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling, 4th edition*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Kowalczyk, C. M., & Pounders, K. R. (2016). Transforming celebrities through social media: the role of authenticity and emotional attachment. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *25*(4), 345-356.

Kwak, H., Lee, C., Park, H., & Moon, S. (2010). What is Twitter a social network or a news media? *Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on World Wide Web ACM Raleigh NC.*

Ladhari, R., Massa, E., & Skandrani, H. (2020). YouTube vloggers' popularity and influence: The roles of homophily, emotional attachment, and expertise. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *54*, 102027.

Lahuerta-Otero, E., & Cordero-Gutiérrez, R. (2016). Looking for the perfect tweet. The use of data mining techniques to find influencers on twitter. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *64*, 575-583.

Lee, M. R., Yen, D. C., & Hsiao, C. Y. (2014). Understanding the perceived community value of Facebook users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *35*, 350-358.

Li, D. C. (2011). Online social network acceptance: a social perspective. *Internet Research*, *21*(5), 562-580.

Lim, J. S., Choe, M. J., Zhang, J. & Noh, G. Y. (2020). The role of wishful identification, emotional engagement, and parasocial relationships in repeated viewing of live-streaming games: A social cognitive theory perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *108*, 1-10.

Lim, X., Radzol, M., Cheah, J.-H., & Wong, M. W. (2017). The impact of social media influencers on purchase intention and the mediation effect of customer attitude. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, *7*(2), 19-36.

Lin, H.-C., Bruning, P. F., & Swarna, H. (2018). Using online opinion leaders to promote the hedonic and utilitarian value of products and services. *Business Horizons*, *61*(3), 431-442.

Liu, S., Jiang, C., Lin, Z., Ding, Y., Duan, R., & Xu, Z. (2015). Identifying effective influencers based on trust for electronic word-of-mouth marketing: A domain-aware approach. *Information Sciences*, *306*, 34-52.

Lou, C., & Kim, H. K. (2019). Fancying the new rich and famous? Explicating the roles of influencer content, credibility, and parental mediation in adolescents' parasocial relationship, materialism, and purchase intentions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2567.

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *19*(1), 58-73.

MacCallum, R. C., Browne, M. W., & Sugawara, H. M. (1996). Power analysis and determination of sample size for covariance structure modelling. *Psychological Methods*, *1*, 130-149.

MacKenzie, S.B., & Podsakoff, P.M. (2012). Common method bias in marketing: Causes, mechanisms, and procedural remedies. *Journal of Retailing*, *88*(4), 542-555.

Magno, F. (2017). The influence of cultural blogs on their readers' cultural product choices. *International Journal of Information Management*, *37*(3), 142-149.

Matute, J., Polo-Redondo, Y., & Utrillas, A. (2016). The influence of EWOM characteristics on online repurchase intention. *Online Information Review*, *40*(7), 1090-1110.

Nambisan, S., & Nambisan, P. (2008). How to profit from a better 'virtual customer environment'. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *49*(3), 53.

Nunnally, J.C. (1978). *Psychometric Theory (2nd. ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pedroni, M. (2016). Meso-celebrities, fashion and the media: How digital influencers struggle for visibility. *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, *5*(1), 103-121.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*(5), 879-903.

Phua, J., Jin, S. V., & Kim, J. J. (2020). Pro-veganism on Instagram: Effects of user-generated content (UGC) types and content generator types in Instagram-based health marketing communication about veganism. *Online Information Review*, *44*(3), 685-704.

Reinikainen, H., Munnukka, J., Maity, D., & Luoma-aho, V. (2020). 'You really are a great big sister' – parasocial relationships, credibility, and the moderating role of audience comments in influencer marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1708781.

Rindova, V. P., Pollock, T. G., & Hayward, M. L. (2006). Celebrity firms: The social construction of market popularity. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(1), 50-71.

Romero, D. M., Galuba, W., Asur, S., & Huberman, B. A. (2011). Influence and passivity in social media. In *Joint European Conference on Machine Learning and Knowledge Discovery in Databases* (pp. 18-33). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2019). Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: the role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit. *International Journal of Advertising*, *39*(2)1-24.

Scott, D. M. (2015). *The New Rules of Marketing and PR. (5th ed.)*. New York: Wiley.

Shen, Y. C., Huang, C. Y., Chu, C. H., & Liao, H. C. (2010). Virtual community loyalty: an interpersonal-interaction perspective. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *15*(1), 49-74.

Shiau, W. L., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Lai, H. H. (2018). Examining the core knowledge on Facebook. *International Journal of Information Management*, *43*, 52-63.

Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *53*, 101742.

Srivastava, M., & Kaul, D. (2016). Exploring the link between customer experience–loyalty–consumer spend. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *31*, 277-286.

Su, Y., Kunkel, T., & Ye, N. (2020). When abs do not sell: The impact of male influencers conspicuously displaying a muscular body on female followers. *Psychology & Marketing*, https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21322

Sweeney, J. C., & Soutar, G. N. (2001). Consumer perceived value: The development of a multiple item scale. *Journal of Retailing*, *77*(2), 203-220.

Thomson, M. (2006). Human brands: Investigating antecedents to consumers' strong attachments to celebrities. *Journal of Marketing*, *70*(3), 104-119.

Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., & Park, C. W. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *15*(1), 77-91.

Tolbert, A. N., & Drogos, K. L. (2019). Tweens' Wishful Identification and Parasocial Relationships with YouTubers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2781.

Torres, P., Augusto, M., & Matos, M. (2019). Antecedents and outcomes of digital influencer endorsement: An exploratory study. *Psychology & Marketing*, *36*(12), 1267-1276.

Tufekci, Z. (2014). Big questions for social media big data: representativeness validity and other methodological pitfalls. *Proceedings of the 8th International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*.

Uzunoğlu, E., & Kip, S. M. (2014). Brand communication through digital influencers: Leveraging blogger engagement. *International Journal of Information Management*, *34*(5), 592-602.

van Eldik, A. K., Kneer, J., Lutkenhaus, R. O., & Jansz, J. (2019). Urban influencers: An analysis of urban identity in YouTube content of local social media influencers in a super-diverse city. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2876.

van Esch, P., Arli, D., Castner, J., Talukdar, N., & Northey, G. (2018). Consumer attitudes towards bloggers and paid blog advertisements: what's new?. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *36*(7), 778-793.

Wan, J., Lu, Y., Wang, B., & Zhao, L. (2017). How attachment influences users' willingness to donate to content creators in social media: A socio-technical systems perspective. *Information & Management*, *54*(7), 837-850.

Wang, S. J., Hsu, C. P., Huang, H. C., & Chen, C. L. (2015). How readers' perceived self-congruity and functional congruity affect bloggers' informational influence: Perceived interactivity as a moderator. *Online Information Review*, *39*(4), 537-555.

Wang, S. M., & Lin, J.C.C. (2011). The effect of social influence on bloggers' usage intention. *Online Information Review*, *35*(1), 50-65.

Wang, Y., & Yu, C. (2017). Social interaction-based consumer decision-making model in social commerce: The role of word of mouth and observational learning. *International Journal of Information Management*, *37*(3), 179-189.

Wilson, E. J., & Sherrell, D. L. (1993). Source effects in communication and persuasion research: A meta-analysis of effect size. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *21*(2), 101.

Wu, W. L., & Lee, Y. C. (2012). The effect of blog trustworthiness, product attitude, and blog involvement on purchase intention. *International Journal of Management & Information Systems*, *16*(3), 265-276

Xiao, M., Wang, R., & Chan-Olmsted, S. (2018). Factors affecting YouTube influencer marketing credibility: a heuristic-systematic model. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, *15*(3), 188-213.

Yang, W., & Sia, C.L. (2018). Why blogger sells: An approach from the attachment theory. In F.H. Nah, & B. Xiao (eds.), *HCI in Business Government and Organizations. HCIBGO 2018. Lecture Notes in Computer Science Vol. 10923* (pp. 526-535). Springer Cham.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. *Journal of Marketing*, *60*(2), 31-46.

Zhang, K.Z., Barnes, S.J., Zhao, S.J., & Zhang, H. (2018). Can consumers be persuaded on brand microblogs? An empirical study. *Information & Management*, *55*(1), 1-15.

Zhang, Y., Moe, W. W., & Schweidel, D. A. (2017). Modeling the role of message content and influencers in social media rebroadcasting. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *34*(1), 100-119.

Zhao, X., Zhan, M., & Liu, B. F. (2018). Disentangling social media influence in crises: Testing a four-factor model of social media influence with large data. *Public Relations Review*, *44*(4), 549-561.