

Misaligned Brand Messages in Sponsored Social Media Content Affecting the User Behavior

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Abstract *The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of misaligned messages on users' behavior when influencers are endorsed in sponsored posts. Previous studies have enlightened the role of influencers in perceiving messages, showing that responses vary with the number of followers and authenticity of the influencers. However, fewer studies were done on determining the mediating role of users' overall attitude towards sponsored posts, message involvement, and repetition of ads on the relationship of influencers' endorsement with their responses and intentions. The Brand Signaling Theory was used as it signifies the signals a brand/company gives to users via current and past social media or marketing activities. A deductive approach was used on a sample size of 253 respondents comprising males and females who are social media users. The results were computed using SMART-PLS software and it was found that a significant and positive relationship exists between influencer endorsement with user engagement, intention towards sponsored posts, and forwarding intention of the sponsored post. Upon studying the mediators, attitude towards sponsored posts was found with no mediation effect while message involvement and repetition of ads had a partial mediation impact on the studied variables. This study can help organizations develop marketing practices that attract users to engage, and show positive intentions towards sponsored ads.*

Keywords: *Influencer Endorsement, User Engagement, Intention Towards Sponsored Posts, Forwarding Intention, Attitude Towards Sponsored Posts, Repetition of Ads, Message Involvement*

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Introduction

Sponsored posts are those posts that contain brand messages, businesses design these for consumers by spending money on them. The goal of sponsored posts is to persuade the target audience by promoting a product or brand with a specific message. As per reports, more than two million businesses around the globe invest in sponsored posts to amplify the intention of the viewers to like, engage, or buy the displayed product (Nordmann, 2019; Sammis et al., 2016). It was reported that in 2022, more than 4.59 billion people were active social media users globally (Dixon, 2023). The figures reportedly lead to opportunities for the businesses of today's world through posts that could be either in the form of text, pictures, videos, or a combination of all, posted by influencers or companies directly. Past studies have significantly proven that the type of message communicated on social media directly influences the users' response, including their engagement, interaction level, reactions, and opinions (Al-Rubaiee & Lind, 2020; Kwok & Yu,

2013; Rietveld et al., 2020; Teo et al., 2019). Companies in today's world are spending hefty amounts on sponsored content to be posted on social media channels including Instagram, YouTube, and other platforms. However, the users get to witness sponsored and unsponsored content in their daily lives and form a grey opinion in believing which post is authentic and which is not. If the messages are not aligned with the brand, the sponsored content has the power to negatively impact the likes and follows of the brand on social media pages (Danial, 2023).

In this research, the impact of influencer endorsement (posts where influencers give opinions about the brand/product) will be studied on different aspects of users' responses and intentions. Moreover, the role of consumers' attitudes towards sponsored posts, message involvement and repetition of ads will be studied that mediate the effect especially when the message delivered is misaligned with the brand image. Here user behavior is not limited to their engagement only but also includes their intention towards the displayed sponsored post.

The study has chosen a sponsored post displayed by Foodpanda on Instagram as a stimulus to shape the respondents' responses when addressing their views about the sponsored content. The idea was to gauge the brand image of Foodpanda among consumers, especially considering the issues that home chefs or sellers face. The message delivered was misaligned in a way that Foodpanda is now facing complaints and users are well known for the behaviour they show towards restaurants, home chefs, and other sellers. Moreover, the topic discussed in this research aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG12) which ensures economic, social, and economic betterment of the society and the surroundings (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2023). Since the goal is to promote sustainable practices by the brands, the research focuses on aligning it with the practices within the domain of marketing and advertising, specifically within the environment of social media. The messages conveyed via sponsored posts lead to users' engagement and decision-making patterns that closely relate to sustainable development. Our study, aiming at the stimuli created through a misaligned sponsored ad displayed by Foodpanda on Instagram, was further studied and marketing tactics (such as influencer endorsement) that signal user behavior were taken into account. At the end of the study, we will focus on how our findings can contribute to the betterment of marketing at the companies' end.

Problem Statement

Sponsored content is a well-known marketing strategy on social media platforms and plays a major role in how audiences in today's world receive information (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, the influence becomes negative if the message shown does not resonate with the brand's image. It adversely impacts user engagement, particularly with dislikes and unfollows. Companies invest actively in social media-sponsored posts but focus less on measuring the factors that make posts effective for the audience (Danial, 2023).

Research Questions & Objectives

Sponsored content on social media is disclosed beforehand to the audience to avoid any confusion in communication (Boerman & van Reijmersdal, 2016). However, consumers' responses depend on many other variables, including influencers' endorsement (Lee & Kim, 2020). It was also studied that the attitude of consumers differs for sponsored posts depending on the attitude towards the influencer (Müller & Christandl, 2019). Thus, to study the factors that depend on influencer endorsement, the following research question is concluded:

- What can be the impact of Influencer Endorsement on User Responses and Intentions to misaligned Sponsored Content in social media?
- How do attitudes towards sponsored posts, message involvement, and repetition of ads mediate users' responses and intentions?

Based on the above questions, the objectives of this study are to:

- To identify the relationship between influencer endorsement with user engagement, intention towards sponsored posts, and forwarding intention of the sponsored post.
- To understand users' responses and intentions due to their attitudes towards the sponsored posts, misaligned message involvement, and repetition of ads.

Literature Review

Sponsored posts are advertisements done in a native form and can be defined as "Any paid advertising that takes the specific form and appearance of editorial content from the publisher itself." Upon analyzing the modern way of such paid advertising, Instagram, a social media channel, is commonly used by brands where sponsored posts are often blended with non-sponsored posts and appear in users' feeds without disrupting their experience (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). These are known as direct communication between brands and consumers via different channels (Ikonen et al., 2017; Pirttimäki, 2018). To enhance the experience, influencers endorse different brands, without mentioning the nature of posts, which often leads to deceptive persuasion as users believe the reviews as credible word of mouth, most of the time (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). Influencers can be defined as social media individuals who have a number of followers who trust them. These influencers capture specific industries and collaborate with brands to promote their products/services in return for a reward (Al-Rubaiee & Lind, 2020). Another study that revolved around paid advertising found that clear disclosure of sponsored content on posts resulted in ad recognition with a positive impact on brand attitude (Wojdowski & Evans, 2016). Since authenticity claims to promote engagement and trust, sponsored endorsement is getting major attention for brands to gain the trust of their target audience (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Pirttimäki, 2018; Spencer, 2016).

Moreover, according to Smith & Wheeler (2002), if the brand awareness of any sponsored post is high among the targeted users, there are chances that the users will have more trust in the ad/sponsored post and the brand, for that matter. It was further studied that consumers behave/react toward products that differ in nature and type. For instance, products that are search goods and experience goods have different consumer behaviours (Lu et al., 2014). Researchers also found that better brand awareness, which makes one a well-known brand, encourages users/consumers to believe that the sponsored post will not deceive them and is more reliable, leading to a better ASP or ads (Lu et al., 2014; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Smith & Wheeler, 2002).

Theoretical Background

The study undermines the Brand Signaling Theory which is based upon the build-up of a brand's reputation in the market. The theory signifies the signals a brand/company gives to the users via current and past social media or marketing activities. These activities shape the reputation of the brand in the market (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993; Lee & Kim, 2020). In this study's context, for brands to build an image, it requires different posts, messages, and appeals (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). Moreover, the theory is useful when two parties (brands and consumers in

this study), access information. The sender (brands/companies) communicates a message and chooses how to convey it while the receiver (consumers/users) chooses how to interpret the same message (Connelly et al., 2010; Kreps & Wilson, 1982). Since consumers build perceptions based on these signals, misaligned sponsored content can lead to negative attitudes towards the post, resulting in less engagement and negative intentions. Studies found that users tend to trust influencers' endorsed brands mainly because as per the Brand Signaling Theory, those influencers have given positive signals to the audience and have created a positive image that the opinions are based on their personal experiences (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Lee & Kim, 2020), leading to authenticity (Uribe et al., 2016).

Influencer Endorsement

Social media influencers are people online with influence other users (Heijmeskamp & Szyntar, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). These people have a number of followers but they are different from typical traditional celebrities and are 'regular people' (Agarwal, 2016; Heijmeskamp & Szyntar, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). These influencers share relatable content with their followers on channels like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter (N. Hair et al., 2010; Weismueller et al., 2020). To be specific, Instagram strategically plays the role of a dominant channel for 89% of marketers to build and boost trends among youngsters (Ishani, 2019). The niche followers interact and stay updated with the news and trends on the topics as per their interests (N. Hair et al., 2010; Weismueller et al., 2020). Previous studies (De Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lyons & Henderson, 2005; Watts & Dodds, 2007; Weismueller et al., 2020) found factors such as credibility and the number of followers as defining parameters for influencers' endorsement effectiveness and the more followers link to liked influencers.

User Engagement

Customer engagement is "The level of customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011; Islam & Rahman, 2016). When a brand image is positive, there are higher chances for consumers to resonate with the communication and hence the entire brand (Sirgy, 1985). It is specifically confined to younger generations, the individuals who are mainly looking for the image and positive attitude of brands before building any association, and not just the value gained after making a purchase (Heine, 2010; Islam & Rahman, 2016; Park et al., 2010).

User engagement or consumer engagement is the user's experience that is associated with positive interactivity between consumers and the source (brand) (Lehmann et al., 2012). Here emotionality, product involvement, and brand actions are the deriving factors (Harmeling et al., 2017; Hughes et al., 2019; Pansari & Kumar, 2017) that also justify the Brand Signaling Theory. More studies were conducted and as per Hughes et al. (2019), campaign intent and influencers also impacted the involvement level. Here likes and comments on sponsored posts were considered the defining aspects of user engagement. Therefore, we can say that brand actions, such as influencer endorsement derive user engagement as per Brand Signaling Theory. These influencers provide enjoyable content and information about brands and products to their followers (Dehghani et al., 2016), hence, we can say that influencer endorsement shapes users' interaction and engagement.

H1: Influencers' Endorsement has a positive relationship with User/Consumer Engagement.

Intention towards Sponsored Post

The phrase intention towards the sponsored post focuses this study on users' intention towards liking, commenting, or sharing the displayed post (Boerman et al., 2022; Nordmann, 2019). This intention can further be classified into purchase intention or the intent of conveying the message to others (electronic Word of Mouth) (Kuo et al., 2009; Nordmann, 2019). It was also found that brand image is a measure for people to resonate and create a self-belonging expression among other social media users which is also shaped by the influencers. Hence, the intention to like, comment, or share a post satisfies the personal motivations of users, following a particular brand and what they are observing (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2019). It was previously claimed that an influencer's credibility/source credibility plays a vital role in shaping consumers' intention towards the post during a specific exposure condition (Lu et al., 2014; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). If the readers consider the influencers' claims authentic and credible, the intention towards the post will be positive.

H2: Influencers' Endorsement that seems credible and authentic in the views of users/consumers has a positive relationship with their intention towards sponsored posts in terms of likes, comments, and shares.

Forwarding Intention

Forwarding intention is the process through which users on the internet intend to forward any message to their friends or relatives using the internet or social media as the medium (Hsieh et al., 2012; Kroon, 2017). This process consists of four stages that begin when a user receives/sees an online video/post. It is followed by the users' decision to open a video/post, read the message and finally the decision to forward the sponsored post/video (Phelps et al., 2004). The final decision is based on how the users perceive the message received (Hsieh et al., 2012; Kroon, 2017). To fulfil the process, brands endorse influencers, micro-bloggers, and celebrities. Thus, such a form of communication helps brands to make their marketing campaigns more effective (Gu et al., 2020). If the message delivered has emotions (involving fun or humour), the intention to forward sponsored posts is subsequently increased (Dobele et al., 2007). Therefore, we can say that influencers on social media who use emotions to deliver messages via sponsored posts are likely to receive consumers' positive attitudes when forwarding posts.

H3: Influencer Endorsement involving emotions has a positive relationship with users' forwarding intention towards the sponsored posts.

Mediating Effect of Attitude towards Sponsored Post

ASP can be referred to as the overall attitude of users on social media towards all types of sponsored posts, in particular, and in general that they witness over time. These attitudes vary from person to person (Lutz, 1985). In general, such negative or positive attitude is built over time, through previous experiences of verbal and visual messages involved (Bongiorno, 2008). When consumers have a positive association with the overall idea of sponsored posts/ads, they tend to show positive behavior towards the brand and post in terms of overall intention and forwarding intention which further influences the positive attitude towards brand awareness (Ishani, 2019). Lu, Chang and Chang did a study (2014) and found that these intentions are intensified when the posts consumers witness have a positive perceived brand image involving influencers.

H4: Influencer Endorsement has a positive relationship with intention towards sponsored posts and forwarding intention. Such relationship is intensified and further mediated by Attitude towards sponsored posts in general.

Mediating Effect of Message Involvement

Message involvement is related to two scenarios, individual-based or situational. Individual involvement revolves around the personal needs, interests, and values of the viewers and situational depends on the time being needs (Zaichkowsky, 1986). For example, during summer, the demand for air conditioners, refrigerators and freezers is high and those who are in need of these appliances will be more involved in sponsored posts related to their situational needs. However, the same audience will be least involved in the same posts once the summers are over. Message involvement is itself an individual's state of motivation for certain situations (Laczniak et al., 1989; Yang, 2020). Depending on these interests, and perceived relevance, the message written on the post gets attention (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020).

While influencer endorsement stands as a factor in influencing users' intention towards sponsored content, message involvement plays a significant role in recognizing and shaping commercial motives. Those who are highly involved show positive intentions towards the post (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020; Yang, 2020).

H5: Influencer Endorsement has a positive relationship with intention towards sponsored posts and this relationship is further positively mediated by high message involvement of users on social media.

Mediating Effect of Repetition of Sponsored Post

It was studied that the involvement of influencers with the brand is dependent on certain factors and repetition of sponsored ads is one of them (Rice et al., 2012). The model that depicts influencers' endorsement relationship with brand attitude also relates to the consumers' positive intention with respect to their purchase behaviors related to buying products/services in the post (Fekadu, 2018). As Hughes et al., (2019) suggested influencers closely impact the users' involvement, the relationship is evident. While influencer endorsement brings traffic to brands, its repetition attracts clicks to an extent and after a certain time, leads to a negative effect (Geng et al., 2023). Moreover, when products/brands are repeatedly shown to users, it increases brand recall and hence brand awareness (Davtyan & Tashchian, 2022).

H6: While influencer endorsement has a positive relationship with user engagement, repetition of ads to a certain extent has a positive mediating effect on user engagement.

Conceptual Framework

The literature gives evidence of influencer endorsement as the study's independent variable. The aim was to study the impact of this independent variable on our dependent variables, including User engagement, ISP, and forwarding intention. The brand signalling theory relates these variables as it refers to the effectiveness of brands communicating information via different activities (Lee & Kim, 2020), where the overall brand image, encouraged by endorsing influencers acts as those cues that brands take. Moreover, the literature also signified the mediating effect of ASP, as in overall attitude, repetition of ads and messages involved in modifying users/consumers behavior, including their engagement level and intention towards the sponsored content they witness on social media. In this specific study, Foodpanda was considered the ad that created stimuli, upon which consumers signified their level of engagement and intention in the presence of mediating factors.

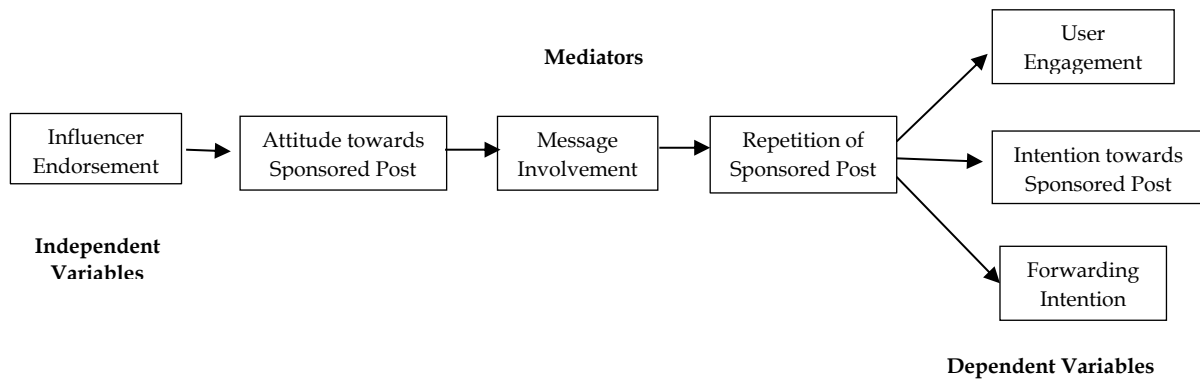


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

Research Philosophy

The phenomenon of the research philosophy defines how the study which had been conducted was observed, gathered, and then analyzed in that specific field. It can be developed through the following three types of research philosophy that are positivism, interpretivism, and post-positivism (Mkansi & Acheampong, 2012). This research has shown that the data gathered indicates the research philosophy to be based on post-positivism. It is because this study influences the observation which has been made before the test in the report published by Dawn (Danial, 2023), and also measured the impacts on variables through the outcome.

Research Approach

A deductive reasoning approach was used for this research where general issues were gathered at the beginning related to the negative impact of misaligned brands, leading to dislikes (Danial, 2023). However, it was a theory upon which we built the hypothesis, collected data to conduct observation and finally, based on the results, logically interpreted the relationships to confirm the findings (Aliyu et al., 2015).

Sample and Sampling Design

Population & Sample Frame

Pakistan is a growing nation and consists of 72.9 million people who use social media regularly and are fond of using these mediums, as per the report of 2022 (OOSGA, 2023). This study covered the population residing in the vicinity of Karachi, Pakistan, and are active social media users, specifically, Instagram, as most of the studied sponsored content was displayed on this platform. The population covered people who know about Foodpanda and have a negative or positive impression of the brand. The gender included both males and females. Due to the large population, the sample frame was unavailable for this study.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique helps determine a specific set of populations to generalize the evidence gained from the study. In this study, non-probability, convenience sampling was used

as the respondents were selected based on the criteria of their availability and convenience (Taherdoost, 2016). This sampling technique is designed to collect responses at ease but also represent the population as its subset (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Since the sampling frame was unavailable for this study, the chances of conducting probability were lowered to none (Forster, 2001).

Sample Size

The sample size represents the entire population of the study. The datasets of more than 250 respondents, CB-SEM and PLS-SEM usually drive similar results, as per the studies of J. F Hair et al. (2019). According to Kline's sample size for SEM, any sample size below 100 respondents is small, 100 to 200 respondents is medium, and more than 200 respondents is good (Memon et al., 2020). Further studies have been conducted on the determination of sample size and much evidence exists in the literature that a sample size of 250 is appropriate for research to be conducted successfully (Hair et al., 2010). Hence, the sample size for this study is 262 but since outliers exist, the final sample size was reduced to 258 after removing the outliers.

Data Collection Tools

Scale & Measure

The questionnaire for the survey was designed as per the study type, i.e., quantitative research method. The constructs were referenced by previous studies and consisted of questions based on a Likert scale which consists of five scales representing consumer's response from most likeliness to least likeliness. In other words, from one extreme to another (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). The studied scale included the original Likert scale measures, suggested by Rensis Likert, including labels; "Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree/Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree" (Taherdoost, 2022). A total of 7 constructs were involved in this study with 28 items in the questionnaire. Here 4 questions were related to demographics, making the items for study 32. All the constructs were reliable and previously studied (provided in Table 1). However, this study further calculated the reliability of the constructs. This is due to the work of previous researchers who indicated that reliability might change when the nature of the study changes (Ahmed Sallam & Ali Algammash, 2016; Eze & Lee, 2012).

Table 1: Scale and measure with reliability and source

Measure/Construct	Source	No. of Items	Reliability
Influencer Endorsement	(Dwidienawati et al., 2017)	04	0.900
User Engagement	(Abbas et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2021)	05	0.880
Intention towards Sponsored Post	(Nordmann, 2019)	05	0.920
Forwarding Intention	(Kroon, 2017)	03	0.740
Attitude towards Sponsored Post	(Ishani, 2019)	05	0.928
Message Involvement	(Karson & Korgaonkar, 2001)	03	0.920
Repetition of Sponsored Post	(Fekadu, 2018)	03	0.705

Results

The statistical analysis of the human population is known as demographic analysis mainly includes age, gender, and other information (Morganosky & Buckley, 1987). The study was conducted on males and females, out of 262 responses, 42.2% were males (110 respondents) and 57.5% were females (150 respondents). 66% (173 respondents) of the age group belonged to the range of 25-34, followed by 15.6% (41 respondents) of 25-44 and 14.1% (37 respondents) of age 24 or less. In terms of respondents' educational background, 44.7% (117 respondents) were

Graduates, 35.1% (92 respondents) were post-graduates, 11.1% (29 respondents) did intermediate, 7.3% (11 respondents) were PhDs or received Higher Education, and 1.9% (5 respondents) did Matric.

Since the aim of the study was to take the survey from those who are active social media users, 98.5% (258 respondents) were using social media either very frequently, frequently, or occasionally. Whereas, 1.5% rarely or never used social media platforms hence they exited from the survey at the beginning and did not participate in our research.

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

To begin with the analysis of collected data, descriptive analysis plays a vital role in describing the data (Gissane, 1998; Hicks & Hicks, 1995). To ensure normal distribution, researchers do descriptive analytics where Skewness and Kurtosis depict the normality. If the value attained after running the analysis for Skewness and Kurtosis lies between the range of +2 and -2, we can conclude it is normal data (George & Mallery, 2003).

Reliability helps researchers understand the quality of research and indicates that the results, in similar observation, will depict the same or closest answers (Kirk & Miller, 1986). The constructs chosen for this research were reliable according to previous studies but since the reliability of constructs works differently when calculated in different environments, we conducted the analysis and obtained the following results (Ahmed Sallam & Ali Algammash, 2016; Eze & Lee, 2012).

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ASP	0.765	0.818	0.833	0.508
FI	0.838	0.915	0.897	0.744
IE	0.794	0.840	0.866	0.623
ISP	0.817	0.904	0.866	0.569
MI	0.864	0.882	0.916	0.786
RSA	0.782	0.785	0.873	0.696
UE	0.763	0.795	0.836	0.509

The Cronbach's Alpha in this study differs from the reliability of the previously studied constructs. Here, the highest reliability is 0.864 for Message Involvement and the lowest is 0.763 for User Engagement. Since the value of reliability/Cronbach Alpha is acceptable when it lies between 0.6 and 0.8 (Janssens et al., 2008; Taan & Hajjar, 2018), the values in Table 2 depicts consistency. However, the values 0.6 to <0.7 is moderate, 0.7 to <0.8 is good, and 0.8 to <0.9 is considered very well (Hair et al., 2015).

Convergent validity defines the accuracy of tests when conducted via different measures for the same construct. As per Wood's "high to low" determination method of checking the validity of the construct, 0.50 is considered a moderate value (Zhu, 2000). Moreover, the levels of convergent validity are considered high when $r=0.85$. The recommended values are above $r=0.7$ and those existing below $r=0.5$ are to be avoided (Carlson & Herdman, 2010). This validity is depicted as the Average Variant Expected (AVE). As depicted in Table 2, the AVE of all the constructs is more than 0.5 and the AVE of FI and MI are more than 0.7, which is considered better for the research.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is the measure to determine the uniqueness of two variables (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022) and is determined by the comparison of the square roots of the variance explained. The square root of each pair has to follow a criterion and it should be greater than the previous one (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity - Fornell-Larcker criterion

	ASP	FI	IE	ISP	MI	RSA	UE
ASP	0.713						
FI	0.616	0.863					
IE	0.490	0.400	0.789				
ISP	0.643	0.781	0.459	0.754			
MI	0.253	0.162	0.251	0.299	0.886		
RSA	0.217	0.358	0.316	0.468	0.399	0.834	
UE	0.581	0.640	0.535	0.718	0.292	0.574	0.713

Correlation analysis shows a relationship/association to an extent between variables that are quantitative. The values obtained are called the Correlation coefficient which lie between a ranges of -1 to +1. For linear or positive association, the results must depict a +1 value and if it shows -1 as the final result, the indication is that a negative association exists between two or more variables (Gogtay & Thatte, 2017). If this value is around 0, it indicates no relationship exists (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Correlation analysis is a prerequisite for running regression tests. Based on the analysis, if the value obtained is either 0.2, or 0.9 or lies within the range, the construct will exist otherwise, it will be deleted before conducting regression analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Structural Equation Modeling and Mediating Analysis

To study the results, the data was gone through Principal Component Analysis using SPSS and it was found that the common method bias exists. Such an issue is addressed as per Harman’s one-factor test, also called the single-factor test. Researchers load the variables to conduct an exploratory factor analysis (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Greene & Organ, 1973; Podsakoff et al., 2003) and based on that, find variables for variances (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

When data for this particular research ran through a single-factor test in the SPSS, it was found that the factors resulted in 52% of the variance. As per the guidelines of the test, (Podsakoff et al., 2003) suggested that the threshold to surpass the test is 50% indicating that one factor is accounting for more than one variance (Jo & Bang, 2023). Hence, the model was tested using SMART PLS-SEM. All the tests were conducted on this software where outliers existed initially but later, those were deleted. Cronbach Alpha for all the variables was conducted and was found reliable > 0.7, Composite Reliability > 0.7, and AVE > 0.5 (See Table 3), qualified for the acceptance criteria.

Table 4: Path Coefficients

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
ASP -> MI	0.253	0.256	0.061	4.138	0.000
IE -> ASP	0.490	0.499	0.043	11.521	0.000
MI -> RSA	0.399	0.401	0.054	7.415	0.000
RSA -> FI	0.358	0.364	0.048	7.378	0.000
RSA -> ISP	0.468	0.475	0.045	10.454	0.000
RSA -> UE	0.574	0.579	0.040	14.178	0.000

In the end, path coefficients (See Table 4) were calculated to identify whether the above-computed hypotheses are accepted and have the expected effects or rejected and do not relate with each other. The data shows that there is a significant impact of the computed relationships and our hypothesis is accepted. It shows that user engagement, intention toward sponsored posts, and user forwarding intentions are directly impacted by influencers' endorsement.

Table 5: Specific Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
IE -> ASP -> MI	0.124	0.128	0.034	3.677	0.000
ASP -> MI -> RSA	0.101	0.103	0.030	3.410	0.001
MI -> RSA -> UE	0.229	0.232	0.038	6.072	0.000
MI -> RSA -> FI	0.143	0.147	0.031	4.625	0.000
MI -> RSA -> ISP	0.187	0.191	0.035	5.287	0.000

Moreover, the bootstrapping method test conducted on SMART PLS with a subsample of 1000, led to identifying the mediation impact of this research. The indirect effects with Confidence Interval Bias Corrected at 95% were conducted that showed LL and UL with no involvement of 0 (See Table 5), which means the values are above 0 and depict mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008; Ramayah et al., 2017). Finally, by analyzing the specific indirect effects (See Table 5), the relationships of mediating effects, i.e. H4, H5, and H6 were found significant with the p-values less than 0.05 for each relationship. Hence, all mediating hypotheses are accepted.

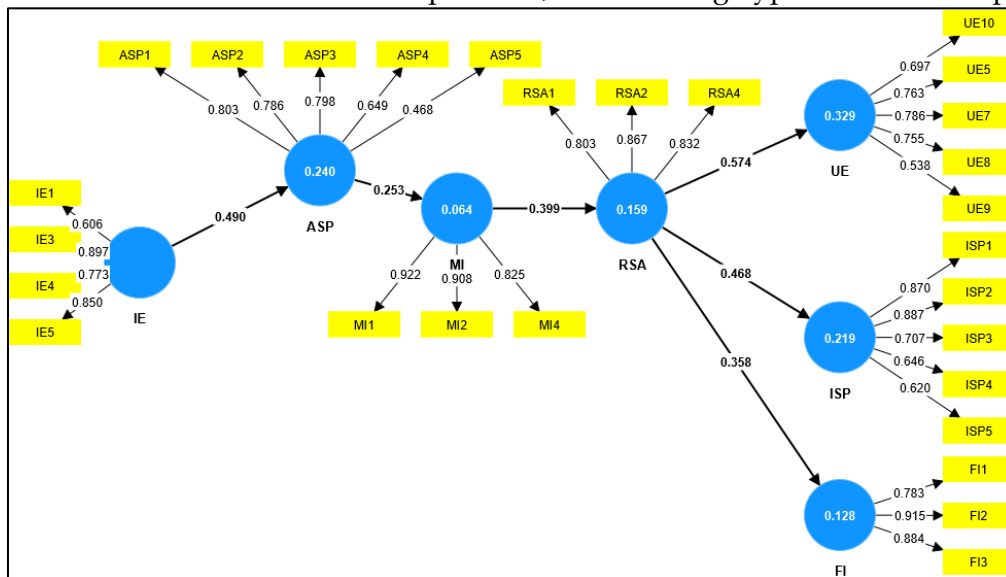


Figure 2: Structural equation modeling using Smart PLS

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to understand the relationship of influencer endorsement in sponsored ads which are misaligned with the brand. To identify it, research was carried out on the effect of influencer endorsement on user engagement, users' intention toward sponsored posts, and their forwarding intention of the post/ad to their friends or family. This was observed when individuals' attitudes towards sponsored ads, message involvement, and repetition of ads were placed as mediators. The result showed significance for all the studied relationships,

depicting that the previous studies conducted to study separate relationships of these variables were valid. To further explain, the following is a detailed evaluation of the computed hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 claims the relationship between the participation of influencers and user engagement is positive. As per the results (See Table 8), user engagement in terms of liking, commenting, and sharing sponsored posts on social media, is highly significant by the influencers who are trusted by the audiences and play a role in shaping their decisions. It was also evident as Hughes et al. (2019) discussed earlier, that the way influencers present the campaign impacts the involvement level.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 sheds light on the role of influencers endorsed by brands for sponsored ads in shaping their intention towards sponsored posts. By intention, we studied users' behaviour and purchase intention, combined. This intention was backed by users' trust in the influencers and based on that, their purchasing behaviour on their recommendations. The relationship was significant hence we can say that the H2 is accepted given that the source (influencers) are credible in the eyes of the consumers (Lu et al., 2014; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

Hypothesis 3

With a sig value of 0.011, H3, which stated there is a positive relationship between users' intention to forward any sponsored post, was found significant. It was further noted from the literature that this form of communication (involving influencers, celebrities, or micro-bloggers) that brands do has a better impact on forwarding intention when emotions are involved in the message delivered (Dobele et al., 2007).

Hypothesis 4

As evidenced in literature (Dobele et al., 2007; Lu et al., 2014; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) and the above-computed results conducted in this study, we can say that a significant relationship exists between Influencer Endorsement and ISP; and Influencer Endorsement and Forwarding Intention. However, the effect remains similar in the presence of the mediator, i.e. ASP. To further analyze the type of mediator, the VAF approach was used with one independent variable, one mediator, and two dependent variables. The final result of 0.05842 or approximately 5.842% is calculated depicting that in this scenario, no mediation exists. When the value of VAF is less than 20%, almost zero mediation is reflected in such a model of the particular variable (J. F. Hair et al., 2021; Ramayah et al., 2017). Hence, despite the existence of significance, the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 states the use of influencers in sponsored posts positively relates to users' intention towards the posts they witness on their social media channels. This further motivates users to act either in terms of eWOM or making decisions about the brand (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2019). As per the results calculated, such a relationship is found significant and positive but since the presence of a mediator, and message involvement did not change the effect between the dependent variable and the independent variable, the VAF approach was used. Upon using the formula $VAF = a * b / (a * b + c)$, (Forum.smartpls.com, 2015). VAF for this hypothesis was calculated at 0.5025, approximately 50.25%, depicting a partial mediation

existence. When the $20\% \leq \text{VAF} \leq 80\%$, partial mediation exists and when $\text{VAF} > 80\%$, full mediation exists in the model (J. F. Hair et al., 2021; Ramayah et al., 2017). Hence, the hypothesis is partially accepted and our objective to determine users' responses and intentions based on the messages involved is achieved.

Hypothesis 6

It was discussed earlier when influencers that users trust provide enjoyable content for a product, the users are positively affected, leading to higher engagement (Dehghani et al., 2016). However, since the effect was not visible in the above-computed indirect effects, the VAF approach was used and 0.501, approximately 50.1% effect was noted. It shows that the mediation partially changes the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2021; Ramayah et al., 2017). Hence, the hypothesis is significant and partially positive. However, based on the above hypothesis, we found the mediation effect of ASP on Influencer Endorsement and ISP; and Influencer Endorsement and Forwarding Intention significant but no mediation. Hence, it can be further studied with a larger sample size and in different settings to obtain a more accurate result.

Conclusion

The study on the impact of misaligned brand messages was conducted in light of SDG12 (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2023) based on the problem that such misaligned posts lead to negative user engagements (Danial, 2023). The sample size of 258 respondents was used and the people of Pakistan, specifically, Karachi who use social media very frequently, frequently, or occasionally were studied. We used a sponsored ad from Foodpanda as the stimulus to notice users' views about such ads. The post was misaligned in the sense that people, especially sellers are facing issues by collaborating with Foodpanda to sell food due to excessive charges and customer complaints (Asad, 2021). The data was collected via questionnaires floated among the students, office colleagues, friends, families, teachers, and other professionals.

Since influencers are highly regarded in Pakistan and 61% of social media users trust the recommendations by influencers (Chawla, 2023) the independent variable for the study was influencer endorsement in sponsored posts. As per our study, 73.6% of respondents trusted the influencers they follow and 60.1% were influenced by their recommendations. The dependent variables were user engagement, intention towards sponsored posts and forwarding intention as a whole. The relationships were further studied in the presence of attitude towards sponsored posts, message involvement, and repetition of ads as mediators. As per the results, the relationship of influencer endorsement with user engagement, intention towards sponsored posts and forwarding intention was found significant. User Intentions (towards sponsored posts and forwarding) due to their attitudes towards the sponsored posts as a mediating factor were not found whereas, message involvement and repetition of ads were found to partially mediate IE on ISP, and IE on UE, respectively.

Implications for Policy Makers and Marketers

Many studies in Pakistan have been conducted that studied the endorsement of influencers on the overall brand image or how users respond to sponsored posts. However, the mediating effect of ad repetition, the message used in the post, and overall users' attitudes towards sponsored posts were not studied. For marketers and policymakers, it can be concluded from this research that the message they choose to show their audience and the frequency they schedule the sponsored ads play a role in shaping users' engagement and intentions. Since ads

aim to prosper the brand in the eyes of the consumers, involving credible influencers who know the art of delivering messages with emotions can be crucial for brands. More research should be done on the specific targeted audience to understand their likes and dislikes upon which the messages could be shaped. As stated earlier, excessive repetition of ads can backfire on brands (Geng et al., 2023), the frequency should be minimal and further studied as per the product or service type. Influencers are the growing community which can address and influence larger audiences on concepts related to ads and other social messages that can sustain the environment.

Limitations & Future Research

The study was confined to a particular urban area of Karachi where media literacy is comparatively high and people trust influencers and the messages they receive. Whereas, other factors such as a study in sub-urban areas, studying notable factors such as sponsorship disclosure, brand credibility, or visual appeal were missing and could be a topic of research in the future. Moreover, the focus was not on influencers of any particular gender, this could have changed the way users behave and respond to the messages they see.

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