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Master Thesis

Who is posting the brand-related content (BRC) on Instagram and do they earn profit? Consumers' response to BRC post on Instagram

"How does perceived profit motive mediate the impact of content source (general user vs. celebrity) and sponsorship level (sponsored vs. non-sponsored) on consumer behavior (likeability of BRC, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention) in the context of Instagram?"

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Firstly, we heartily express our gratitude to our supervisor Tarje Gaustad for his continuous guidance every time we required it and for his immense support throughout. We truly appreciate Mr. Gaustad for sharing his knowledge which has been highly valuable for the completion of this paper.

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The process of building this work from a problem statement to a complete thesis paper had a lot of learning curves. Working on this paper was an opportunity to closely explore our topic of interest and contribute to the field by analyzing the real-time responses. Indeed, the experience was insightful, rigorous, challenging and fun, to say the least.

Abstract

Growing use of social media and predicted increases in the social media marketing trend necessitates an understanding of how different social media elements work. This study focuses on finding how the brand-related content (BRC) source (general users vs. celebrities) and sponsorship (non-sponsored vs. sponsored) interact to impact the consumer behavior (likeability of BRC post, brand attitude and purchase intention) for Instagram users. In this context, this study also aims to explore the mediation effect of consumer-perceived profit motive associated with the relationship of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior.

Our findings indicate no significant interaction effect of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior. While sponsorship do not have significant impact on consumer behavior, BRC source significantly impacts consumer behavior. Particularly, BRC by general users lead to significantly more positive consumer behavior compared to celebrity-generated BRC. Further, both BRC source and sponsorship significantly affect consumer perceived profit motive which further impacts consumer behavior. The study finds that BRC by celebrities gives the impression of profit motive, which leads to unfavorable consumer behavior. Further, sponsored post is also associated with profit motive, leading to negative effects on consumer behavior. Therefore, perceived profit motive plays a significant role in influencing consumer behavior when Instagram users come across BRCs; This implies that to encourage favorable consumer behavior, brands should create BRCs in ways that do not give the impression of profit motive regardless of whether they use celebrities or general users for brand marketing on Instagram.

Keywords

Brand-related content (BRC), celebrity, general user, sponsored content, non-sponsored content, perceived profit motive, likeability of BRC post, brand attitude, purchase intention

Contents

1.0. Introduction

The number of social media users crossed 4.26 billion in 2021 and is expected to increase to around six billion by 2027; the anticipated rise in the number of social media users is majorly attributed to the growth of, what is now, a half-baked digital market (Dixon, 2022a). Indeed, 83% of marketing specialists use social media marketing channels for digital marketing campaigns reasoning that they get better exposure, increased traffic, improved lead generation and direct communication with customers (Faria, 2022). Brand-related content (BRC) encompassing any content in the forms of image, text, audio and video that mention a brand or brands (Gross, 2022), is a major source of product information shaping consumers' attitude towards the brand and driving consumers' purchase intention (Chu & Kim, 2011; Elwalda et al., 2016). Social media channels, therefore, have become an indispensable platform for marketers to reach their targeted consumers and enhance brand attitude.

More and more brands are actively increasing their social media presence for consumers' attention. One popular way for them to increase their brand awareness is by harnessing the popularity of celebrities in social media, also known as influencer marketing. These social media celebrities can be anyone with reputation, expertise and power to engage with a mass of followers in social media (Vodák et al., 2019) and have significant impact on purchasing decision of consumers (Brown & Hayes, 2008, p. 50). Globally, marketers spent USD 16.4 billion on influencer marketing in 2022, which is double the figure compared to that in 2019 (Dencheva, 2023a). Celebrity endorsements have long been a popular marketing communication strategy among brands; They seek to transfer qualities of the endorser such as likeability, attractiveness and trustworthiness to their own brand imagery (Erdogan, 1999).

BRCs also originate from general users in the form of user-generated content (UGC). According to Naab and Sehl (2017), a content qualifies as UGC, if they are: a) personal contributions by the general users, b) published with public access to the content, and c) born outside the domain of professional routines or profession. UGC are all over on the internet in the forms of blogs, product reviews, home-made advertising, product usage descriptions (Fader & Winer, 2012). Therefore, user

generated BRC arise solely at the personal discretion of the users without any interference by brands; Such content is not sponsored by brands.

Be it celebrities or general users, social media users are encouraged for brand engagement in the digital media to create a buzz of the brand name or product in the market and grow brand awareness via BRC creation. According to Gross (2022), based on the content producer, controller and distributor, social media BRC can be categorized as owned (owned and controlled by companies), sponsored or paid (partially owned and controlled by companies), and non-sponsored or earned (neither owned nor controlled by companies). Hence, some BRCs have profit generating motive while others play the role of information sharing.

Particularly, users tend to avoid content created with profit generating motive. They avoid advertising messages and the ad clutter in general (Cho et al., 2004), especially those created from activity tracking (Ruckenstein & Granroth, 2020). However, celebrity-generated sponsored content enables the brands to persuade their targeted audience to pursue the advertised content instead of avoiding them (Childers et al., 2019). This shows consumers are willing to pursue celebrities-generated sponsored content, despite being an advertisement in its essence. Such willingness also explains the success and popularity of influencer marketing in general.

This indicates an interesting interaction between the source of the content and the sponsorship type (sponsored or not sponsored) in developing a positive consumer attitude towards the brand and higher purchase intention.

1.1 Research Question

Ample studies have contrasted consumers' reactions to content sources (close friends vs. celebrities), measured the effect of sponsorship disclosure and analyzed consumer behavior in different social media platforms. For example, Phua and Ahn (2016)'s research shows that consumers' perception of and reaction to the content from the trusted source such as their friends and families, are more positive compared to the sponsored posts by advertisers (Phua & Ahn, 2016). Research studying the impact of content source (influencer vs. traditional celebrity) on consumers' willingness to pay found that contents by influencers who demonstrate intrinsic motivation and creative

control carry higher consumer-perceived authenticity, leading to increased willingness to pay for the endorsed product (Kapitan et al., 2022). Existing studies also show the effect of sponsorship disclosure in influencers' content. For example, Carr and Hayes (2014) examined the effect of celebrity-generated product reviews (in blogs) on consumers, in the presence of non-sponsorship disclosure.

However, to our knowledge, there is no research that answers the question:

"How does perceived profit motive mediate the impact of content source (general user vs. celebrity) and sponsorship level (sponsored vs. non-sponsored) on consumer behavior (likeability of BRC, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention) in the context of Instagram?"

The closest related research compares content sources – close friends and celebrities – and studies the interaction effect of source and sponsorship (organic vs. sponsored) in the context of Twitter (Kim & Lee, 2017). The study found that consumers attributed recommendations by close friends to informational sharing purpose and those by celebrities to profit generating motive. Thus, the study demonstrated the motives as the mediation effect on consumer behavior and measured consumer behavior in Twitter.

Nevertheless, Instagram is highly influential compared to twitter (Krallman et al., 2016). Indeed, marketing specialists consider Instagram to be one of the most lucrative marketing mediums. This platform has propelled influencer marketing whereby content creators are increasingly partnering with brands (Faria, 2022). It is the leading social media platform for influencer marketing (Statista, 2023).

Further, existing research has explored UGC as an influential force on consumers' purchase intention (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Shuqair et al., 2017). Likewise, according to a survey among 401 respondents in the US, Instagram is also the most preferred platform for UGC compared to other social media sites such as Twitter (Mckeon, 2020). While existing research compares close friends and celebrities as the content source, the comparison of general random users and celebrities is quite different. In that, consumers evaluating the content and the intention behind the content do not personally know either source. Each source comes with their own strength: BRC by

general users has the strength of perceived authenticity while that by celebrity carries the strength of trust by celebrities' followers on Instagram.

Therefore, this paper fills the research gap in the existing literature on BRC in social media marketing and explains the interaction effect of content source and sponsorship on consumer behavior in the context of Instagram. The paper adds to the existing knowledge about the comparative strength of content sources (general users vs. celebrity) and that of content sponsorship level on likeability of BRC post, brand attitude, purchase intention. Additionally, it broadens the existing knowledge on the interaction effect of these sources and sponsorship level on consumers' behavior in social media, especially in Instagram. The worldwide spendings on social media marketing is expected to be over USD 300 billion by 2024 from 230 billion in 2022 (Statista, 2023b). Therefore, findings from this study will have practical implications on the strategies that brands – particularly social media marketers and digital marketers – design and apply in their social media marketing campaigns.

2.0. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Ample studies surrounding source, sponsorship, brand attitude and purchase intentions exist. Based on the existing studies, we reach our hypotheses and design the conceptual framework.

2.1. Brand-related Content (BRC)

The major element in social media channels is content in the forms of image, text, audio, and video. Such content can be brand-related, defined as any content that mentions brand (Gross, 2022) or non-brand-related referring to content that doesn't mention any brand.

BRC isn't a new concept that started with social media. In fact, the roots can be traced back to 1930 when a multinational giant, Procter & Gamble aired BRC in radio, targeting the housewives in America (Nowlin, 2021). The result was a boost in ROI. Later, these BRC radio campaigns transitioned to TVs and became what is commonly referred to as "soap operas". These early BRCs were groundbreaking and comparatively simplistic in theme as compared to the BRC as we know today.

BRC is a major source of product information shaping consumers' attitude towards the brand and driving consumers' purchase intention (Chu & Kim, 2011; Elwalda et al., 2016). Traditionally the brands themselves produced BRCs and they were in control of the BRCs. In simple words, the BRCs used to be brand manufactured.

However, with the ever-growing increase in the use of social media, general consumers have become one of the major sources of BRCs; the brands do not have control on the quality and valence of the BRC, when it is generated by consumers on their free will. This can be seen in reviews, blogs, vlogs in social media and so on. A survey conducted among 2000 adults in the UK, Australia and the US found that 86 percent of the respondents reported importance of authenticity in BRC to like and support a brand (Nosto, 2017). The same survey showed that consumers can go as far as unfollowing the brand on social networking sites for producing unauthentic content.

2.2. Consumer Behavior – Attitude and Intention

Marketing and advertising scholars have again used attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions as constructs for predicting consumer behavior. Research show that attitude towards the brand has a positive effect on purchase intention and established that intention is a strong predictor of behavior (Smith et al., 2008; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). Attitude towards the brand is strongly related to purchase intention for holistic consumers (Zaranteonello & Schmitt, 2010). Indeed, marketers and advertisers use purchase intention as a vital input to develop new or improve existing products, (Morwitz, 2012) which explains the constant effort of brands encouraging consumers to leave reviews and feedback.

The TRA model (Theory of reasoned action) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1980) explains the relationship of consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions on purchase behavior. TRA considers attitude as the most important predictor when it comes to whether a person will pursue an action, or not. It posits that people behave in a sensible and rational manner. According to the theory, whether a person acts or not is determined by three factors; attitude towards behavior, normative beliefs and intention. TRA theory contributes to explaining why people are influenced by celebrities and regular users when they post brand-related content. For example,

Instagram posts by someone one looks up to (celebrities) strengthens normative beliefs as consumers typically associate themselves with social media celebrities they follow; These consumers get the impression that the society around them expects them to also use the product. Further, recommendations by such celebrities are likely to generate positive associations towards the product. This positive attitude towards the product leads to stronger purchase intention. Therefore, this increases the probability of purchase behavior to take effect, and buying the product (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980).

This theory's popularity among marketing scholars and in explaining purchase behavior (Lutz, 1991) strengthens our approach in using it in constructing the consumers behavior (attitude towards the brand and purchase intention) variables as a part of this paper's conceptual framework.

In social media, likes are also closely associated to brand evaluations. A study found that positive reactions and likes on brand posts in social media are significantly associated to positive brand attitude (Lee et al., 2020). Facebook itself promotes the function of "like" over "share" because liking the brand post indicates positive attitude towards the brand, while sharing the brand post is seen as more neutral (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013).

Therefore, we use likeability of the post (referred to as likeability from hereon), brand attitude and purchase intention as the three dimensions of consumer behavior for the purpose of this paper.

2.3. Content Sponsorship Awareness Effects

Many existing studies contribute to the theoretical knowledge of content sponsorships and their impact on consumer behavior.

Organic or non-sponsored content drives credibility due to their authenticity and works in the same manner as a traditional word-of-mouth. Brands try to manufacture and blend their BRC to appear as much alike as non-sponsored content to leverage the credibility attached to non-sponsored content while pushing their commercialized message (Bladow, 2018). Nevertheless, now, there's an obligation for sponsorship disclosure to make the intent of advertising apparent for audiences in line with

consumers' right and media ethics of making the audience aware of being exposed to such targeted persuasive content (Boerman et al. 2018).

Existing studies show the activation of skepticism when consumers are aware of its sponsorship (Jansen & Resnick, 2006). This is in line with the Persuasion Knowledge Theory, which explains the knowledge consumers develop about persuasion and how they respond to "cope" with persuasive events (Friestad & Wright, 1994). When consumers active in social media come across sponsored BRC, their knowledge of persuasion attempt is activated, leading to manipulation suspicion; consumers associate such attempts as being manipulative, inappropriate and unfair, resulting in negative brand attitudes and lower purchase intentions (Campbell, 1995). Followingly, the "coping" mechanism can be to not buy the product being sponsored, or to even avoid the brand completely.

A study on sponsorship disclosure timing and how it affected the processing of the sponsored content showed that sponsorship disclosure prior to, or simultaneously with the sponsored content, led to negative effects on the attitude towards the brand (Boerman et al., 2014). Even though this experiment was done on TV-advertising it can possibly also apply to Instagram. Because of the rules regarding marketing in Europe, sponsored content must be disclosed immediately together with the content in Instagram. Therefore, it is not possible to wait until after the sponsored content for the disclosure. Disclosure of a BRC being sponsored gives viewers enough time to recognize the BRC as a brand advertisement, leading to persuasion resistance (Boerman et al., 2014). Additionally, existing study found that the generation and sharing of non-sponsored BRC are positively related to attitude and intentions towards the product (Sabermajidi et al., 2020).

Therefore, there are sufficient grounds to posit that disclosure of sponsored BRC leads to less trust, less positive attitude towards the brand and weaker consumer behavior, compared to non-sponsored BRC.

Summing up the existing literature, we reach our first hypothesis.

H1: BRC on Instagram that are non-sponsored generate stronger consumer behavior than sponsored BRC.

2.4. BRC Sources

Apart from the firms themselves, a major source of BRC are social media celebrities who deliver convincing product information to consumers and help brands utilize their network of followers (Geng et al., 2020). The increasingly growing popularity of brand endorsements by celebrities in their social media and the effectiveness of influencer marketing demonstrates celebrities as an influential content source. A study shows that consumers associate higher trustworthiness and positive attitude towards the brand when endorsed by celebrities due to greater social presence (Jin et al., 2019).

General users, another major content source, actively engage with BRC. Including sharing their experiences with brands, and seeking brand information (Livingstone, 2004). Although the BRC from general users can take many forms, the most prominent are reviews and recommendations (Chari et al., 2016). A study among undergraduates found that people use social networking sites and online user reviews to collect information (Kim et al., 2011). 177 million reviews in Yelp in 2018, 90 million reviews in Goodreads in 2019 demonstrate that product reviews are one of the leading content creation activities in social media (Dixon, 2022b).

In their study, Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019) found that celebrities in social media are powerful sources of brand information, and that purchase intention increases with brand recommendations in social media (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). To be specific, celebrities with a higher number of followers are perceived to have higher source credibility compared to ones with lower number of followers (Jin & Phua, 2014). Following celebrities on social media can be a result of perceived authenticity, consumerism, inspiration for creativity and envy (Lee et al., 2022). This is also in line with the TRA model, as the posts by celebrities strengthen the celebrity-followers' normative beliefs leading to a higher purchasing desire.

Further, the level of bond is a significant predictor for positive consumer behavior, including seeking and passing of product information by users (Chu & Kim, 2011). A higher level of bond translates to higher credibility. Credibility can be understood as the perceived expertise of the source and their trustworthiness (Hovland & Weiss,

1951). Considering that people are more familiar with the popular celebrities and less with a random general user in Instagram, we reach the second hypothesis for this study:

H2: BRC on Instagram by celebrities attracts a more positive consumer behavior than by general users.

2.5. Interaction Effect of BRC Source and Sponsorship

To this point, the influential effect of user generated, and celebrity generated BRC are established in theory and in practice. Brands leverage the popularity and follower networks of celebrities and/or the authenticity of general users. Brands also leverage general users' reputation of being authentic by offering them incentives to promote brand messages. In fact, general users are a major fake information creator (Stevens, 2018) and relying on the reviews can have its own purchase risks.

A study among 900 students in a university in the U.S. shows that the movie endorsement by a peer Facebook user led to stronger believability, positive attitude and emotional response toward the sponsored Facebook advertisement compared to the endorsement by the movie star (Jin, 2018). Another study identifies *parasocial relationship and wishful identification* as the mechanisms by which celebrity generated content influence consumers' engagement and other brand activities online (Cheung et al., 2022), which is also in line with the TRA model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980).

While consumers try to avoid advertisements or move away from profit-generation intent of content creators as explained by persuasion knowledge theory, it is interesting to see how the change in sponsorship level play a role in generating favorable consumer behavior i.e., more likeability, positive attitude towards the brand and stronger purchase intention. Hence, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: There is an interaction between source and sponsorship.

Referring to the persuasion knowledge theory, sponsored BRC leads to consumers' awareness of manipulation, resulting in unfavorable consumer behavior (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This means there is high skepticism and high perceived purchase risk associated to sponsored BRC. However, celebrity endorsements are found to bring in

a lot of sales due to being a trusted source (Lee et al., 2022) while paid reviews by a random general user can be hard to trust without established familiarity as the level of bond with the BRC source is significant (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, there can be persuasion resistance in the latter situation.

When consumers perceive that a celebrity is endorsing a brand motivated by the quality of the product itself and is not purely for monetary gain, their attitude towards the brand is significantly positive (Bergkvist, 2015). On the other hand, in the cases of non-sponsored content, genuine reviews by both the celebrities and general users carry more credibility.

Therefore, combining these two scenarios leads us to hypothesize that:

H3a: There is more difference in the level of consumer behavior between BRC by general users and celebrities, when the content is sponsored (vs. non-sponsored).

We combine the findings from the studies that celebrities generated BRC lead to a positive consumer behavior (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Jin et al., 2019) and that sponsored content negatively affects consumer behavior (Campbell, 1995; Friestad & Wright, 1994). Further, considering the bond with BRC source is significant in driving positive consumer behavior such as eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011), we reach the following hypothesis:

H3b: Consumers behave most positively when celebrities recommend a brand without any sponsorship.

2.6. Consumer Perceived Profit Motive

Causal attribution theory postulates people's tendency to try to make causal inferences on others behavior (Heider, 1958). That means, when a potential consumer comes across BRC on Instagram, or any other social media site. They will develop a perception about the motive behind such content creation. Many excisting studies have studied the motives of generating electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and tried to classify them in structured categories (Dichter, 1966; Henning-Thurau et al. 2004). Such motives could be product involvement, concern for other consumers, information sharing, advice seeking, social benefits, profit-generation, and more (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). For this paper, we focus on perceived profit motive

(including monetary incentives) and no profit motive (including sharing experiences, giving advice, concern for other consumers); the choice is also motivated based on the work of Kim and Lee (2017). In this context, persuasion knowledge theory applies as well whereby, consumers are said to hold beliefs and theories on the motives and strategies behind the BRC and the marketers of such content. Such perceptions become an antecedent of attitudes in response to the influencer agent or product being promoted (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

A study conducted to examine the effect of sponsorship disclosure, found that celebrity generated BRC that arise out of genuine product reviews without any commercial relationship and explicitly mentions “this post is not sponsored", leads to positive consumer responses due to low ad skepticism (Boerman et al., 2018). Such a message explicitly clarifies that the intent of the content is information sharing and not to gain profit. Indeed, a genuine product review that doesn’t have commercialization intent increases the purchase intention due to reduced risks attached to purchase (Dichter, 1966).

However, consumers perceive celebrities in a more positive light in the presence of justification for sponsorship compensation, than a mere sponsorship disclosure; The justification also increases credibility of social media celebrities and the message (Stubb et al., 2019). Additionally, celebrity generated BRC that exclusively discloses that the content isn’t sponsored (referred to as impartiality post), are less likely to be considered as advertisements compared to posts without any sponsorship disclosure (Stubb & Colliander, 2019). Indeed, commercial orientation reduces trustworthiness and negatively impacts content’s credibility (Gamage & Ashill, 2022). Hence, it is interesting to find if profit motive mediates the impact of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior.

The attribution theory posits that people infer the intent of message being communicated (Eagly & Chaiken, 1975). A study found that when the content is disclosed as an ad, it generates negative brand attitude due to activated ad skepticism, and in turn negatively affects celebrity’s credibility (Boerman et al., 2018). Marketing journals have indeed shown that profit-generating motives are likely to be associated with unfairness and lead to negative attitudes (Campbell, 1999).

This leads to the final hypothesis of this paper:

H4: The effect of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior is mediated through perceived profit motive.

2.7. Overview of Hypotheses

Our study, therefore, contains the test and discussion of the following hypotheses:

H1: BRC on Instagram that are non-sponsored generate stronger consumer behavior than sponsored BRC.

H2: BRC on Instagram by celebrities attracts a more positive consumer behavior than by general users.

H3: There is an interaction between source and sponsorship.

H3a: There is more difference in the level of consumer behavior between BRC by general users and celebrities, when the content is sponsored (vs. non-sponsored).

H3b: Consumers behave most positively when celebrities recommend a brand without any sponsorship.

H4: The effect of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior is mediated through perceived profit motive.

2.8. Conceptual Model

Based on the theoretical findings presented above, we construct the conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 1.

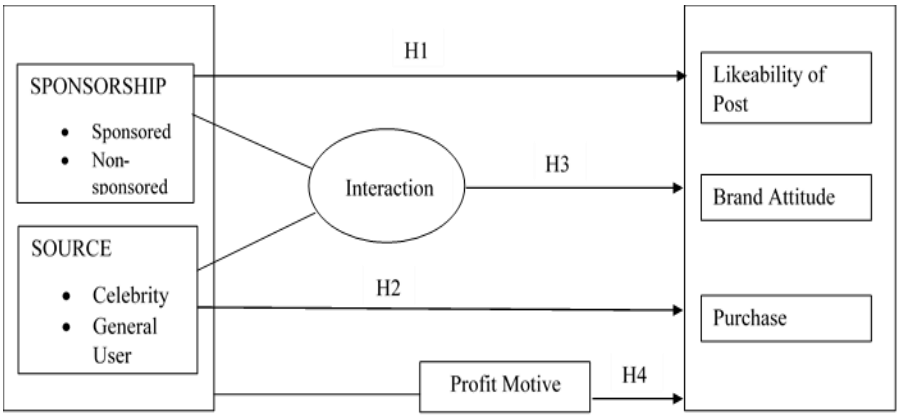


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0. Methodology

This section concerns elaborative explanations of survey design, including stimulus material, sample, questionnaire and scale development. Details of methods for data collection, ethical considerations taken into account and sample statistics will be presented here.

3.1. Survey Design

The survey is designed as an experiment. The respondents are randomly assigned into 12 groups with different manipulations (Figure 2). All respondents get a screenshot of an Instagram profile and a post by the same person. 50% of the sample are given a post by a celebrity, and the other half a post by a general user. Within those groups 50% see a post with a BRC marked as sponsored, while the other half sees BRC not marked as sponsored.

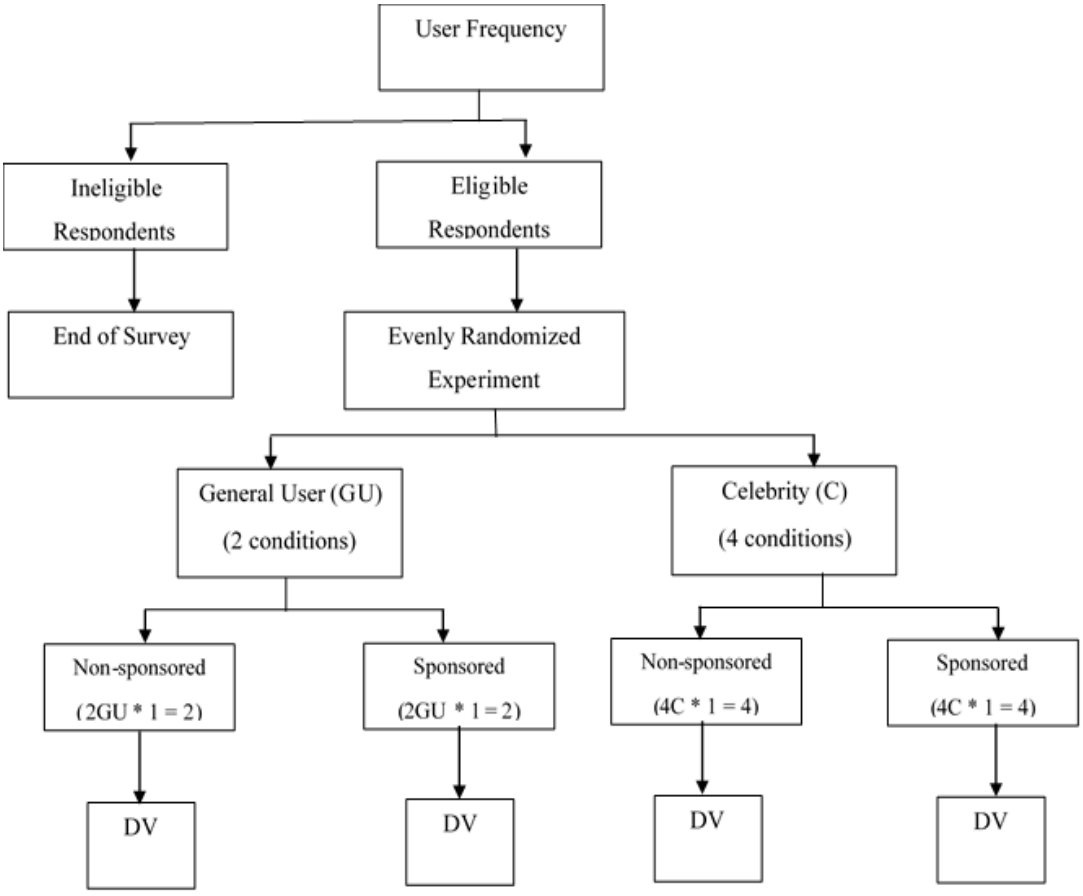


Figure 2: Survey Flow in brief

The goal of the experiment is to check if likeability of BRC post, brand attitude and purchase intention are affected as a cause of the exposed condition. We also intend to measure how different combinations of source and sponsorship can have varied impacts on our dependent variables connected to consumer behavior; it is therefore a causal experiment (Gripsrud et al., 2018, p. 55). Hence, we are interested in analyzing the cause and effect relationship between our independent variables (source and sponsorship) and consumer behavior.

The details of the components of the survey are explained hereforth.

3.1.1 Stimulus Material

Product

To carry out the test, donuts are a product that fits our experiment. It is an easy-to-understand product, which is also affordable, instigating feel-good experience among consumers (Petty, 2014). This product is gender-neutral and is basically for everyone. From understanding of the product to higher affordability, donut as a product for our study fits suitably. It also gives a window to broaden the experimental validity.

Further, using fashion, apparel, gadgets, personal care, etc. products that are heavily brand centric can affect the validity of this study due to respondents' pre-existing biases. For example, Apple users are very loyal to the brand (Richter, 2022) and hence, make it difficult for us to get the results intended due to pre-existing brand loyalty if we had chosen mobile phones as our product. Therefore, doughnuts (Figure 3) make a good fit for this study.

To control for the existing brand bias, we also decided to make a fictional name for the brand. As we did not want the answers in the survey from the respondents to be prejudiced, based on their own previous experiences, we decided to use a name that was new to the respondents.

Figure 3: Product image used in the survey

BRC source

To control pre-existing bias that respondents may have for a particular celebrity or a gender, we used four different celebrities - Taylor Swift, Julia Roberts, Cristiano Ronaldo and Tom Cruise. All of them are widely popular and have a large number of followers. It made celebrity recognition more likely among respondents. Jin and Phua (2014) claim that celebrities with higher number of followers give higher source credibility. However, the number of followers was not shown to the respondents in the experiment to control the influence of relatively higher or lower number of followers on the survey participants' responses.

In addition to the celebrities, we used two fictitious general users as BRC sources, one female and one male. Using 2 general users was enough as there is no chance of bias due to unfamiliarity with either source. In total there are 12 different conditions within the 4 categories (source*sponsorship).

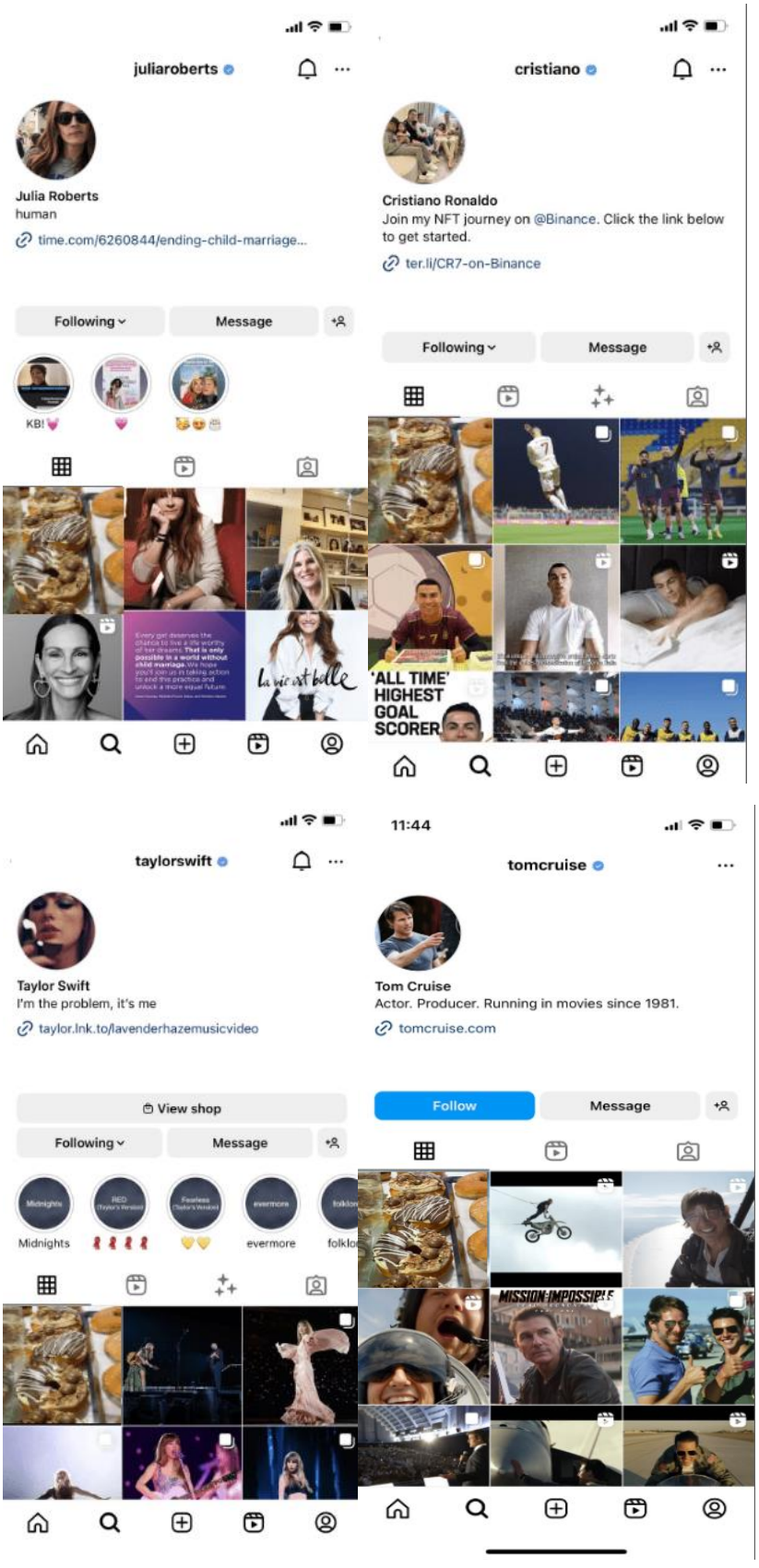


Figure 4: Profiles of BRC sources (celebrities)

On the other hand, we also created Instagram profiles of fictional general users (Figure 5) as our second group of BRC sources. The usernames for the random general users were randomly picked and they were Hannah Johnson and Henry Miller.

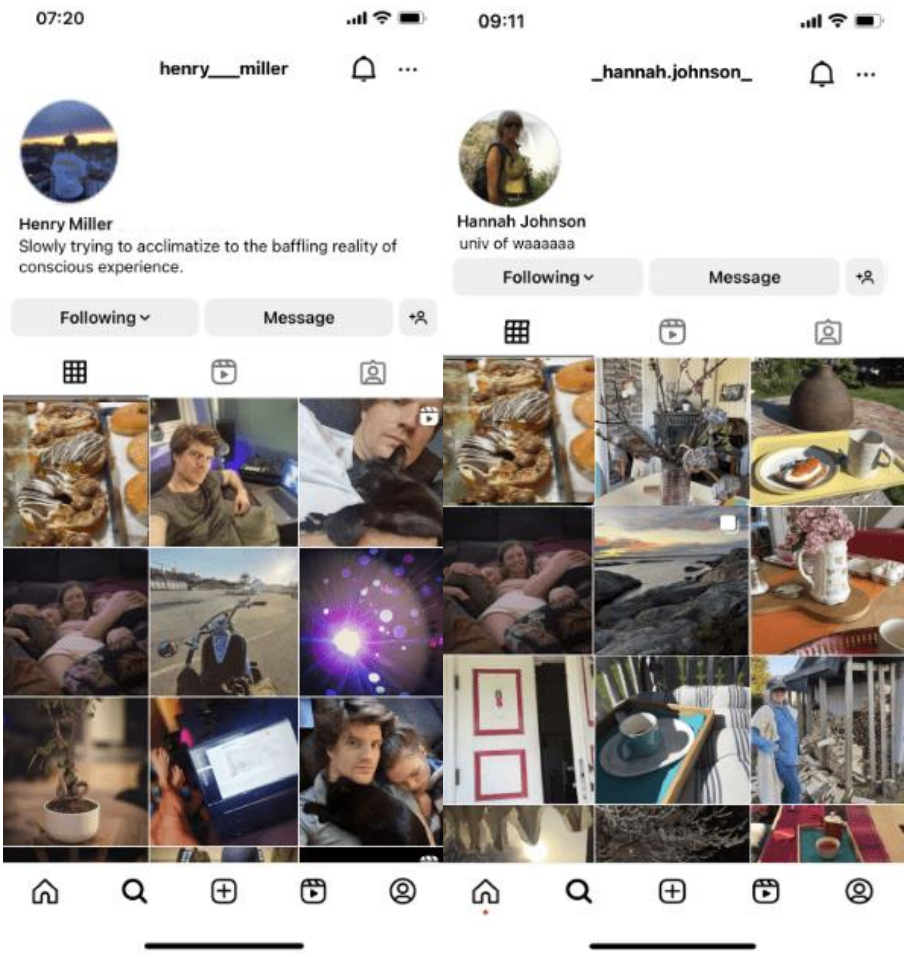


Figure 5: Profiles of BRC sources (general users)

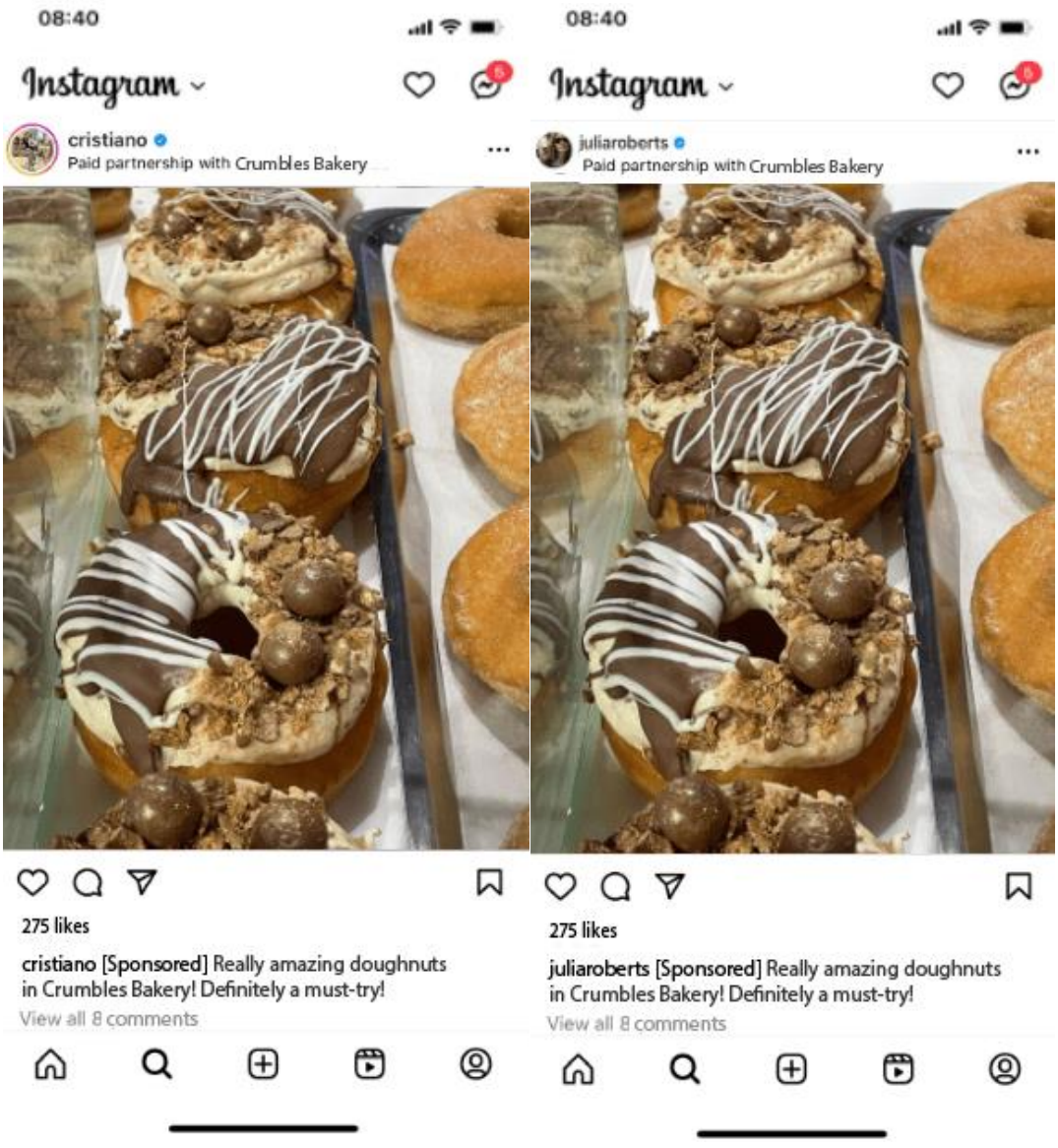
Content sponsorship

The respondents were either exposed to a post that was sponsored or non-sponsored. Respondents were evenly distributed for the exposure of sponsored and non-sponsored conditions.

Instagram requires any business accounts or personal accounts creating brand-related content and exchanging value with the brand, to explicitly mention the sponsorship (Instagram for Creators, n.d.). Further, celebrities must display paid partnership label and tag the brand (Figure 6). Using this common knowledge, we address the

consumer's right to be aware of the targeted persuasive knowledge (Boerman et al. 2018).

Much like how it is in the real world, the sponsored posts were marked as "Paid partnership" right below the username. For effective manipulation, the sponsorship disclosure was also made as the first statement in the caption, which is a common practice for sponsored content in Instagram, and are also required in the Norwegian marketing law, which says that "everyone should be able to notice that it is advertisement before or at the same time they see the post" (Forbrukertilsynet, 2022). Therefore, the manipulation for sponsored posts were crafted to reflect the real-world practice.

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Search
Instagram
tomcruise
Paid partnership with Crumbles Bakery
275 likes
tomcruise [Sponsored] Really amazing doughnuts in Crumbles Bakery! Definitely a must-try!
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taylorswift [Sponsored] Really amazing doughnuts in Crumbles Bakery! Definitely a must-try!
View all 8 comments

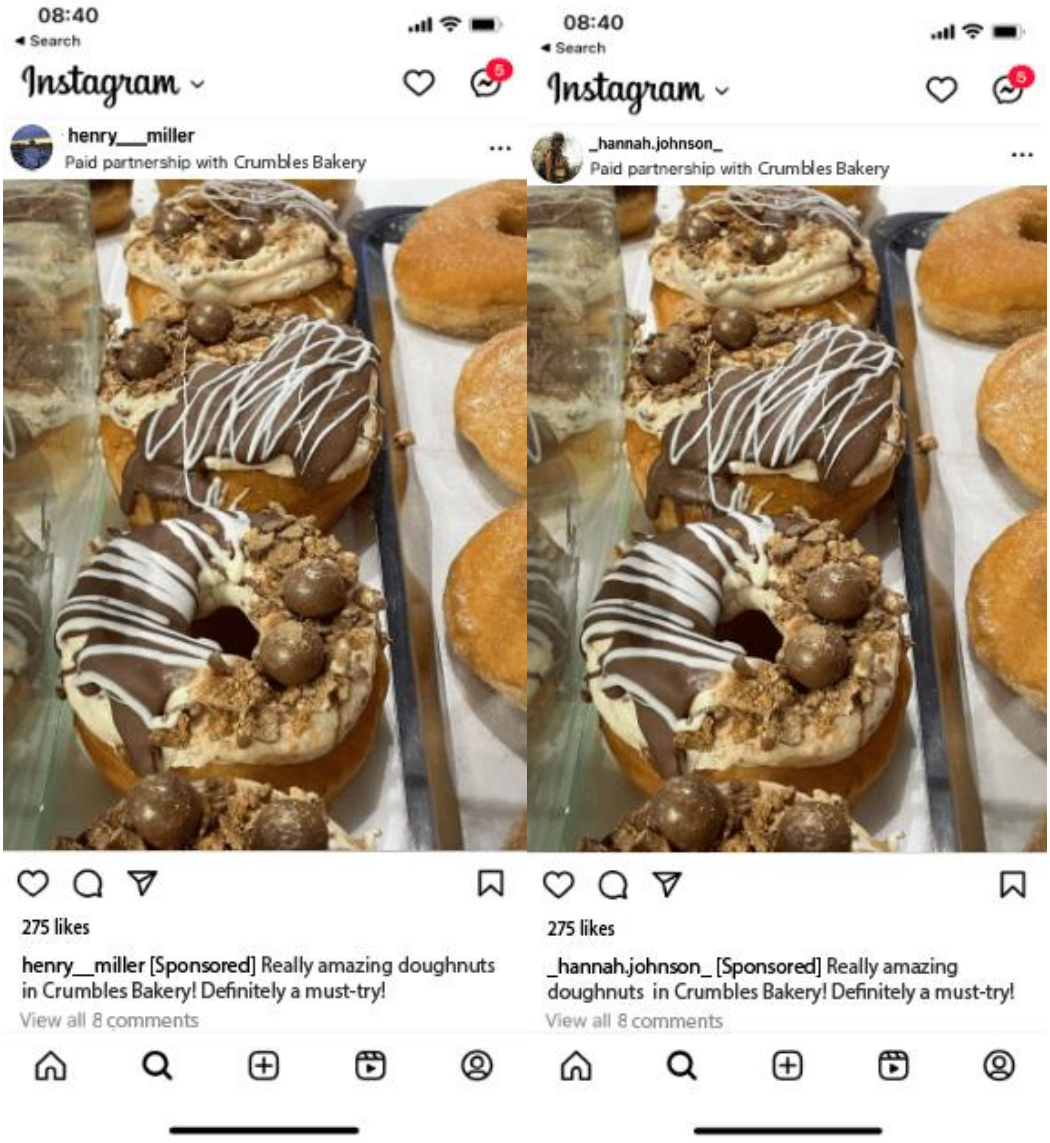
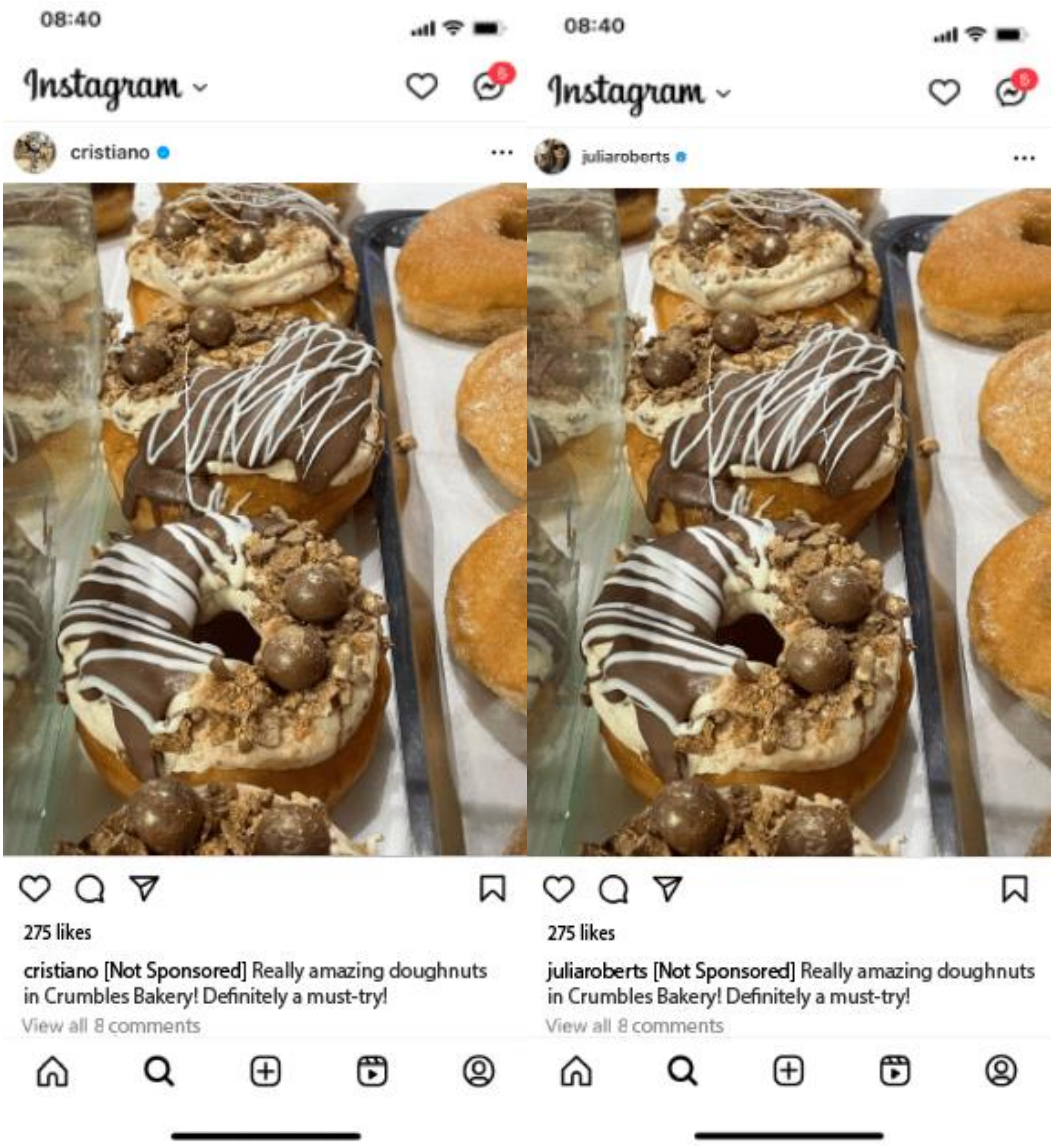


Figure 6: Sponsored BRC posts

The non-sponsored posts in Instagram do not come with a special tag. However, there are instances when celebrities or promoters mention non-sponsorship of the posts to indicate their genuine feedback on a product or service, and to show that they are not paid or get any other benefits from posting their opinion in social media. The effectiveness of such a practice of non-sponsorship disclosure in bringing a positive consumer attitude towards the brand is found in the existing research (Boerman et al., 2014). Therefore, respondents assigned to the non-sponsored conditions got BRC with caption mentioning "[Not Sponsored]" at the very beginning (Figure 7). This

helped respondents assigned in non-sponsored condition to recognize that the BRC post was created by the free will of the BRC source.




08:40
Instagram
tomcruise
275 likes
tomcruise [Not Sponsored] Really amazing doughnuts in Crumbles Bakery! Definitely a must-try!
View all 8 comments


08:40
Instagram
taylorswift
275 likes
taylorswift [Not Sponsored] Really amazing doughnuts in Crumbles Bakery! Definitely a must-try!
View all 8 comments

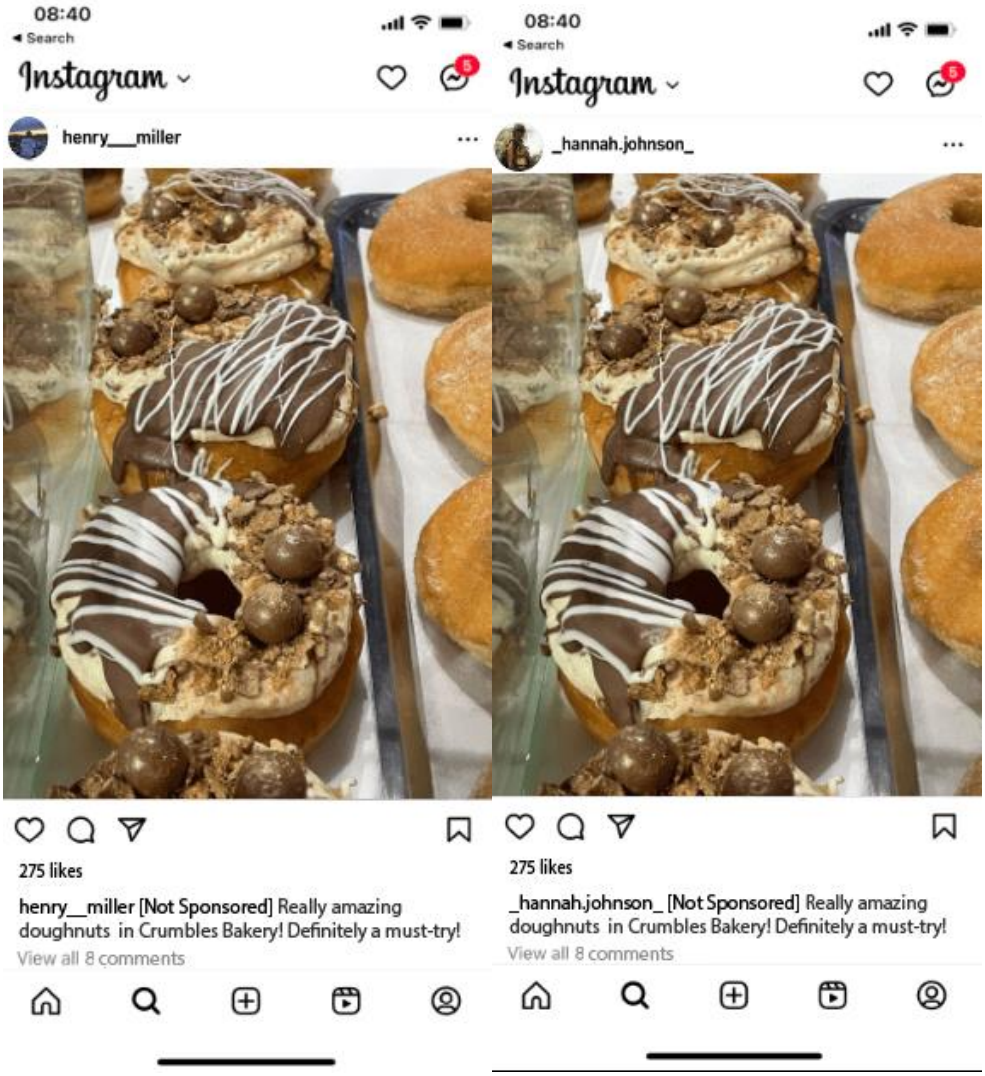


Figure 7: Non-sponsored BRC posts

BRC

The BRC was an Instagram post of a picture of doughnuts with a simple caption in text, “Really amazing doughnuts in Crumbles Bakery! Definitely a must-try!” The caption was kept simple and brief to ensure that it doesn’t create a sense of BRC sources trying to over-sell. Additionally, a short caption increases the probability that the respondents would indeed read the caption instead of skipping or skimming through it. Further, to maintain the internal validity, the content across content sources were kept the same. The only difference was the manipulations (Figure 7).

It was also important to control any kind of biases related to the brand name for successful testing of the subject of interest. Therefore, the brand name for the

doughnut was fictitious (Crumbles Bakery). The brand name was kept gender neutral. Any resemblance to the existing brand was highly coincidental.

3.1.2. Questionnaire Development

Each respondent taking the survey was exposed to 1 condition out of 12 (6 sources*2 sponsorship levels). The questionnaire started with a simple screening question concerning the Instagram usage behavior. All respondents who indicated no usage of Instagram were omitted from the study.

The second section included manipulation where each respondent was exposed to one combination condition among 12 different combinations of sponsorship and source levels. First, the Instagram profile of the source appeared on the respondents' screen and when they scrolled down, they could see the BRC, followed by unaided brand recall question.

The next section presented statements to measure likeability of the post, brand attitude, purchase intention, eWOM intention and profit motive. Further, to enable manipulation check, the questionnaire included questions whereby the respondents had to mark the source and sponsorship condition they got. Finally, the survey was concluded with demographic questions.

To avoid the acquiescence bias, we used both the positive and negative valence statements and framed a concise questionnaire (SurveyMonkey, n.d.).

3.1.3 Scale Development

Existing research base was utilized to design statements to measure the mediating and dependent variables. The respondents were presented with 2 statements for profit motive (Lee, Haley, & Mark, 2012), 5 adjectives to measure likeability of the post, 3 statements for brand attitude, 3 statements for purchase intention (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017) and 3 statements for eWOM intention (Chu & Chen, 2019). Designing the statements based on the established studies was done to increase the validity of the resulting data, which ultimately assures the quality and integrity of the survey (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

Further, Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7 was presented to the respondents as it helps obtain granular feedback from respondents (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). The scales remained consistent throughout the survey, meaning 1 = Strongly Disagree & 7= Strongly Agree, and 1= Highly Improbable & 7= Highly probable. However, the valence of the statement was altered (using both positive and negative statements), to minimize the bias and keep the respondents focused.

Table 1 presents the summary of the statements taken from the existing studies:

Construct	Items	Literature
Profit motive	The person posted about Crumbles Bakery because they are paid for doing so The person posted about Crumbles Bakery to share information with others	Kim and Lee (2017)
Brand attitude	I have a pleasant idea of Crumbles Bakery I prefer this bakery This bakery has a good reputation	Kudeshia and Kumar (2017)
Purchase Intention	I would like to buy the doughnut in the post I will look for more information about Crumbles Bakery from other sources I am likely to try Crumbles Bakery	Stubb and Colliander (2019)
eWOM intention	I am likely to spread positive review about Crumbles Bakery on social media I would recommend Crumbles Bakery to my friends If my friends were looking to purchase doughnuts, I would tell them to try Crumbles Bakery	Chu and Chen (2019)

Table 1: Scale development

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

The population for this experiment is people who use Instagram. Therefore, the first question in the survey asks about how often the respondents use Instagram, and the

ones that answer that they do not use the application, gets filtered out. In that way we avoided over coverage with respondents that are not within our population, as they were sent to the end of the survey. Since the population is large, we cannot ask everyone, and therefore have to choose a sample (Gripsrud et al., 2018, p. 167).

Our sample is chosen with non-probability sampling, a convenient selection to be specific. This is because the respondents are collected through our social network. The survey was mainly distributed on Instagram and Facebook. A convenient sample cannot be counted as representative for the whole population (Gripsrud et al., 2018, p. 174). This is because many respondents from the sample will not have a chance to be part of the experiment, because they are not part of our network. To minimize this and reach out to a wider range of respondents the survey was also distributed in Facebook-groups with more than 20,000 members.

3.2.1. Ethical and Privacy Considerations

Before collecting answers in the survey all respondents were shown a text explaining that we did not collect any personal data, and that we follow GDPR rules. To ensure privacy and anonymity were taken care of, the survey did not collect any personally identifiable data. The demographic questions included age, gender and country of living, which are not detailed enough to identify any respondents. During preparation of the survey and data collection, the general guidelines by National Research Ethics Committees were followed in order to maintain respect for all participants (Torp, 2019).

3.2.2. Sample Description

Table 2 gives the summary of the sample description. The total respondents were 678 out of which, 6.3% do not use Instagram. They were sent to the end of the survey and therefore, are not a part of the data used in this study. Of the total sample (n=635) 78.9% of the respondents are women and 18.9% are men. The rest either did not indicate their gender or chose non-binary category. Therefore, the sample had a major part of female respondents. In terms of age distribution, the average age is 31.5 years, and the median is 32 years. This means there are no big outliers when it comes to age. This is also the age that we were targeting as they are heavy Instagram users (Dixon,

2023). Indeed, 82.05% are regular users while 10.55% use Instagram every other day and 7.4% of the sample use Instagram once a week or less.

Gender	Male = 120 (18.9%)	Female = 501 (78.9%)	Others = 14 (2.2%)	
Age	Mean = 31.5 years		Median = 32 years	
Usage	At least once a day = 521 (82.05%)	Every other day = 67 (10.55%)	Once a week or less = 47 (7.4%)	Do not use = 43 (6.3% of 678)

Table 2: Sample description

4. 0. Data Analysis

4.1. Manipulation Check

Before administering the actual survey, a pre-test survey was rolled out among respondents (n=60). The objective of this pre-test was to assess the success of intended manipulation on respondents. We carried out the manipulation test by using the Pearson chi-square analysis. The analysis showed $p<0.001$ for both the source and sponsorship. This indicated that both the BRC sponsorship and source manipulations were successful (Table 3). Therefore, we carried out the chosen manipulation method for our main survey as well.

Manipulation	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Source	1	<.001
Sponsorship	1	<.001

Table 3: Manipulation Check for Pre-test

The manipulation check was also done for the actual survey. The respondents were asked to select the name of the source from the given list of 6 sources (4 celebrities and 2 general users). The responses were reduced to a categorical variable (celebrity and general user). Respondents were also asked if the BRC post they saw was sponsored or not.

Manipulation	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Source	1	<.001
Sponsorship	1	<.001

Table 4: Manipulation Check for Survey

The chi-square test showed $p<0.001$ for both source and sponsorship, indicating a significant association between the actual exposed condition and respondents' perceived condition (Table 4). Therefore, the manipulation was successful.

4.2. Factor Analysis

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was carried out to determine whether the factor analysis was appropriate (Table 5). The resulting KMO measure of .918 indicates that the data is well-suited for factor analysis (Malhotra, 2010, p. 606). Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p<.001$) indicates that significant intercorrelations exists among the variables in our dataset. Hence, there is scope for dimension reduction.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5000.743
Sponsorship	df	120
	Sig.	<.001

Table 5: KMO and Bartlett's Test

We used confirmatory factor analysis on the scales adopted from existing studies on brand attitude and purchase intention. To reduce the number of variables and identify the underlying factors for meaningful analysis (Malhotra, 2010, p. 615) factor analysis was done. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was carried out using direct oblimin rotation, which reduced the variables to 4 factors (Table 6). Each of those factors were constituted of variables that had factor loadings 0.5 or higher to ensure meaning explanation. These 4 factors explained 66.243% of the total variance.

Factor	Factor Interpretation (% variance explained)	Loading	Variables included in the Factor
F_1	Purchase intention (43.883%)	.751	I will look for more information about Crumbles Bakery from other sources
		.628	I am likely to try Crumbles Bakery
		.766	I am likely to spread positive review about Crumbles Bakery on social media
		.741	I would recommend Crumbles Bakery to my friends.
		.673	If my friends were looking to purchase doughnuts, I would tell them to try Crumbles Bakery
F_2	Profit motive (8.047%)	.883	The person posted about Crumbles Bakery because they are paid for doing so
		.500	The person posted about Crumbles bakery to share information with others (Recoded)
F_3	Likeability of the post (7.348%)	.591	I find this post exciting
		.750	I find this post useful
		.627	I find this post trustworthy
		.831	I find this post useless (Recoded)
F_4	Brand attitude (6.965%)	-.850	I have a pleasant idea of Crumbles bakery
		-.741	I prefer this bakery
		-.808	This bakery has a good reputation

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 6: Factor Analysis

4.3. Reliability Test

Testing reliability helps in establishing the reproducibility of measurements of this study on different occasions, enabling future researchers for similar observations (Goldstein & Simpson, 2015, p. 149). To measure the internal consistency reliability of the items of the underlying construct (Malhotra, 2010), we used Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient for likeability was 0.789 (Table 7). Since the alpha coefficient was above the acceptable level of 0.6 (Malhotra, 2010, p. 287), the measures used were reliable and the construct validity was established. Similarly, the alpha coefficient for brand attitudes and purchase intention was .804 and .867 respectively (Table 7). Therefore, all the factors defining consumer behavior have internal consistency with established construct validity.

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Likeability	.789	4
Brand attitude	.804	3
Purchase intention	.867	5

Table 7: Cronbach's alpha for reliability test

On the other hand, due to the use of two items to measure profit motive, we used Spearman-Brown reliability (Table 8). Spearman-Brown formula is relatively a more suitable reliability coefficient than cronbach's alpha, when a construct is measured by a two-item scale (Elsinga et al., 2013).

Factor	Spearman-Brown Prophecy Formula	N of items
Profit Motive	.223	2

Table 8: Spearman-Brown Prophecy Formula for two-item construct

The Spearman-Brown Prophecy resulted in a reliability coefficient of 0.223 (Table 8). It indicates inconsistency in the scale used for profit motive. Nevertheless, these were the only measures used for profit motive, which is also the only proposed

mediating variable in this study. Hence, we decided to continue using it, while also addressing its low coefficient score.

4.4. Correlation Matrix

To get insights on how the factors extracted previously are related, we analyzed the component correlation matrix (Malhotra, 2010).

Component	Purchase intention	Profit motive	Likeability	Brand attitude
Purchase intention	-			
Profit motive	-.162**	-		
Likeability	.475**	-.153**	-	
Brand attitude	-.487**	.132**	-.446**	-
Coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)				
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis				
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization				

Table 9: Correlation matrix

The correlation matrix (Table 9) shows that purchase intention has a weak negative correlation with profit motive at -.162 and with brand attitude at -.487. However, there is a weak positive correlation of purchase intention with the likeability of BRC post. Further, profit motive weakly correlates with likeability (-.153) of the post in the negative direction. However, profit motive has positive but weak correlation with brand attitude (.132). Further, the correlation coefficient was -.446 between likeability of the post and brand attitude, indicating a weak negative correlation. Looking at the p-value<.01, we find that all the correlations are significant.

4.5. Descriptives Analysis

Skewness and kurtosis scores are one of the most commonly used statistics to measure the shape of distribution (Malhotra, 2010, p. 454). They indicate whether the data is normally distributed or not. Therefore, skewness and kurtosis scores were used to determine the distribution of the data (Table 10). Likeability, brand attitude and profit motive have skewness and kurtosis values between the range of –1.96 and 1.96, which indicates that the data is normally distributed. In the case of purchase intention,

the skewness = 2.021 and kurtosis = -2.340 indicate that the data is not normally distributed.

Factor	Statistic	Std. Error	Skewness	Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis
Likeability	.043	.097	.443	.274	.194	1.412
Brand attitude	-.006	.097	-.062	.13	.194	.670
Purchase intention	.196	.097	2.021	-.454	.194	-2.340
Profit motive	-.134	.97	-.138	-.229	.194	-1.180

Table 10: Skewness and Kurtosis analysis

4.6. Tests for Hypotheses

In alignment with the results (Table 10), likeability, brand attitude and perceived profit motive was treated as normal distribution while purchase intention was treated as non-normal distribution. In such a scenario, while testing H1 and H2, we used independent sample t-test for two DVs (likeability and brand attitude) and Mann-Whitney U test for one DV - purchase intention (Malhotra, 2010, p. 478).

Further, to test H3, ANOVA was carried out because ANOVA test is robust in cases of normality assumption violations (Field, 2013, p. 444). Finally, to test H4, we utilized bootstrapping model 8, followed by model 4. Bootstrapping is also robust in the normality assumption violations (Davison & Hinkley, 1997).

5.0. Results

This section is concerned with the detailed results of hypothesis testing.

5.1. Hypothesis Testing

5.1.1. Hypothesis 1

The independent sample t-test was carried out to assess whether non-sponsored BRCs on Instagram generate stronger consumer behavior compared to sponsored BRC. The results shown in Table 11 indicate that there is no significant impact of sponsorship ($p>.05$) on likeability ($p = .225$) nor on brand attitude ($p = .334$).

Factor	Statistic	df	p
Likeability	-.755	633	.225
Brand attitude	-.429	633	.334

Note. $\mu_{Non-sponsored} > \mu_{Sponsored}$

Table 11: Independent sample t-test for sponsorship on likeability and brand attitude

Further, Mann-Whitney U test for the significance of sponsorship on purchase intention shows that there is no significant effect of sponsorship on purchase intention (p = .894) in Table 12.

	Purchase Intention
Mann-Whitney U	50091
Z	-1.34
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.894

Table 12: Test for sponsorship on purchase intention

These results suggest rejection of H1, which assumed that BRC on Instagram that are not sponsored generate stronger consumer behavior than sponsored BRC. This result can also be illustrated in Figure 8.

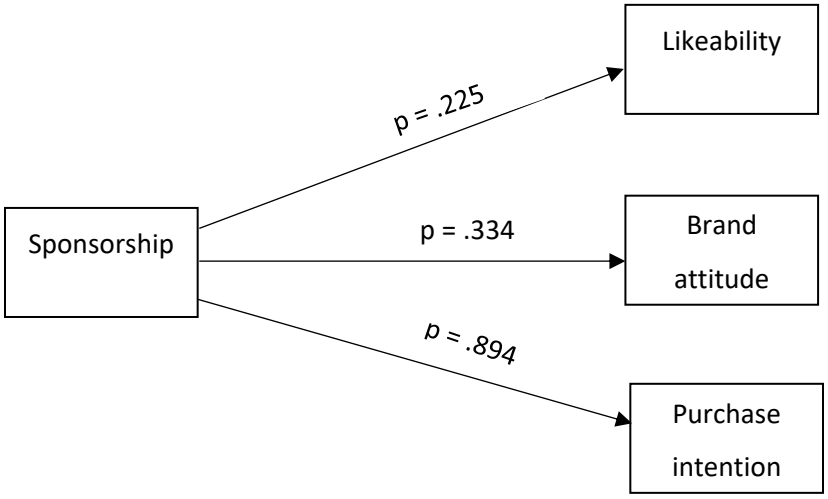


Figure 8: Illustration of H1 test result

5.1.2. Hypothesis 2

To investigate whether BRC by celebrities lead to a more favorable consumer behavior, we conducted independent sample t-test for likeability and brand attitude. The results (Table 13) show that there is no significant relationship between source and likeability (p = .981) and source and brand attitude (p = .466).

Factor	Statistic	df	p
Likeability	-.2.079	633	.981
Brand attitude	-.085	633	.466

Note. $H_{A:}\ \mu_{Celebrities} > \mu_{General\ users}$

Table 13: Independent sample t-test for source on likeability and brand attitude

For the test of significance of source on purchase intention, we conducted Mann-Whitney U test. The test result (Table 14) shows that there is no significant relationship between source and purchase intention (p = .053).

	Purchase Intention
Mann-Whitney U	39996
Z	-1.939
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.053

Table 14: Independent sample t-test for source on likeability and brand attitude

The findings from independent sample t-test and Mann-Whitney U test together leads to the conclusion that H2 is rejected. Hence, there is not enough evidence to support that BRC on Instagram by celebrities attracts a more positive consumer behavior than by general users.

The result for H2 test is illustrated in Figure 9.

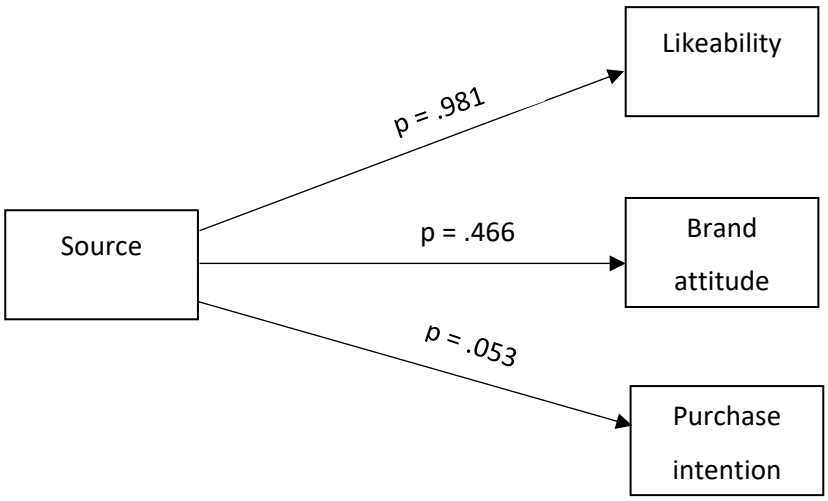


Figure 9: Illustration of H2 test result

5.1.3. Hypothesis 3

We used ANOVA to test the interaction between source and sponsorship. The positive values of mean square in Table 15 indicate that a sponsored BRC post by celebrity lead to positive consumer behavior. Nevertheless, such an impact is not significant for any consumer behavior – likeability (p = .165), brand attitude (p = .190) and purchase intention (p = .819).

DV	Interaction	df	Mean Square	F	p
Likeability	Spons*Source	1	2.654	1.934	.165
Brand attitude	Spons*Source	1	2.399	1.721	.190
Purchase intention	Spons*Source	1	.099	.052	.819

Table 15: ANOVA test showing interaction effect across all consumer behaviors

This non-significant interaction effect of BRC sponsorship and source is also illustrated in the figure 10 with the p-values for likeability, brand attitude and purchase intention.

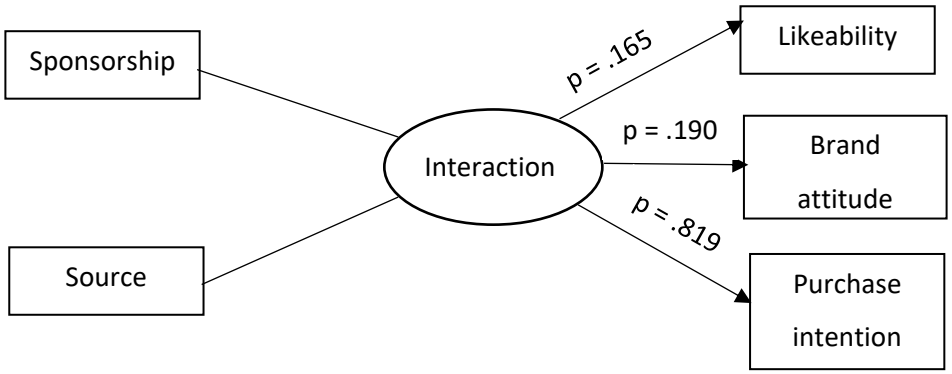


Figure 10: H3 test result summary for interaction effect with p-values

However, Table 16 presents the evidence that source has a significant main effect on likeability (p = .039) and purchase intention (p = .045).

DV	IV	df	Mean Square	F	p
Likeability	Source	1	5.864	4.272	.039
Purchase intention	Source	1	7.658	4.048	.045

Table 16: ANOVA test showing interaction effect across all consumer behaviors

In conclusion, we cannot confirm H3. It means that there is no evidence to support the interaction effect of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior. Nevertheless, BRC source has significant effects on two DVs – likeability of BRC post and purchase intention.

5.1.4. Hypothesis 3a

H3a suggests that while there is a difference in consumer behavior when BRC is posted by general user as opposed to the post by a celebrity, the level of difference is high in the condition of sponsored content compared to that in the condition of non-sponsored content. To check, we carried out ANOVA, then a Post Hoc Comparison with tukey to test the different conditions up against each other. The results in Table 17 show that there is no significant difference in either of the two the conditions (p>.05).

Contrast	Sponsorship	Source	-	Sponsorship	Source	Mean Difference	SE	Ptukey
1	Yes	General User	-	Yes	Celebrity	.343	.139	.067

2	No	General User	-	No	Celebrity	.067	.141	.965

Table 17: Pairwise Comparison

Comparing the mean differences between contrast 1 and 2, we get the mean difference of the contrasts = .276 (i.e., .343 - .067 = .276). Further, to calculate the t-statistic, we use the following formula:

$$t - statistic = \frac{.276}{\sqrt{.139^2 + .141^2}} = 1.394$$

Using t = -1.394 for one-tailed test, we get p = .082 (Table 18) according to an online calculator (P Value from t score Calculator, n.d.). It was not expected to get a significant difference in the t-test, since the ANOVA did not show any significant results in the first place.

Contrast	t	df	p
Contrast 1 – Contrast 2	1.394	631	.082

Table 18: Contrast of Mean Differences

Therefore, the p-value > .05 indicates that there is not enough evidence to confirm H3a. Hence, we cannot confirm that there is more difference in the level of consumer behavior between BRC by general users and celebrities, when the content is sponsored (vs. non-sponsored).

5.1.5. Hypothesis 3b

The post-hoc comparison test (Table 19) shows that contrasts sources shows that consumer behavior is more positive for general users than celebrities (MD = .205, Ptukey = .039).

Comparison				
Source	Source	Mean Difference (MD)	t	Ptukey
General User	Celebrity	.205	2.07	.039

Table 19: Comparison test for source

Therefore, we cannot accept our H3b.

5.1.6. Hypothesis 4

To analyze the mediation effect of perceived profit motive, we ran model 8 in bootstrapping (Hayes, 2018). The moderated mediation effect of profit motive is significant if the resulting class interval in the index of moderated mediation doesn't include 0. Our result shows that the moderated mediation effect is not significant (Table 20) for source and sponsorship because the interaction is not significant given by the class interval [-.075 - .158] as presented in Table 18.

	Index	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Source	.041	-.075	.158

Table 20: Index of moderated mediation from Model 8 Hayes PROCESS Bootstrapping

Therefore, we further analyzed the mediation effects by running Hayes model 4 separately to test if there exists a mediation effect of profit motive on the relationship between BRC sponsorship and consumer behavior (likeability of the post, brand attitude and purchase intention). The conceptual model is presented in Figure 11.

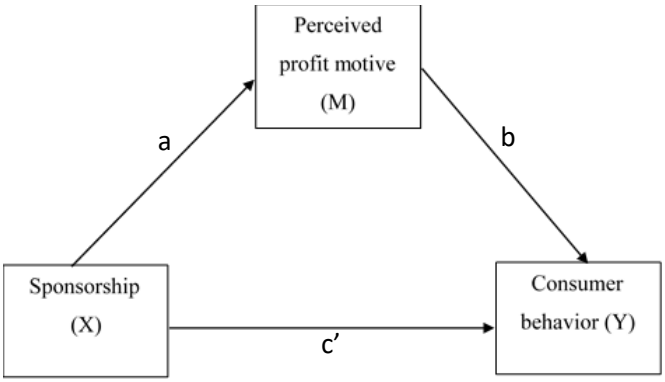


Figure 11: Conceptual diagram of Hayes Model 4 for sponsorship, profit motive and consumer behavior

First, we determined whether the perceived profit motive has a mediating role in the relationship between sponsorship and likeability (Table 20a). The results show that a significant indirect effect exists on impact of sponsorship on likeability (a*b = -.207, t = -4.746), supporting H4 for likeability. However, there is no significant direct or total effect of sponsorship on likeability of posts on Instagram in the presence of perceived profit motive (p>0.001). For mediation the test of indirect effect is

important and not the individual paths between components in the model (Hayes, 2018, p. 119). Therefore, perceived profit motive mediates the relationship between sponsorship and likeability of the post in the model at hand.

Second, we analyzed the mediating role of perceived profit motive between sponsorship and brand attitude (Table 20a). The result indicates a similar result - there is neither direct (p = .244), nor total effect (p = .667) of sponsorship on brand attitude. However, there is an indirect effect of sponsorship on brand attitude mediated by profit motive (a*b = -.154, t = -3.985). Hence, mediation exists.

Table 20a further shows that the total effect of impact of sponsorship on purchase intention does not exist (c = .005, p = .965). However, there is a significant direct effect (c' = .253, p = .024) and there is a significant indirect effect (a*b = -.207, t = -5.039) as the resulting class interval [-0.350, -0.154] does not include the value 0. Therefore, impact of sponsorship on purchase intention is mediated by perceived profit motive.

Y	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect (a*b)	t-statistics	Mediation
Likeability	-.070	.137	-.207	-4.746	Yes
	p=.451	p=.152	CI = [-.299, -.127]		
Brand Attitude	-.040	.114	-.154	-3.985	Yes
	p=.667	p=.244	CI = [-.236, -.083]		
Purchase Intention	.0048	.2527	-.248	-5.039	Yes
	p=.965	p=.024	CI = [-.350, -.158]		

Table 20a: Model 4 Hayes PROCESS Bootstrapping when sponsorship is independent variable

Similarly, we also examined the significance of profit motive as a mediating variable that impacts the relationship between BRC source and consumer behavior under Hayes Model 4. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 12.

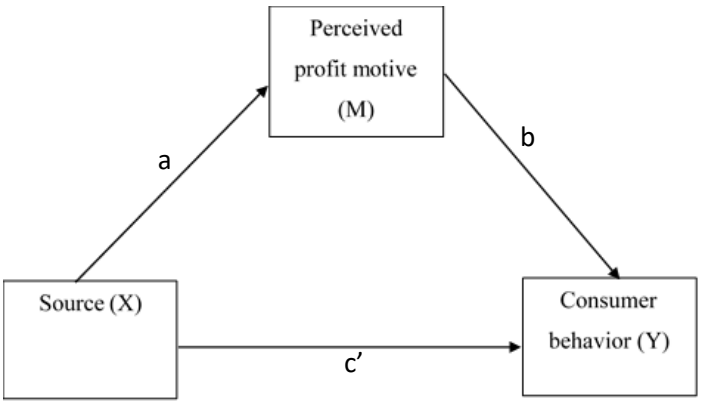


Figure 12: Conceptual diagram of Hayes Model 4 for source, profit motive and consumer behavior

Taking the model of BRC source as the predictor of likeability of the post and keeping the perceived profit motive as mediator (Table 20b), we find that a mediation effect exists (a*b = -.078, t = -2.833). The total effect of source on likeability of the post is significant as well in the presence of perceived profit motive (c = -.207, p = .038). However, the direct impact is not significant (c' = -.128, p = .187). Therefore, there is a full mediation effect.

Further, there is no total effect (c = .001, p = .933) nor direct effect (c' = .069, p = .490) of source on brand attitude (Table 20b). However, there is a mediation effect given by CI [-. 111, -.020] with a*b = -.060 and t = -2.579.

Finally, the impact of source on purchase intention is fully mediated by perceived profit motive (a*b = -.090, t = -2.783) as the direct effect is not significant (c = -.145, p = .203) as shown in Table 20b. Further, the total effect of source on purchase intention is significant in the presence of perceived profit motive (c = .235, p = .044).

Therefore, in all cases the mediation effect of profit motive exists, leading to acceptance of H4. In simple words, the effect of source and that of sponsorship on consumer behavior is mediated through perceived profit motive.

Y	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect (a*b)	t-statistics	Mediation
Likeability	-.207	.128	-.078	-2.833	Yes
	p=.038	p=.187	CI = [-.136, -.029]		

Brand Attitude	-.008 p=.933	.685 p=.490	-.060 CI = [-.111, -.020]	-2.579	Yes
Purchase Intention	-.235 p=.044	-.145 p=.203	-.090 CI = [-.157, -.034]	-2.783	Yes

Table 20b: Model 4 Hayes PROCESS Bootstrapping when source is independent variable

The results further show (Table 21) that path b is always negative, suggesting a negative causal effect of perceived profit motive with likeability of the post, brand attitude and purchase intention. Further, the r-square values across the different models show that the variability in the DV (likeability, brand attitude and purchase intention) is not highly accounted for by IV (source, sponsorship) and mediator (profit motive).

Model	Impact of M on DV (b)	R-square	p
Sponsorship -> Profit Motive -> Likeability	-.223	.066	.000
Sponsorship -> Profit Motive -> Brand attitude	-.165	.036	.000
Sponsorship -> Profit Motive -> Purchase Intention	-.267	.068	.000
Source -> Profit Motive -> Likeability	-.202	.066	.000
Source -> Profit Motive -> Brand attitude	-.155	.035	.000
Source -> Profit Motive -> Purchase Intention	-.232	.063	.000

Table 21: Model 4 Hayes PROCESS Bootstrapping for path b

Further, the bootstrapping analysis also demonstrates that the effect of sponsorship on perceived profit motive is significant (a = .930, p = .000) as shown in Table 22. The effect of source on profit motive is also significant (a = .387, p = .001). Furthermore, comparing the coefficient values of sponsorship and source (.930>.387) imply that BRCs with “Paid partnership” disclosure leads to higher perceived profit motive than the source as celebrity.

X	Coeff (a)	t	p
Sponsorship	.930	8.688	0.000
Source	.387	3.226	0.001

Table 22: Impact of independent variables on perceived profit motive

Overall, our results confirm H4 as perception of profit motive mediates the relationship between sponsorship and consumer behavior (likeability of the post, brand attitude and purchase intention). It is also a significant mediator for the impact of sources on consumer behavior. To be specific, perception of profit motive negatively impacts consumer behavior.

5.2. Summary of Hypothesis Results

After conducting and analyzing the tests, we summarize the hypothesis results in Table 23.

Hypothesis	*Variables*	*Results*
H1	BRC on Instagram that are non-sponsored generate stronger consumer behavior than sponsored BRC.	Not supported
H2	BRC on Instagram by celebrities attract more positive consumer behavior than by general users	Not supported
H3	There is an interaction between source and sponsorship	Not supported
H3a	There is more difference in the level of consumer behavior between BRC by general users and celebrities, when the content is sponsored (vs. non-sponsored)	Not supported
H3b	Consumers behave most positively when celebrities recommend a brand without any sponsorship	Not supported
H4	The effect of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior is mediated through perceived profit motive	Supported

Table 23: Summary of hypothesis test results

6.0. Findings and Discussions

The pervasiveness of social media is a double-edged sword; it gives opportunities for brands to reach greater masses of audience, but also poses a challenge for marketers to stand out from their competitors to win consumers. In the effort from increasing brand awareness to creating higher conversions, brands practice different social media marketing strategies. Existing research shows the success of celebrity-appointment for brand endorsements (Jin et al., 2019), and that of BRC by general users (Kim et al., 2011). Previous studies also show that non-sponsored BRC drives positive consumer responses (Boerman et al., 2018). At the same time, the long-established success of celebrity endorsements cannot be overlooked. Based on these existing studies, we developed the following research question:

"How does perceived profit motive mediate the impact of content source (general user vs. celebrity) and sponsorship level (sponsored vs. non-sponsored) on consumer behavior (likeability of the BRC, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention) in the context of Instagram?"

In exploring the impact on consumer behavior caused by BRC source, sponsorship, and their interaction in the context of Instagram, our study reveals that there is no significant impact. The exception is the significant impact of source on likeability of BRC post on Instagram and on purchase intention. Further, perceived profit motive plays a significant role in mediating the impact of source and that of sponsorship on consumer behavior.

First, the results show that non-sponsored BRC (compared to sponsored BRC) does not significantly lead to favorable consumer behavior, including likeability of the BRC on Instagram, brand attitude and purchase intention. This result is a contrast from the findings in previous studies that sponsored content leads to high level of skepticism and consequently to unfavorable consumer behavior (Campbell, 1995).

Second, the results also indicate no significant effect of BRC generated by celebrity (vs. general users) on consumer behavior when the direction of effect was specified ($\mu_{Celebrities} > \mu_{General\ users}$). Again, this is a contrast to the findings in a previous study that celebrities generate a strong and positive consumer behavior compared to

close friends in social media (Kim & Lee, 2017). It is to be noted that the finding of our study is applicable when there is no consideration of factors such as brand-fit, content analysis, and others, and only considers the relationship of BRC source on consumer behavior in isolation. Indeed, this finding can be explained by taking a look at the real-world behavior. For example, celebrities are trusted by people; that brings the association of lower purchase risk if one has been following the celebrity in question. Nevertheless, there are instances where BRC posts by celebrities can give the impression of an ideal unattainable life while those by general users can influence consumer behavior due to attainability (Meglio, n.d.). Further, one celebrity is engaged in endorsing multiple different brands (Kelting & Rice, 2013), which can lead to interference in consumers' memory of the brand being endorsed. This can further lead to no significant change in consumer behavior despite the exposure to celebrity BRC.

However, the source has a significant effect on consumer behavior when specific direction was not tested. In particular, we found that general users influence the likeability of BRC post and purchase intention positively, but not the brand attitude. First, the possible explanation for the significant effect of general users on consumer behavior is that the product promoted by general users are perceived to be attainable by regular people. Second, the insignificant effect of source on brand attitude can be specific to our sample data – when respondents saw the BRC post, deciding to purchase or to not purchase the product (donut) can be easier than answering how they feel about the fictional brand without knowing anything about it and without trying (tasting, in this case) the product.

We also tested whether the BRC source has a significant impact on brand recall. Generally, brands implement celebrity endorsements to reach wider audience by utilizing the network and popularity of appointed celebrities. However, our analysis shows that there is no impact on unaided brand recall by consumers ($p = .660$) regardless of whether the BRC post is from celebrity or general user (Annex 9.1). In the context of brand recall through celebrity endorsements, the existing study demonstrates that there is no significant difference in brand attitude and purchase intentions in the case of high brand-celebrity fit compared to low brand-celebrity fit (Mishra, 2015). Additionally, the existing research also found that when the brand

and the celebrity have either high or low congruency, the brand recall is high (Kelting & Rice, 2013). Our study used low brand-celebrity match whereby the celebrities were neither bakery specialists nor food experts. Rather their professions were actor, singer and player – a completely unrelated profession from the product being endorsed in this study. The insignificance of source on brand recall is therefore a contrast to the findings in the existing research.

Further, the level of sponsorship and BRC source do not affect each other in influencing consumer behavior. Even with the inclusion of perceived profit motive, the interaction between source, sponsorship and perceived motive on consumer behavior is not significant.

Nevertheless, perceived profit motive acts as a mechanism that influences the consumer behavior on different levels of sponsorship (sponsored and non-sponsored). Precisely, consumers' perception of BRC as being profit motive negatively influences the relationship between sponsorship and consumer behavior. Naturally, compared to non-sponsored BRC, a sponsored BRC is associated more with profit motive. When consumers perceive the BRC to have profit motive, they are likely to show a weaker consumer behavior. This is in line with persuasion knowledge theory whereby people cope with persuasion by showing a weaker or unfavorable consumer behavior (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

Such a mediating effect of perceived profit motive is also seen in the relationship between source and consumer behavior. Particularly, consumers perceive that celebrities have a stronger profit motive than general users while posting BRC. That means, the Instagram posts by celebrities that mention brand gives the impression that celebrities are gaining profit from the BRC post compared to if the BRC was posted by a general user.

It is important to note that while perceived profit motive has a significant moderation effect on the relationship between source, sponsorship and consumer behavior, the model does not explain the variability in the consumer behavior much (Annex 9.2). This suggests that the model can be better with inclusion of other factors such as brand-celebrity fit (Kelting & Rice, 2013).

6.1. Theoretical Implications

Overall, this study contributes to the theoretical body with a contrasting finding that there is no significant direct effect of sponsorship and the interaction effect of source and sponsorship on consumer behavior in the context of Instagram. Nevertheless, BRC source on Instagram significantly impacts likeability and purchase intention. Further, consumers' perception of profit motive attached to BRC mediates the impact on consumer behavior by source and by sponsorship.

While previous studies have studied interaction of sponsorship on BRC sources as celebrity vs. close friends (Kim & Lee, 2017), the study of contrasting the influence of celebrity vs. general user on consumer behavior (likeability of post, brand attitude and purchase intention) is new. Therefore, this study fills the gap and contributes to the theoretical body.

Further the finding of celebrity BRCs associated as driven by profit motive confirms the existing study where Temperley and Tangen, (2006) also found that consumers believe celebrities to be "Pinocchio" trying to milk money by using their popularity.

The significance of brand recall across the source levels (general users and celebrities) show that brand recall is not necessarily guaranteed by celebrity endorsements. While the existing study advocates for higher brand recall when the brand-celebrity fit is low (Kelting & Rice, 2013), our study contradicts that finding.

6.2. Managerial Implications

Our results imply that perceived profit motive significantly impacts the relationship between source and consumer behavior. When consumers believe that the BRC by a brand is driven by profit motive, they are likely to show negative behaviors. Therefore, it is important to construct the BRC posts and brand-related messages in a way that shows more authenticity and doesn't give the impression of profit earning motive.

The marketing managers should consider the pros and cons of appointing celebrities. While previous research show positive influences of celebrities, this study demonstrates that it does not always hold true. Therefore, while allocating budgets for social media campaigns, marketing managers should weigh the cost and benefits of

appointing a celebrity, especially when such an appointment can easily demand a hefty investment.

Further, celebrity endorsements do not necessarily lead to unaided brand recall (Annex 9.1). Therefore, merely relying on celebrity endorsements for brand awareness and recall is not enough. However, previous study has indeed shown that while moderate celebrity-brand congruency inhibits recall of brand name, either high or low congruency enables improved brand recalling (Kelting & Rice, 2013). Therefore, while managers should pay attention in the brand-celebrity match, they should also take other initiatives to promote brand in social media to reinforce brand recall. This is particularly important at an age when celebrities are endorsing multiple brands.

This study finds that BRC by general users gives the impression of being away from profit motive and drives more likes on Instagram and increases consumers' purchase intention. Hence, in their campaigns, marketing managers should strategize to encourage the general users to create and share BRCs. Such campaigns can be selfies in brand-specific photo booth, posting pictures of the product by making the product appealing in appearance or encouragements to tag the brand in BRC posts.

Further, consumers may be indifferent to forming attitude towards the brand just by looking at a BRC post in Instagram. Although brands have, time and again, leveraged celebrities' self-image to sell the brand, our study shows that forming an attitude towards the brand is independent of the BRC source.

7.0. Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this study poses opportunities for future research. First, we used convenience sampling by utilizing our social network (Instagram and Facebook). While that was the most natural method, considering that the social media posts are not always targeted specifically unless it is a gender-specific ad targets, our data was female-centric. The results may differ if the data is distributed somewhat equally across the genders. Therefore, a uniform data distribution among genders is recommended for future researchers.

Second, donut was chosen for being gender-neutral, easy-to-understand and an affordable product for general consumers. However, it might not be the product that people might be interested in, especially at an age when people increasingly prefer healthier diets; and health and wellness centric food consumption is increasing globally (Shahbandeh, 2022). The outcome can be different for other products such as luxury goods. Further, it can be interesting to see how different products can bring different results through comparison tests.

Third, this study employed two variables under perceived profit motive. However, the use of more than two items for perceived profit motive is recommended for future research to establish the construct validity for a more meaningful generalizability of the results.

Further, forming a positive or negative brand attitude for the brand can be unrealistic without knowing the brand or testing the product in question. On the other hand, intending to purchase, especially for an affordable product like a donut, is easier. Therefore, it will be interesting to see future study where the first impression of the brand is measured instead of brand attitude.

Finally, this study didn't involve content analysis to check the differential effects of different kinds of BRC; For example, some celebrities are found posting just a picture without a caption (Jennie, 2021), some use simple words (Sophie Elise, 2023), while others promote brands with many compelling words (Emilie Voe Nereng, 2023). It will be interesting to analyze how these different types of content would moderate the relationship between source, sponsorship and consumer behavior.

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9. Annex

9.1. Chi-square table for brand recall and source

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.194a	1	.660

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 62.61.

9.2. Table: Model fit and significance

Model	Indirect effect (a*b)	R-square	p
Spons -> Profit Motive -> Likeability	-.207	.066	.000
Spons -> Profit Motive -> Brand attitude	-.154	.036	.000
Spons -> Profit Motive -> Purchase Intention	-.248	.068	.000
Sourc -> Profit Motive -> Likeability	-.078	.066	.000
Sourc -> Profit Motive -> Brand attitude	-.060	.035	.000
Sourc -> Profit Motive -> Purchase Intention	-.0896	.063	.000