

Influencers and brands successful collaborations: a mutual reinforcement to promote products and services on social media

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Abstract

Brands and influencers are increasingly collaborating in the development of marketing campaigns. This work analyses to what extent the collaboration of influencers with renowned brands affects the effectiveness of the message and the influencer's own reputation. The results of an experiment with more than four hundred Spanish consumers indicated that renowned brand-influencer collaborations, in comparison to non-renowned brand-influencer collaborations, enhanced consumers' attitude towards the message, their purchase intentions and the perceived credibility of the influencer. Furthermore, positive attitude towards the message and intention to search for information are greater for services offered by renowned brands than for their products. This study contributes by bridging a gap in the literature and raises interesting implications for brand managers and their decisions to collaborate with influencers on social media.

Keywords:

Renowned brands, influencers, attitude, credibility, Instagram, social media.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been notable growth in collaboration between brands and influencers to promote products to their social media target audiences (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández 2019; Belanche et al., 2021). Influencers are seen as the opinion leaders of the current era, and they frequently promote brands on social media (Sokolova and Kefi 2019). Influencers and brands collaborate because the content that influencers generate on social media prompts a better response from users (Linqia 2020). Influencers' recommendations are highly valued by their followers, who accept their advice and tend to acquire and recommend the products promoted in these collaborations with brands (Rakuten 2019; Belanche et al., 2021). In view of the effectiveness of these collaborations, in recent years brands have gradually increased the investment they make in the promotional actions they undertake with influencers. Thus, the worldwide influencer-based marketing industry currently accounts for around \$8 trillion, and the figure is expected to continue to increase significantly, to some \$15 trillion in 2022 (Schomer 2019). These points highlight the importance that influencers have for brands in the current context, and research in the field should be intensified to produce more effective collaborations between these agents.

The previous literature links the brand reputation concept with quality and prestige (Aaker and Keller 1990). The products and services of reputed brands have excellent positioning (Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden 2003), so they develop strong, lasting relationships with consumers (Bolton and Drew 1991). Prestigious brands are highly regarded by consumers (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, and Sen 2012), which is particularly valuable in an increasingly changing world. For all these reasons, reputed, or renowned, brands play a fundamental role in the economy and society. For example, in Spain, the companies that form the Leading Brands of Spain Forum employ more than 1.3 million people and are

responsible for more than 35% of national GDP (FMR 2020). The consumer behaviour literature suggests that the success of renowned brands is based on several factors, including the quality and functionality of their offer, and the consumer's search for a better social position or improvement of their self-concept (Graeff 1997). Some authors, for example Vigneron and Johnson (1999), have argued that brand reputation provides conspicuous value (status sign), perceived unique value (scarcity or exclusivity), perceived social value (belonging to a particular group), hedonic value (pleasure or enjoyment of the experience) and perceived quality value (confidence and security). In short, whether publicly or privately, consumers link the use of reputed, attractive brand personalities with their own images and personalities, and the brand experience acquires great personal importance for them (Park and John 2010).

As influencers act as reference points for their followers they are used by brand managers to promote all kinds of products and services. Despite the growing interest in brand-influencer collaboration, academic research into the topic remains scarce (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020a). Previous studies have analysed the antecedents that motivate the appearance of influencers on social networks (e.g., Casaló et al., 2020a; De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders 2017), the creation of indexes that facilitate the analysis of the effectiveness of influencer-based promotional actions (e.g., Arora et al., 2019; Gräve 2019), and the persuasive capacity of messages (e.g., Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández 2019; Torres, Augusto, and Matos 2019; Belanche et al., 2021). Recently, research has focused on the impact of sponsorship disclosure, that is, when influencers admit (or not) that they have been financially compensated for promoting a certain product/service (e.g., Boerman 2020; De Jans et al., 2020; Stubb, Nyström, and Colliander 2019). However, in the analyses of the impact of brand-influencer

collaborations, no distinction has been made between brands with higher or lower reputational levels.

To address this gap in the literature the present study aims to analyse the effectiveness of influencers' messages as a function of whether they collaborate with a renowned or a non-renowned brand. Taking the lead from the associative network memory model (Srull and Wyer 1989), it is proposed that, when an influencer collaborates with a renowned brand, as compared to a non-renowned brand, his/her followers will adopt an improved attitude towards the message and increased intention to search for information about, and purchase, the product or service. In addition, it is proposed that this collaboration may also be beneficial to the influencer, as his/her credibility with consumers is enhanced. Furthermore, these consequences were examined based on whether the promotion involved a physical product or a service, on the assumption that the effects would be greater on services due to their greater complexity and uncertainty (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). Thus, this work links two increasingly closely-related research fields, influencer marketing and brand management. The analysis allows us to identify the cross effects that result from collaborations between influencers and brands with varied reputations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Influencer marketing

The widespread use of social networks allows people to share their opinions in simple ways, to quickly communicate with other users and influence their perceptions and decision-making. This has motivated some individuals to dedicate themselves professionally, semi-professionally, and altruistically, to sharing their opinions through social networks (Audrezet, De Kerviler, and Moulard 2018). In very recent times some

of the more highly-successful individuals have been termed influencers (Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez 2020b). Although, due to the recency of the phenomenon, there is no standard definition, influencers can be described as individuals with the ability to shape the attitudes and behaviours of their social network audiences (Freberg et al., 2011). Influencers originate, in general terms, from so-called opinion leaders (Casaló et al., 2020a). They are individuals considered to have some of the following characteristics: (1) their opinions are well respected in one or more topics; (2) they are proactive members of a community; (3) they frequently make important contributions to the community; and (4) other users perceive them to have good taste in relation to the community theme (Leal, Hor-Meyll and de Paula Pessôa, 2014).

Unlike celebrities known for their previous activities (e.g., in music, sports, television [Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2019]), a particular characteristic of influencers is that their origins lie in the social networks themselves, that is, they have achieved their fame and reputation as opinion leaders directly through this medium (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019). In contrast to celebrities, influencers often develop closer and wider relationships with their followers, who come to see them as friends (Chae 2017; Belanche et al., 2021). This is one of the factors that makes followers perceive influencers as more credible and honest (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017), and that allows them to generate successful online communities (Sokolova and Kefi 2019). This all gives the influencers greater powers of persuasion: influencers generate among their followers better attitudes and behaviours towards the products they sponsor in their collaborations with brands (Jin and Muqaddam 2019; Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández 2019; Lou and Yuan 2019). Thus, brand managers now consider influencer marketing as an effective sponsorship option (Schomer 2019).

2.2. Famous, prestigious and renowned brands

A brand can be understood as a name or symbol that identifies products and services (Aaker 1991). Brand reputation was defined by Aaker and Keller (1990) as the perception of quality associated with the brand. From this perspective, Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) argued that, in the marketing literature, the brand reputation concept was closely related to brand image. Yi (1990) suggested that brand reputation resembles consumer satisfaction. However, Bolton, and Drew (1991) concluded that the then current mainstream literature considered satisfaction as a temporary assessment, while brand reputation has a consumer-brand relational component that is more permanent. Subsequently, in the literature it was shown that brand reputation results from a combination of product quality, brand acceptance in the market and marketing activities (Fombrun and Van Riel 1997).

Brands that enjoy high reputations become prestige brands. In fact, as indicated by Steenkamp et al. (2003), a brand's prestige is reflected in its remarkably high status compared to other brands in the market. Prestige brands have been described as having unique and distinctive values (Dubois and Czellar 2002). In fact, consumers are willing to pay higher prices for prestige brands because they believe that they transmit their elevated social status (Vigneron and Johnson 1999). However, the prestige of brands does not influence all consumers in the same way. Specifically, consumers with greater public awareness are more conscious of the image they transmit to others and acquire prestigious brands to use them publicly and communicate an image of themselves that accords with their ideal image (Abdelwahab et al., 2020). However, people who have higher personal awareness, and are more focused on their own feelings and perceptions, buy prestige brands because they generate in them pleasant experiences or resolve problems particularly well (Fennell 1978), or they want to associate themselves personally with the

brand's quality and prestige as reinforcement of their self-concept (Graeff 1997). In any case, consumers hold prestige brands in high esteem and associate them with high status (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, and Sen 2012). All this helps managers of reputable brands to achieve excellent positioning of their products and services (Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden, 2003) in customers' minds. Thus, prestige brands become well known and renowned by consumers.

2.3. Theoretical framework: memory associations

This research takes as a basis the associative network memory model (Srull and Wyer 1989) to explain the relationships that develop in the consumer's mind when (s)he observes an influencer collaborating with a brand; the model has recently been used in various contexts (Mohanty 2018; Belboula and Ackermann 2019; Sürücü et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020). Srull and Wyer (1989) argued that the human memory uses a complex network of associations to organize the information stored within its confines. The associative network memory model proposes that information stored in our memories on any concept can be represented through a complex network of nodes. The nodes contain specific pieces of information (e.g., an opinion about an influencer, a brand name, the emotions derived from consuming a brand). The nodes are connected to each other through links (e.g., we associate renowned brands with prestige, quality, exclusivity). These links may be more or less robust, thus we establish associations with greater or less intensity (e.g., the more positive associations that have been made with the brand, and the greater the frequency and intensity of the past experiences with the brand, the more robust will be the link and positive associations with the brand).

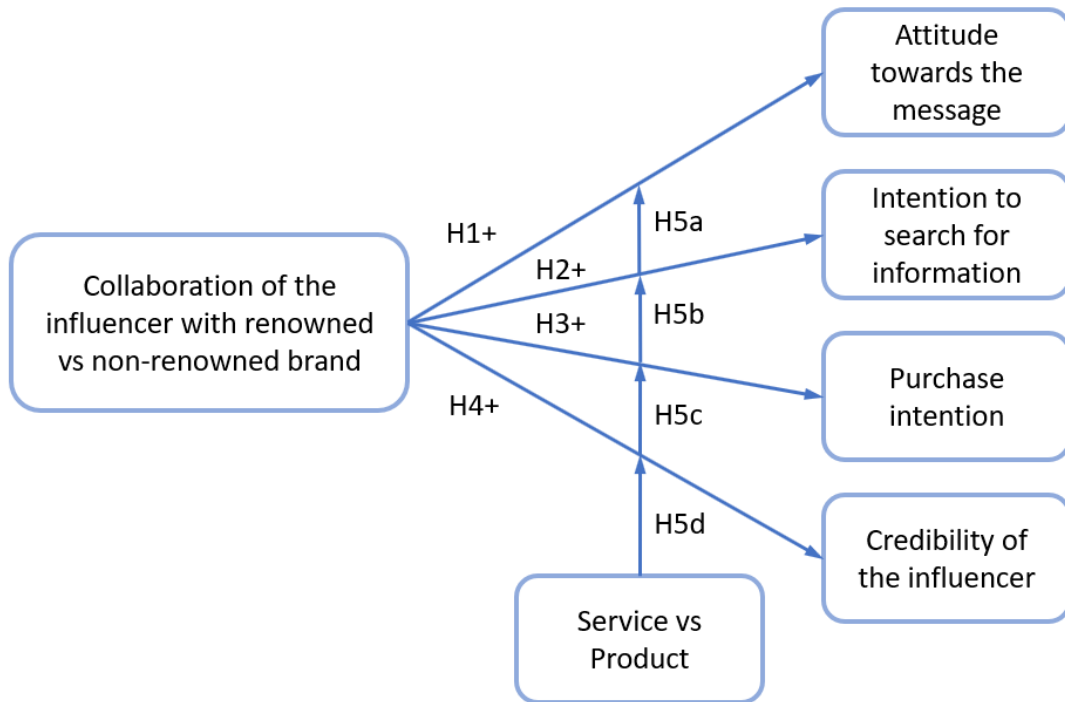
Keller (1993) indicated that node activation occurs when information is stored (e.g., when we watch an advertisement or interact with a brand) and when we retrieve information from the long-term memory (e.g., when we remember a positive brand-related

experience). When a node receives the necessary stimuli, it can trigger a connected node (e.g., brand and quality, influencer and quality). Logically, if both nodes evoke similar associations, simultaneous activation is more likely to occur (Lee, Lockshin and Greenacre 2016). In this way, when using a brand's products or services we experience a series of sensations in specific nodes, as happens also when we observe the content generated by an influencer on social networks. Although the nodes are connected to each other by stronger or weaker links, certain stimuli (e.g., collaborations between influencers and brands) cause the connections to be made with greater intensity and thus recover the associations linked to the relevant nodes. As with alliances between brands (Gammoh, Voss, and Chakraborty 2006; Barroso-Méndez, Galera-Casquet, and Valero-Amaro 2015), our research proposes that when a promotional message links influencers and brands that are considered positively by, and have high reputations among, consumers, the combination will have very favourable effects for both the brand (e.g., purchase intention) and the influencer (e.g., increased credibility).

2.4. Hypotheses development

The study hypotheses are depicted graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Model of the study's proposed relationships



Prestigious, reputable brands are highly valued by consumers and associated with high status (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, and Sen 2012). These brands are usually renowned, widely known and their products and services enjoy excellent positioning (Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden 2003). A brand's reputation is closely tied to perceptions of high quality, and consumers expect everything about the brand to be consistent with high quality, including its communications (Dahlén, Granlund and Grenros 2009).

Indeed, a brand's reputation accords a favourable halo to everything related to it, including its commercial messages (Dahlén, Granlund, and Grenros 2009). Specifically, the higher a brand's reputation, the more positive are consumers' interpretations of its messages (Mitra and Golder 2006), as they consider reputation to be a clear indicator of value (Dahlén, Granlund, and Grenros 2009; Chaudhuri 2002). Furthermore, if the type of communication developed is considered appropriate, the fact that it comes from a

reputable brand gives it more value (Dahlén, Granlund, and Grenros 2009). However, consumers do not expect communications from non-renowned brands to be very valuable, so expectations about these brands on new communication channels are low (Dahlén et al., 2009).

Starting from the basis that followers of an influencer have a positive perception of him/her (Belanche et al., 2020), and taking as reference the basic arguments of the associative memory network model (Srull and Wyer 1989), we argue the following: If an influencer promotes a renowned brand, the positive perceptions that the follower associates with the influencer will reinforce his/her positive perceptions of the renowned brand. In turn, the positive perceptions that the follower associates with the renowned brand will reinforce his/her positive perceptions of the influencer. Therefore, the influencer-renowned brand collaboration will have a synergistic positive effect on both and everything associated with them, including the commercial message. These factors lead consumers to adopt more positive attitudes towards messages when influencers collaborate with renowned brands than when they collaborate with non-renowned brands. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. The consumer's attitude towards a sponsored message will be more favourable if the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand than if (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand.

Torres, Augusto, and Matos (2019) showed that when brands collaborate with noted influencers (good reputation, experts) consumers develop higher purchase intentions towards the promoted products. Ki and Kim (2019) demonstrated that followers who want to look like their influencers (in terms of lifestyle, fashion, etc.) are more likely to buy influencer-sponsored branded products. In fact, the influence of this type of opinion leader has been shown to have a direct effect on the purchase intention for the products

of the brands with which they collaborate (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, (2019). Moreover, brand reputation also increases the impact of communications in commercial terms (Chaudhuri 2002).

Influencers' messages may be more effective when they promote renowned brands because the prior links that the consumer has established with the brand facilitate greater activation (arousal), information processing and memorization (Jeong and Biocca 2012). Specifically, a brand recognized by the consumer tends to be easily accessible in his/her network of mental associations, and is thus more easily identified and paid more attention (Raaijmakers and Shiffrin 1992). In addition, a brand with which the consumer has a previous relationship will generate faster information processing (Jeong and Biocca 2012). Thus, followers have more favourable attitudes towards messages due to the extension of the positive perceptions they have of the influencer and the renowned brand, and they consequently pay more attention to the message content. The follower's increased attention and capacity for subsequent memorization creates a particularly suitable breeding ground for him/her to continue with the purchase decision-making process. In this sense, there is correspondence between the mental associations the consumer attributes to the influencer and to the reputed brand, which motivates him/her to undertake a more extensive search for information about the product or service and increases his/her purchase intention. Therefore, we formulate the following two hypotheses:

H2. The consumer's intention to search for information about a promoted product or service will be greater if the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand than if (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand.

H3. The consumer's purchase intention for a promoted product or service will be greater if the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand than if (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand.

The perceived credibility of an information source reflects the extent to which it is considered to be experienced and honest (objective) (Ohanian 1990). The traditional communication literature has verified that the positive image associated with a message sponsor (e.g., a celebrity) is transferred to the brands they promote, thus improving consumer evaluations and attitudes (Amos, Holmes and Strutton 2008) and the brands' credibility (Spry, Pappu, and Bettina 2011). Thus, to enhance brand reputation, companies have traditionally sought the prestige and reputation of celebrities; however, this transfer can also take place from the brand to the person, as when consumers use highly reputable, or renowned, brands to improve their personal images (Vigneron and Johnson 1999).

Undoubtedly, according to the memory association network model (Keller 1993; Mohanty 2018), the associations established in the minds of consumers can, when they process communications and advertising, function in any direction (in our case, from the influencer to the brand, and from the brand to the influencer). In this sense, the previous literature on brand alliances proposes that tie-ups with reputed brands increase the reputation of brands that collaborate with them, while collaboration with non-renowned brands puts at stake the renowned brand's reputation (Gammoh, Voss, and Chakraborty 2006). Consumers expect investing in the stocks/shares of highly-reputable brands to be risk-free and to pay off (Montgomery and Wernerfelt 1992). Renowned brands invest time and money in building and maintaining their reputations; they must avoid collaborating with agents who might damage the company's reputation (Gammoh, Voss, and Chakraborty 2006). Thus, through this network of mental associations, the positive

perceptions that consumers have about renowned brands exert a favourable impact on the perceptions that they have of influencers, which increases the influencers' credibility.

Based on these points, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. An influencer's credibility will be greater if (s)he collaborates with a renowned brand than if (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand.

Finally, this research proposes that hypotheses H1-H4 will be reinforced in a comparison of services and physical products. The service industry encompasses a wide range of activities (e.g., hospitality, catering, etc.) characterized by their marked intangibility, heterogeneity, and the impossibility of separating the production process from final consumption (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). The acquisition of services is inherently complex because consumers cannot physically confirm their quality until after the experience (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). Therefore, the evaluation of services involves greater uncertainty, which transforms into higher perceived risk (Murray and Schlacter 1990). Therefore, consumers require more information and to evaluate different viewpoints before making decisions. This involves them in more extensive research to ensure that they are making the right decisions (Gursoy and McCleary 2004).

The previous literature has argued that, to deal with this uncertainty, consumers take into account commercial information, in particular information provided by other consumers. This is the case with influencers who, because of their particular characteristics, such as their followers' feelings of closeness towards them, and their reputation and experience (Chae 2017), are seen as reliable information sources in the decision-making process (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). Therefore, the intensity of the effects proposed in the four posited hypotheses will be greater when the influencer promotes a service than when (s)he promotes a product. That is, the differences in attitude towards the message,

intention to search for information and purchase, and the credibility of the influencer, which were already understood to be more positive when the influencer collaborated with a renowned (vs. non-renowned) brand, will be greater still for a service (vs. a product). Consequently, the following moderation effects are proposed:

H5a: The difference in the attitude of consumers towards a sponsored message when the influencer is collaborating with a renowned (vs non-renowned) brand will be even greater for a service (vs. a product).

H5b. The difference in the intention of consumers to search for information when an influencer collaborates with a renowned (vs non-renowned) brand will be even greater for a service (vs. a product).

H5c. The difference in consumers' purchase intention when the influencer collaborates with a renowned (vs non-renowned) brand will be even greater for a service (vs. a product).

H5d. The difference in the credibility of an influencer when (s)he collaborates with a renowned (vs non-renowned) brand will be even greater for a service (vs. a product).

3. Empirical study

3.1. Experimental design

To test the research hypotheses an experiment was designed for Spanish social networks users between 18 and 65 years old. A market research agency was hired and provided a sample of 402 users. The empirical study was conducted in June 2020. The study was presented as a survey about the messages transmitted by social media network influencers; the process began with a brief definition of the influencer concept. To participate in the study the consumers had to follow at least one influencer. In fact, most commonly (46.8%) they followed between 6 and 10 influencers. Following current

research guidelines in this field (e.g., Ki, Cuevas, Chong, and Lim 2020), the participants were asked to provide the name of one of their preferred influencers, who was thereafter taken as a reference point for the rest of the study. To verify the status of the influencer, information about his/her account was sought through several control questions (e.g., the name of the influencer's account).

The participants were then randomly assigned to one of four experimental settings, with each group including approximately a quarter of the sample (between 95 and 106 participants per group). A 2 (renowned brand vs. unrecognized brand) \times 2 (service vs. product) between-subjects experiment was conducted; the combinations resulted in each group of participants viewing only one of the four message types. The membership of the Forum of Leading Spanish Brands was mined to select brands with high reputations, while for the selection of the non-renowned brands, it was decided to use fictitious names to avoid familiarity effects, as suggested by Cauberghe and Pelsmacker (2008). The renowned and non-renowned brands were represented as being in the same category of products or services. The stimuli chosen for the service (hotels) were the renowned brand NH Hoteles, and the non-renowned brand PL Hoteles. Cola-Cao (powdered chocolate drink) was chosen as the renowned branded product and Tam-Tam the non-renowned. The brand was included in an Instagram post purportedly published by the selected influencer, alongside a photograph (i.e. an image of an hotel, an image of a cup of cocoa) and an identical positive generic message for both category of brand (e.g., “After a long day at work, there is nothing like having a cup of ‘renowned/non-renowned brand’ before going to sleep”). The participants then answered a questionnaire with the measurement scales of the research variables. Finally, they responded to questions about sociodemographic variables, such as age, gender, and educational level. Of the 402 participants, 27.6% were between 18 and 24 years, 35.8% between 25 and 34 years,

22.1% between 35 and 44 years, 10.4% between 45 and 54 years, and 4% between 55 and 64 years old. In terms of gender, 57.2% of the sample were men, 40.6% were women, and 2.2% answered "other" or did not respond to the question. The participants had mainly university studies (42.8%) or a Baccalaureate or Middle Degree (33.1%).

3.2. Measurement instruments

The variables were measured through 7-point Likert-type scales (from 1, "totally disagree", to 7, "totally agree") previously validated in the literature and, where necessary, slightly adapted to our analysis context. Each scale consisted of four items, except for influencer credibility, with three. The brand reputation scale (e.g., "The brand that appears in the message has a good reputation", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$) was taken from Chaudhuri (2002). The scale for measuring attitude towards the message (e.g., "I have a good opinion of this message", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$) was adapted from Silvera and Austad (2004). The search intention scale (e.g., "You are likely to seek information about this product/service in the near future," Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.97$) was taken from Belanche et al. (2020). The purchase intention scale (e.g., "The next time I need this type of product/service, I will probably buy this one", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) was adapted from Xu and Pratt (2018) and Müller, Mattke, and Maier (2018). Finally, the credibility of the influencer (e.g., "This influencer is credible", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.98$) was measured by adapting the scales of Ohanian (1990) and Müller et al., (2018). Finally, a question was included to verify that the participants correctly remembered whether a product or service had been promoted in their scenarios.

3.3. Manipulation check

The reputation scale confirmed that the manipulation was satisfactory, that is, the reputation of the brand in the renowned brand scenarios was reported as superior to that

in the non-renowned brand scenarios ($M_{\text{Renowned}} = 5.58$, $M_{\text{Non-renowned}} = 3.40$; $t [400] = 15.79$, $p < 0.01$). All the participants were able to correctly remember if a product or service had been promoted in their scenario.

3.4. Results

A series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were carried out to test the hypotheses; specifically, one for each of the four dependent variables. The results showed that where an influencer collaborates with a renowned brand, compared to a non-renowned brand, attitude towards the message is significantly higher ($F [1.401] = 4.44$, $p < 0.05$, $M_{\text{Renowned}} = 4.21$, $M_{\text{Non-renowned}} = 3.90$). This result corroborates H1 and confirms that the combination of influencers and brands perceived as valuable by customers generates a favourable halo effect. Furthermore, the effect is significantly greater for services than for products ($F [1.401] = 5.41$, $p < 0.05$), confirming the interaction effect proposed in H5a. Thus, due to the uncertain outcome and the intangible nature of services, the collaboration between influencers and renowned brands would be particularly successful in increasing customers preference for services compared to more standardized products.

Regarding intention to search for information, there were no significant differences between renowned and non-renowned brands ($F [1.401] = 0.79$, $p > 0.10$, $M_{\text{Renowned}} = 3.36$, $M_{\text{Non-renowned}} = 3.52$), so H2 is not supported. However, there was a significant interaction effect ($F [1.401] = 14.70$, $p < 0.01$). This effect confirms H5b, which indicates that when the influencer promotes a service of a renowned brand, there is a greater search for information, which is not the case for renowned brand products. Consequently, this finding suggests that the collaboration between influencers and renowned brands will make customers search for further information about the promoted services, maybe because they need more information about services than about products.

On the other hand, when the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand, purchase intention is greater than when (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand ($F [1.401] = 19.56, p < 0.01, M_{\text{Renowned}} = 4.03, M_{\text{Non-renowned}} = 3.27$). This result corroborates H3, proving once again that a marketing campaign based on influencer collaboration with renowned brands is more effective than with non-renowned brands. However, there were no significant differences on impact based on whether a product or service was involved ($F [1.401] = 0.15, p > 0.10$), so H5c is not supported.

Last, where influencers collaborate with a renowned brand, compared to a non-renowned brand, their credibility is shown to be slightly higher ($F [1.401] = 2.78, p < 0.10, M_{\text{Renowned}} = 4.98, M_{\text{Non-renowned}} = 4.71$), thus confirming H4 in a (marginally) significant way. This finding suggests that influencers' image will also benefit from their collaboration with a renowned brand, in a sort of mutual reinforcement. Nonetheless, the impact on the credibility of the influencer is not altered based on whether (s)he promotes a product or a service ($F [1.401] = 0.52, p > 0.10$), so H5d cannot be confirmed. Table 1 provides a summary of the results.

Table 1. Summary of results

Hypothesis	Result	Interpretation
Direct effects		
H1	Confirmed	Consumers' attitude towards a sponsored message is more favourable when the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand than when (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand
H2	Not confirmed	Consumers' intention to search for information about a promoted product or service does not vary based on whether the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand or a non-renowned brand
H3	Confirmed	Consumers' purchase intentions for promoted products or services are higher when the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand than when (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand

H4	Confirmed	The perceived credibility of an influencer is slightly higher if (s)he collaborates with a renowned brand than if (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand
Moderating effects		
H5a	Confirmed	The effect of the renowned brand on consumer attitudes towards the influencer's message (H1) is greater for services than for products
H5b	Confirmed	Although intention to search for information is unaffected by whether the influencer promotes a renowned or a non-renowned brand (H2), consumers seek more information about the services of renowned brands, but not for the products of renowned brands.
H5c	Not confirmed	The effect of a renowned brand on purchase intention (H3) does not vary based on whether the influencer promotes a product or a service
H5d	Not confirmed	The effect of a renowned brand on the credibility of the influencer (H4) does not vary based on whether the influencer promotes a product or a service

4. Conclusions

4.1. Discussion of the results

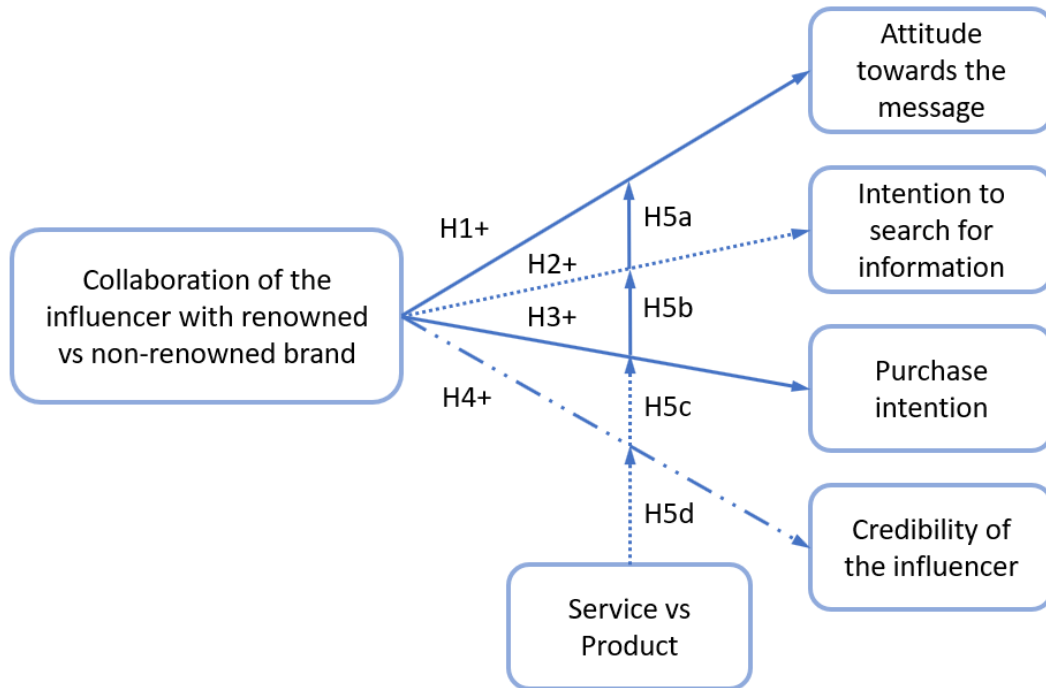
Given the intensive use that consumers make of social networks, influencer marketing is today a very popular phenomenon (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández 2019). The previous literature has demonstrated that influencer-brand collaborations on social networks increase the effectiveness of the commercial message (Jin and Muqaddam 2019; Rakuten 2019). The brand management literature has shown that consumers associate renowned brands with attributes such as quality and prestige (Aaker and Keller 1990), thus they like to align their personal images to these brands (Vigneron and Johnson 1999). However, the research to date has not clarified the role that influencers play in communications about different types of brand; there is a gap in the literature about the possible differential effect of influencer marketing involving renowned and non-

renowned brands. Based on the associative network memory model (Srull and Wyer 1989), our research proposes that collaborations between influencers, perceived as opinion leaders by their followers (Sokolova and Kefi 2019), and renowned brands, are beneficial for both parties, and this is the case more so for services than for products.

The results of the study, in which more than four hundred Spanish users of social networks participated, supported most but not all of the proposed relationships. Figure 2 depicts the relationships and their significance. A first notable finding was that the results confirmed that the consumer's attitude and purchase intention are greater when the influencer collaborates with a renowned brand than when (s)he collaborates with a non-renowned brand. In other words, the positive associations that the consumer has towards the influencer and the renowned brand mutually reinforce each other, which makes their social network communications more effective. Furthermore, the effect of the renowned brand on purchase intention is always positive, irrespective of whether it is a product or service that is being promoted. These results agree with the findings in the previous literature about the use by brands of innovative, expensive communication channels. These studies verified that consumers assume that brands with high reputations are willing to make greater marketing efforts as a sign of their quality (Kirmani 1997), the communication channel being one more aspect of the value derived from the brand-consumer exchange (Dahlén, Granlund, and Grenros 2009). However, consumers' intention to search for information is similar when the influencer collaborates with renowned brands and non-renowned brands. This lack of significant effect may be due to the fact that consumers already know the renowned brands and the characteristics of their offers, thus they do not need to seek out more information about them. In fact, the significant moderating effect of service versus product helps clarify this point, suggesting

that customers will only require further information for services but not for products of renowned brands.

Figure 2. Significance of the proposed relationships



Notes: Solid lines mean significant effect ($p < 0.05$), dotted lines mean not significant effect ($p > 0.10$), dot-dashed line means marginally significant effect ($p < 0.10$).

As previously noted, when promoting services, rather than products, influencer-renowned brand collaboration is particularly effective in terms of information search and purchase intentions. That is, having viewed a promotional message put out by an influencer, consumers do not need to look for information about the products of renowned brands, surely because these products have stable and well-defined attributes, but they do tend to look for information on services offered by renowned brands (e.g., hotels). In turn, the consumer's attitude towards the message is increased to a greater extent when the influencer promotes a renowned-brand service than when (s)he promotes a renowned-brand product. This finding agrees with recent results in the literature, indicating that the

utilitarian value of social media images posted by brands highly used by customers is lower than when this information is posted by lowly used brands (Gutiérrez-Cillán, Camarero-Izquierdo, and San José-Cabezudo 2017). These effects are explained by the fact that the complex and variable nature of services is subject to uncertainty, and the opinions of influencers (as reliable sources of information, Djafarova and Rushworth 2017) help to dispel doubts in the mind of the consumer.

As an additional contribution, the study reveals that the collaboration between influencers and renowned brands is also beneficial for the influencer. Specifically, the results showed that collaborating with a renowned brand increases the influencer's credibility, which is not the case with a non-renowned brand. In other words, as with alliances between brands (Gammoh, Voss, and Chakraborty 2006; Barroso-Méndez, Galera-Casquet, and Valero-Amaro 2015), the positive effects of the influencer-brand collaboration produce synergies for both parties, and encourage consumers to establish associations between them. This finding confirms the results of previous studies that showed that influencer-brand collaborations increase the consumer's perceptions of the experience and honesty of the information source (i.e., the influencer) (Jin and Muqaddam 2019).

Finally, although influencer's collaboration with renowned brands (compared to non-renowned brands) is more effective to increase purchase intentions and influencer's credibility among customers, these effects are not moderated by service versus product campaigns. Actually, the lack of significance of these moderating effects indicates that the influencer-renowned brands collaboration would be successfully boosting purchase intentions and influencer's credibility when promoting both services or products.

4.2. Managerial implications

The findings of the present study raise interesting implications for brand management. The main recommendation is related to our confirmation that influencer marketing is an effective tool through which to transmit commercial information to consumers. In fact, this new channel, that uses social networks for information dissemination, is now a regular means of communication (Linqia 2020). As with advertising, brands must continue to transmit their messages to remain well positioned in the consumer's mind by using these less intrusive media to create authentic brand narratives (Belanche 2019; van Loggerenberg, Enslin, and Terblanche-Smith 2021). In this sense, our research suggests that managers of renowned brands should grasp this opportunity and use influencer marketing as one more channel in their marketing strategies. In particular, this type of collaboration improves the attitude towards, and purchase intention for, the products and services of renowned brands. In addition, in the case of renowned brands' services, consumers have a better attitude to influencers' messages and tend to seek more information about them. The results of this research suggest that these types of collaborations would not be as successful for non-renowned brands, although they might prompt consumers to seek for more information about their products and services.

This study also has implications for the influencer's personal brand management. In fact, the influencer's credibility is one of his/her main tools through which to become a truly influential opinion leader for his/her followers (Sokolova and Kefi 2019). The results of our study suggest that influencers increase their credibility through collaborating with renowned brands, but not so when they collaborate with non-renowned brands. Ultimately, partnering with reputed brands is a beneficial strategy for influencers, as consumers establish positive associations between both parties.

4.3. Limitations and future research lines

This work examines the advantages of collaboration between influencers and renowned brands; it has limitations that, in turn, suggest new lines of research that should be addressed in the near future. We used only four brands (two for each brand category), thus it would be interesting to extend the study to a greater number of products and services linked to different brands (Chin, Isa, and Alodin 2020). The study sample consisted of Spanish social network users, and the results might vary based on cultural influences. It would be interesting to replicate the study in other countries with citizens from other cultures to confirm the robustness of the findings. Finally, influencer marketing may be subject to multiple variables (e.g., message type) that have been simplified and controlled in our experimental design to achieve greater internal validity. Thus, it would be advisable for brands and influencers to manage their collaborations with care to control these details and achieve their commercial objectives.

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