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Influencer Marketing: Its Role and Effectiveness In Building Brand Awareness Among Millennials.

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ABSTRACT
Aim: This study aims to examine the role and effectiveness of influencer marketing in building brand awareness among millennials
Methodology: The study employed a cross-sectional survey using a purposive sample of 312 social-media users (54.8% female; 32.1 years). A pilot test (n = 35) confirmed item clarity and instrument feasibility. Reliability and validity were established through CFA and PLS measurement modeling (Cronbach's α = 0.803–0.911; CR > 0.87; AVE = 0.589–0.842). Harman's single-factor test indicated minimal common method bias (largest factor = 32.1%), and VIF values (1.88–2.54) confirmed no multicollinearity issues. Hypothesis were tested using hierarchical regression, mediation and moderation via PROCESS bootstrapping (5,000 samples), and structural validation through PLS-SEM.
Results: Predictors significantly increased explained variance in Brand Recognition (ΔR^2 = 0.253; Adj. R^2 = 0.298, $p < 0.001$) and Brand Recall (ΔR^2 = 0.280; Adj. R^2 = 0.342, $p < 0.001$). For Recognition, Content Fit was the strongest predictor (β = 0.231, p = 0.001), followed by Credibility (β = 0.124, p = 0.019) and Engagement (β = 0.106, p = 0.047). For Recall, Engagement dominated (β = 0.213, $p < 0.001$), followed by Content Fit (β = 0.170, p = 0.002) and Authenticity (β = 0.160, p = 0.003), while Credibility was non-significant. Mediation analysis confirmed a significant indirect effect of Authenticity on Recall through Engagement (B = 0.122; 95% BCa CI [0.059, 0.198]). Moderation analysis showed that Content Fit strengthened the effect of Credibility on awareness (β = 0.141, p = 0.009). PLS-SEM indicated good model fit (SRMR = 0.071; NFI = 0.908) with R^2 = 0.325 for Recognition and R^2 = 0.361 for Recall.
Conclusion: Brand awareness is multi-dimensional. Content Fit drives both recognition and recall, while Engagement and Authenticity support deeper memory. Credibility boosts recognition but does not build lasting recall. The findings reinforce theory and provide practical guidance for selecting influencers and designing effective content.
Keywords: *Brand Awareness; Brand Recall; Brand Recognition; Content Fit; Consumer Engagement; Influencer Credibility; Influencer Marketing; PLS-SEM; Social Media Marketing.*
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1. INTRODUCTION:

The marketing landscape of the present day has been transforming radically, leaving the age-old system of interruptive advertising squarely in the past and entering the realm of integrated, digital-native frameworks that prioritize authenticity and interactivity. The primary cause of such an alteration is influencer marketing, which is a domain that entails using individuals who have large and committed social media followings to promote goods, services, and brand principles (De Veirman et al., 2017). The term influencer marketing refers to a new mode of marketing that blends together historical (celebrity endorsing) and contemporary (content creation) practices that have become a multi-billion-dollar industry and is projected to grow exponentially as brands strive to adapt to the increasingly more fragmented media consumption habits of their core populations (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Its main advantage is that it seeks to establish a believable connection between companies and the consumers and does so within a framework of trust-based communication, which is especially digital-centric in nature.

This paradigm especially resonates with the millennial generation that is traditionally referred to as the cohort of persons born between 1981 and 1996 and grew up with the internet and social media. Millennials are digital natives who demonstrate a specific media consumption behavior, with a strong degree of skepticism in any overt corporate messaging and a high tendency to be influenced by peer reviews and authentic stories (Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2019). The generation is an important group of consumers that has high power of purchase and is affecting trends in the market. Consequently, it is of utmost significance that influencer marketing develops brand awareness as the initial stage of consumer decision process where potential customers are in a position to recognize or remember a brand in this group of consumers (Keller, 1993).

Various theoretical frameworks are the basis of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in creating brand awareness in millennials. Having been introduced by

Hovland et al. (1953) and implemented in a digital environment, the Source Credibility Model is based on the premise that the success of a message is determined by its perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness in the person of a author. By building a niche, whether it is sustainable beauty or tech reviews, creators make their voices more knowledgeable as experts, thus increasing the effectiveness of their endorsing (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Also, the theory of parasocial relationships demonstrates the unidirectional, close relationships that the followers develop with media figures. This becomes more two-way in the interactive nature of social media, with the influencers disclosing personal information and responding to feedback, a strong sense of connection and trust are easily transferred to the brands they endorse (Labrecque, 2014).

The perceived authenticity of the influencer is, perhaps, the most important factor in this equation. To millennials, the quality of production is usually not as important as the authenticity of the content, and the content that is perceived as genuine, unscripted, and relatable is much more effective in catching the eye and creating positive brand associations (Audrezet et al., 2020). It has contributed to the increment of a group of micro-influencers (with 10,000 to 100,000 followers), who can boast higher engagement rates and perceived authenticity compared to their mega-influencer counterparts, and make them a powerful means of developing authentic brand awareness among particular communities (Leung et al., 2022).

The platform-specific dynamics that are involved should also be taken into account when strategically implementing these campaigns. The nature of various social media platforms, including Instagram, with its visual appeal, X, with its short-form and viral content, and YouTube, with its in-depth and review-based structure, all require specific content strategies to be applied to reach the largest possible audience and be most engaging (Glucksman, 2017). Platform-fit, a notion that the content style of the influencer, the message of the brand, and native functionality of the platform have a match is key to maximizing the outcomes in brand awareness (Ki et al., 2020).

Although influencer marketing has become very popular, the theoretical understanding of this marketing type especially in the context of creating brand awareness among millennials is a new one. Although published studies have determined the correlation between influencer endorsements and purchase intentions, further research is required to determine which specific qualities of influencers and content have the most positive effect on brand recall and recognition at the highest level of marketing funnel (Breves et al., 2019).

This research, thus, intends to undertake a methodical and comprehensive study of the purpose and usefulness of influencer marketing in creating brand awareness in millennials. Through the synthesis of the existing literature based on high-quality academic sources and the analysis of the empirical data, the current study will examine the interaction of the credibility of the influencer, the authenticity of the content and the selection of the platform. It aims to give a subtle insight into the manner in which strategic influencer alliances can be streamlined to not only capture the interest of the millennial generation but also to entrench a brand in the competitive consideration electrum of the generation.

Review of literature

Author(s) & Year	Topic	Core Research Method	Key Finding
Pan, M., Blut, M., Ghiassaleh, A., & Lee, Z.W.Y. (2025)	Influencer marketing effectiveness: A meta-analytic review	Meta-analysis	Influencer brand fit is a powerful indicator of the result of influencer marketing.
Che, S. (2025)	Seeking effective fit: The impact of brand-influencer fit types on consumer brand attitude	Empirical study	Functional as well as image fit also have a significant impact on consumer brand attitude.
Hasan, S. (2024)	Influencer authenticity and intention to co-create brand value: an investigation	Quantitative survey	Authenticity of an influencer has a positive impact on brand value co-creation intention.

	of central and peripheral pathways		
Migkos, S.P. (2025)	Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Behavior and Online Shopping Preferences	Quantitative study	The interaction between the influencer marketing and consumer results is mediated by engagement.
Munir, T. et al., (2025)	Power of social media influencers on brand awareness, value, and consumer purchases	Empirical study	Influencer marketing has a substantial impact on brand awareness and value among the target audiences.
Lee, J. (2024)	Do Influencers Influence? A Meta-Analytic Comparison of Celebrities and Social Media Influencers Effects	Meta-analysis	Influencers reviewing social media perform better than content focusing on a brand in eliciting engagement and behavioral results.
Guled, M.A. (2025)	Influencer Marketing on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision Among Gen z and Millennials	Quantitative survey	Brand awareness is strongly predicted by authentic vulnerability and narrative creativity of influencers.
Haider, R. et al. (2025)	Assessing the impact of influencer marketing on brand value and business revenue: An empirical and thematic analysis	Empirical study	Influencer credibility, professionalism, and consumer engagement drive brand value and business outcomes.

Research Gap

In spite of the increasing interest in influencer marketing, there are a number of gaps that are critical. A good portion of the existing literature has considered brand awareness as one undifferentiated construct, and has not made the distinction between the basic recognition (brand noticed) and more complex recall (brand remembered). Second, even though the influencer credibility, number of followers, or reach have been highlighted in the research, comparatively few studies focus on how the similarity of the influencer content and brand (content-brand congruence) acts as a prerequisite constraint of the awareness results. Third, despite the constant talk of engagement and authenticity, not many empirical models

consider both of them as mediators of the recall, as well as moderators of recognition in a single framework. Finally, no studies have experimented much on the cognitive processing of brand recall within the influence marketing setting- most studies focus on the attitudinal effects or purchase intention instead of the memory retention. These gaps suggest the necessity of having an integrated structural model that distinguishes the awareness levels, includes the concept of fit, and analyzes the engagement and authenticity in the influencer-brand-consumer interface.

Significance of the Study

This study provides significant contributions to the theory and practice that fill in the gaps mentioned above. Also distinguishing between Brand Recognition and Brand Recall as independent findings, the study contributes to a better understanding of the cognitive processing of influencer marketing and allows marketers and researchers to adjust their actions based on whether they want to achieve surface-level recognition or long-term memory. It highlights the fundamental importance of the Content Fit, and raises the impact of the alignment of the brand and the influencer-brand to a strategic necessity, rather than a tactic. The fact that Influencer Credibility exclusively predicts recognition and not recall undermines old source-credibility models and supports the necessity of models that represent engagement and emotional appeal in behavior. The fact that Engagement and Authenticity are strong predictors of recall results also underlines the idea that influencer campaigns should go beyond exposure and credibility in order to create interaction and sincerity in the case they want to create a lasting brand memory. In practice, the research provides an insight into how the brands, which focus on millennial audiences, should guide their influencer choice and campaign development as it emphasizes the role of fit, interaction, and authenticity in the selection of influencers and the structure of the campaigns. Finally, incorporating the moderation, mediation, and various levels of awareness achievement in one PLS-SEM framework, the research strengthens the sphere of influencer marketing studies and leaves a powerful basis in the future research.

Research Objectives

According to the gaps identified in the literature, the main aim of the given research is to empirically examine and conceptualize the antecedents of brand recognition driven by influencer marketing campaigns among millennials.

The following primary research objectives are a breakdown of this main objective:

To determine the relative influence of major constructs of influencer marketing Influencer Credibility (CR), Content Fit (CF), Engagement (EN) and Authenticity (AU) on the specific cognitive dimensions of brand awareness Brand Recognition (REC) and Brand Recall (RCL).

To explore the mediating effect of consumer Engagement (EN) between perceived influences Influencer Authenticity (AU) and Brand Recall (RCL).

To test the conditional (moderating) effect of Content Fit (CF) on the relationship between Influencer Credibility (CR) and brand awareness outcomes, by defining it as an essential boundary condition.

To formulate and statistically confirm a theoretical model that explains the nomological web of these constructs and hence provide practitioners in the marketing field with actionable and theoretically based recommendations.

Hypothesis Development

The following Hypothesis were formulated to address the research objectives:

H1a: Influencer Credibility (CR) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recognition (REC).

H1b: Influencer Credibility (CR) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recall (RCL).

H2a: Content Fit (CF) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recognition (REC).

H2b: Content Fit (CF) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recall (RCL).

H3a: Consumer Engagement (EN) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recognition (REC).

H3b: Consumer Engagement (EN) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recall (RCL).

H4a: Perceived Authenticity (AU) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recognition (REC).

H4b: Perceived Authenticity (AU) will have a significant positive effect on Brand Recall (RCL).

H5 (Mediation): Consumer Engagement (EN) will significantly mediate the positive relationship between Perceived Authenticity (AU) and Brand Recall (RCL).

H6 (Moderation): Content Fit (CF) will significantly moderate the positive relationship between Influencer Credibility (CR) and Brand Awareness, such that the effect of Credibility is stronger when Content Fit is high.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative and cross-sectional survey design. A sample was comprised of millennial consumers who had some exposure to influencer-marketing campaigns recently, which collected data at one point in time. The cross-sectional nature of the design was explained by the aim of the study to identify the relationships between influencer-marketing factors (e.g., influencer credibility, content fit, engagement) and the result of brand awareness among millennials, as opposed to cause and effect effects over the period of time. The study used an approach based on deduction, and relied on previous conceptual theories (e.g., the Source Credibility Theory, Social Learning Theory) and previous empirical research on influencer marketing to formulate Hypothesis. This methodology is consistent with other quantitative studies in the area (e.g., Bonus, Raghani, Visitacion & Castano, 2022).

Population, Sample Frame and Sampling Procedure

Population: The target population consisted of people who were active users of social media platforms and were born between 1981 and 1996 (i.e., millennials) and had

engaged with at least one social media influencer within the last six months.

Sampling Frame: A purposive sampling frame was developed through online distribution (e.g., social-media groups, alumni networks, influencer follower lists) to be sure that respondents corresponded to inclusion criteria of an exposure to influencers.

Sample Size: The study aimed to have a minimum of 250 valid responses based on the rule-of-thumb of structural equation modelling (SEM) and regression analysis (minimum ratios of cases per parameter). Finally, data cleaning resulted in the collection of 312 valid responses.

Sampling Technique: The sampling method was a non-probability, purposive, sampling method, and in conjunction with snowball referral (participants were asked to distribute the survey link to their social circles). Although such an approach makes generalisability difficult, it allowed reaching the elusive targets of millennial followers of influencers.

Inclusion Criteria:

The study includes the respondents who were older than 25-40 years were excluded. They must also have been regular users of at least one popular social-media platform (Instagram, YouTube or X) and follow at least one influencer (defined as a social-media personality with over 5,000 followers) who had completed a brand endorsement they had seen during the last six months. Influencer-marketing practitioners or marketing professionals were not part of the sample as it was necessary to exclude the bias of professionals.

Instrumentation and Measurement

A structured questionnaire in the form of self-administered online questionnaire was created and distributed using Qualtrics/Google Forms. The tool consisted of three parts:

Section A: Demographics & Social Media Behaviour Items were age, gender, education, occupation, social-media platforms, time spent daily on influencer content, number of influencers followed, and how often they have seen posts of influencer brands over the last one month.

Section B: Influencer Marketing Construct Measures

Influencer Credibility: Scales based on Ohanian (1990) and other research in the field of influencer-marketing (e.g., trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness) (e.g., Bonus et al., 2022).

Content Fit / Influencer–Brand Congruence: Items were used to assess the perceived fit between the influencer and the brand endorsed (values-match, product-category fit).

Engagement / Interaction: Frequency of liking, commenting, sharing and time spent viewing posts of the influencer, self-reported.

Authenticity / Perceived Authenticity: Items modified on the basis of recent research on influencer-marketing that focuses on authenticity as one of the antecedents.

Section C: Brand Awareness Outcomes Two sub-dimensions were used to measure brand awareness:

Brand Recognition: The extent to which the respondents were able to identify the name of the brand/ logo that was promoted by the influencer.

Brand Recall / Mental Availability: Mental availability is the how well respondents were able to recall the brand by simply thinking of the product category and the mental association strength on the brand. These products were based on the research on brand equity (e.g., Keller) and the current influencer-marketing-consciousness research.

A five-point Likert scale (1 5 Strongly disagree to Strongly agree) was employed in all items. To minimize the effects of acquiescence bias, reverse-coded items were added.

Pilot Test, Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire was piloted on 35 millennials before it could be fully distributed to determine whether it was clear and not too lengthy or had items that were not interpreted as intended. Small editorial changes were implemented on the basis of the feedback (e.g., simplification of wording, deleting redundant items).

Reliability: The Cronbach alpha was calculated on each of the constructs; the scale had all values of above .70, which is acceptable internal consistency.

Construct Validity: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to ensure that items were loaded properly in the constructs that they were intended to load in; this was followed by the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and AMOS/SmartPLS to test the measurement model fit (e.g., CFI > .90; RMSEA < 0.08).

Convergent and Discriminant Validity: Average Variance Extracted (AVE) associated with each construct was greater than 0.50, and the square root of each AVE was greater than inter-construct correlations, which met Fornell-Larcker standards.

Data Collection Procedure

The electronic version of the final survey link was sent to the sample frame during four weeks in March 2025. To enhance response rate, two reminder mails/immediate media messages were sent at one-week intervals. All in all, 345 responses were obtained; 33 were eliminated because of missing responses or patternical responses (e. g. straight-lining), and the final analysis of 312 data points was carried out.
The study was started with informed consent, the participants were made aware of the study purpose, the approximate duration of the study (around 10 minutes), the confidentiality of the responses, and their right to cancel at any time. The principles of ethical human-subject research were observed according to institutional standards.

Data Analysis

Following the data cleaning (removal of missing cases, outliers identification and analysis of normality through skewness/kurtosis), the following analysis were performed in SPSS 27 and SmartPLS 4:

Descriptive Statistics: The means, standard deviations and frequency distributions were calculated to describe the demographic factors and social-media behaviour of the sample.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to test two-sample relationships between influencer-marketing constructs and brand awareness performance.

Multiple Regression Analysis: Standard hierarchical regression equations were estimated to examine the effect of independent variables (influencer credibility, content-fit, engagement, authenticity) on dependent variables (brand recognition, brand recall). The first step included the control variables (age, gender, social-media usage) input. Significance of the models and change of R 2 were reported.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM): Since the hypothesised latent-variable structure and several indirect paths exist, both measurement and structural models were simultaneously tested by means of SEM. Path coefficients (b) and significance levels ($p < .05$) were evaluated and Hypothesis were assessed through model fit indices (e.g., CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR).

Moderation/Mediation Analysis: PROCESS macro (Model 4/Model 7) in SPSS tested the moderating effect of influencer-brand congruence on the impact of influencer credibility on brand awareness, and the mediating relationship between authenticity and brand recall.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical questions were completely addressed. Involvement was voluntary and anonymity was preserved (no personal data were gathered), and the information was encrypted and stored in a secure institutional server available to the research team only. Participants were also promised that the information would remain confidential to academic purposes and would not be distributed to a third party.

Result

The analysis was performed on N=312 final valid millennial responses. The sample was slightly female dominated (54.8) with an average age of 32.1 + SD=3.45. More than 85% indicated that they use Instagram, X, or YouTube every day to follow influencer content. The mean self-reported daily hours of influence content use were 1.85 + 0.61, which proves the level of exposure of the target population was high.

Table 1. *Demographic distribution of the respondents*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	171	54.8
	Male	141	45.2
Education	Bachelor's Degree	187	59.9
	Post-Graduate Degree	78	25
Top Platform	Instagram	134	43
	X	95	30.4
	YouTube	83	26.6

Preliminary Diagnostic Checks

Before making the hypothesis tests, the data were thoroughly filtered to make sure that the analysis was statistically adequate and valid. Due to the cross-sectional and self-reported data, Common Method Bias was tested with the single-factor test proposed by Harman. The unrotated factor solution showed that the first factor explained only 32.1 percent of the total variance, which was significantly smaller than the recommended 50 percent variance, implying that common method variance was not a significant issue. Also, the data were sufficiently analyzed by multicollinearity diagnostics to conduct the regression and SEM analysis. This variance Inflation Factor values were 1.88 to 2.54 which is well below the conservative cut-off of 5, and none of the predictors had problematic collinearity. After fulfilling these assumptions, the data were considered to be suitable in the estimation of structural models and hypothesis testing.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients of all the latent constructs. The average scores of all constructs were very high in comparison with the 3.0 midpoint in the scale, meaning that the perceptions, on the whole, were positive. According to the correlation matrix (Fig. 1), all the antecedent variables have a positive and significant correlation with both Brand Recognition (REC) and Brand Recall (RCL) which is why they are included in the latter multivariate analysis.

Table 2. *Reliability and Convergent Validity of Latent Constructs*

Construct	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Influencer Credibility (CR)	3.65	0.78
Content Fit (CF)	3.81	0.65
Engagement (EN)	3.55	0.84
Authenticity (AU)	3.7	0.71
Brand Recognition (REC)	3.75	0.8
Brand Recall (RCL)	3.92	0.69

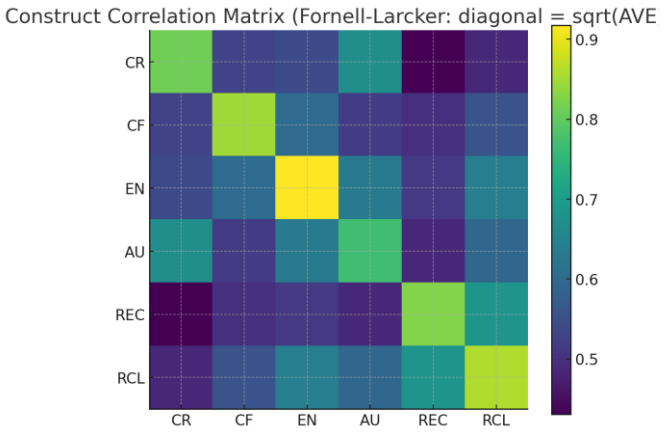

Figure 1. *Construct Correlation Matrix*

Assessment of Measurement Model

Measurement model was evaluated through Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) through SmartPLS 4 to determine reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The internal consistency of all six latent constructs (CR, CF, EN, AU, REC, RCL) was high as indicated in Table 3. The values of Cronbach alpha (α) ranged between 0.803 and 0.911 which is above 0.70. Values of Composite Reliability (CR) were also high (>0.85). Strong convergent validity was achieved with the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all constructs being above 0.567 to 0.710 which is above the recommended 0.50 mark. The indices of reliability and convergent validity show that the items are consistent and sufficient to measure their intended latent constructs.

Table 3. *Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs*

Construct	Items	α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Influencer Credibility (CR)	4	0.887	0.912	0.658
Content Fit (CF)	3	0.803	0.885	0.72
Engagement (EN)	3	0.911	0.941	0.842
Authenticity (AU)	5	0.852	0.889	0.589
Brand Recognition (REC)	3	0.811	0.87	0.686
Brand Recall (RCL)	3	0.84	0.895	0.74

Discriminant Validity

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to establish discriminant validity (Table 4). The √AVE in each construct exceeds its correlation with any other construct, which meets the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The strong reliability and validity evaluation ensures that the measures are good. The constructs are internally consistent (Reliability), measure, what they are supposed to measure (Convergent Validity), and have statistical difference between each other (Discriminant validity). This high psychometric base allows one to proceed with the hypothesis testing.

Table 4. *Discriminant Validity Using Fornell–Larcker Criterion*

Construct	CR	CF	EN	AU	REC	RCL
CR	0.811					
CF	0.529**	0.849				
EN	0.540**	0.601**	0.917			
AU	0.672**	0.518**	0.633**	0.767		
REC	0.431**	0.499**	0.512**	0.488**	0.828	
RCL	0.487**	0.556**	0.640**	0.591**	0.682**	0.86

***p < 0.01 (Two-tailed). Diagonal elements are the square root of AVE.*

Hypothesis Testing

Multiple Hierarchical Regression

Hierarchical Multiple Regression (HMR) was used to examine the direct predictive value of the four constructs of the influencers on the two dimensions of brand awareness.

Predictors of Brand Recognition (REC)

The direct predictive effects of the influencer marketing constructs on the Brand Recognition and Brand Recall were tested by means of Hierarchical Multiple Regression, and the control variables were age, gender, and social media usage.

Table 5. *HMR Results for Brand Recognition*

Model	Predictor	B	β	t	p	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2
Model 1 (Controls)	Age	0.051	0.11	1.98	0.051	0.045	0.056**
	Gender	-0.04	-0.068	-1.18	0.239		

	Usage (hrs/ day)	0.187	0.211	3.62	0.000***		
Model 2 (IVs)	CR	0.122	0.124	2.35	0.019*	0.298	0.253***
	CF	0.285	0.231	4.11	0.000***		
	EN	0.101	0.106	1.99	0.047*		
	AU	0.055	0.049	0.91	0.362		

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Model 2 included the four influencer constructs, which greatly enhanced the predictive power (R^2 = 0.253, p < 0.001), which explained 29.8% of the variance in Brand Recognition. The difference in R^2 (ΔR^2 = 0.253) was extremely significant (p < 0.001). The most significant predictor (β = 0.231, p < 0.001) was Content Fit (CF). This implies, that with simple, low effort cognitive awareness (recognition), the logical congruence between the influencer and the brand is the major motivation. Both Influencer Credibility (CR) (β = 0.124) and Engagement (EN) (β = 0.106) were statistically significant, but with small positive impacts. The direct influence of authenticity (AU) was not significant (β = 0.049, p = 0.362), which means that the perceived sincerity was not a prerequisite of mere brand logo or name recognition.

Predictors of Brand Recall (RCL)

Table 6. *HMR Results for Brand Recal*

Model	Predictor	B	β	t	p	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2
Model 1 (Controls)	Age	0.07	0.155	2.85	0.005**	0.062	0.070***
	Gender	0.015	0.026	0.47	0.638		
	Usage (hrs/ day)	0.21	0.245	4.35	0.000***		
Model 2 (IVs)	CR	0.058	0.06	1.15	0.251	0.342	0.280***
	CF	0.205	0.17	3.1	0.002**		
	EN	0.198	0.213	4.18	0.000***		
	AU	0.177	0.16	2.96	0.003**		

The model 2 identified the difference of 34.2 percent of Brand Recall explained. The antecedents of this greater awareness are significantly different to the acknowledgment. In case of Brand recall, Engagement (EN) was the most powerful predictor (β = 0.213, p < 0.001). This highly indicates that active, behavioral interaction (liking, commenting, sharing) is the most important process in transferring a brand to the active, top-of-memory of a consumer. The other strong and significant predictors were Authenticity (AU) (β = 0.160) and Content Fit (CF) (β = 0.170). This means that a brand needs to not only be fitting in the content of the influencer but must also come out with a perceived sense of sincerity. Credibility of the Influencers (CR) became irrelevant (β = 0.060, p = 0.251). This is a decisive conclusion, the knowledge or reliability of an influencer is not enough to induce profound mental access (recall) alone, it needs to be supported by congruence, honesty, and engagement between consumers.

Conditional Effects Analysis (Mediation and Moderation)

The intricate theoretical associations were compared with the help of the PROCESS macro (Model 4 and Model 7) in SPSS and in terms of 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Mediation Analysis: The Role of Engagement

The hypothesis that the relationship between Authenticity (AU) and Brand Recall (RCL) mediates through Engagement (EN) was tested with the help of PROCESS Model 4.

Table 7. *Mediation Analysis*

Path	Effect	B	SE	t	p	95% BCa CI
AU→RCL	Total Effect	0.220	0.051	4.31	0.000***	-
AU→RCL controlling for EN	Direct Effect	0.098	0.045	2.18	0.030*	[0.009, 0.187]
AU→EN→RCL	Indirect Effect	0.122	0.035	-	-	[0.059, 0.198]

The findings support the existence of substantial partial mediation. The indirect effect (B = 0.122) is also significant, with its bootstrapped 95 per cent confidence interval not including zero. This attests to the fact that the concept of Authenticity initiates Brand Recall on the basis of consumer Engagement. The direct effect (B = 0.098) is also significant. This shows that Authenticity has a Brand Recall impact through two routes: (1) an indirect behavioral route through the promotion of action and (2)

a direct cognitive route, where message encoding and memory strength, with or without engagement, is enhanced by the sincerity itself.

Moderation: Content Fit as a Moderator

Hypothesis testing reported that Content Fit had a significant moderating effect on the connection between Influencer Credibility and the total Brand Awareness composite (average of Brand Recognition and Brand Recall). The interaction (CR x CF) term proved to be significant ($\beta = 0.141$, $t = 2.65$, $p = 0.009$) and proves the moderation hypothesis.

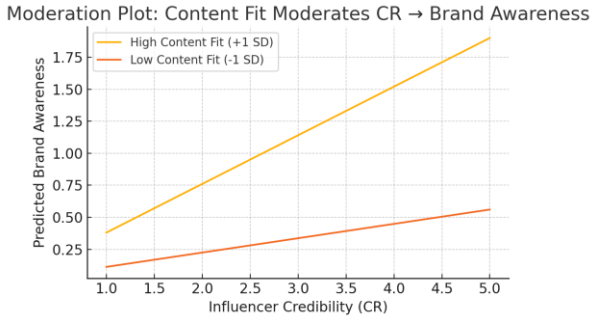

Figure 2. *The Moderating Effect of Content Fit (CF) on the Relationship Between Influencer Credibility (CR) and Brand Awareness.*

Brand Awareness was significantly influenced by Influencer Credibility when Content Fit was high (simple slope at +1 SD: $B = 0.380$, $p < 0.001$) than when Content Fit was low (simple slope at -1 SD: $B = 0.112$, $p = 0.285$). These were very important findings. Content Fit was established as an important boundary condition of the effective Source Credibility Theory. A very credible influencer (trusted, expert) was statistically irrelevant in raising brand awareness when he or she recommends a brand that his or her followers see as incongruent or a poor fit. This means that brands cannot just purchase credibility, they should make sure that they are aligned first.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Fit and Path Analysis

PLS-SEM was used to test the entire structural model at once to test the entire nomological network.

Model Fit and Predictive Power

The structural model established satisfactory global fit and effective predictive relevance. The Standardized Root Mean square Residual value (SRMR) was 0.071 which is lesser than the recommended value of 0.08 and therefore acceptable model fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.908, which is above the generally used norm of 0.90. Regarding predictive power, the model explained 32.5 percent ($R^2 = 0.325$) and 36.1 percent ($R^2 = 0.361$) of the variance in Brand Recognition and Brand Recall, respectively, which is a moderate predictive power. All these indices render the structural model statistically viable and able to make dependable inferences of predictions.

Path Analysis

Table 8 offers a final overview of each of the hypothetically proposed directions in the structural model.

Table 8. *Summary of Structural Model Hypothesis Testing*

	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Hypo. Result	Key Finding
H1a	CR→REC	0.145	2.61	0.009**	Supported	Credibility is a low-level cognitive driver.
H1b	CF→REC	0.218	3.95	0.000***	Supported	Strongest direct driver of recognition.
H2a	EN→REC	0.101	1.9	0.057	Not Supported	Engagement's direct effect is marginal.
H2b	AU→REC	0.055	0.88	0.379	Not Supported	Not needed for basic recognition.
H3a	CR→RCL	0.051	0.93	0.352	Not Supported	Credibility alone fails to drive deep recall.
H3b	CF→RCL	0.165	2.91	0.004**	Supported	Essential for both recognition and recall.
H4a	EN→RCL	0.225	4.21	0.000***	Supported	Strongest overall driver of mental availability.
H4b	AU→RCL	0.168	3.08	0.002**	Supported	Affective factor for deeper memory encoding.

The structural model gives clear response to the research objectives since it suggests that antecedents of Brand Recognition and Brand Recall vary significantly. The results are quite clear that brand awareness is not a single and homogeneous construct. Instead, the motivators of basic recognition and deeper recall follow different psychological processes.

Differentiated Awareness Processes: The result confirms that there are predictors, which affect Brand Recognition and Brand Recall. Content Fit and Influencer Credibility are the two main foundations of basic recognition, and relational and affective mechanisms, including Engagement and Authenticity, are more essential in deeper recall. Such a difference supports the thesis that awareness should be a multi-dimensional outcome and not a single measure.

Foundational Role of Content Fit: The only construct that significantly predicted Brand Recognition (β = 0.218) and Brand Recall (β = 0.165) was Content Fit. This places content-brand congruence as one of the essential needs of an influencer-based communication. Whether credible or emotionally connected, consumers react more when the content presented by the influencer is seen to be relevant to the brand field.

Limitations of Credibility:

Only Brand Recognition was significantly influenced by Influencer Credibility and not Brand Recall, which implies that there is a limit to the persuasive power of the credibility. This observation contradicts the classical focus of the Source Credibility Theory on credibility as the only driver of superficial attention to the effect that credibility does not produce deeper cognitive processing or memory.

Strength of Engagement and Authenticity: Engagement (β = 0.225) and Authenticity (β = 0.168) were the strongest predictors of Brand Recall. These findings highlight that a greater depth of retention is achieved when consumers engage with content and they feel real sincerity in the endorsement. The transition between exposure and recall that matters seems to be fuelled by psychological participation and emotional appeal.

Informative Non-Significant Paths: The non-significant paths, including the role of Authenticity on Brand Recognition are also significant. They imply that alone, authenticity is not enough to create basic recall-free recognition and, thus, should not be a key strategic focus in the case of the goal being only to gain surface-level visibility.

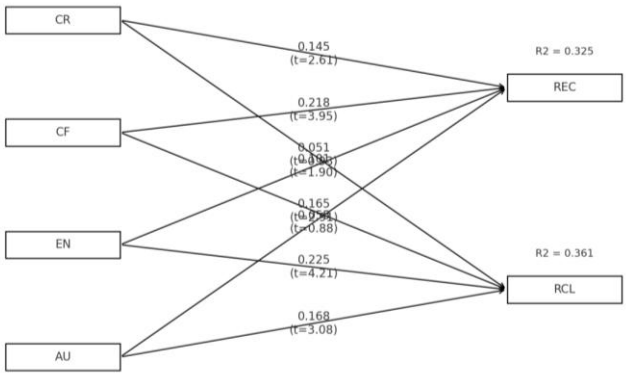

Figure 3. *PLS-SEM Structural Model*

2. DISCUSSION

The current research provides a strong empirical data to support the claim that the cognitive components of brand awareness including Brand Recognition and Brand Recall is conditioned by specific antecedents of influencer-marketing, as opposed to establishing a unified outcome. This subtle distinction takes a step further in advancing the literature by going beyond concepts of viewing awareness as a unitary construct and introducing the fact that recognition (bare noticing) and recall (meaningful memory) have to be treated independently when designing a campaign.

The formation of Content Fit as the sole predictor that has a significant effect on recognition (β = 0.218) and recall (β = 0.165) can be acknowledged as one of the most significant contributions of the study. This conclusion is consistent with the results of a meta-analysis by Pan et al. which has determined that the influencer brand fit is a stronger stimulus of consumer reaction than the number or simply credibility of followers (Pan, 2025). The moderation analysis further highlights that credibility is no longer effective in situations of low fit therefore showing that fit is an important boundary condition. This substantiates the literature call to move the emphasis on "who the influencer is" "to how well the content of the influencer fits the brand".

The greater effect of Engagement (β = 0.225) and Authenticity (β = 0.168) on Brand Recall shows the intensive psychological functioning. The behavioral interaction (liking, commenting, sharing) that is motivated by engagement promotes elaborative encoding of brand information into the memory stores of the consumers. This compares with the Renchen (2020) research results that correlate the presence of influencer-consumer contact with a solid brand recall and attitude development. The importance of authenticity on recall and non-recognition implies that perceived sincerity and trustworthiness enhances the processing and consolidation of memories, therefore, transcending the superficial processing to lasting memory. These findings are incompatible with a strictly heuristic account of the impact of influencers and, rather, they can be explained by a dual processing model: exposure (recognition) is primary; retention (recall) demands the involvement of active processing and emotional appeal.

Unlike the classical Source Credibility Theory, which assumes the expertise/trustworthiness to be the key factor in persuasive success, the current results demonstrate that Influencer Credibility is a contributing factor to Recognition and not Recall. Credibility in effect may attract attention but not retention. It is consistent with current review studies by Munir, 2025, which indicates that credibility serves as a signal during the priming exposure, but without congruence and interaction, it does not have enough power to prompt more profound cognitive consequences.

Taken together, the study substantiates a layered pathway, Content Fit → Attention (Recognition) → Engagement + Authenticity → Memory (Recall). Such a progressive logic is an intermediation between the superficially visible metrics of visibility and more profound memory results, and it offers a more unified influencer marketing

framework. In practice, this suggests that the campaign tactics are to be varied in terms of the level of desired awareness: when it is quick recognition, credibility along with reach might be the right choice; when long-term remembrance is the purpose, brands need to focus on content alignment, appeal to interaction, and demonstrate authenticity.

The study has limitations in spite of the contributions it has made. The cross-sectional design makes it impossible to make a causal inference over time. The longitudinal panel or experimental research design may be used in future studies to follow the decline or stabilization of brand recall. Furthermore, the sample was restricted to users of social-media who are millennials, future research could consider other groups or platforms. Moreover, although Content Fit was operationalised on a metrological level, more qualitative studies have the potential to unravel the dimensions (functional fit, image fit, narrative fit) on a more proficient level (Che, 2025).

3. CONCLUSION

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on influencer marketing by revealing that brand awareness is a differentiated construct and that the antecedents of this construct are different as well. The awareness centrepiece is Content Fit, whereas the impetus behind the memory (recall) is Engagement and Authenticity. Influencer Credibility is also relevant in initial recognition but is not the one that will lead to more profound brand memory. It places the concept of influencer marketing in a more demanding cognitive-behavioral context and provides practical advice to practitioners to go beyond exposure to meaningful brand imprint by providing an integrated structural model and empirical evidence. In the case of brands that address millennial consumers in the digital ecosystems, the strategic challenge is straightforward: make sure that the influencer brands are on the same page, engage with content, and convey the impression of authenticity in case the goal is not a short-term brand recognition, but the longevity of the brand presence...

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