Beyond the hype

A quantitative and comparative study about the efficacy of two types of influencers. Should start-ups and unknown brands use smaller and cheaper influencers or bigger and more expensive influencers?

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Bachelor Thesis
Stockholm School of Economics
2023

ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has grown in popularity making it crucial for firms to understand how they should optimize their influencer marketing campaigns. This is an even greater issue for parsimonious unknown brands who tend to have limited resources and, as such, might refrain from employing macro-influencers in their marketing campaigns. In fact, many researchers are now questioning the current consensus in the industry of using macro-influencers, instead stating that nano-influencers might be more effective. In this thesis, this shift from macro-influencer to nano-influencer is called into question. Should the use of nano-influencers be the new go-to-strategy for new and unknown brands in their instagram marketing initiatives? After conducting a survey with 174 social media users, this quantitative study pointed towards that unknown brands should use macro-influencers rather than nano-influencers. More specifically, macro-influencers were shown to elicit more positive brand attitudes and higher brand credibility. Brand attitude was shown to be mediated by influencer expertise and fit whereas brand credibility was shown to be mediated by influencer expertise.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Influencer marketing has grown in popularity which is reflected in the strong and exponential growth of influencer marketing spending (Valentina Dencheva, 2023). With the growth of the online world, firms acknowledge that partnerships with influencers can open the door to large potential audiences. As a result, companies actively collaborate with various influencers who, primarily and most noticeably, tend to differ in follower counts. On one extreme of the spectrum lies the smallest influencers, the nano-influencers, whereas on the other extreme lies the biggest influencers, the macro-influencers. In order to expose the brand to the largest possible customer group, the common consensus in the industry has been to collaborate with the largest influencers, so-called macro-influencers, who often demand a higher compensation for their ability to drive exposure. Consequently, start-ups and lesser known parsimonious brands have been faced with the difficult decision of choosing which type of influencer to collaborate with; an expensive macro-influencer or a myriad of cheaper nano-influencers. The difficulty in the decision lies in the uncertainty of the outcomes. Does the higher price tag of macro-influencers always mean that they are more effective? Should unknown brands employ macro-influencers or follow the shift in the industry and employ nano-influencers? How should a small brand operate in this competitive and saturated landscape?

According to Rundin and Colliander (2021), social media influencers (SMIs) are online personalities who influence their followers across one or more social media platforms. They have established credibility in a specific industry through their activity on social media (Brown and Hayes, 2008) and are seen as more credible and authentic than regular endorsers (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). SMIs strong influence on their followers has resulted in a lucrative marketing channel for brands. These brands often engage in paid collaborations, which are commonly realized in the form of sponsored content (De Veirman, Cauberghe et al., 2017). Sponsored content is when the influencer creates and publishes a product recommendation post on social media, and in return, receives compensation from the sponsoring brand (Stubb, Nyström et al., 2019). This has proved to be effective, where the

influencer's strong sway over its followers leads to successful sponsored campaigns. Consequently, influencer marketing has grown, giving rise to the recent emergence of new types of influencers. Thousands of different influencers are available, offering divergent topical interests, numbers of followers, and other characteristics (Swant, 2016). According to Kay, Mulcahy et al.(2020), there are several media-driven numerical classifications of influencers, most of which are based on the number of followers (Rundin and Colliander, 2021). Following the numerical classification by Campbell and Farrell (2020) reveals that there are two extremes of the spectrum. The influencers with the biggest followers counts are called macro-influencers whereas the influencers with the smallest follower counts are called nano-influencers.

Macro-influencers are known for their huge follower base with them being characterized by having over 1 million followers. These influencers have a longer reach due to their higher follower count but are yet to have reached a celebrity status. Their long reach allows them to drive brand exposure in marketing campaigns. Moreover, they are able to drive high engagement rates where they have a dominant position within a certain niche and their audience often aspire to be like them (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). Naturally, as a result of their high follower count, these influencers command a higher price tag (Godwin, 2018). In contrast to marcoinfluencers, nano-influencers are much smaller in size, having a small follower base of 1,000 to 10,000 followers (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). Their audience includes family, friends, and acquaintances, which makes them more engaging than other types of influencers (Balaji et al., 2021). This allows nano-influencer to form a tighter-knit community (Keng-Boon Ooi et al., 2023) consisting of followers in their close social proximity (Campbell and Farrell, 2020) which, in turn, allows them to be perceived as more authentic. Despite this, as a result of their smaller follower base, they tend to be less expensive in contrast to the larger macro-influencer (Balaji et al., 2021).

1.2 Current Issue & Purpose

As media consumption patterns change, from watching television, to now endlessly scrolling through instagram, influencers have become all the more popular. The growth of influencers has been sudden and explosive, with influencer marketing making up to 5% of the total online advertising market in 2020 (Haenlein et al., 2020). Brands are desperately seeking to

capitalize on influencers where collaborations with macro-influencers had long been the go-to strategy for brands. This is now changing as nano-influencers are slowly gaining more popularity (Balaji et al., 2021). Nevertheless, identifying appropriate influencers with a strong impact on their target audience still constitutes one of the biggest challenges for companies (De Veirman et al., 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to compare two types of influencers, nano-influencers and macro-influencers. More specifically, the study aims to compare the two types of influencers on their ability to positively influence brand attitude and brand credibility. Moreover, a comparison between the attitudes towards the two influencers is also made. These three aspects, brand credibility, brand attitude (Vidyanata and Hadiwidjojo, 2018), and influencer attitude (Jean et al. 2019), in turn, have a direct influence on purchase intention. Thus, more broadly, this study aims to measure the efficacy of the two influencers in an instagram unknown brand sponsored post.

1.3 Research Gaps & Contribution

1.3.1 Nano-influencers

While studies conducted on influencer marketing are plentiful, comparative studies between nano-influencers and macro-influencers are meagre. This is most likely as a result of the classification, nano-influencers, being relatively new with the term making its first appearance in an article by Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020). Thus, most researchers have focused on understanding nano-influencers by primarily studying it in a non-comparative context. Albeit, there are a few researchers who have compared the two influencers. Whereas Balaji et al. (2021) focused on investigating the effectiveness of nano-influencers in persuading consumers on social media platforms, Himelboim and Golan (2023) conducted a comparative study, comparing the role of nano-, micro-, and macro-influencers in showcasing brand commitment towards social causes. Similarly, Brewster and Lyu (2020) have conducted a comparative study on three types of influencers; nano-influencers, microinfluencers, and macro-influencers. In contrast to the study by Himelboim and Golan (2023), the study by Brewster and Lyu (2020) only focuses on the parasocial relationship between the different influencers. As such, they solely measure influencer credibility and brand attitude.

1.3.2 Micro-influencers & macro-influencers

Even though the field of nano-influencers requires further comparative studies, the more general field of influencer marketing has numerous comparative studies. Many of these comparative studies center around comparing microinfluencers with macro-influencers. For example, Janssen et al. (2021) investigated how product-influencer fit and number of followers together affect endorsement effectiveness on the social media plattform, Instagram. Moreover, Gross and Wangenheim (2022) investigated how SMIs' follower count influences the effects of advertising appeals on engagement with sponsored posts, once again, deciding to focus on micro-and macro-influencers. Lastly, De Veirman, Cauberghe et al.(2017) investigate the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude, by making a comparative study between micro-and macro-influencers.

The current study contributes to research in 2 major aspects. Firstly, by solely focusing on unknown parsimonious brands, this study takes on a unique perspective resulting in a unique and novel contribution to current research within the field of influencer marketing. Secondly, by measuring the efficacy of the two different influencers on variables such as brand attitude, influencer attitude, and brand credibility, this study aims to capture purchase intention indirectly rather than directly, which the authors believe would give less deceiving results.

1.4 Scope

The scope of the study is limited to investigating which influencer, a nano- or macro-influencer, is more effective in eliciting higher levels of influencer attitude, brand attitude and brand credibility. These variables were chosen due to their direct impact on purchase intention. Therefore, the study is, firstly, limited in the aspect that it does not measure purchase intention directly. Purchase intention is not measured directly since the fictional scenario gives rise to certain uncontrollable factors which hinder from accurately capturing purchase intention. As such, purchase intention is measured indirectly through other, so-called mediating variables. The variables influencer attitude, brand attitude, and brand credibility have their own respective mediators. The study aims to capture these mediating variables but is limited to only capturing the most relevant and significant mediators. Hence, the second limitation to the study occurs due to the complexity attached with capturing all possible mediators to influencer attitude, brand attitude, and brand credibility. Lastly, the scope of the study only encompasses the effects on a single social

media platform, instagram. This platform was chosen due to it being the most popular platform for influencer marketing (Janssen, P. Schouten et al., 2021). Hence, the last limitation to the study pertains to the social media platform.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Identification Theory

An array of research has been conducted regarding the subject of influencer endorsements and its effect on consumer behavior. Research has shown that identification might be a critical factor underlying celebrity endorsers' effects on consumer behavior. Basil (1996) discovered that a spokesperson with whom the audience identifies with ensures the greatest likelihood of achieving increased adoption of those messages resulting in lasting attitude or behavior change.

Scholars have suggested that the effectiveness of celebrity advertising can be attributed to the process of social influence (Kamins et al., 1989). Kelman (1961) identified three processes that facilitated the potential that an individual will accept influence from another person or group. Of these processes, identification is particularly applicable to the topic of celebrity endorsements. Identification is a process that significantly impacts how effective advertisement messages are and occurs when an individual tries to look like a certain person through imitation, therefore adopting the behavior of that person in order to boost his/her self-image. Identification is, therefore, defined as a form of establishing identity since the identification process occurs when a person forms or maintains an identity associated with a celebrity endorser. Thus, when a consumer tries to adopt the meanings or images presented by the endorser, they engage in an identification process. Consequently, when consumers identify with a celebrity, they are more likely to buy the products they endorse, hoping to adopt their lifestyle and values (McCracken, 1989; Amos, Holmes et al. 2008). It is through the process of identification that celebrity endorsements achieve their effectiveness.

Traditional celebrity endorsers are being replaced by social media influencers for marketing communications purposes. Previous research has indicated that social media can aid in identification, albeit primarily with celebrities (Click et al., 2013). Nevertheless, previous studies on influencers, such as Colliander and Dahlen (2011) have indeed equated influencers to media characters suggesting that it is possible for followers to identify with influencers in a similar manner. According to Janssen et al. (2021), consumers feel more similar to influencers than celebrities and, consequently, identify themselves more with influencers. Unlike celebrities, influencers are shown to be perceived as more authentic (Chapple and

Cownie, 2017) as well as perceived as more approachable (Djaforova and Rushworth, 2017). By addressing their followers directly in their posts, influencers foster a sense of closeness that makes fans feel like peers (Erz and Christensen, 2018).

One could argue that nano-influencers are perceived as having more relatable lives to the average follower. They are seen as a more genuine and authentic representation of followers' lives. This, in contrast to macro-influencers who often possess a higher social status and are seen as living lavish lifestyles. This can partly be attributed to the fact that nano-influencers are more geographically and socially similar to their followers, as well as their lives being perceived as more realistic and relatable compared to macro-influencers (Colliander, Unpublished). Consequently, given that the perceived similarity between the influencer and the follower plays a crucial role in fostering identification which, as stated, elicits more positive attitudes (Basil, 1996), the following hypothesis can be developed:

H1a: *The use of nano-influencers elicits more positive influencer attitudes than macro-influencers.*

On the other hand, De Veirman et al. (2017) analyzed the impact of influencers' follower count on attitudes toward the influencer and the advertised brand. The number of followers positively affected the influencer's likability through perceived popularity and opinion leadership. In other words, the follower count signals popularity and opinion leadership. This allows a similar yet contradicting hypothesis to be developed.

H1b: *The use of macro-influencers elicits more positive influencer attitudes than nano-influencers.*

2.2 Signal Theory

Signal theory is defined as addressing the information asymmetry that persists between the sender and the receiver. Information asymmetry persists due to companies having a better understanding of the quality of their products in comparison to their consumers. This creates

a need for market mechanisms that enable companies to credibly inform consumers about the quality of their products.

The signaling process itself addresses this through increased information sharing, developing familiarity between the parties, as well as promoting connection. More specifically, “signals” are used as a mechanism to bridge the gap between consumers and companies, thus, solving problems that arise under asymmetric information sharing (Scott and White, 2016). Different signals can be transmitted to consumers to communicate the quality of the products. These signals can be derived from activities, or variables, such as advertising, branding, retailer reputation, advertising expenditure, and perceived brand effort to name a few. These variables play a critical role in the consumers' buying process since they, in tandem, facilitate the adoption of diverse heuristic and behavioral patterns that consumers utilize. Thereby, the variables ease the process of product and brand selection. Therefore, marketing decisions need to be carefully considered since the efforts/initiatives pursued serve as a form of signals to customers, conveying the company's promises and commitments (Kirmani and R.Rao, 2000).

One heuristic that can potentially be used by social media users is the following count of an influencer. When an influencer has a larger following count, consumers likely believe the influencer is a valid and reliable message sender, ascribing greater source credibility to them (Leung, Gu et al. 2022). The larger number of followers of macro-influencers could thus signal their expertise and credibility which according to, Wu and Wang (2011), results in higher attitudes towards the brand.

H2a1: *The use of macro-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise.*

H2a2: *The use of macro-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*

However, nano-influencers have a tighter-knit community (Keng-Boon Ooi et al., 2023) consisting of followers in their close social proximity (Campbell and Farrell, 2020) as well as

often being seen as more authentic. This results in an audience niche where the nano-influencers might be perceived as having more expertise in their specific niche. Moreover, due to their close relation to their audience, they might be perceived as more credible. In line with the findings from Wu and Wang (2011), expertise and credibility should elicit more positive brand attitudes which allows the following hypothesis to be developed:

H2b1: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise.*

H2b2: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*

In continuation, the use of bigger and more expensive influencers can signal the higher advertising expense and brand effort. According to Kirmani and Wright (1989), advertising expense is an indicator of marketing effort which. Naturally, the use of a macro-influencer should signal higher advertising expense, which, in turn, should result in higher perceptions of brand effort. Higher-perceived expense and effort has a positive impact on brand attitudes, brand interest, and word-of-mouth (Modig, Dahlen et al., 2014). This allows the following hypothesis to be developed:

H2a3: *The use of macro-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by brand effort*

On the other hand, it is also possible to hypothesize that the use of nano-influencers will elicit higher perceived brand effort, which could further elicit higher brand attitude. According to Dahlén, Rosengren et al. (2008), there are many facets of brand effort, one of them being creativity. The authors state that creativity in marketing campaigns can, amongst other factors, signal higher brand effort. A nano-influencer is not as well-known and might require some degree of creativity in the form of thinking outside of conventional macro-influencers. As mentioned, higher perceived brand effort has a positive impact on brand attitudes (Modig, Dahlen et al., 2014). This allows yet another hypothesis to be developed.

H2b3: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by brand effort.*

2.3 Source credibility

In one of the foundational works that has framed most studies within the subject of credibility, source credibility is posited to consist of perceptions of source trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland, Janis et al., 1953). Credible sources are more effective in persuading people than non-credible sources, and credibility, as mentioned, can be established through expertise and trustworthiness.

In terms of source credibility, expertise is defined as how well an individual knows about a product (Hovland et al. 1953). Trustworthiness, on the other hand, is based on the source's perceived honesty, objectivity, and lack of bias. In the context of marketing and advertising, source credibility theory has important implications for the use of celebrity influencers, as discussed in the study by Scheinbaum and Wang (2018). The authors of the study found that trustworthiness is the most important factor in enhancing brand credibility through celebrity endorsement followed by expertise. More importantly, Scheinbaum and Wang (2018) show the various facets of source credibility and its important role in fostering brand credibility.

Thus, influencer expertise and influencer credibility are both hypothesized to have a mediating effect on brand credibility.

There are numerous reasons as to why nano-influencers might elicit higher brand credibility. Firstly, nano-influencers tend to have a more defined niche, which, as mentioned, can enhance their perceived expertise in a specific area. Through mediation, influencer expertise is expected to positively impact brand credibility. Apart from this, nano-influencers have a tighter-knit community (Keng-Boon Ooi et al., 2023) consisting of followers in their close social proximity (Campbell and Farrell, 2020) and are often perceived as more authentic. All of which play a contributing role in potentially increasing influencer and source credibility and, in turn, brand credibility.

H3b1: *The use of nano-influencer elicits higher brand credibility than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise*

H3b2: *The use of nano-influencer elicits higher brand credibility than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*

On the other hand, connecting aspects of signal theory with source credibility allows a different hypothesis to be developed with regards to brand credibility. As mentioned, one heuristic that can potentially be used by social media users is the follower count of an influencer. Thus, when an influencer has a larger following count, consumers likely believe the influencer is a valid and reliable message sender, ascribing greater source credibility to them (Leung, Gu et al. 2022). Consequently, the high follower count of a macro-influencer can be used as a heuristic resulting in higher perceptions of expertise and credibility in contrast to the smaller nano-influencer. This, in turn, through the previously mentioned mediators, signals brand credibility. This allows the following hypothesis to be developed:

H3a1: *The use of macro-influencers signals higher brand credibility than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise.*

H3a2: *The use of macro-influencers signals higher brand credibility than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*

2.4 Fit Theory

Fit theory, which is also known as match-up theory, is a key concept in influencer marketing that suggests that the effectiveness of an influencer's promotion or endorsement of a brand is heavily influenced by how well the influencer and the brand are matched. Previous research has noted that the perceived fit between the endorser and the promoted product is essential for achieving successful results in the context of influencer advertising (Breves, Liebers et al., 2019). Fit theory can be applied to influencer marketing by examining the congruence between the characteristics of the brand and the influencer. There are three dimensions of fit that brands should take into account when selecting influencers; brand fit, personnel fit and

audience fit. Brand fit refers to how well the influencers content harmonizes with the values and image of the brand, personnel fit involves the influencers personality and lifestyle and lastly audience fit pertains to the relevance of the influencers followers and the intended target audience of the brand.

It is important for brands, and especially new brands to carefully consider the fit between the brand and the influencer when selecting influencers for their marketing campaign. Academic studies indeed show that a good fit between the characteristics of the influencer and the product and/or brand it endorses is an important determinant of endorsement effectiveness. According to Breves, Liebers et al. (2019), brand-influencer fit is demonstrated to positively influence consumers' attitudes toward the brand. This points towards a possible mediating role of brand-influencer fit on brand attitude.

As mentioned, nano-influencers have a follower base consisting of followers in social and geographical proximity to the influencer. This gives the nano-influencers a niche audience. Similarly, an unknown brand tends to be geographically constrained. Moreover, they tend to have few product offerings resulting in them having a niche audience. Through audience fit, the use of a nano-influencer is likely to result in higher brand fit which, through mediation, will elicit higher brand attitudes.

H2b4: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by brand-influencer fit.*

On the other hand, a macro-influencer might have a higher perceived fit with the unknown brand due to its ability to complement the unknown brand, thus creating a good fit. For example, the use of a macro-influencer, due to the large following base, will generate higher awareness of the unknown brand than the use of a nano-influencer. This logical reasoning might result in higher perceptions of brand-influencer fit between a macro-influencer and an unknown brand.

H2a4: *The use of macro-influencer elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by brand-influencer fit.*

H1a: *The use of macro-influencer elicits more positive influencer attitudes than nano-influencers*
H1b: *The use of nano-influencer elicits more positive influencer attitudes than macro-influencers*

H2a1: *The use of macro-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise.*
H2a2: *The use of macro-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*
H2a3: *The use of macro-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by brand effort*
H2a4: *The use of macro-influencer elicits higher brand attitude than nano-influencers, mediated by brand-influencer fit.*

H2b1: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise.*
H2b2: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*
H2b3: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by brand effort*
H2b4: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by brand-influencer fit.*

H3a1: *The use of macro-influencers signals higher brand credibility than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise.*
H3a2: *The use of macro-influencers signals higher brand credibility than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*

H3b1: *The use of nano-influencer elicits higher brand credibility than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise*

H3b2: *The use of nano-influencer elicits higher brand credibility than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility.*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

A qualitative study was conducted in order to establish the cause-and-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables. More specifically, an experimental study was deemed to be suitable in order to truly capture the causation between the variables. Therefore, an experiment was conducted with the purpose of resembling an actual paid promotion by an unknown brand. This study stems from a deductive approach where previous research papers and established theories are used in the formulation of the hypotheses and survey questions.

3.1.1 Choice of subject area

Influencer marketing is a growing marketing approach adopted by both well-established, known brands as well as smaller, less well-known brands. In recent years, the field of influencer marketing has become all the more relevant. As a result, influencer marketing has garnered attention from researchers who have compiled their findings into research papers, articles, and books. A common denominator amongst the findings seems to be the lack of a focus on firm-specific circumstances. Therefore, the interest and choice of subject area stems from the will to provide smaller, less well-known and parsimonious firms with relevant finings, thus allowing them to thrive in a competitive landscape. Moreover, the scant collection of research papers that do compare influencer types show conflicting results. For example, whereas the results from the study by Hughes et al. (2019) suggest that bigger influencers are better at driving engagement, the results from the study by Wies et al. (2022) suggest that mid-size influencers drive more engagement. This ambiguity in the results amongst research papers that compare influencer types has further induced curiosity and interest in studying the subject further. The overlapping and, at times, contradicting results have led to a slightly excessive amount of hypotheses in the current study. This was done purposefully since by hypothesizing about a broader set of outcomes, the current study can more easily support or undermine the results from previous studies.

3.2 Research design

The experiential study was conducted through a survey which was divided into four sections; A) Screening questions, B) Introduction to the fictional scenario C) Manipulation check and

D) Survey questions. The order of the questions were decided as to avoid any confusion and unwanted respondent bias.

3.2.1 Variables and mediators

The study contains one independent variable, three dependent variables and four mediators. In the conducted study, the independent variables are the amount of followers an influencer has. The study aims to measure the causation of the independent variable on the dependent variables, which are the brand attitude, influencer attitude, and brand credibility. These dependent variables were chosen due to their direct influence on purchase intention. Hence, rather than measuring purchase intention directly, it is measured indirectly. Purchase intention was measured indirectly since measuring purchase intention directly gives rise to uncontrollable factors that might affect the results. More specifically, purchase intention is more strongly influenced by factors outside the scope of the study, such as the advertised product rather than the use of the influencer. As such, it was deemed more appropriate to measure purchase intention indirectly.

Moving on, previously conducted research on these dependent variables point towards mediating effects on the dependent variables. Therefore, the current study aims to identify and analyze the most relevant mediators. The mediators in the study are influencer expertise, influencer credibility, brand effort, and lastly, fit (*See figure 1 and figure 2)*.

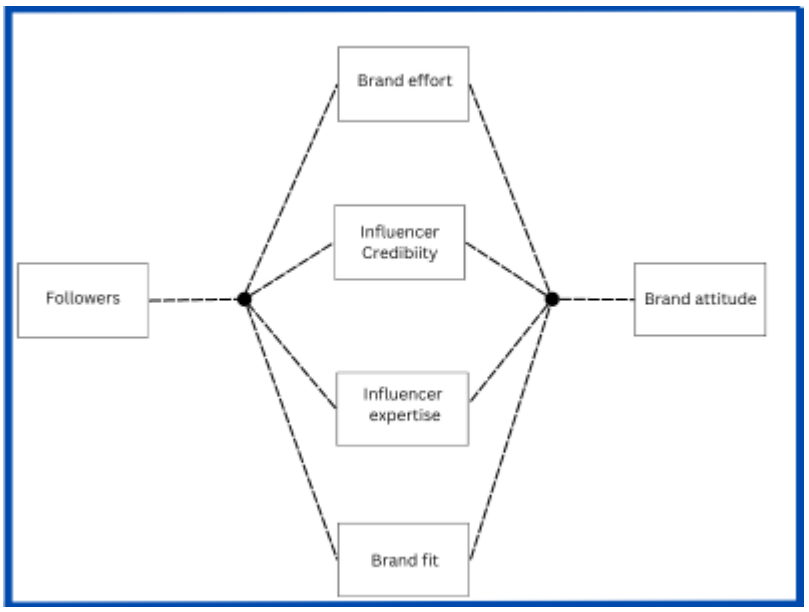

Figure 1: The independent variable (to the left) and the dependent variable (to the right). The relationship is mediated by the mediators (in the middle)

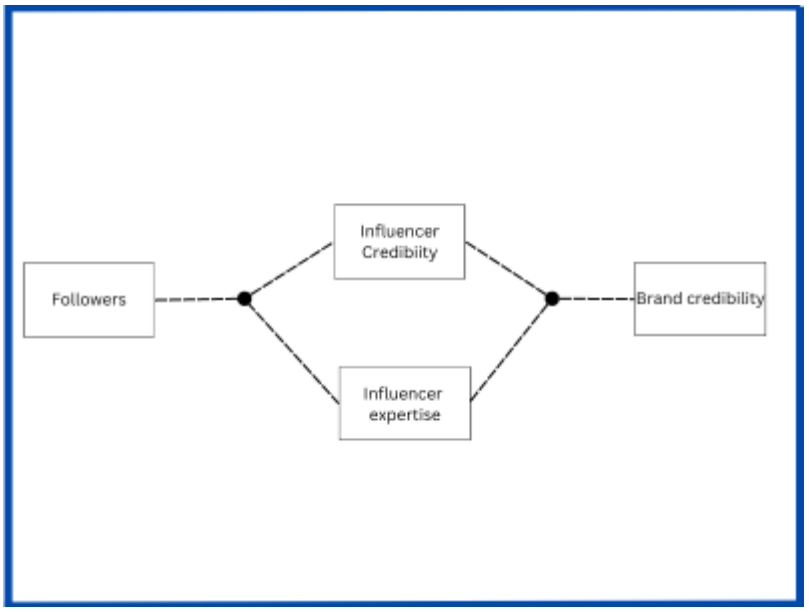

Figure 2: The independent variable (to the left) and the dependent variable (to the right). The relationship is mediated by the mediators (in the middle)

3.2.2 Introduction and Screening question

The survey started off by providing a brief introduction to the respondents where the reason behind the survey was revealed (*See appendix 1)*. Furthermore, the introduction aimed to emphasize anonymity and attentiveness when answering the survey. Thereafter, the first screening question was provided which measured the usage of instagram, allowing for a filtration of respondents who do not use instagram regularly. Regularity was defined as a couple times a month or more. This vague definition was purposefully created in order to allow each respondent the ability to answer truthfully yet ephemerally. The respondent could solely respond with a *YES* and a *NO*. The respondents who answered *NO* to the first screening question were disregarded to allow for a rightful understanding of the relationship between the dependent and independent variable. The second screening question was a control question presented at the end of the survey with the purpose of measuring the attentiveness of the respondents. When asking "*What was the survey about"* the respondent was presented with 3 choices *A) Influencer, B) Astronaut, and C) Race-car*. By constructing the question in the aforementioned way, all the respondents who answered the survey with attentiveness should comfortably be able to answer correctly. Those who answered incorrectly did not contribute with providing rightful answers and thus, their answers were disregarded.

3.2.3 Fictive scenario

The fictive scenario is a recreation of a real paid collaboration between a completely unknown and made-up brand and either a nano- or a macro-influencer (*See appendix 2-5)*. Thus, the respondents have an equal possibility of seeing one of two scenarios; A) A paid collaboration between the unknown brand and a macro-influencer and B) A paid collaboration between the unknown brand and a nano-influencer. The respondents are asked to imagine that they are scrolling through instagram when they suddenly encounter the campaign. Throughout the scenarios, it is emphasized that the brand is unknown. This is done in order to hinder the respondents from making any incorrect brand associations, allowing the authors to truly capture the effects of an unknown brand. A lack of emphasis could place the study at a risk of being incorrect. This is since even though the brand is a fictitious brand, the respondents may incorrectly assume that it is not and might falsely confuse the unknown brand with another, perhaps well-known brand. Each scenario also had a short description of

the influencer in order to capture the respective strengths and weaknesses of each marketing approach. Naturally, the description of the influencers differed.

Macro-influencer

In order for the respondents to understand the influence and size of the macro-influencer, the influencer was described as having an impeccable and trendy fashion sense which garnered the influencer a massive following often receiving thousands of likes and comments on each post (*See appendix 4)*.

Nano-influencer

Nano-influencers differ from macro-influencer in numerous ways, the most significant and noticeable being the size of the influencers. As stated, the small following of the nanoinfluencers tend to consist of friends and family. Therefore, it was deemed important to emphasize this aspect in the description of the nano-influencer. In turn, the respondent was asked to imagine that they were acquainted with the nano-influencer, either directly or indirectly through mutual friends. Despite the small size of the nano-influencer, the influencer was, similarly to the macro-influencer, described as having an impeccable and trendy fashion trend. This is since all the aspects that are not affected by the type of influencer (Nano vs. macro) should be kept constant throughout both scenarios in order to turley capture the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (*See appendix 2)*.

Lastly, the last two sentences of the fictitious scenario were dedicated to clarifying that the answers shall be based on first impressions and spontaneous thoughts. This is since the pre-study revealed that respondents had a difficulty with understanding how to answer the questions. By explaining that the questions are purposefully ambiguous and that the survey should be solely answered based on first impressions and spontaneous thoughts, the difficulty and confusion with answering the survey was eliminated.

3.2.4 Choice of product

Each scenario uses the same product, crocs. This product was chosen after careful consideration. This is necessary since, a low product engagement from the respondent places the study results at a risk of being affected by the lack of need of, and engagement with the product. This, in turn, gives rise to uncontrollable factors which may result in the study not truly serving its purpose as a comparative study between a nano-influencer and a

macro-influencer. More specifically, two aspects of the product were carefully considered. Firstly, the authors deemed it important for the product to be unisex in order to capture product engagement and, in turn, truthful answers from both genders. Secondly, the product choice was based on hedonic characteristics, this in order to facilitate the respondents ability to answer the survey by creating stronger engagement with the product. In contrast, if a product with utilitarian characteristics was chosen, the answers would be situational based with most of the respondents having a difficulty with placing themselves in the scenario and truthfully answering the questions unless they have a need for the product. In turn, this could result in a low score for certain questions, such as brand attitude, irrespective of which influencer the respondent sees.

3.3 Data collection

The sample consisted of 279 respondents where the responses were collected in two primary ways. Firstly, the survey was distributed through various social media platforms. These channels consisted of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Linkedin. The respondents acquired through these channels, therefore, consisted of respondents from the authors own personal network. Distributing the survey through various social media channels was deemed to be reasonable since it allowed for a greater probability of respondents who use the social media platform Instagram. Secondly, the survey was distributed in various universities where the authors walked around with a QR-code which, when scanned, led the respondent directly to the survey. The universities where the survey was distributed consisted of Stockholms universitet, Karolinska institutet, and Kungliga Tekniska högskolan. This method of data collection was deemed reasonable since this respondent group primarily consists of young and tech-savvy individuals who likely use social media platforms such as Instagram.

3.4 Research method

3.4.1 Pre-study

Before the survey was distributed, a pre-test was conducted. This pre-test served the purpose of, firstly, investigating whether there were any faults and gaps in the survey. The pre-test, after questioning a small portion of the respondents, revealed that the survey was perceived as being confusing and hard to answer. Therefore, changes were made to the survey where a more detailed and clear description of the influencer was adopted. Moreover, as mentioned, certain words and phrases were added and repeated throughout the survey in order to provide

the respondent with a clearer understanding of how to answer the questions. Secondly, the pre-test aimed to measure the efficacy of the manipulated variable through a question serving as a manipulation check. This manipulation check occurred directly after the fictitious scenario with a question following a 10-point scale. The question: How *many followers did the influencer have*? (1=few and 10=many) showed a positive result. After the small changes were implemented, the survey was deemed to be suitable and was used in the main study.

3.4.2 Measurements

All questions presented in the survey follow the 7-point likert scale with certain exceptions. Firstly, the first screening question did not follow a likert scale since the purpose of the question was solely to measure whether the respondent uses instagram. Secondly, the manipulation check was based on a 10-point scale rather than 7 point likert scale. This was since the authors believed that a 10-point scale was more representative of the large difference between a nano-influencer and a macro-influencer. Lastly, the last screening question (control question) did not follow a likert scale since the purpose of the question was to, in a simple manner, measure the attentiveness of the respondents. All the questions on a 7 point likert scale are derived from previous peer-reviewed studies.

Attitudes

After the introduction, the first screening question, the scenario, and the manipulation check, the respondent is asked to answer questions regarding the influencer and brand attitude. Following the 7-point likert scale and in line with peer-reviewed literature (Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989), the brand attitude was measured with 3 items: “My impression of the crocs brand is good”, “My impression of the crocs brand is pleasant” and “My impression of the crocs brand is favourable”. The influencer attitude was measured similarly with the 3 items being “My impression of the influencer is good”, “My impression of the influencer is pleasant” and “My impression of the influencer is favourable”.

Brand and influencer congruence/fit

Brand and influencer congruence/fit was measured with 6 items: “The influencer has a good match with the crocs brand”, “The compatibility between the influencer and the crocs brand is high”, “The alignment between the influencer and the crocs brand is high”, “The influencer and the crocs brand have a high fit”, “It makes sense for the brand behind the crocs to collaborate with this influencer”, and “It is logical for the brand behind the crocs to

collaborate with this influencer". The items were amended from Belanche, Casaló et al. (2021).

Brand and influencer credibility

Brand credibility was measured using 3 items: "The crocs brand is credible", "The crocs brand is believable", and "The crocs brand is honest". Similarly, influencer credibility was measured using 3 items: "The influencer is credible", "The influencer is believable", and "The influencer is honest". The items were altered from Colliander & Marder (2017).

Influencer expertise

"The influencer is an expert in their field", "The influencer has great knowledge", and "The influencer provides references based on their expertise" were the 3 items used to measure influencer expertise. These items were adapted from Youssef and Lebdaoui (2020).

Perceived effort

Lastly, perceived effort was measured using 3 items: "The crocs brand devotes much effort to its advertising", "The crocs brand devotes great resources to its advertising" and "The crocs brand devotes time and energy to its advertising". The items were adopted from Dahlen et al. (2020).

3.4.3 Reliability of the Study

Söderlund (2005) suggests that when evaluating a study, it is important to consider its reliability and quality as well as any measurement errors that occurred randomly or systematically. In order to do so, the concepts of reliability and internal and external validity is used which provides a framework for evaluating the reliability and generalizability of the findings of the study.

Reliability

Reliability is examined in order to concur whether the results and findings of the study would remain the same or similar over multiple attempts, in other words, how reliable the results are. To control for reliability, the internal consistency of the questions were tested using Cronbach Alpha and, in line with Söderlund, values above 0.7 were considered acceptable. Multiple-choice measures have been used to create reliability where internal consistency has been ensured using Cronbach's Alpha (Söderlund, 2005). A summary of Cronbach Alpha is

presented below. In order to assure good reliability, the authors of the study utilized previously validated and reliable questionnaires from similar studies, with minor adjustments when warranted in order to ensure that the questions conformed to the intended purpose of the study.

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Brand attitude	0.887	3
Brand credibility	0.885	3
Influencer attitude	0.951	3
Fit	0.921	6
Brand effort	0.813	3
Influencer expertise	0.910	3
Influencer credibility	0.892	3

Furthermore, one manipulation check question was asked as well as a two control question in order to ensure that respondents understood the survey's stimuli as well as had the ability to correctly and truthfully answer the questions. Lastly, respondents who failed the control question, respondents that finished the survey in less than 100 seconds, and respondents that failed to identify what the survey was investigating or did not use social media regularly were excluded to obtain good reliability.

Validity

Validity pertains to the validity and quality of the study as well as whether the study is actually measuring what it set out to measure. Validity is essential for making sure that the study as been conducted rigorously and that the results are meaningful (Berntsson et al., 2016)

Internal validity

In order to check how likely or plausible the results from the study are, internal validity is used. The internal validity is strengthened through the use of previously validated and reliable questions in the specific research area in combination with the use of the ten-point and seven-point Likert scale. Moreover, the survey was designed to portray a realistic scenario,

and in order to accurately compare the effectiveness of a macro- and nano-influencers the follower count was used as a basis for which the respondents should evaluate the influencers, keeping all other aspects constant as well as reducing any subjective preferences by using a unknown fictitious brand name.

External validity

In order to check whether the results could be generalized and, thus, applied to the entire population, external validity needs to be ensured. To control for external validity, the significant level was used, and a threshold of 5 % ($p < 0.05$) was chosen as acceptable in order to determine if the results of the various statistical tests conducted could be assumed to be generalizable to the entire population.

4. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

4.1 The Dependent variables

First and foremost, as mentioned, the survey consisted of two control questions. The first control question was designed with the purpose of solely capturing responses from respondents that use instagram regularly. The respondents that do not use instagram regularly were excluded from the analysis (N=48) Secondly, yet another control question was conducted in order to solely capture responses from attentive respondents. The respondents that were not attentive when answering the survey were excluded from the analysis, and respondents who either did not fully finish the survey or finished it in less than 100 seconds were excluded (N=72). Moreover, a manipulation check was conducted in order to control whether the independent variables, namely, the influencer size, was perceived correctly. The manipulation check revealed that the group that was exposed to the macro-influencers perceived it as having more followers ($M_{Followers}$= 7.74) than the group exposed to the nano-influencer ($M_{Followers}$= 3.89), t = 11.668, $p < 0.01$.

The study is divided into 2 major parts. In the first part, two independent sample t-tests are conducted. This part of the study aims to test hypothesis 1 together with partially testing hypothesis 2 and 3. With partially it is meant that solely the first part of each respective hypothesis is tested. In other words, solely the differences in the dependent variables for the two influencer types are tested, thus excluding the mediating effects. In turn, the mediating effects (hypothesis 2 and 3) are tested in the second part of the study by calculating a serial moderated mediation model with PROCESS Macro 4.2 (Hayes, 2018).

As mentioned, an independent sample t-test was conducted in order to test if there is a difference in the study's dependent variables (Brand attitude, brand credibility and influencer attitude) based on whether respondents were exposed to the nano-influencer or the macro-influencer (*see table 1*).

	Macro-influencer (N=89)	Nano-influencer (N=85)	*p*-value	*SD*
Brand attitude	$M = 4.56$	$M = 3.66$	$p < 0.05$	*Macro = 1.38* *Nano = 1.30*
Brand credibility	$M = 4.97$	$M = 3.97$	$p < 0.05$	*Macro = 1.16* *Nano = 1.23*
Influencer attitude	$M = 4.33$	$M = 3.99$	$p > 0.05$	*Macro = 1.40* *Nano = 1.36*

Table 1: Comparison of the mean values of the dependent variables between the two influencers

The results show that the use of a macro-influencer elicited a higher brand attitude and brand credibility. The macro-influencer also elicited higher influencer attitude but since this result is non-significant, this result had to be disregarded. This allows us to reject any hypothesis concerning influencer attitude since no conclusion can confidently be drawn. In order to accept and further reject any of the remaining hypotheses, the mediation relationship has to be investigated further.

Consequently, an independent sample t-test was conducted on the hypothesized mediators, once again, investigating the mean results based on whether respondents were exposed to the nano-influencer or the macro-influencers (*see table 2*).

	Macroinfluencer (N=89)	Nanoinfluencer (N=85)	P-value	SD
Fit	5.39	4.26	$p < 0.05$	*Macro = 1.35* *Nano = 1.49*
Brand effort	4.47	3.23	$P < 0.05$	*Macro =1.63* *Nano =1.52*
Influencer expertise	3.86	3.04	$P < 0.05$	*Macro =1.52* *Nano =1.37*
Influencer credibility	3.94	4.24	$P > 0.05$	*Macro =1.43* *Nano =1.46*

The result shows that the use of a macro-influencer in an instagram campaign results in higher perceptions of brand and influencer fit, brand effort, and influencer expertise. Due to the results of the mean-value of influencer credibility being non-significant, no reliable comparison can be made between macro-and nano-influencers in terms of the perceived influencer credibility.

4.2 The Mediators

As mentioned, in the second part of the study the mediating effects were tested. In order to identify the possible presence of mediating variables in a regression model, a serial moderated mediation model (*see table 3-6*) was calculated with PROCESS Macro 4.2 (Hayes, 2018). All of the reported regression coefficients were unstandardized and the bootstrapping method (m = 10 000) was employed.

4.2.1 Mediators on Brand Credibility

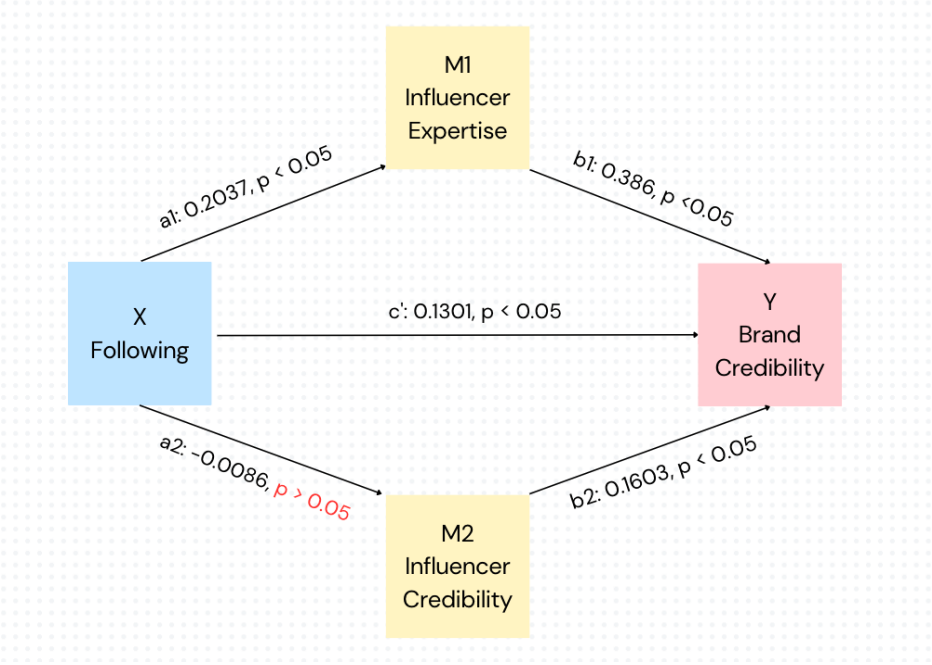

Diagram 1

To begin with, each individual relationship needs to be identified and analyzed. In other words, the relationships a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2, and c' need to be identified and analyzed. In the diagram, a_1 and a_2 show the relationship between the independent variable (follower count) and the mediators (Influencer expertise, shown by a_1 and Influencer credibility, shown by a_2).

The relationship a_1 shows a positive coefficient value of 0.20 ($p < 0.05$). The relationship a_2 resulted in a negative coefficient which shows that a higher follower count results in a lower perceived influencer credibility. Although, due to the large *p*-value, no reliable conclusions can be drawn regarding the mediating effects of influencer credibility.

Moving on, the relationship b_1 (the relationship between Influencer Expertise and Brand Credibility) was analyzed. The results indicate a coefficient of 0.39 ($p < 0.05$). Lastly, the direct relationship between the independent and dependent variable , C', was analyzed. This shows a coefficient of 0.13, and hence, further strengthening the possible role of mediators.

After establishing each of the individual relationships individually, the mediating relationship had to be analyzed more holistically. This is done by analyzing the indirect effect of the independent variable, follower count, on the dependent variable, brand credibility. This is done by excluding the direct relationship between the follower count and brand credibility, and instead analyzing the remaining relationships in combination. As mentioned, influencer credibility is excluded from the analysis, thus, only the mediating role of influencer expertise is analyzed. Analyzing the whole relationship from A1 to B1 together, rather than separately as previously done, shows that influencer expertise (M1), had a coefficient of 0.0788. Since the bootstrap interval was higher than 0 for both the lower and upper confidence interval, it can be assumed that the results are significant at the alpha level of 0.05. All in all, it can be reliably concluded that influencer expertise has a partial mediating effect on the dependent variable, brand credibility. The results are summarized in the tables below.

(Y) Brand Credibility	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect of X on Y	0.2075	0.0300	6.9202	.0000	.1483	.2666

Table 3

Indirect Effect(s) of X on Y	Effect	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Total	0.0774	0.0378	0.1216

M1: Influencer Expertise	0.0778	0.0448	0.1185
M2: Influencer Credibility	-0.0014	-0.0140	0.0136

Table 4

To provide more depth to the analysis, an effect size is calculated. This is done by dividing the indirect effect of the independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (Y) with the total effect of the independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (total effect of X on Y / indirect effect of X on Y = 0.2075 / 0.0788). The results show that the independent variable (follower count) directly accounts for 62 % of the variation in the dependent variable. The remaining impact on the dependent variable of 38 % occurs indirectly, through a mediator, influencer expertise.

4.2.2 Meditators on Brand Attitude

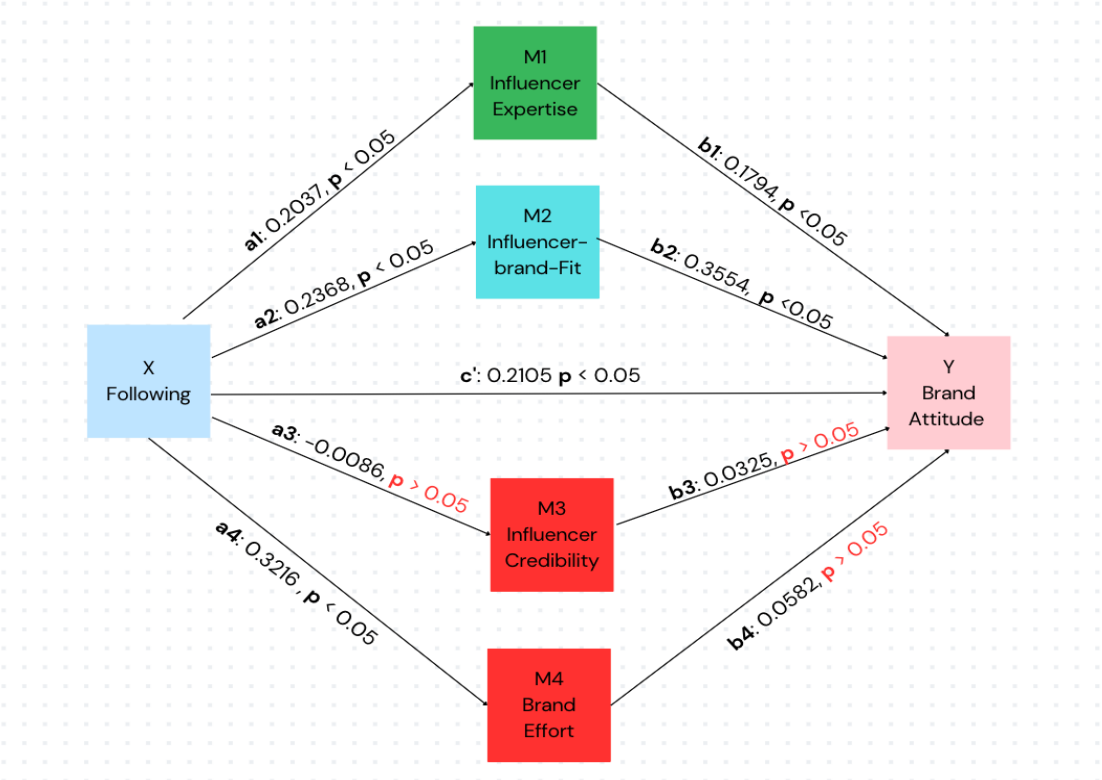

Diagram 2

In order to identify the possible presence of mediating variables on brand attitude, a serial moderated mediation model was calculated with PROCESS Macro 4.2. The results are summarized in the table below.

Indirect Effect(s) of X on Y	Effect	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Total	0.1397	0.0846	0.1955
M1:brand-influencer-fit	0.0841	0.0461	0.1251
M2:Influencer Expertise	0.0365	0.0688	0.0746
M3: Brand Effort	0.0187	-0.0316	0.0685
M4: Influencer Credibility	-0.0003	-0.075	0.0067

Table 5: X = following, Y = Brand attitude, M= mediator

The results show that only influencer-brand fit (M1) and influencer expertise (M2) can be reliably said to have a potential mediating effect whereas influencer credibility (M3) and brand effort (M4) have to be disregarded from the analysis as a result of the unacceptable *p*-value. The results from table 3 pertaining to the indirect effects of X on Y mediated by brand-influencer-fit and influencer expertise show that the mediating variables M1 and M2 had a coefficient of 0.0841 and 0.0365 respectively. Since the bootstrap interval was higher than 0 for both the lower and upper confidence interval, it can be assumed that the results are significant at the alpha level of 0.05.

	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect of X	0.2105	0.0335	6.2769	.0000	.1443	.2767

on Y						

Table 6: Total effect of X (following) on Y (brand attitude)

Lastly, an effect size is calculated for influencer-brand-fit (M1) and influencer expertise (M2). The results show that 42.7 % of the variation in the dependent variable, brand attitude, occurs directly through changes in the independent variable (follower count). The remaining impact of 57.3 % on the dependent variable brand attitude occurs indirectly through the mediator's influencer expertise and brand-influencer fit, which in turn, accounts for 17.35% and 39.95 % respectively of the total effect on brand attitudes.

These findings allow for certain hypotheses to be rejected whereas others are accepted.

H2a1: *The use of macro-influencers elicit higher brand attitude, mediated by influencer expertise:*
ACCEPTED

H2a4: *The use of macro-influencer elicits higher brand attitude, mediated by brand-influencer fit*:
ACCEPTED

H3a1: *The use of macro-influencers will signal higher brand credibility mediated by influencer expertise:*
ACCEPTED

H1a: *The use of macro-influencer is expected to elicit more positive influencer attitudes*:
REJECTED

H1b: *The use of nano-influencer is expected to elicit more positive influencer attitudes:*
REJECTED

H2a2: *The use of macro-influencers elicit higher brand attitude, mediated by influencer credibility*:

REJECTED

H2a3: *The use of macro influencers elicit higher brand attitude, mediated by brand effort*:
REJECTED

H2b3: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude, mediated by brand effort*:
REJECTED

H3b1: *The use of nano-influencer elicits higher brand credibility than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer expertise*:
REJECTED

H3b2: *The use of nano-influencer elicits higher brand credibility than macro-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility*:
REJECTED

H3a2: *The use of macro-influencers signals higher brand credibility than nano-influencers, mediated by influencer credibility*:
REJECTED

H2b4: *The use of nano-influencers elicits higher brand attitude than macro-influencers, mediated by brand-influencer fit:*
REJECTED

5. DISCUSSION

Should start-ups and lesser known parsimonious brands use macro-influencer or nano-influencers in their instagram marketing campaigns? The results point towards that unknown brands benefit more from using macro-influencers rather than nano-influencers in their instagram marketing campaign. More specifically, by using macro-influencers in the instagram campaign, a firm can elicit more positive attitudes and higher credibility towards the brand. Hence, an unknown brand aiming to strengthen their brand and drive sales should strongly consider using a macro-influencer in their instagram campaign. Moreover, the results show that the relationship between the size of the influencer and brand credibility is mediated by influencer expertise. Similarly, the relationship between the size of the influencer and the brand attitude is mediated by fit and influencer expertise.

5.1 Brand credibility

The results from the study support hypothesis H3a1, brand credibility was indeed higher when using macro-influencers. The mean values of the mediators shows that influencer expertise was perceived as being higher for the macro-influencer (3.86) compared to the nano-influencer (3.03). This could be explained through the signal theory which states that a high-following count is an important basis for respondents to evaluate the influencer and by extension the brand the influencer promotes. More specifically, the macro-influencers large follower base signals influencers expertise, which in turn, through mediation, positively influences brand credibility.

On the other hand, influencer credibility was perceived as being higher for the nano-influencer. The reason why nano-influencers are seen as more credible could be explained by identification theory, in which nano-influencers, due to their closer resemblance to the average person, were expected to generate higher identification, hence, allowing the nano-influencer to be perceived as more trustworthy and credible. Together with this, nano-influencers have a following base that consists of acquaintances (Balaji et al., 2021) which, in turn, has a contributing role to the nano-influencer being seen as more credible.

Despite the logical reasoning, due to the non-significance of the result, no reliable comparisons can be made between the two influencers with regards to their credibility.

In continuation, the authors hypothesis on the mediating effects on brand credibility. The mediating effects of influencer expertise on brand credibility are supported by the results. More specifically, the results indicate a partial mediating effect of influencer expertise (effect size of 38%). On the other hand, the mediating effects on influencer credibility on brand credibility is not fully supported, due to non-significant results, and, as such, it is disregarded.

All in all, the results show that unknown brands aiming to be seen as more credible are better off using macro-influencers in their sponsored instagram content. The reason behind this is that macro-influencers are perceived as having higher expertise, which has a strong mediating effect on brand credibility.

5.2 Brand attitude

The results from the study support hypothesis H2a1 and H2a4, the use of a macro-influencer elicited more positive attitudes towards the brand than the use of a nano-influencer. This could primarily be explained by the strong relationship between the follower count and brand attitude where a higher follower count of the influencer results in more positive attitudes towards the brand. Furthermore, the positive brand attitudes that are elicited when using a macro-influencer can also be explained through the mediating variables brand-influencer fit and influencer expertise.

Firstly, macro-influencer are deemed to be a better fit with an unknown brand. Since the results point towards that brand fit is a mediator of brand attitude, a higher perceived fit should naturally result in a more positive attitude towards the unknown brand. Moreover, a large portion of the variation in brand attitude can be explained by variations in fit (39.95%). This shows the importance of brand-influencer fit in eliciting positive attitudes towards the brand. The reason why the macro-influencer was deemed to have a better fit with the unknown brand could be explained by the macro-influencers ability to complement areas in which the unknown brand lags behind. For example, as a result of the brand being unknown, it might signal unprofessionalism. This negative signal can be mitigated by the use of macro-influencers, which, by signaling positive traits, such as expertise, can minimize or

even completely eliminate the negative signals transmitted by the brand. This ability of the macro-influencer seems to be an aspect that the respondents were aware of, therefore, resulting in higher perceptions of fit.

Secondly, as noted by Pornpitakpan (2004), source credibility is a crucial aspect in shaping attitudes. According to previous research, an important aspect of source credibility is the previously discussed variable, influencer expertise. The current study confirms the role of influencer expertise as a partial mediator of brand attitude. More specifically, 17.35% of the variation in brand attitudes can be explained by variation in influencer expertise. Thus, the macro-influencer ability to elicit more positive brand attitudes can be further explained by them being perceived as having more expertise in comparison to their smaller counterparts.

In terms of influencer credibility, no reliable comparison could be made between the two influencers. Moreover, no conclusions regarding the mediating effect of influencer credibility on brand attitude could be made. Similarly, no conclusions can be made regarding the mediating effect of brand effort on brand attitude. On the other hand, the effects of follower count on brand effort can reliably be concluded.

More specifically, the results show that the use of macro-influencers is expected to generate higher perceptions of brand effort. This result is in line with the signal theory, which states that macro-influencers signal higher cost and complexity, which in turn leads to higher perceptions of brand effort. However, the authors also hypothesized that the use of nano-influencers could be expected to generate a higher perceived effort for the brand which, in line with Dahlén et al., 2008, occurs due to the brand being perceived as having put more effort, time and energy to find a smaller nano-influencers as compared to a large and established macro-influencer. The results support the former point where macro-influencers elicited higher perceptions of brand effort (4.47) in comparison to nano-influencers (3.23). This shows that when it comes to the two facets of brand effort, advertising expense and creativity, perceptions of advertising expense are more important in the perceptions of brand effort in comparison to perceptions of creativity.

6. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The nano-influencers might not be well-suited for all types of brands. In fact, the current studies results show that unknown brands are better off using macro-influencers in their instagram marketing campaign. More specifically, when an unknown brand uses a macro-influencer in their instagram sponsored content, they are able to elicit more positive attitudes and higher brand credibility. These are two factors that have a direct influence on the receiver's intention to conduct a purchase.

Furthermore, the study showed that the perceived expertise of the influencer has a direct influence on both brand attitudes and perceptions of brand credibility whereas the fit between the brand and the influencer solely has a direct influence on perceptions of brand credibility. Macro-influencers are perceived as both having higher expertise and being a better fit with the unknown brand and as such, these influencers elicit more positive attitudes towards the brand as well as eliciting higher perceptions of brand credibility. Macro-influencers are perceived as having more expertise which can be explained through signal theory. This theory states that the follower count of the macro-influencer is used as a heuristic to draw conclusions regarding their expertise. More specifically, their higher follower count allows social media users to perceive the influencer as a valid and reliable message sender. Moreover, the macro-influencer is also deemed to have a better fit with the unknown brand in comparison to a nano-influencer. This perception of a good fit arises due to macro-influencers ability to complement areas in which the unknown brand either lag behind or do not possess. An example of such an area would be awareness of the unknown brand where, through the use of a bigger influencer, the unknown brand is able to drive more exposure to the brand and, in turn, increase the awareness of the brand.

All in all, unknown brands should use macro-influencers in their marketing campaigns. In order to further enhance the efficacy of the campaign with regards to purchase intention, unknown brands should focus on finding macro-influencer that are perceived as experts in their field and that are perceived as having a good fit with the brand.

7. LIMITATIONS

This study is not free from limitations. Primarily, five limitations have been identified. Firstly, the aim of the study pertained to investigating the effectiveness of different types of influencers for an unknown brand, however, the term Crocs was used to describe the product that the influencers were promoting. Consequently, although the authors of the study multiple times throughout the questionnaire emphasized that the brand behind the Crocs product was unknown, we recognize that respondents might interpret our categorization of the product (i.e Crocs) as a product created by the Crocs brand which itself is not unknown. Secondly, due to various constraints, not all possible mediators were studied. As such, every aspect of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable could not be explained. Thirdly, all the traits of each respective influencer was not captured, which exposes the study to a margin of error. The intended purpose of the description of each influencer served the purpose of capturing various weaknesses and strengths of each respective influencer. For example, nano-influencers tend to have a follower base that primarily consists of acquaintances. As such, the respondent was asked to imagine that they were acquainted with the influencer. Despite the attempt to mitigate this risk by providing detailed and concise descriptions of each respective influencer, it is not possible to completely avoid this risk. This can lead to certain biases in the results. Fourtly, there are cognitive limitations with regards to the respondents possible inability to fully understand each question. Once again, the authors attempted to mitigate this risk by emphasizing that the questions were purposefully ambiguous, and that the questions should be answered based on first impressions and spontaneous thoughts. This was done in order to facilitate the respondents ability to answer the question. In spite of this attempt, the authors are aware of the fact that this does not fully eliminate the risk. As such, it is categorized as a limitation to the study. Lastly, a limiting factor to the study seems to be related to personal factors of each respondent, which can result in the questions of the survey being interpreted in different ways. More specifically, the respondent is asked to place themselves in a scenario, where each scenario might differ based on the respondents personal opinions, thoughts, impression and circumstances. More generally, apart from the first limitation, all the limitations seem to be rooted in the intention to re-create a scenario.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH

This study leaves room for future studies. Firstly, the study aims to measure purchase intentions indirectly through brand credibility, brand attitude, and influencer attitude. Hence, a future study could be conducted with the aim of measuring further variables that have a direct influence on purchase intention. This would give the study more breadth. Secondly, future studies can add more depth to the current study by analyzing the effects of moderators. More specifically, the study can analyze the moderating effect of the brand size. This is possible since the current study placed a focus on providing implications for an unknown brand. Thus, the two moderating variables could be an unknown brand and a known brand. Lastly, the current study focused on a single social media platform, instagram. Thus, future studies could possibly study whether the results observed are true for all social media platforms. Moreover, future studies can also delve deeper into the subject by replicating the study and analyzing whether the results differ based on demography of the respondents such as age and gender.

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10. APPENDIX

Hello,

First and foremost, thank you for taking your time to fill this survey.

This survey is conducted by Dhruv Sharma (50725@student.hhs.se) and Enrique Mridha (50729@student.hhs.se). We are two bachelor students from Stockholm School of Economics who are writing a bachelor thesis pertaining to the area of influencer marketing. Your answers have a foundational role in our bachelor thesis and therefore, we kindly ask you to answer this survey attentively. Questions related to your attentiveness will be part of the survey.

This survey should not take more than 3-5 minutes to answer. All the answers are completely anonymous and analysed on an aggregate level.

We truly appreciate your help and would, once again, like to thank you for your time.

Appendix 1: Introduction to the survey

Imagine the following scenario...

You are scrolling through Instagram when you see the post below. What you see is a social media advertisement posted by an influencer that you are acquainted with, either directly or indirectly through mutual friends with a following base of roughly 4000 followers. This influencer is known for having a impeccable fashion sense and trendy style and his small following base look up to him as a fashion inspiration.

The post is a paid promotion where the influencer is promoting Crocs (footwear) for a small, unknown brand XYZ. Please note that the influencer in question is someone you are acquainted with and has a small following base. Using the scenario provided above and the image provided below, answer the following questions.

Please keep in mind that the questions are purposely ambiguous, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your answers should be based solely on your spontaneous thoughts and first impressions.

Appendix 2: Description of a nanoinfluencer

Appendix 3: Sponsored content by a nanoinfluencer

Imagine the following scenario...

You are scrolling through Instagram when you see the post below. What you see is a social media advertisement posted by a well-known influencer with a following base of roughly 1 million followers. This influencer is known for having a impeccable fashion sense and trendy style, which has garnered him a massive following on social media. His posts often receive thousands of likes and comments from followers who look up to him as a fashion inspiration

The post is a paid promotion where the influencer is promoting Crocs (footwear) for a small, unknown brand XYZ. Please note that the influencer in question is a well-known figure with a significant following base. Using the scenario provided above and the image provided below, answer the following questions.

Please keep in mind that the questions are purposely ambiguous, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your answers should be based solely on your spontaneous thoughts and first impressions.

Appendix 4: Description of a macroinfluencer

Appendix 5: Sponsored content by a macroinfluencer

Internal validity (Cronbach's alpha)

Brand attitude (3 sub questions)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.887	3

Influencer Attitude

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.951	3

Influencer brand-fit (6 sub questions)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.921	6

Brand Credibility (3 sub questions)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.885	3

Influencer credibility (3 sub questions)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.892	3

Influencer expertise (3 sub-questions)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.910	3

Brand effort

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.813	3