I don't want your apology

An experimental study on the efficacy of response strategies to repair influencers' brand image and purchase intentions toward endorsed brands after a scandal.

Amanda Stenberg

Clara Carlberg

ABSTRACT

Social media influencer (SMI) transgressions when endorsing brands have become a current topic and various SMI-related scandals have gained massive media coverage in the past decade. SMIs themselves face backlash and a damaged personal brand image and the endorsing brands express either support or dissociation, through termination of contracts with the endorsed influencer. Despite its increasing prominence and critical importance for brands, SMI transgressions have not been extensively researched in conjunction with effective image response strategies to apply post-transgression. This quantitative study, therefore, investigates the subject of SMI transgressions and endorsing brands, by measuring the effectiveness of two common response strategies - the mortification strategy (giving an apology) versus the silence strategy - and their effects on social media users. More specifically, their attitudes towards the SMI and purchase intentions of the endorsed brand. Furthermore, we examine the effect of authenticity as a mediator for improving SMI image when adopting a mortification strategy. Using a fictitious experiment in an online survey, 94 responses (female, U.S.-based were obtained and analyzed using Independent sample t-Tests, Paired sample t-Test, General Linear Model, and Regression Process model 6 (SPSS macro) for mediation analysis. The findings show that an SMI transgression affects followers' perceptions and attitudes toward the SMI image and their perceived authenticity negatively. Also, the purchase intentions of the endorsed brand were affected negatively. The examined response strategies do not, however, provide support that either strategy can repair the SMI's image nor reduce negative effects on purchase intentions. No significant mediation relationship of authenticity to improve SMI image could be proven. The study results have implications for SMIs, brands and researchers within the field, and suggest that using a response strategy such as apologizing or being silent after a transgression has no significant effect on repairing the personal brand image of the influencer nor on the purchase intentions of the brand. After a transgression, both the perception of the SMI and purchase intentions remain damaged. These novel insights contribute to the existing body of literature on the subject of social media influencer marketing and crisis communication. Further research on response strategy efficacy over a period of time should be conducted to investigate this relevant topic further.

Keywords

Social media influencer, transgression, endorsing brands, response strategies, mortification strategy, silence strategy, SMI image, perceived authenticity, purchase intentions.

Authors

Amanda Stenberg, 50712

Clara Carlberg, 50718

Supervisor

Aylin Cakanlar, Assistant Professor, Business Administration, Center for Retailing

Examiner

Fredrik Lange, Assistant Professor, Program Director, Center for Retailing

Bachelor Thesis

Bachelor Program in Retail Management

Stockholm School of Economics

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The saying 'all publicity is good publicity' is a commonly used cliché. Public people and companies often view gaining publicity as a way to enhance their brand, and as a result gain positive effects such as brand equity, trust and influence. However, research uncovers that most publicity is in fact negative, as negative news about a person or company is more likely to be published and spread. To narrow down and define the various events and scenarios that might lead to negative publicity is seemingly impossible. Though a crisis cannot always be avoided, it can be mitigated and managed to minimize the impact, hence the vast research area of crisis communication and reputation management.

As brands make an effort to apply new and effective marketing strategies, social media influencer marketing has grown in popularity. It is seen as both an accessible and appealing way to reach consumers, partly due to the omnipresence of social media and the access to consumers through an appealing influencer rather than traditional ads (Vrontis et al., 2021). Brands entering partnerships with social media influencers have caused the social media influencer economy to grow exponentially in a very short period of time (Kintu et al., 2022), hitting $16.4 billion in 2022 (McKinsey, 2022). Using social media influencers (SMIs) can be an efficient way to benefit a brand, by creating meaning and values in consumers' minds, that are transferred to the endorsed brand, thus improving the overall brand image. When a brand partners with well-known personalities, the brand is in essence associating that person's public persona with the intrinsic values and reputation of the brand, along with the reputation that the brand has worked hard to build (Kintu et al., 2022). However, when SMIs are part of scandals, controversial or criminal behavior or other transgressions, the negative perception of them could transfer to the brand image and even reduce purchase intentions (Shukla, 2021).

As a response strategy to transgressions, brands behave in different ways, in some cases by terminating the endorsement, and in some by maintaining it. In the field of athlete endorsements, Gatorade terminated its endorsement with Tiger Woods after evidence surfaced of his infidelity in 2010 (Brown, 2014), while Nike maintained its endorsement with Colin Kaepernick after kneeling during the national anthem at the NFL in 2016 (Kelner, The Guardian, 2018). Although cultural and ethical diversities influence what is considered a transgression, the Woods and Kaepernick events both received large negative backlash from

the public. As it is in an athlete's best interest to maintain a positive image, it is important to apply a response strategy to repair their image. Brown discovered that when faced with a non-criminal transgression, athletes gained most image repair by apologizing, what Benoit refers to as a 'mortification strategy' (Brown, 2014). Similarly to athletes, transgressions involving SMIs occur, with endorsing brands behaving in different ways. Similarly to the termination of Woods' endorsement with Gatorade, a transgression involving the Swedish SMI Margaux Dietz resulted in several brands terminating their endorsement and even demanding the removal of endorsed posts in Dietz's social channels (Eriksson, Resume, 2022). Naturally, it is in SMIs' best interest to repair their image following a transgression. However, despite the growth of SMIs, no research has been conducted on SMIs as their reputation in many cases influences their financial income. Additionally, when an endorser is involved in a transgression and their image is negatively impacted, negative meaning transfer to the brand occurs, which results in a more negative attitude toward the endorsing brand and decreased purchase intentions (Shukla, 2021). Likewise, authenticity, defined as the feelings and practice of being true to one's self or others, is further an important factor for SMIs to consider following a transgression as it is considered to boost message effectiveness as it allows the recipient to identify with the message and the sender (Brown et al., 2003). In sociology and social psychology, authenticity pertains to self-presentation and conceptions of the self, meaning "the feelings and practice of being true to one's self or others" (Vannini et al., 2008). However, there is no research investigating how authenticity influences the effects of a mortification strategy, in terms of impact on the SMI and the brand. There is a need to expand current studies to confirm if the results from image repair and response strategy research are transferrable from athletes, majorly influential celebrities of the past, to the field of SMIs, majorly influential celebrities of today. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of using a mortification strategy on consumers' image of the SMI and additionally, purchase intentions with the endorsed brand when a transgression has occurred.

This research study is expected to contribute to the existing body of literature on the topic of transgressions within the SMI industry with endorsed brands. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the effects of using the mortification strategy versus the silence strategy, and how it affects consumers' attitudes toward the SMI endorsing a brand and purchase intentions. These strategies were chosen based on perceived prevalence within the SMI context, and previous research. Previous research has declared the mortification strategy effective in order

to repair a public person's image after a transgression, and this strategy is also often used in real life (Brown, 2014). Not responding or reacting, also referred to as the silence strategy is less researched, but a common strategy to apply that could be necessary, especially in situations where there are multiple stakeholders and relationships involved, as in the case involving an SMI and an endorser brand or brands (Le, P.D. et al., 2018). By achieving these objectives, this study is expected to provide new insights into post-transgression response strategies and address some of the gaps in the current literature. Additionally, the study's findings can be applied in contexts regarding SMIs and brands having the intention to work with SMIs, providing valuable information to SMI practitioners, endorsing brands, and researchers. Our study is expected to provide a rigorous and robust analysis of the research question and contribute to the existing stream of research on this topic (Brocato et al., 2012; Brown, 2014; Le, P.D. et al. 2018). Overall, the study's contribution to response strategies post-transgression within the SMI industry with endorsed brands is expected to be significant and have important implications for future research and practice in this area.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Negative Publicity

Advertising is often seen as the most influential tool for companies and brands when it comes to influencing people's perceptions, in order to gain positive effects. Past research has shown that a brand's image isn't only controlled by the company itself. Consumers and the media also play a big role in shaping how people see a brand. Negative news, what people say about a brand and even how competitors are perceived can have a big impact on how people view a brand (Dahlén & Lange, 2006). Negative publicity has vast effects on the perception of a brand for several reasons. Compared to advertising, people are more likely to believe and be influenced by publicity (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). Additionally, negative news and publicity are more likely to be published and spread than positive news, meaning companies generally get more negative coverage than positive (Dean, 2004). Furthermore, negative information carries a higher degree of significance in the eye of the consumer, influencing their assessment of brands more than positive information (Ahluwalia et al., 2001). The outcome of these mechanisms for companies and brands can be highly damaging to the reputation (Dean, 2004) and equity of the brand (Dawar et al., 2000). Research on negative publicity

also uncovered that companies hold limited power to reclaim their narrative and create a more positive brand view in the eyes of consumers through advertising, as negative publicity has been found to reduce the effectiveness of a company's advertising (Stammerjohan et al., 2005). Dahlén and Lange (2006) investigated the effect of a brand crisis on the product category and competing brands and found that a crisis is "contagious" to other brands in the same category, to a varying degree depending on the perceived similarity of the brands. Clearly, research shows that a brand does not hold all power as to how it is perceived, and that the perception is influenced by associated entities through what is referred to as "spillover effects".

2.1.1 Spillover Effects

Spillover effects are according to Raufeisen et al., (2019) 'a change in beliefs regarding one entity due to the evaluation of another associated entity'. These effects occur in various domains, marketing being one of the more prevalent, commonly mentioned in branding research when discussing the effects of co-branding, brand endorsements and brand extensions. Raufeisen categorized spillover effects as occurring in two steps, (1) the creation of a mental connection between two entities, such as brands, and (2) the transfer of attributes from one entity to another.

Such spillover effects are occurring in the common marketing practice of endorsements and sponsorships. It was proposed by McCracken in 1989 that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements heavily depends on the wide range of associations the celebrity has. Initially, a celebrity endorser acquires some symbolic properties from their public role, these properties are then transferred to a given brand through communication that associates the endorser with the brand, and lastly, are recognized by consumers. Through this process, known endorsers can influence consumers' beliefs and attitudes toward a brand (Tian et al., 2021).

The concept of 'fit' is central to spillover effects. In the domain of sponsorship research, it is suggested a good fit between the brand and the sponsored entity has a positive effect on recall of and attitudes toward the brand (Raufeisen, 2019). However, there is no consensus on whether the relationship between fit and customer evaluation is linear, U-shaped, or inverted U-shaped. Another factor that influences spillover effects is the characteristics of the associated entity and brand characteristics, as well as the number and quality of associations.

A more significant number of associations and higher quality associations strengthen the transfer of effect and attributes between the brand and associated entity (Aaker et al., 1990).

2.2 Celebrity Endorsers

Celebrity endorsement is widely acknowledged as a common practice in modern marketing (Hsu et al., 2002). A celebrity endorser refers to any individual who leverages their public recognition to promote a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement (Hsu et al., 2002; Erdogan 1999). In the United States, the percentage of ads featuring celebrity endorsers increased from approximately 15 percent to around 25 percent between 1979 and 1997 (Hsu et al., 2002). This data demonstrates the extensive use of celebrities as a persuasive tool in communication and advertisement. Each year, marketers invest substantial amounts of money in celebrity endorsement contracts, driven by the belief that celebrities serve as impactful and effective advocates and representatives for their products or brands and that celebrities possess the ability to attract consumers' attention and effectively transfer the celebrities' positive attributes to the brands they endorse (Chung et al., 2017). Extensive research supports this, revealing that celebrity endorsers have a notable impact on the audience's attention, memory, evaluations, and purchase intentions (Hsu et al., 2002), and, have positive effects on attitudes toward advertising messages, the attention audiences pay to these messages, brand awareness, brand attitudes, purchase intentions and brand loyalty (Chung et al., 2017). Traditionally, celebrity endorsers encompass various professions such as entertainers including actors, actresses, singers, and models, and athletes, politicians, and business people (Hsu et al., 2002). Some well-known company collaborations with traditional celebrities are *George Clooney* for *Nespresso, Julia Roberts* for *Lancome* and *Justin Timberlake* for *McDonald's*. Nespresso's brand uniqueness stems from its multifaceted strategy that positions the company as a luxurious and aspirational lifestyle brand. Alongside their premium products, their advertising plays a pivotal role, featuring renowned personalities like George Clooney as a spokesperson that personifies the brand's image of elegance, success and aspiration, resonating with the desired audience (Brem et al., 2016). To capitalize on the effect of transferring celebrities' positive traits to the endorsed brand to attract the attention of consumers, Nespresso renewed the endorsement deal with Clooney worth US $40 million in 2013 (Chung et al., 2017). Likewise, Lancome renewed the endorsement deal with Roberts for five additional years worth US $50 million in 2010

(Sauers, 2010), while Timberlake was compensated US $6 million for partnering with McDonald's in the 2000s for an ad campaign along with the iconic "I'm Lovin' It" jingle (Spencer, 2021).

The notion of celebrity endorsement has however gained a new meaning in the recent decade, as online presence plays a more vital role today compared to some years ago when opportunities to engage with celebrities were scarce and controlled by the celebrity for the sake of publicity and promotional endeavors. The emergence of social media has altered this one-sided relationship into a more interactive, dynamic and reciprocal one where celebrities now actively share seemingly personal information with their audience on various social media platforms (Chung et al., 2017), such as Instagram and Youtube. The advent of these new media environments has significantly reduced the distance between audiences and celebrities, and has altered the role of being a brand endorser and what it requires, both from the brand and the "online celebrity" themselves.

2.3 Social Media Influencers and Company Collaborations

SMIs are people who have become famous via social media (Pelkonen et al., 2019), and can with an increasing number of followers attract a mass audience and build a fan base of which they can become a source of advice for their followers (Vrontis et al., 2021). SMIs are thus individuals with a significant following on social media platforms, with the ability to sway and influence their followers' opinions. By partnering with a SMI, brands can leverage their reach and credibility to promote products and services to a wider audience. Additionally, partnering with influencers (e.g., by offering free products or paying them) (Vrontis et al., 2021), can provide a more authentic and relatable way for brands to connect with their target audience. Something that many brands are realizing the potential of, seeing that the terms influencer communication and influencer marketing have been broadly adopted to refer to the appearance of branded goods in endorsers' social media channels (Pelkonen et al., 2019). In particular, brands specifically utilize SMIs to cultivate positive reactions from consumers related to their interests, facilitating a collaborative effort between the SMI and their followers to shape the brand's image on social media. Brands favor having SMIs endorse the brand as approximately 50% of internet users follow some kind of SMI and rely on their recommendations. Moreover, 19% of all U.S. consumers made a purchase in 2018 due to a

SMIs' recommendation, making the omnipresence of social media a successful marketing strategy. (Vrontis et al., 2021).

One example of a much-noticed and successful brand endorsement by a social media influencer was Dunkin' Donuts' partnership with the TikTok sensation Charli D'Amelio in 2020 to promote their products on the platform. As a result of the endorsement and renaming a drink to "The Charli", the following day led to a 57% increase in app downloads and a 45% increase in cold brew sales (Gandola, 2022). Another one is the international leading provider of meal kit delivery services HelloFresh which frequently partners with SMIs as part of their marketing strategy to further promote the brand. In their own words, they *love influencers as they are inspirers who possess the gift of conveying the experience of a really good dinner in a natural and genuine way* (HelloFresh, 2023). When looking at the Swedish market, HelloFresh are endorsed by several SMIs with varying follower numbers including Familjen Torsgården with 431K subscribers (YouTube, 2023), Fixa Formen with 71,6K followers (Instagram, 2023), and Israa Alhaj with 202,1K followers (TikTok, 2023). The effects that these brands are aiming to achieve is to not only capitalize on the attention a celebrity or influencer receives, but also to transfer positive sentiment from the influencer to the endorsed brand. This process can, as Chung et al., 2017 discuss, be understood through the concept of meaning transfer.

2.4 SMI Endorsements Gone Wrong

If an endorsing SMI generates negative publicity, the endorsed brand may be at risk of being perceived as "guilty by association", making it susceptible to any criticism or backlash the SMI may receive (Kintu et al., 2022). The rise and emergence of SMI scandals and transgressions connected to the endorsed brand have motivated a growing body of literature (Lohneiss et al., 2013; Brown, 2014) exploring effects on variables including brand image, brand attitude and purchase intent. Shukla (2021) found that information about an endorser that holds negative meaning, similarly transfers through the endorsement process, from the endorser to the endorsing brand. This was measured as a decrease in brand attitude among consumers. Additionally, the negative meaning transfer was even more significant when the endorser was a celebrity, compared to an expert or a combination of expert and celebrity (Shukla, 2021).

In prior research, Shukla et. al 2021 examined the attitudinal effects on a brand when a celebrity endorser committed a socially unacceptable transgression. From 10 different crimes, they found drunk driving was closest to the mean of how severe the crimes were considered by participants. Examining a level of average socially unacceptable or inappropriate behavior allows the study to demonstrate how even comparatively smaller levels of transgression could significantly affect attitudes toward the endorser brand, something more severe or extreme transgressions would most definitely achieve (2021). In a related experiment, Brown examined the attitudinal effects of an athlete committing a non-criminal transgression. The examined transgression was determined on neutrality, seen as neither extremely negative nor extremely positive (2014). It is evident from past research that various endorsers of brands transgress and thus have negative effects on the brand through negative meaning transfer (Till et al., 1998, Shukla 2021). In 2017, Pepsi faced a negative PR incident after a campaign film featuring Kendall Jenner. The campaign depicted Jenner joining a peaceful protest and after an "enlightenment" moment, handing a can of Pepsi to a police officer, which was seen as insensitive and violating the ethical boundaries of the industry because it coopted a social issue. The advertisement coincided with significant protests against racial inequality and police brutality in the USA, including the Black Lives Matter movement. The incident sparked fury and rapidly attracted extensive media attention, along with a plethora of online opinions and widespread mockery about both Pepsi and Jenner. Pepsi later apologized and withdrew the campaign, highlighting the importance of not mixing product promotion with sensitive social matters as the advertisement acted as a form of cultural appropriation and brand activism. (Jakić, 2021; Ferrucci, 2022). A product-harm crisis took place in 2018 when Snapchat enlisted the SMI Luka Sabbat with 1,6 million Instagram followers, to promote their new Spectacles product. Snapchat wanted Sabbat to promote the product on Instagram rather than its own platform. Sabbat never fulfilled the full endorsement as requested, leading Snapchat to sue Sabbat for non-compliance and breach of contract, but it backfired when Snapchat was exposed for promoting its product on a competitor's platform. This influencer and marketing failure left both Sabbat and Snapchat embarrassed, damaging Sabbat's credibility as an influencer and showcasing Snapchat's epic marketing blunder. (Alvarez, 2018; Kubbernus, 2020). Looking at the Swedish market, at the end of 2022, a scandal erupted surrounding Swedish social media influencer Margaux Dietz, which gained considerable negative attention in Swedish media and lead to the termination of sponsor

contracts and demands from previous endorser brands to delete all endorsed social media posts (Eriksson, 2022). However, as transgressions occur in the field of endorsed SMIs and brands decide to respond differently, by keeping or terminating endorsements, there is no research stating which strategy is most effective to repair the image of both the SMI and the endorsing brand. There is currently no research on the effectiveness of a mortification strategy in the specific field of SMIs, as previous research investigated athletes.

2.5 Image Repair Framework and Mortification Strategy

Cheng et al., (2017) conducted a thorough analysis of crisis communication research that focused on social media from 2002 to 2014. Their review identified 69 articles, of which approximately 25% employed Image Restoration Theory (IRT) as a guiding framework, indicating that it was the most commonly utilized theory in this field of study. IRT is a theory and framework first developed by Benoit, the framework consists of five strategies to repair one's image in response to guilt for wrongdoing. The framework theory is based on two key assumptions. First, communication is motivated by a set of universal goals for each person and is designed to achieve these goals for the speaker (Clark et al., 1979). Second, maintaining a favorable image is one of the key goals of communication. The five strategies that the framework presents are denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification, further explained in Table 1 (Brown, 2014).

Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Strategies

Categories	Strategies and Explanations
Denial	- Simple denial *Stating that the organization or individual did not perform the act in question* - Shifting the blame

Evading responsibility	- Provocation *Scapegoating, claiming the actions were provoked by the actions of another person or organization* - Defeasibility *Claiming the action was provoked by lack of information or misinformation* - Accident - Good intentions
Reducing offensiveness	- Bolstering *Stressing the positive traits of the organization or individual* - Minimization *Claiming the crisis is not as serious as the public or media perceives* - Differentiation *Making the act seem less offensive than the public perceives* - Transcendence *Places the crisis in a more favorable context* - Attack the accuser - Compensation
Corrective action	- Corrective action *Promising to correct the problem*
Mortification	- Mortification *Admitting the crisis was the organization's or individual's fault and asking for forgiveness*

Table 1

The mortification strategy entails admitting the crisis was the organization's or individual's fault and asking for forgiveness. The strategy has been debated extensively in crisis communication, and calls for the accused to apologize, thereby taking responsibility. Benoit argues that if the person is at fault they should respond in a timely fashion, however, other researchers argue that caution is important as an apology could be interpreted as taking on liability, which could have legal repercussions (Brown, 2014). In experiments, Brown found that the type of transgression (criminal or non-criminal) had an effect on which strategy was most effective. Investigating the strategies of mortification, bolstering and accusing the attacker, it was found that for a non-criminal transgression, the mortification strategy was the most effective for image repair, whereas for a criminal transgression, attacking the accuser

was more effective. Brown hypothesizes that apologizing could imply guilt, and when faced with a criminal transgression the "innocent until proven guilty" nature of the transgression could influence the image, therefore it could be in a person's best interest to not apologize until there has been a conviction (Brown, 2014). Additionally, the effect of apologizing could be influenced by other factors, such as the concept of forgiveness and various factors that facilitate forgiveness, which can differ depending on individuals and situations (Fehr et al., 2010). In contrast to Benoit's image repair strategies, not all SMIs are trained in crisis communication and thus a possible response from a SMI when a transgression has occurred is to simply do nothing. Silence can also be seen and used as a strategy to de-escalate a conflict (Kempf, 2005). In a fast-moving social media landscape, we believe SMIs might use silence strategically to hope the transgression will not catch the attention of media or followers.

Based on this prior research, we propose negative meaning from the transgression information will be transferred from the SMI to the endorsed brand and consequently, brand attitude will be negatively affected. We further hypothesize that the negative meaning transfer will be moderated by the choice of response strategy, whereby the mortification strategy will diminish the negative effects on the brand, as compared to the strategic silence strategy. In order to investigate the effectiveness of the mortification strategy leading to improved brand image through meaning transfer from the SMI, this study will address the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 1:** The mortification strategy when adopted by an SMI will repair their image post-transgression more effectively than using a strategic silence strategy.

2.6 Authenticity

Authenticity is about knowing, being and achieving the state of 'being yourself' and 'true to oneself' (Tolson, 2001; Baldwin, 2021), and is a construct made up of several attributes, often attributes such as sincerity, genuinity, truthfulness, and originality (Molleda, 2010), which are all fundamental to effective celebrity endorsement in social media today. Authenticity is thus an important factor for the branding of SMI. Studies have explored the effects and outcomes of brand authenticity, showing, for example, that brand authenticity positively impacts brand trust (Schallehn et al., 2014) and consumers' behavioral intentions

(Fritz et al., 2017). Additionally, the perceived authenticity of a celebrity was a more important predictor of consumers' purchase intentions than familiarity with the celebrity (Ilicic et al., 2016). Pöyry et. al 2019 proved that this holds true in the setting of SMIs, where the perceived authenticity had a positive relationship with purchase intentions. Further, it is assumed that authenticity is a particularly important attribute in a social media platform context such as Instagram, as endorsements and advertisements are frequently appearing on the platform (Audrezet et al., 2018). In terms of adopting a mortification strategy, Brocato et al., (2012) investigated participants' reactions to four account strategy types offered by a CEO in response to a corporate crisis event. Research results show that giving an apology decreases negative impressions of the CEO and that the CEO was perceived as more authentic and trustworthy. Hence, following a corporate crisis, a CEO can regain personal trustworthiness more effectively by giving an apology rather than denying the event. Thus, this study will address the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 2:** Adopting a mortification strategy will be more effective in improving SMI image if the SMI is perceived as authentic.

2.7 Purchase Intentions

Based on the meaning transfer model, it is fair to assume that if a celebrity endorser is involved in a transgression, the negative attitude is transferred to the endorsed brand. As the meaning transfer model suggests, the meaning residing in the endorser is likely to be transferred to the brand they endorse, affecting consumers' purchase intentions. Similarly, transfer theory anticipates that consumers will form opinions of endorsed products based on past experiences or opinions that extend to future experiences (Um et al., 2016).

To conclude whether SMI transgressions can induce mitigated negative effects on consumers' purchase intentions by adopting the mortification strategy, the last hypothesis is introduced:

> **Hypothesis 3:** Following an SMI transgression, using a mortification strategy will lead to reduced negative effects on purchase intentions towards the endorsed brand compared to adopting the strategic silence strategy.

2.8 Conceptual Model

Figure 1 illustrates our hypotheses in a conceptual model based on the presented literature.
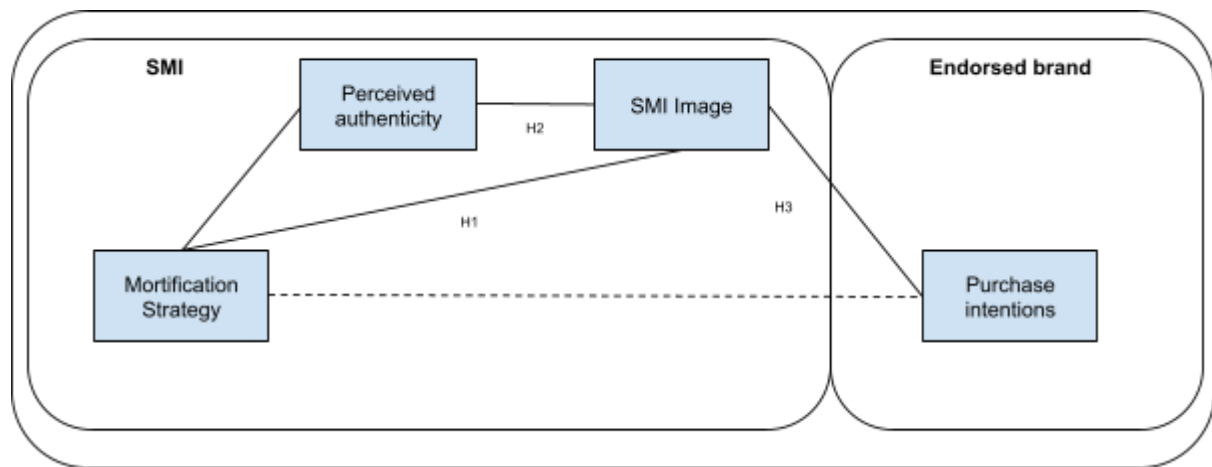

Figure 1

3. METHOD

3.1 Measures

This research study aims to investigate the impact of mortification response strategy versus strategic silence strategy on the transgression of SMI on their image and purchase intention, and whether this effect is mediated by perceived authenticity. This study will use a between-subjects design with the mortification response strategy and strategic silence strategy as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable and perceived authenticity will be examined as mediator 1 and SMI image as mediator 2 between the independent and dependent variables. The measures for this study will include a questionnaire that assesses respondents' perceptions and attitudes of SMI transgressions on SMI image, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention. The results of this study will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different response strategies for SMIs in the context of transgressions and the role of perceived authenticity in this process.

3.2 Pre-study

The purpose of the pre-study was to obtain an understanding of which incidents are perceived as more or less transgressive. The scenario that was perceived as more transgressive was to be used in the main study, as a scenario that is less transgressive is less likely to have significant effects. This study's methodology and obtained results are presented in the following sections before the main study is outlined.

3.2.1 Methodology Pre-study

In the pre-study, two scenarios (dictatorship regime; bought followers) were presented to measure which was perceived as more transgressive. Participants were asked to imagine two different scenarios. The first scenario was the following:

"Imagine that you have just seen on an influencer's social media channel that they are on holiday in a country notorious for having an oppressive dictatorship regime. The influencer has posted images and videos from the country, highlighting that they are having a good time. They do not mention or recognize the oppressive regime in their social media channels."

The scenario was selected based on a real-life sponsored trip made by a Swedish influencer couple to the authoritarian regime of Saudi Arabia, which caused massive critique and backlash from their social media followers and news media, calling it a "dictatorship holiday" (Nyheter24, 2022). The second scenario was the following:

"Imagine it is revealed that an influencer has bought followers for themselves on social media channels. The influencer intentionally positions themselves as an authentic and popular influencer. With the help of these paid, fake followers, the influencer has pretended to be more popular than they are and tried to attract interest and sponsorships from brands."

This scenario was based on a pre-existing "influencer transgression" scenario and modified to fit the purpose of our research question. Study participants were then asked to rate the perceived transgressiveness of the two scenarios as a manipulation check, using transgressiveness measures on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 equaling "Strongly disagree" and 7 equaling "Strongly agree,". The measures used were *transgressive, unethical, immoral, inappropriate,* and *severe (*Reinikainen et al. 2021).

The pre-study was made in Qualtrics and distributed on March 27, 2023. 85 U.S.-based participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The participants' age distribution was 18-64, with a gender distribution of 41% female and 59% male. 80 responses were considered valid and used in the following analysis. A reliability check was performed to ensure an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha, above 0.7 (0.908) (Tavakol et al., 2011). Indices were made to measure the mean rating for each scenario.

3.2.2 Results Pre-study

Results from the manipulation check in the pre-study revealed significant differences in the responses for low and high-transgressive conditions, indicating that the participants view buying followers to be more transgressive than traveling to a dictatorship regime ($M_{buying\ followers} = 5.165$, $M_{dictatorship\ travels} = 4.33$, $p < .001$). Hence, showing why the second scenario was chosen. Mean ratings for each of the five individual variables used to measure respondents' perceived level of transgression are provided in Tables 2, 3 and 4 below.

Scenario 1: Traveling to a dictatorship regime

Measuring variables	Mean rating	Index name	Total mean rating
Transgressive	4.14		
Unethical	4.18		
		Transgressiveness_Scenario1	4.33
Immoral	4.26		
Inappropriate	4.58		
Severe	4.50		

Table 2

Scenario 2: Buying followers

Measuring variables	Mean rating	Index name	Total mean rating
Transgressive	4.88		
Unethical	5.40	Transgressiveness_Scenario2	5.165
Immoral	5.13		
Inappropriate	5.38		
Severe	5.05		

Table 3

Paired T-test of transgressive scenarios

Measuring variables	Mean rating	Significance level	t	df
Transgressiveness_Scenario1	4.3481			
Transgressiveness_Scenario2	5.1679	<.001*	4.188	80

Table 4

*Significant at the p = .05 level

3.3 Main study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the attitudinal effects that occur with consumers when a SMI applies a mortification strategy post-transgression. The study was conducted via an online survey distributed on March 30, 2023. In detail, the study examined how consumers' perception of the SMI image and purchase intentions with an endorsed brand are affected after an SMI transgression has been disclosed and a mortification response strategy has been applied by the SMI. The perceived authenticity was examined to determine

its impact as a mediating factor. The effect of the independent variables (using a mortification response strategy vs. strategic silence strategy) on the dependent variables (SMI image and purchase intentions) was examined. This study used a two-factor, between-subject design, where participants were randomly distributed into two groups, in which different strategies were being tested. In both scenarios, the endorsed brand continued the endorsement. The dependent variables were measured before and after participants were randomly distributed into one of two groups and provided with one of the hypothetical scenarios, to facilitate significant results before and after the SMI transgression. The following section details the methodology used in the main study.

3.3.1 Participants

The online survey was created using Qualtrics and distributed to 133 female U.S-based participants via Amazon MTurk. Only females were recruited to avoid negative responses for purchase intentions due to incongruence between the participant and the SMI and endorsed product, as it is assumed males are not likely to be as congruent with a female lifestyle-SMI and the skin care category as females (Shukla, 2012). Each respondent was paid $1.00 to complete the survey. Respondents who incorrectly answered the control questions at the beginning of the survey were excluded from the sample. Specifically, respondents who were not female, failed to consent, and failed the attention check, were excluded. Further, respondents who failed to correctly identify the survey topic were removed from the sample. The final sample with valid responses included 94 female respondents with an age distribution ranging from 25-71 years old, where the mean age was 42.9. Further sample information was gathered in the survey, including participants' use of the social media platform Instagram, and purchasing habits of skincare products, as this was the chosen category for the fictitious endorsed brand used in the study. 85% of respondents reported having an Instagram account (N=80). The participants are, based on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 equaling "Never" and 5 equaling "Very often", reportedly using Instagram very often ($M_{\text{using Instagram}}$ = 4.49), posting on Instagram every now and then ($M_{\text{posting on Instagram}}$ = 3.35) and purchasing skincare products regularly ($M_{\text{purchasing skincare}}$ = 3.95).

3.3.2 The treatments

The following section presents the various treatments to which participants of the survey will be exposed to. The treatments are intentional changes or manipulations made by the researchers in order to investigate the hypotheses.

3.3.3 SMI and Endorsed Brand

A fictitious SMI and brand were created and used in the study, to avoid influence from respondents' potential prior knowledge or attitude toward a known SMI or brand, which could have influenced their perception and rating in this study, thereby affecting the study results. The familiarity of the SMI was investigated, to avoid any imagined prior attitudes. The fictitious SMI was a young woman ("Emily Smith") presented in a created Instagram post, where she posed with a skincare product from a fictitious endorsed brand ("Northern Lights"). The choice of SMI and product category for the endorsed brand was made to be congruent, as stronger congruence between a perceived brand personality, perceived endorser personality and consumer personality increases the likeliness that consumers consume that brand (Shukla, 2012). As congruence could not be examined in a separate pre-study, the SMI, brand and type of product were chosen with congruence in mind. The Instagram post featured the SMI name and profile picture, endorsed brand tag and 3824 likes and 54 comments (showing that it is a popular influencer). A caption and emojis were included to simulate a more realistic scenario. See Appendix B for the image of the post used in the experiment. Participants were presented with the post alongside the following information about the influencer and the brand:

"The well-known social media influencer Emily Smith is a popular influencer with 1M followers on Instagram that usually posts lifestyle and beauty content. She posts a picture advocating for a skin treatment serum. It is an endorsed post from Northern Lights, a well-known brand within the skincare industry."

3.3.4 SMI Transgression

The SMI transgression was chosen based on the results of the pre-study. To build on previous researchers' reasoning, a transgression of a non-criminal nature was used, as a criminal offense would more likely be seen as very socially unacceptable and produce extreme image results (Shukla, 2021), which a mortification response strategy would not likely be able to repair. To ensure the transgression was still efficient in influencing the SMI image, the scenario perceived as the most transgressive from the pre-study was chosen for the main study (buying followers, M = 5.16). The transgression was presented as follows:

"Imagine it is revealed that the social media influencer Emily Smith has bought followers for herself on social media channels. Emily Smith intentionally positions herself as an authentic and popular social media influencer. With the help of these paid, fake followers, Emily Smith has pretended to be more popular than she is and tried to attract interest and sponsorships from brands."

3.3.5 Response Strategy

The response strategies were described in a text. The mortification response strategy included the core elements of a response strategy according to Benoit; admitting responsibility for the situation and asking for forgiveness (Brown, 2014). The following text was presented to half of the participants, following the transgression scenario:

"In the following days, the social media influencer Emily Smith posts an apology in her social media channels. She says that she recognizes the issue of her actions of buying Instagram followers, and how she feels remorseful and apologizes. The brand Northern Lights' endorsement of the social media influencer Emily Smith continues."

Similarly, the silence response strategy was described in text and was presented to half of the study participants:

"In the following days, the social media influencer Emily Smith does not post or comment any statements regarding her action of buying Instagram followers in her social media channels. She does not apologize or show remorse. The brand Northern Lights' endorsement of the social media influencer Emily Smith continues."

At the conclusion of the survey, participants were informed that the SMI, brand, and scenario were fictional.

3.4 Measures

Following exposure to the SMI and endorsed brand, the respondents were asked to rate their attitude toward the SMI and purchase intentions of the endorsed product and brand on a 7-point Likert scale, where all measure variables were gathered from previous peer-reviewed

research. They were then informed about the transgression scenario, randomly distributed into two groups, and presented with one of the two response strategies. Respondents were then asked to rate their attitude toward the SMI and purchase intentions again, using identical measure variables as in the initial assessment. A question about the perceived authenticity of the SMI was added, based on measure variables from previous research, on a 7-point Likert scale. These measures are described further below.

3.4.1 SMI Image

Measures for perceived SMI image were obtained from previous research (Spears & Singh, 2004*).* The respondents were asked to rate their attitude toward the SMI using the five items *appealing, good, pleasant, favorable* and *likable.* They were asked to do this both before and after exposure to the transgression scenario and response strategy. Reliability tests were performed and an acceptable Cronbach's alpha was obtained. Thereafter, indices for SMI image pre- and post-transgression were created (SMIattitude_pre, SMIattitude_post). Different indices were created for the respective response strategies.

3.4.2 Purchase Intentions

Purchase intentions were measured by using statements about the interest and intention of purchasing and using the product. The statements used were: "I have interest in this product from Northern Lights", "I would purchase this product from Northern Lights", "I have interest in using this product from Northern Lights" and "I would use this product from Northern Lights". Respondents rated their level of agreement on a scale of Strongly disagree - Strongly agree. They were asked to do this both before and after exposure to the transgression scenario and response strategy. Reliability tests were performed, an acceptable Cronbach's alpha was obtained and thereafter indices for purchase intentions pre- and post-transgression were created (PI_pre, PI_post). Different indices were created for the respective response strategies.

3.4.3 Authenticity

Measures for the perceived authenticity of the SMI were obtained from previous research (Pöyry et al, 2019). The respondents were asked to rate the perceived authenticity of the SMI using the three items *genuine, honest* and *sincere.* They were asked to do this both before and after exposure to the transgression scenario and response strategy. Reliability tests were performed and an acceptable Cronbach's alpha was obtained. Thereafter, indices for SMI

authenticity pre- och post-transgression were created (authenticity_pre, authenticity_post). Different indices were created for the respective response strategies.

Table 5 includes all measures used in the survey.

Measures

Construct	Measurement items	Source	Cronbach's Alpha
SMI Image (pre)	*I find the social media influencer Emily Smith to be…*	Spears & Singh, 2004	.969
	…appealing, good, pleasant, favorable, likable		
Purchase Intentions (pre)	"I have interest in this product from Northern Lights" "I would purchase this product from Northern Lights" "I have interest in using this product from Northern Lights" "I would use this product from Northern Lights"		.964
SMI Authenticity (pre)	*I find the social media influencer Emily Smith to be…*	Pöyry et al, 2019	.976
	…genuine, honest, sincere		
SMI image (post) Strategy 1	*I find the social media influencer Emily Smith to be…*	Spears & Singh, 2004	.981

	...appealing, good, pleasant, favorable, likable		
Purchase Intentions (post) Strategy 1	"I have interest in this product from Northern Lights" "I would purchase this product from Northern Lights" "I have interest in using this product from Northern Lights" "I would use this product from Northern Lights"		.987
SMI Authenticity (post) Strategy 1	*I find the social media influencer Emily Smith to be…*	Pöyry et al, 2019	.987
	…genuine, honest, sincere		
SMI image (post) Strategy 2	*I find the social media influencer Emily Smith to be…*	Spears & Singh, 2004	.976
	…appealing, good, pleasant, favorable, likable		
Purchase Intentions (post) Strategy 2	"I have interest in this product from Northern Lights" "I would purchase this product from Northern Lights" "I have interest in using this product from Northern Lights"		.958

	"I would use this product from Northern Lights"		
SMI Authenticity (post) Strategy 2	*I find the social media influencer Emily Smith to be…*	Pöyry et al, 2019	.975
	...genuine, honest, sincere		

Table 5

3.5 Significance level

Many scientific studies apply the established limit value of 0.05 for significance. As a higher p-value increases the risk of a Type 1 error, this study adheres to the significance level of 0.05 for the statistical analyses.

3.6 Reliability

The term reliability within academic research is defined as "trustworthy and credible empircism" (Jacobsen, 2002). It encompasses how reliable the result is over time, as well as how probable the result is as a representation of the entire population. Studies with a high degree of reliability are characterized by the ability to produce similar results when repeated. This requires that measure variables are credible, tested and proven. To fulfill the requirement of reliability, the design of this study is based on questions and scales obtained from previous research. Beyond reliability, this ensures understandability with respondents. This study uses phrasings of survey questions and answers, as well as constructs from previous research. Additionally, Cronbach's alfas have been obtained to investigate internal consistency, before variables were merged to create indices.

4. RESULTS

The results will be presented in order, following the three hypotheses. However, initially, the effect of the scenario will be presented. This is in order to understand if the manipulated transgressive scenario from the pre-study was, also in the main study, effective in creating a negative effect on SMI image, authenticity and purchase intention.

4.1 Main Effect of Transgression

The initial analysis was performed to compare results for SMI image, perceived authenticity, and purchase intentions before and after the transgression to determine if the transgression negatively affected the respondents' perceptions. Results from general linear model tests showed significant (<0.001) negative within-subjects effects on all three constructs when comparing pre-transgression and post-transgression perceptions. The SMI image was negatively impacted (M $_{SMI\ image\ pre}$ = 4.585, M $_{SMI\ image\ post}$ = 2.289), as was the perceived authenticity (M $_{SMI\ authenticity\ pre}$ = 3.744, M $_{SMI\ authenticity\ post}$ =1.911) and purchase intentions (M $_{purchase\ intention\ pre}$ = 3.093, M $_{purchase\ intention\ post}$ =2.311). See Table 6 for a summary of the within-subjects effects of the general linear model tests.

Scenario effect (within-subjects effects)

Variable	Mean value	Significance level	F-value	df
SMI Image (pre)	4.5851			
		<0.001*	222.906	93
SMI Image (post)	2.2894			
Purchase Intentions (pre)	3.0931			
		<0.001*	61.063	93
Purchase Intentions (post)	2.3112			
SMI Authenticity (pre)	3.7447			
		<0.001*	157.972	93
SMI Authenticity (post)	1.9113			

Table 6

*Significant at the p = .05 level

4.2 Hypothesis 1

> **H1**: *The mortification strategy when adopted by an SMI will repair their image post-transgression more effectively than using a strategic silence strategy.*

Independent Sample T-tests were performed to investigate how the choice of response strategy affected participants' image of the SMI. An index based on the five variables of SMI image was used as input for the T-test. Respondents who were exposed to the mortification strategy treatment (N= 47) were compared with those exposed to the silence strategy treatment (N= 47). The results, shown in Table 7, indicate that applying a mortification strategy did not produce significantly different results from applying a silence strategy (M $_{Mortification}$ = 2.306, M $_{Silence}$ = 2.285, p = .135), in order to repair the SMI image. Thereby, hypothesis 1 is not supported.

T-test results of using a mortification strategy vs. a silence strategy on SMI image

Variable	Mean value		T-value	df	Two-sided p
Mortification strategy	2.3064				
			-.069	92	.945
Silence strategy	2.2851				

Table 7

*Significant at the p = .05 level

4.3 Hypothesis 2

> **H2**: *Adopting a mortification strategy will be more effective in improving SMI image if the SMI is perceived as authentic.*

Independent Sample T-tests were performed to examine the potential mediation effect of perceived authenticity (authentic vs. not authentic) on SMI image. An index based on the three variables of authenticity was used as input for the T-test. Respondents who were exposed to the mortification strategy treatment (N= 47) were compared with those exposed to the silence strategy treatment (N= 47). The results, shown in Table 8, indicate that applying a mortification strategy did not produce significantly different results from applying a silence strategy (M $_{Mortification}$ = 1.6809, M $_{Silence}$ = 1.9858, p = .824), to increase perceived authenticity.

T-test results of using a mortification strategy vs. a silence strategy on perceived authenticity

Variable	Mean value		T-value	df	Two-sided p
Mortification strategy	1.6809				
			.999	92	.320
Silence strategy	1.9858				

Table 8

*Significant at the p = .05 level

A mediation test was performed, using Hayes' Process Macro 6 (Hayes, 2017), in order to see if perceived authenticity of the SMI mediates the relationship between being exposed to the mortification strategy and the SMI image. Indices for SMI image and authenticity were created and used for the test. The results, seen in Table 9, show that being perceived as authentic did not significantly mediate the relationship (β= -0.355, ; CI_{95} [.036, -.1613]). Thereby, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Mediation test of authenticity as a mediator of SMI image

Variable	Beta	Standard Error	Upper level CI	Lower level CI
Authenticity	-.0355	.0498	.0366	-.1613

Table 9

4.4 Hypothesis 3

> **H3**: *Following an SMI transgression, using a mortification strategy will lead to reduced negative effects on purchase intentions towards the endorsed brand compared to adopting the strategic silence strategy.*

Independent Sample T-tests were performed to investigate how the choice of response strategy affected participants' purchase intentions toward the endorsed brand. An index based on the four variables of purchase intention was used as input for the T-test. Respondents who were exposed to the mortification strategy treatment (N= 47) were compared with those exposed to the silence strategy treatment (N= 47). The results, shown in Table 10, indicate

that applying a mortification strategy did not produce significantly different results from applying a silence strategy (M $_{Mortification}$ = .7660, M $_{Silence}$ = .7979, p = .479), in order to reduce negative effects on purchase intentions. Thereby, hypothesis 3 is not supported.

T-test results of using a mortification strategy vs. a silence strategy on purchase intentions

Variable	Mean value		T-value	df	Two-sided p
Mortification strategy	.7660				
			.159	92	.874
Silence strategy	.7979				

Table 10

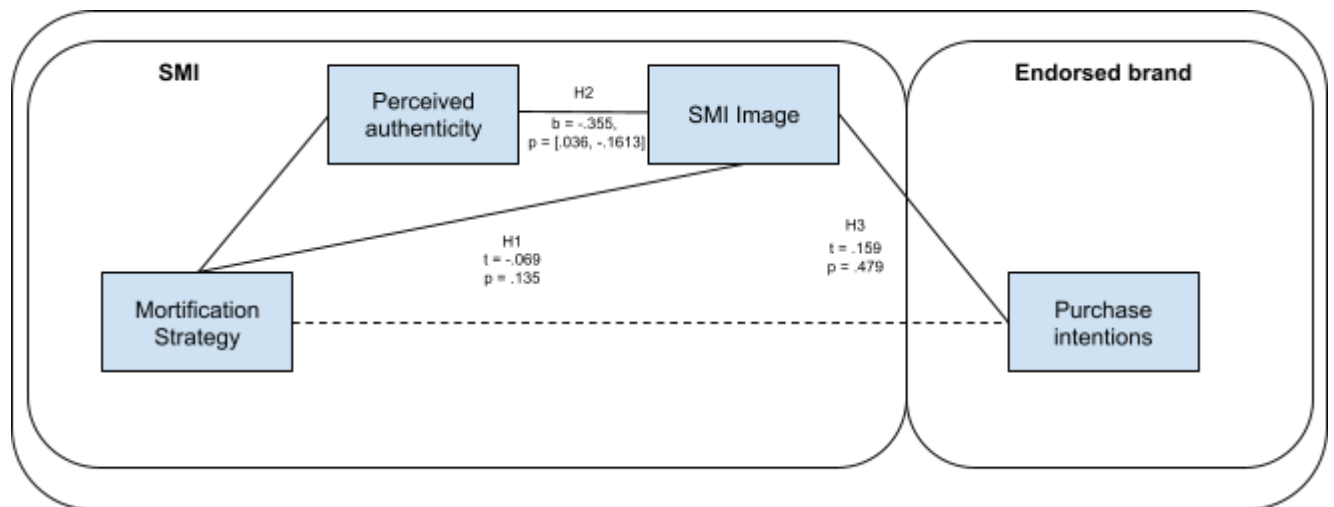**Significant at the p = .05 level*

4.5 Conceptual Model

Figure 2

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical Contribution and Managerial Implications

SMI transgressions, when endorsed by brands, are becoming more frequent and are an uprising current issue that various brands are battling with. This is a challenging area for brands to navigate as SMIs have varied impacts on their followers and more and/or less power to influence their attitudes and behaviors. This thesis has with its studies provided valuable insights regarding how an SMI transgression has a negative effect on followers' perceptions towards the SMI, perceived authenticity and purchase intentions, but that adopting a strategy of either giving an apology or saying nothing at all post-transgression will not yield in reduced negative effects of followers perceptions. This has both theoretical contributions and managerial implications and will be discussed below.

5.1.1 Main Effect of Transgression

As with many previous studies, we found that certain SMI characteristics and behaviors have an effect on how favorably the audience perceives them and the endorsements they make (Pelkonen et al., 2019). In this study, the transgression negatively affected the respondents' perceptions of all three constructs when comparing perceptions pre- and post-transgression. Of the three constructs, SMI image was affected most negatively, which is reasonable considering that the transgressive act was performed by the SMI and should thus have an effect on the followers. Perceived authenticity was found to have the second highest negative effect post-transgression, out of the three constructs studied. The difference in respondents' decreased perceptions of perceived authenticity could be explained by that such a transgression can damage the trust followers have in the SMI. SMI's are often perceived positively by their followers (Reinikainen et al., 2020) and are typically seen as authentic and genuine, and their followers often view them as a credible source of information and recommendations (Uzunoğlu et al., 2014; Russel 2017). This is further supported by Ember, 2015, stating that as SMIs gain popularity and trust with their followers, more brands are incorporating SMI endorsements into their marketing strategies to gain consumers' trust and attention through a reliable and influential, or "cool" source. These endorsements are further highly valuable, as they can contribute to positive brand image and trust (Matin et al, 2022) and heightened purchase intentions for the brand (Lee et al., 2016). When an SMI engages in behavior that violates these expectations, such as buying followers like the provided scenario

in our study, followers may feel misled and exploited (Tan et al., 2021) which negatively impacts attitudes, trust and purchase intentions toward the endorsed brand (Till et al., 1998; Reinikainen et al., 2021). As a result, they may begin to question the SMI's recommendations of the endorsed brand and product, leading to a decrease in perceived authenticity. The decreased perceptions of the SMIs image and perceived authenticity post-transgression have great implications for the SMI as a transgression can damage both the SMIs image and its personal brand. Followers may perceive the SMI as less trustworthy and less authentic which can generate further negative perceptions of the SMIs overall image and difficulties in undertaking other endorsement partnerships.

Moreover, purchase intentions showed the lowest negative effect post-transgression out of the three variables studied. It still, however, revealed a significant difference, indicating that a transgression of this kind will generate negative perceptions and a decreased willingness from followers to purchase an endorsed product. This means, for companies that use SMI endorsements as a marketing strategy, that they first and foremost need to carefully select endorsers and evaluate their social media behavior and public image to avoid any pre-existing negative associations before entering a partnership with a SMI. As a transgression can yield damaging consequences to the endorser brand based on decreased purchase intentions of the followers, companies should be proactive in preparing a crisis strategy to be able to take quick action if a SMI transgressive action or behavior becomes problematic. This can be developed into a contingency plan constituting having a backup SMI endorser or alternative marketing strategies if the SMI becomes embroiled in a scandal or transgression. Overall, this emphasizes the importance of carefully managing SMI endorsements and being prepared to respond to negative events that could impact followers' perceptions and ultimately purchase intentions. The accentuated negative effects of SMI image, perceived authenticity and purchase intentions post-transgression support the idea that the endorsed SMI should be carefully chosen and the content the SMI posts should align with the SMIs ideals and values to be perceived as authentic.

5.1.2 SMI Image

In the main study, results indicated that using a mortification response strategy following a transgression did not repair the SMI image more efficiently than using a silence response strategy. This suggests there is no significant difference in the efficacy of the two image

repair strategies on SMI image after this has been impaired. This differs from previous research results on the subject of image repair strategies. However, it is in line with previous discussions on the topic where researchers opposing Benoit are arguing that an apology could be regarded as accepting liability, and therefore impact the image more negatively than if no liability was recognized. The results from this study could be an indication of these discussed negative effects of accepting liability (Brown, 2014). However, if there is proof of the transgression and liability, as can often be the case in the world of social media in the form of video, the results of not apologizing could be different, as liability is already established. These study results indicate that a transgression is effective in damaging the SMI image, and that an apology is not effective in repairing the SMI image after a transgression has occurred. Thus, an implication for SMIs would be that to sustain a positive image among consumers, it is more important to avoid the transgression firsthand, than it is to apologize after.

5.1.3 Authenticity

The perceived authenticity was not significantly different between the different response strategies and did not mediate the respondent's SMI image. Thus, applying a mortification strategy did not produce higher levels of perceived authenticity of the SMI with the respondents. This was the case despite respondents perceiving the SMI as authentic prior to the transgression scenario (M = 3.744). Prior research has established that the construct of authenticity positively affects the liking and image of a SMI, and that perceived authenticity is effective in predicting consumers' purchase intentions. However, no previous research has investigated the mediation effect of authenticity when SMIs or celebrities apply a mortification response strategy. The results of this study indicate that giving an apology does not lead to the SMI being perceived as more authentic than if no apology is given.

5.1.4 Purchase Intentions

The results indicated that using a mortification strategy did not lead to reduced negative effects on purchase intentions toward the endorsed brand, compared to using a silence strategy. This suggests that there is no significant difference in the efficacy of the two image repair strategies on purchase intentions after this has been impaired. The results of the main study show that the SMI transgression negatively affects the SMI image and purchase intentions of an endorsed product, this is aligned with previous research findings on meaning transfer between an SMI and purchase intentions of an endorsed product. However, since the mortification strategy was not effective in improving the SMI image (hypothesis 1 was not

supported), the expected meaning transfer effects to repair respondents' purchase intentions did not occur. This could, as suggested in the discussion of hypothesis 1 (5.1.2. SMI Image), depend on the potential negative effects of taking on liability when giving an apology for a transgression (Brown, 2014).

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

Although this thesis found interesting results regarding the impact of SMIs' transgressive behavior on the respondent's overall attitude toward the influencer, the non-significant results and rejection of the hypothesis indicate that it has some limitations and, therefore, present some avenues for future research. This research is specific for, and is thereby limited to, the social media influencer industry and SMIs' behavioral effect on the respondent's perceptions, indicating that the results might not be applicable in other endorsement sectors. Further investigation can thus expand on this study by examining this topic within other industries and more specifically, examining the opposite feature of brand transgression. This is in terms of the effects it has on respondents' attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions, thereby contributing to this limited academic area. By conducting such research, additional insights from another perspective could be gained which can help companies in their communication strategy post a transgression.

Moreover, this study used Amazon MTurk alone as the medium to recruit participants who were paid $1, indicating limited diversity as they may not be representative of the broader population. This can ultimately limit the external validity of the study, as the results may not be generalizable to other populations. The payment can further lead to reduced motivation, engagement, effort and quality of responses as they may be participating solely for the financial compensation. In addition, our research specifically targeted U.S based, female respondents which further limits the diversity and generalizability of the data collected as this sample may not be translatable to other populations. Valuable insights that could have been gained from a more diverse sample were thus missed and the practical applicability of the study's results was limited. From these limitations, there may also have been a risk of bias in the results as the sample was not diverse and representative of the population, leading to skewed results and inaccurate conclusions. Future research could thus take a broader sample

into account by focusing on both females and males outside the U.S. to provide clarification and/or confirmation of our findings.

Furthermore, the research design of the experimental setting, being the fictitious SMI, could have caused altered responses as the SMI might not have been perceived as real and the findings are thus not entirely interchangeable with real-life influencers. Another limitation is the provided scenario which might not have been perceived as real, believable, or of enough crucial character to the research, as when stated, it was solely in a short text without a further context or an associated picture. By only presenting one scenario in a compressed context, the study's findings may not be generalizable to other scenarios or situations. Moreover, the scenario was chosen as the results showed that it was the most transgressive out of the two scenarios tested in the pre-study. However, as the respondents in the pre-study were not the same sample who participated in the main study, this can further limit the external validity of the study as it may not be representative of the broader population or context. Furthermore, the magnitude of the transgression could have impacted the results in terms of the transgression being regarded as too severe to forgive based on the short, written apology given. The transgression could have required a more extensive or personal, spoken apology from the SMI. In future research, the transgression-apology relationship could be investigated to ensure the apology is sufficient for the magnitude of the transgression.

The research design featured only two strategies, the mortification strategy and the silence strategy, indicating that respondents may have felt limited in their options and not be able to express opinions or preferences, leading to biased results as the two chosen strategies may not fully represent the range of possible options. As the strategies were chosen and formulated into an apology and a non-apology by us, the findings may not be generalizable to other scenarios or situations which limits the external validity of the study. An issue of limited relevance is also prevalent as the chosen strategies might not be relevant or meaningful to the respondents, leading to responses not accurately reflecting the participant's true attitudes or behaviors in this type of setting. Further research is thus warranted and future studies could provide other interesting entry points and conclusions about whether an SMI transgression actually has an impact on various social factors and behavioral patterns. This altogether must thus be considered carefully before applying our findings in practical settings. By addressing the aforementioned constraints and limitations, and exploring future

research opportunities, a more comprehensive assessment of the effects of SMI transgressions can be achieved, resulting in an expanded range of insights on this highly relevant and current topic.

Lastly, this study required participants to record a response immediately after the transgression and response strategies had been presented. This short time frame is likely not a perfect reflection of a real-life scenario, as emotional reactions might be more extreme directly after the information is given, and not continuous over time. As stated in the theoretical background, the effect of apologizing can be influenced by factors, one of which is forgiveness. One meta-analysis on the subject of forgiveness by Fehr et al. highlighted that the relationship between forgiveness and time remains unclear and points to a need for more research on the effect of time on forgiveness (2010). Therefore, we suggest future research could examine the impact of response strategies given a more extensive time perspective, to capture potential shifts in the level of forgiveness.

APPENDIX

1. Survey questionnaire

Dear respondent,

This survey aims to find out how social media influencers' scandals and transgression affect consumers' attitudes toward the influencer endorsing a brand and the endorser brand. Furthermore, we hope to understand consumers' purchase intentions of the endorsed products. Information gathered from this survey is for the sole purpose of our bachelor's thesis in Retail Management at the Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the survey, please contact Amanda Stenberg or Clara Carlberg, 50712@student.hhs.se or 50718@student.hhs.se

Many thanks in advance for participating!

Kind regards, Amanda and Clara

Part 1: General information

Respondents' profiles

Please provide your personal information. All information provided will be treated as confidential.

Gender

Male

Female

Non-binary

Do not want to say

Age

Below 20

21-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

Above 61

Part 2: Respondents' perceptions and image of the SMI, SMI's authenticity, brand and purchase intentions

<u>Information</u>

"The well-known social media influencer Emily Smith is a popular influencer with 1M followers on Instagram that usually posts lifestyle and beauty content. She posts a picture advocating for a skin treatment serum. It is an endorsed post from Northern Lights, a well-known brand within the skincare industry."

<u>Questions</u>

Are you familiar with Emily Smith portrayed above?
Yes/No

Please rate your attitude towards each of the following statements.
SMI, scale -3/+3 (do not agree - fully agree). Examines SMI image.

1. unappealing/appealing
2. bad/good
3. unpleasant/pleasant
4. unfavorable/favorable
5. unlikable/likable

Endorser brand, scale -3/+3(do not agree - fully agree). Examines brand image.

6. unappealing/appealing
7. bad/good
8. unpleasant/pleasant
9. unfavorable/favorable
10. unlikable/likable

"If you were in the market today for this product/brand, how likely do you feel it is that you would purchase/use this product/brand?" scale -3/+3 (do not agree - fully agree). Examines purchase intentions.

11. never/definitely
12. definitely do not intend to buy/definitely intend
13. very low/high purchase interest

14. definitely will not buy it/definitely will buy it

15. probably will not buy/probably will buy

Transgression scenario

"Imagine it is revealed that the social media influencer Emily Smith has bought followers for herself on social media channels. Emily Smith intentionally positions herself as an authentic and popular social media influencer. With the help of these paid, fake followers, Emily Smith has pretended to be more popular than she is and tried to attract interest and sponsorships from brands."

Information - Response strategy (Mortification vs. Silence)

Participants are then subject to one of the two alternatives below:

1. The SMI adopts a mortification strategy

"In the following days, the social media influencer Emily Smith posts an apology in her social media channels. She says that she recognize the issue of her actions of buying Instagram followers, and how she feels remorseful and apologizes."

2. The SMI keeps silence and adopts a strategic silence strategy.

"In the following days, the social media influencer Emily Smith does not post or comment any statements regarding her action of buying Instagram followers in her social media channels. She does not apologize or show remorse."

Information - Brand endorsement

"The brand Northern Lights endorsement of the social media influencer Emily Smith continues."

Questions

Please rate your attitude towards each of the following statements.

SMI, scale -3/+3 (do not agree - fully agree). Examines SMI image.

1. unappealing/appealing
2. bad/good
3. unpleasant/pleasant

4. unfavorable/favorable
    5. unlikable/likable

Endorser brand, scale -3/+3(do not agree - fully agree). Examines brand image.
    1. unappealing/appealing
    2. bad/good
    3. unpleasant/pleasant
    4. unfavorable/favorable
    5. unlikable/likable

"If you were in the market today for this product/brand, how likely do you feel it is that you would purchase/use this product/brand?" scale -3/+3 (do not agree - fully agree). Examines purchase intentions.
    1. never/definitely
    2. definitely do not intend to buy/definitely intend
    3. very low/high purchase interest
    4. definitely will not buy it/definitely will buy it
    5. probably will not buy/probably will buy

<u>Control question</u>

What was this survey about?
    a. Petrol stations
    b. SMI transgressions
    c. Heinz ketchup

B. Image of Instagram-post used in the Main study

REFERENCES

Aaker, D.A. and Keller, K.L. (1990) Consumer Evaluations of Brand Extensions - Sage Journals, Journal of Marketing. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/002224299005400102 (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Ahluwalia, R., Burnkrant, R.E. and Unnava, H.R. (2000) Consumer response to negative publicity: The moderating role of Commitment, Sage Journals. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmkr.37.2.203.18734 (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Ahluwalia, R., Unnava, H.R. and Burnkrant, R.E. (2001) The moderating role of commitment on the spillover Effect of Marketing Communications, Sage Journals. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1509/jmkr.38.4.458.18903 (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Alvarez, E. (2018) Influencer Luka Sabbat sued for not shilling Snapchat spectacles on Instagram, Entrepreneur. Available at: https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/influencer-luka-sabbat-sued-for-not-shilling-sn apchat/322672 (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G. and Moulard, J.G. (2018) Authenticity under threat: When Social Media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation, Journal of Business Research. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0148296318303229?casa_token=8-fZ 46oUCdYAAAAA%3ARgrp65RcChOxfWPPiqbyfsV-JlPllrYcz_cD-s29e4wNuEd9i_LdfUI HsVD_ASvIvvjS_B0QqVM (Accessed: 15 March 2023).

Baldwin, M., Gino, F. and Hofmann, W. (2021) 'Running Head: AUTHENTICITY ON THE FRINGE'. psyarxiv.com, PDF. (Accessed: March 13, 2023).

Brem, A., Maier, M. and Wimschneider, C. (2016) Competitive advantage through innovation: The case of Nespresso, European Journal of Innovation Management. Available at:

https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJIM-05-2014-0055/full/html?casa_to
ken=9MBcVwTgmykAAAAA%3AUET_8BGYZ5sDHLqzsonZykpvpUAHekLD8b8D3-Xc
FEMbWRniwfvmBJ6t3B65OvmWFbu7p4tszw0eblJKFJTNBAHFYAf4a7fReO8EYr7iVNZ
v28Je4-Q (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Brocato, E.D., Peterson, R.A. and Crittenden, V.L. (2012) When things go wrong: Account
strategy following a corporate crisis event, SpringerLink. Available at:
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/crr.2011.24#Sec10 (Accessed: 15 March 2023).

Brown, K.A. (2014) Is Apology the Best Policy? An Experimental Examination of the
Effectiveness of Image Repair Strategies During Criminal and Noncriminal Athlete
Transgressions, SAGE Journals. Communication & Sport. Available at:
https://journals-sagepub-com.ez.hhs.se/doi/10.1177/2167479514544950 (Accessed: March
10, 2023).

Brown, S., Kozinets, R.V. and Sherry Jr., J.F. (2003) Teaching old brands new tricks: Retro
Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning, SAGE Journals, Journal of Marketing.
Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmkg.67.3.19.18657 (Accessed: 10
March 2023).

Cheng, Y. and Cameron, G. (2017) 'The Status of Social-Mediated Crisis Communication
(SMCC) Research', in *Social Media and Crisis Communication*. 1st edn. New York:
Routledge, p. 12.

Chung, S. and Cho, H. (2017) Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social
Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement, Wiley Online Library. Available at:
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/mar.21001 (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Clark R., Delia J. (1979). Topoi and rhetorical competence. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65,
187–206.

Dahlén, M. and Lange, F. (2006) A disaster is contagious: How a brand in crisis affects other
brands, The Journal of Advertising Research. Available at:
https://www.journalofadvertisingresearch.com/content/46/4/388 (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Dawar, N. and Pillutla, M.M. (2000) Impact of Product-Harm Crises on Brand Equity: The Moderating Role of Consumer Expectations, Sage Journals, Journal of Marketing Research. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmkr.37.2.215.18729 (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Dean, D.H. (2004) Consumer Reaction to Negative Publicity: Effects of Corporate Reputation, Response, and Responsibility for a Crisis Event, Sage Journals. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0021943603261748 (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Ember, S. (2015) Cool influencers with big followings get picky about their endorsements, The New York Times. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/03/business/media/cool-influencers-with-big-followings-get-picky-about-their-endorsements.html (Accessed: 05 May 2023).

Erdogan, B.Z. (2010) Celebrity endorsement: A literature review, Taylor & Francis online, Journal of Marketing Management. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1362/026725799784870379 (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Eriksson, S. (2022) Annonsörernas Krav på Margaux: Rensa Bort Våra Tidigare Samarbeten från Flödet, Resumé. Available at: https://www.resume.se/alla-nyheter/nyheter/annonsorernas-krav-pa-margaux-rensa-bort-vara-tidigare-samarbeten-fran-flodet/ (Accessed: 11 March 2023).

Fehr, R., Gelfand, M.J. and Nag, M. (2010) 'The road to forgiveness: A meta-analytic synthesis of its situational and dispositional correlates.', *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(5), pp. 894–914. doi:10.1037/a0019993. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20804242/ (Accessed: 17 April 2023)

Ferrucci, P. and Schauster, E.E. (2022) Keeping up with the Boundaries of Advertising: Paradigm Repair after Pepsi's Big Mess, Journal of Communication Inquiry. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/01968599221095164?journalCode=jcia (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Fritz, K., Schoenmueller, V. and Bruhn, M. (2017) Authenticity in branding – exploring antecedents and consequences of Brand Authenticity, European Journal of Marketing. Available at: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJM-10-2014-0633/full/html?casa_token=bElaGmSl98EAAAAA%3AFtHXyV0wiFY2NDpwTbqYhJexbPeP2i7mTa3mcaVsjeCvX8_APDGlXf2k39FGFzM25ymE103ZqldEv3a4NluWr_rjRu0wRqq7jkjU0KbfTGBEPwSWiH3c (Accessed: 15 March 2023).

Gandola, K. (2022) Top 6 brand-influencer collaborations and why they worked, Net Influencer. Available at: https://www.netinfluencer.com/top-6-brand-influencer-collaborations/ (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Hayes, A.F. (2017) 'Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis A Regression-Based Approach'. Guilford press, PDF.

HelloFresh (2023) Är du en influencer?, HelloFresh. Available at: https://www.hellofresh.se/about/influencers (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Hsu, C. and McDonald, D. (2002) An examination on multiple celebrity endorsers in advertising, Journal of Product & Brand Management. Available at: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/10610420210419522/full/html?casa_token=7TsK7kgLOhsAAAAA%3A1e2TMFtYBxlUxLt2iETgqcAAn-REyR4b0hV4u5wHaBKxEI8S_ckxLDhvM7d0AmeCvc7D7MQBtWrstbNgTSQvE8qH805tHQibsJt5VQNbLrcmwtWm1Ori (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Ilicic, J. and Webster, C.M. (2016) Being True to Oneself: Investigating Celebrity Brand Authenticity, Wiley Online Library. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.20887 (Accessed: 15 March 2023).

Instagram (2023) FixaFormen, Instagram. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/fixaformen/ (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Jacobsen, DI & Hellström, C. (2002) Vad, hur och varför: Om metodval i företagsekonomi och andra samhällsvetenskapliga ämnen. Översatt av Gunnar Sandin, Studentlitteratur AB, Lund. Available at: https://portal.research.lu.se/sv/publications/vad-hur-och-varf%C3%B6r-om-metodval-i-f%C3%B6retagsekonomi-och-andra-samh%C3%A4l (Accessed: 10 April 2023).

Jakić, I. (2023a) Bad pr examples, Determ. Available at: https://www.determ.com/blog/bad-pr-examples/ (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Jon och Jannis diktatursemester (2022) nyheter24.se. Available at: https://nyheter24.se/bloggbevakning/2022/03/27/jon-och-jannis-diktatursemester/ (Accessed: 21 March 2023).

Kelner, M. (2018) Nike's controversial Colin Kaepernick ad campaign its most divisive yet, The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/sep/04/nike-controversial-colin-kaepernick-campaign-divisive (Accessed: 10 March 2023).

Kempf, W. (2005) Two experiments focusing on de-escalation oriented coverage of post-war conflicts, Regener online. Available at: https://regener-online.de/journalcco/2005_2/pdf_2005-2/kempf_2005.pdf (Accessed: 12 March 2023).

Kintu, B. and Ben-Slimane, K. (2022) Companies responses to scandal backlash caused by social media influencers. Sage, International Journal of Market Research. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1470785320957577 (Accessed: March 10, 2023).

Kubbernus, C. (2020) 28 epic influencer marketing fails of all time, Kubbco. Available at: https://www.kubbco.com/epic-influencer-marketing-fails-of-all-time/ (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Lee, J.E. and Watkins, B. (2016) YouTube vloggers' influence on consumer luxury brand perceptions and intentions, Journal of Business Research. Available at:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0148296316304222?casa_token=DIyI
0Z0kPLIAAAAA%3AthAc2axd6HoqopHBUuvww_WnPrRG1RzoRmJwCExw41NBsU6G
BmeWhHM0emrC5fYuDdLEfs8l5ew (Accessed: 05 May 2023).

Le, P.D. et al. (2018) When is silence golden? The use of Strategic silence in crisis
communication, Corporate Communications: An International Journal. Available at:
https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/CCIJ-10-2018-0108/full/html?af=R
(Accessed: 12 March 2023).

Lohneiss, A. and Hill, B. (2013) The impact of processing athlete transgressions on Brand
Image and purchase intent, Taylor & Francis. European Sport Management Quarterly.
Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/16184742.2013.838282
(Accessed: March 10, 2023).

Matin, A., Khoshtaria, T. and Todua, N. (2022) 'The impact of Social Media Influencers on
brand awareness, image and trust in their sponsored content: An empirical study from
Georgian social media users', *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New
Media*, 10(18). doi:10.54663/2182-9306.2022.v10.n18.88-114.

McKinsey & Company. (2022) Mind the gap: Influencer economy: The 24/7 sponsorship
market that surrounds gen Z, Global management consulting. Available at:
https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/email/genz/2022/09/13/2022-09-13b.html
(Accessed: 10 March 2023).

Molleda, J.C. (2010) "Authenticity and the construct's dimensions in public relations and
communication research," Journal of Communication Management, 14(3), pp. 223–236.
Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541011064508. (Accessed at: April 27 2023)

Pelkonen, M., Naumanen, E. and Laaksonen, S.-M. (2019) A call for authenticity: Audience
responses to Social Media Influencer endorsements in strategic communication, Taylor &
Francis. International Journal of Strategic Communication. Available at:
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1609965?casa_token=lXFclt-
oLacAAAAA%3AHO67g7U3BPYvw8QfOf_rDTaLKTLra5tFb2efAtf82Yahp0XLYaZyeK8P
EkEMwskoebHtMg_JrHhrvA (Accessed: March 10, 2023).

Pöyry, E. et al. (2019) A call for authenticity: Audience responses to Social Media Influencer endorsements in strategic communication, Taylor & Francis, International Journal of Strategic Communication. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1609965?casa_token=h6Z9L wXGazcAAAAA%3AWgeW2RyRDrjRTZiw9ZADQqGxJBYZARWNwanR9qzhdPF7NAv BNOplqRWA9ivAflPr-5IYnYo8UG-UAg (Accessed: 15 March 2023).

Raufeisen, X. et al. (2019) Spillover effects in marketing: Integrating Core Research Domains, SpringerLink. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13162-019-00143-x (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Reinikainen, H. et al. (2021) Making and breaking relationships on social media: The impacts of Brand and influencer betrayals, Science Direct, Technological Forecasting and Social Change. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0040162521004224?via%3Dihub#bib005 3 (Accessed: 10 April 2023).

Reinikainen, H. et al. (2020) 'You really are a great big sister' – parasocial relationships, credibility, and the moderating role of audience comments in Influencer marketing, Taylor & Francis, Journal of Marketing Management. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1708781 (Accessed: 05 May 2023).

Russell, C.A. and Rasolofoarison, D. (2017) Uncovering the power of natural endorsements: A comparison with celebrity-endorsed advertising and product placements, Taylor & Francis, International Journal of Advertising. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348033?casa_token=P7qkq3 gAsroAAAAA%3A3FX9L2tifhLPtd8bCWgzBzGpLAejLG0XKRU-9zTURLV3ZRrt8b4H-u 5N64RkfxjuZw4zuaMUgeEZ&journalCode=rina20 (Accessed: 05 May 2023).

Sauers, J. (2010) Lancôme pays Julia Roberts $50 million for her services, Jezebel. Available at: https://jezebel.com/lancome-pays-julia-roberts-50-million-for-her-services-5642863 (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Schallehn, M., Burmann, C. and Riley, N. (2014) Brand authenticity: Model development and empirical testing, Journal of Product & Brand Management. Available at: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JPBM-06-2013-0339/full/html?casa_to ken=Gb0PfWk9zrgAAAAA%3AkVTPBC_U-EOoPzrmk_pwZhNMTKAHpOXtRyLLGE5G pSj3JobU5uHAhpwbrdObfC_KYfrv0bxbw42GBH6mm495SAm2qik5dHd5HHbxq23-HWZ ogeekFAVz (Accessed: 15 March 2023).

Shukla, P., Breberina, J. and Rosendo-Rios, V. (2021) When endorsers behave badly: Consumer self-expression and negative meaning transfer, Taylor & Francis, International Journal of Advertising. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02650487.2021.2016267 (Accessed: 10 March 2023).

Spears, N. and Singh, S.N. (2004) 'Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions', *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 26(2), pp. 53–66. doi:10.1080/10641734.2004.10505164.

Spencer, A. (2021) How much does Justin Timberlake make for endorsements?, TheThings. Available at: https://www.thethings.com/how-much-does-justin-timberlake-make-for-endorsements/ (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Stammerjohan, C. et al. (2005) An Empirical Investigation of the Interaction between Publicity, Advertising, and Previous Brand Attitudes and Knowledge, Jstor, Journal of Advertising. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4189319 (Accessed: 17 August 2023).

Tan, T.M. et al. (2021) Recover from a service failure: The differential effects of brand betrayal and brand disappointment on an exclusive brand offering, Journal of Business Research. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S014829632030638X?casa_token=Hm

762gQ8c2oAAAAA%3AuObnqpYJZ9tqBMB6L1Y3uNwK0dbzaZ5e5ntOuE3JsdNBEzagd m4MJs7996quibuTlWsp_2ehfQ (Accessed: 05 May 2023).

Tavakol, M. and Dennick, R. (2011) Making sense of Cronbach's alpha, IJME, International Journal of Medical Education. Available at: https://www.ijme.net/archive/2/cronbachs-alpha/ (Accessed: 10 April 2023).

Tian, S. et al. (2021) Meaning transfer in celebrity endorsement and co-branding: Meaning valence, association type, and Brand Awareness, Taylor & Francis, International Journal of Advertising. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02650487.2021.1940059?casa_token=twx-f7I 7aHwAAAAA%3AKZuxvqHFWD1ijgk638HTve4Uumj8o5qx849iCJLgxf131svilEhxewz7J 9uGJnMWAv2OUxPyjSzV (Accessed: 13 May 2023).

TikTok (2023) Israalo, Tiktok. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@israalo (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

Till, B.D. and Shimp, T.A. (1998) Endorsers in advertising: The case of negative celebrity information, Taylor & Francis, Journal of Advertising. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00913367.1998.10673543?casa_token=lSr1cQ okJC4AAAAA%3A_BNyLD3xfrW3ttp1bN2GUtdQEyJyZ44fpFtV6cYZHMg3zUcqyMENx zDY0BGJLZocNTIoeF6NmbqLgg (Accessed: 11 March 2023).

Tolson, A. (2001) `Being yourself': The pursuit of authentic celebrity, SAGE publications. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1461445601003004007 (Accessed: 13 March 2023).

Um, N.-H. and Kim, S. (2016) Determinants for Effects of Celebrity Negative Information: When to Terminate a Relationship with a Celebrity Endorser in Trouble?, Wiley Online Library, Psychology & Marketing. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.20923 (Accessed: 16 March 2023).

Uzunoğlu, E. and Kip, S.M. (2014) Brand Communication Through Digital influencers: Leveraging blogger engagement, ScienceDirect, International Journal of Information Management. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0268401214000450?casa_token=W97 cnaMlgHIAAAAA%3A53Il4x4qbO4PdpxN8GI5E96LpopjBlET1z5Ce9Qzpv5YyBwZTyD9 a26wFEwBLhc7cukmD-b0Kg (Accessed: 05 May 2023).

Vannini, P. and Franzese, A. (2008) The Authenticity of Self: Conceptualization, Personal Experience, and Practice, Compass Onlinelibrary Wiley. Available at: https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00151.x (Accessed: 10 March 2023).

Vrontis, D. et al. (2021) Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. Wiley Online Library. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ijcs.12647 (Accessed: March 10, 2023).

YouTube (2023) Familjen Torsgården, YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/@FamiljenTorsgarden (Accessed: 18 August 2023).