

Influencer Credibility and Content Engagement as Drivers of Brand Awareness on Instagram

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Abstract

Instagram has become an important platform for brand communication because it allows brands to reach consumers through visual content, short videos, stories, reels, and influencer-led promotional messages. In this context, influencer credibility and content engagement play a major role in shaping brand awareness. Influencer credibility refers to the extent to which followers perceive an influencer as trustworthy, expert, attractive, authentic, and reliable. When followers believe that an influencer is credible, they are more likely to pay attention to the promoted brand, trust the message, and remember the brand later. Prior studies show that influencer credibility influences consumer trust, brand credibility, engagement, and purchase-related responses. Content engagement also supports brand awareness by encouraging followers to interact with influencer content through likes, comments, shares, saves, reels, stories, polls, and other interactive features. Such engagement increases message exposure and strengthens brand recall and recognition. This topic explains how influencer credibility and content engagement work together to create brand awareness on Instagram. It argues that credible influencers attract attention, while engaging content helps followers remember and recognize the brands being promoted. Therefore, brands should select influencers carefully and design content that encourages active audience participation.

Keywords

Influencer credibility, content engagement, brand awareness, Instagram marketing, social media influencers, brand recall, brand recognition, influencer marketing.

1. Introduction

Instagram has become an important platform for digital marketing because it allows brands to promote their products through images, reels, stories, live sessions, and influencer collaborations. Many brands

now use social media influencers because followers often trust influencers more than traditional advertisements. Influencer credibility, including trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, authenticity, and reliability, helps users pay attention to brand messages and remember promoted brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). At the same time, content engagement through likes, comments, shares, saves, reels, stories, and interactive features increases brand visibility and helps users recognize and recall brands more effectively (Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Delbaere et al., 2021). Therefore, influencer credibility and content engagement both play an important role in creating brand awareness on Instagram.

Objectives

1. To examine the role of influencer credibility in creating brand awareness among Instagram users.
2. To study how content engagement increases users' attention toward promoted brands on Instagram.
3. To analyze how Instagram users recognize and recall brands promoted by influencers.
4. To understand how influencer credibility and content engagement together influence brand awareness.

2. Influencer Credibility

Influencer credibility refers to the perceived believability and reliability of an influencer. It is one of the most important factors in influencer marketing because followers are more likely to accept a message when they believe the source is credible. In social media marketing, credibility is not based only on popularity or follower count. It also depends on whether the influencer appears trustworthy, knowledgeable, authentic, attractive, and reliable. These dimensions shape how followers interpret branded content.

Trustworthiness is a key part of influencer credibility. It refers to the extent to which followers believe that an influencer is honest and sincere. If followers feel that an influencer promotes products only for money without genuine experience, the promotional message may lose value. However, when the influencer is perceived as honest, followers are more likely to consider the promoted brand positively. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencer credibility affects consumer trust in branded content, showing that trust is central to influencer marketing. Similarly, Weismueller et al. (2020) explain that source credibility affects consumer responses to influencer endorsements on social media.

Expertise is another important component of credibility. It means that the influencer is seen as knowledgeable about a product category or topic. For example, a skincare influencer who regularly explains ingredients, product routines, and skin types may be seen as more credible when promoting beauty brands. In the same way, a fitness influencer may be more credible when discussing sportswear, supplements, or training equipment. Masuda et al. (2022) found that influencer attributes affect consumer responses in social media influencer marketing, suggesting that the perceived characteristics of influencers can shape how followers respond to promotional content.

Attractiveness also contributes to influencer credibility, but it should not be understood only as physical appearance. In influencer marketing, attractiveness may include communication style, personality, lifestyle appeal, content quality, and similarity with followers. Schouten et al. (2020) explain that identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit influence the effectiveness of influencer endorsements. This means followers may respond more positively when they feel connected to the influencer or when the influencer fits the promoted product.

Authenticity is especially important on Instagram because users often value natural and relatable content. Authenticity refers to the perception that the influencer is genuine and not artificially presenting a brand message. Lee and Eastin (2021) developed and validated a scale for perceived authenticity of social media influencers, showing that authenticity is an important concept in understanding influencer effectiveness. When influencers appear authentic, followers may feel that the brand recommendation is based on real experience rather than paid promotion alone.

Reliability is also necessary for credibility. A reliable influencer is consistent in content, behavior, and recommendations. If an influencer frequently changes opinions or promotes too many unrelated products, followers may question the sincerity of the message. Casaló et al. (2020) found that opinion leadership on Instagram has important consequences for influencer effectiveness. This suggests that influencers who are seen as reliable opinion leaders can play a stronger role in shaping followers' brand-related perceptions.

Overall, influencer credibility increases the possibility that followers will notice, believe, and remember brand-related messages. It acts as a bridge between the influencer's personal image and the brand's visibility. When credibility is high, the promoted brand is more likely to gain awareness among Instagram users.

3. Content Engagement on Instagram

Content engagement refers to the interaction between users and Instagram content. It includes visible actions such as likes, comments, shares, saves, reel views, story replies, mentions, and participation in interactive tools such as polls, questions, quizzes, and live sessions. Engagement shows that users are not only seeing content but also responding to it. In the context of influencer marketing, engagement is important because it increases the visibility and memorability of brand messages.

Likes are the simplest form of engagement. They show that users have noticed and responded positively to a post. Although likes may not always reflect deep involvement, they help increase the visibility of influencer content. Comments reflect a higher level of engagement because users spend time expressing opinions, asking questions, or sharing experiences. When followers comment on a brand-related post, the brand receives more attention and may become more memorable.

Shares are highly valuable because they extend the reach of influencer content beyond the influencer's immediate followers. When users share posts or reels with others, they help spread the brand message to new audiences. Saves are also important because they indicate that users find the content useful or worth revisiting. For example, a follower may save a skincare routine, fashion recommendation, travel guide, or product review promoted by an influencer. This repeated access can strengthen brand recall.

Reels and stories have become powerful tools for engagement on Instagram. Reels allow influencers to present products in short, entertaining, and visually attractive formats. Stories allow more informal and frequent communication through polls, links, questions, countdowns, and direct replies. Tafesse and Wood (2021) found that influencer content and engagement strategies play an important role in followers' engagement with Instagram influencers. This suggests that the form and style of content influence how users interact with promotional messages.

Interactive content is especially useful for brand awareness because it encourages active participation. For example, an influencer may ask followers to vote between two product designs, answer questions about a brand, participate in a giveaway, or share their opinions in the comments. Such interactions make the brand message more active in the user's mind. Delbaere et al. (2021) argue that social media influencers can create routes to brand engagement for their followers, showing that influencer content can help build stronger brand-user relationships.

Content engagement also supports algorithmic visibility. When users interact with posts, reels, or stories, the content may become more visible to other users. This means that engagement can indirectly increase brand awareness by expanding content reach. Leung et al. (2022) explain that influencer marketing effectiveness depends on multiple factors, including influencer and content-related

elements. Therefore, brands cannot depend only on influencer popularity; they must also focus on creating content that encourages interaction.

In short, content engagement is a major driver of brand awareness because it increases exposure, interaction, sharing, and memory. Engaging content helps the brand move from passive visibility to active recognition among Instagram users.

4. Brand Awareness on Instagram

Brand awareness refers to the ability of consumers to recognize and recall a brand. Recognition means that users can identify a brand when they see its name, logo, packaging, color, or product. Recall means that users can remember the brand without direct visual support. On Instagram, brand awareness is created through repeated exposure, influencer recommendations, visual identity, hashtags, reels, stories, and user interaction.

Instagram is especially suitable for brand awareness because it is a highly visual platform. Brands can use images, videos, reels, product demonstrations, and influencer collaborations to make their identity more recognizable. When influencers repeatedly present a brand in an attractive and relatable way, followers may begin to remember the brand even if they do not immediately purchase the product. This is important because awareness often comes before trust, preference, and purchase intention.

Brand awareness on Instagram is also shaped by the way users process influencer content. If an influencer's message is credible, followers are more likely to pay attention to it. If the content is engaging, followers are more likely to interact with it and remember it. Lee and Kim (2020) found that influencer credibility and brand credibility affect the effectiveness of Instagram promotional posts. This shows that credibility is important not only for persuasion but also for the way users respond to brand communication.

Brand recognition can occur when followers repeatedly see the same brand in influencer posts, reels, stories, captions, and hashtags. For example, if a fashion influencer frequently tags a clothing brand and shows its products in different outfits, followers may begin to recognize the brand name and style. Brand recall can occur when users later remember the brand while shopping or discussing similar products. In this way, Instagram content can create memory links between the influencer, the product category, and the brand.

Influencer opinion leadership also contributes to brand awareness. Casaló et al. (2020) show that Instagram influencers can act as opinion leaders, influencing followers' attitudes and responses. When

an influencer is seen as an opinion leader, the brands they promote may receive more attention. This can be especially important for new or less familiar brands that need visibility among target audiences.

Brand awareness is not only about exposure; it also depends on meaningful exposure. Users may see many advertisements on Instagram but ignore most of them. However, when the message comes from a trusted influencer and appears in engaging content, users are more likely to process and remember it. Liu and Zheng (2024) highlight the persuasive power of social media influencers in shaping brand credibility and purchase intention. This supports the idea that influencers can strengthen brand-related perceptions when their messages are credible and persuasive.

Thus, Instagram brand awareness depends on both cognitive and social processes. Users must first notice the brand, then connect it with the influencer's message, and finally remember it when needed. Influencer credibility and content engagement help this process by increasing attention, trust, interaction, and memory.

5. Role of Credibility and Engagement in Creating Brand Awareness

Influencer credibility and content engagement work together to create brand awareness. Credibility helps attract attention and trust, while engagement helps increase interaction and memory. When both factors are present, Instagram users are more likely to notice, remember, and recognize the promoted brand.

First, credible influencers make brand messages more acceptable. Followers often see influencers as relatable individuals rather than formal advertisers. If followers trust the influencer, they may also trust the brand message. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencer credibility and message value affect consumer trust in branded content. This is important for brand awareness because trust encourages users to pay attention to the brand rather than ignore the content as ordinary advertising.

Second, influencer expertise helps followers understand the value of the brand. For example, when a beauty influencer explains how a skincare product works, or when a fitness influencer demonstrates how to use a sports product, followers receive useful information along with brand exposure. This increases the chance that the brand will be remembered. Masuda et al. (2022) show that influencer attributes shape consumer responses in social media influencer marketing, which supports the importance of matching influencer qualities with brand communication goals.

Third, authenticity strengthens the emotional connection between followers and influencer content. If users believe that the influencer genuinely likes or uses the product, they are more likely to see the brand positively. Lee and Eastin (2021) emphasize perceived authenticity as a key dimension of social

media influencer evaluation. Authenticity can reduce resistance to sponsored content and make the brand message feel more natural.

Fourth, engagement increases the depth of user involvement. When users like, comment, share, save, or respond to influencer content, they become active participants in the brand communication process. Tafesse and Wood (2021) show that content and engagement strategies influence followers' engagement with Instagram influencers. This means that the way content is designed can affect how strongly users interact with it. Higher engagement can strengthen brand recall because users spend more time with the content.

Fifth, engagement also increases social visibility. When followers comment on or share influencer content, other users may also see the brand message. This creates a wider communication effect. Delbaere et al. (2021) explain that influencers can create brand engagement among followers, showing that influencer marketing can support stronger brand connections. Such engagement may help brands become more familiar within online communities.

Sixth, influencer-brand fit is important for both credibility and awareness. If the influencer and brand do not match, followers may question the promotion. For example, a luxury fashion influencer promoting a low-quality unrelated product may create confusion. Schouten et al. (2020) explain that product-endorser fit is important in influencer endorsement effectiveness. A strong fit helps followers understand why the influencer is promoting the brand, which makes the message more believable and memorable.

Finally, credibility and engagement together help move users from simple exposure to meaningful awareness. A user may see a brand once and forget it. However, if the brand is promoted by a credible influencer and presented through engaging reels, stories, and interactive content, the user is more likely to remember the brand. Leung et al. (2022) argue that influencer marketing effectiveness depends on a combination of influencer-related and marketing-related factors. Therefore, brands should not treat influencer marketing as only a matter of follower count. They should examine credibility, content quality, engagement strategy, audience fit, and brand alignment.

Overall, influencer credibility creates the foundation for trust and attention, while content engagement strengthens interaction and memory. Together, they help Instagram users recognize and recall brands more effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, influencer credibility and content engagement are important factors in increasing brand awareness on Instagram. When influencers are trustworthy, knowledgeable, authentic, attractive, and reliable, followers are more likely to pay attention to their brand messages and remember the promoted products. At the same time, engaging content such as reels, stories, likes, comments, shares, saves, and interactive posts helps brands become more visible and memorable among Instagram users. Therefore, brands should not only choose popular influencers but also focus on credible influencers who can create meaningful and engaging content. This combination helps users recognize, recall, and develop awareness of brands promoted through Instagram

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