



**28th International Conference
on Corporate and Marketing Communications**

Conference Proceedings

*Valuing Diversity in Corporate and Marketing Communications:
Towards an Inclusive Corporate and Market Environment*

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Foreword from the conference organisers

Dear CMC2024 attendees, dear readers of these conference proceedings,

it was a great pleasure to host the 28th International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications at the University of Vienna. The 2024 conference theme “Valuing Diversity in Corporate and Marketing Communications: Towards an Inclusive Corporate and Market Environment” brought together great minds – researchers and practitioners – to discuss current issues on diversity, equity and inclusion in our field, as well as other topical issues in corporate and marketing communications.

Valuing diversity in corporate and marketing communications is crucial in today’s globalized and interconnected world. Companies promoting diversity and inclusion in their communication with stakeholders not only demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility; they also benefit in terms of brand reputation, customer loyalty, and employee engagement. In marketing communications, diverse representation and inclusive messaging can help to build stronger connections with a wider range of customers, which may ultimately lead to increased sales and market share. By also acknowledging and valuing diversity in their communications with employees, companies can foster a positive and inclusive work culture in which each individual is respected, thereby creating a sense of belonging. Overall, incorporating diversity into corporate and marketing communications is not only a responsible approach but also a smart business strategy.

These conference proceedings present the latest research on the topics of diversity in corporate, workplace and marketing communications. The volume furthermore addresses a variety of other topical areas ranging from sustainability communication, cultural aspects in advertising, crisis communication and complaining, to AI and platform communication and theory and methods related discussions. The presentations of the various research findings stimulated lively discussion during the conference, and we hope that reading the abstracts of these papers will continue to inspire readers.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the presenters, attendees and helpers who made this conference a resounding success. Let us continue to foster collaboration, innovation and knowledge sharing to navigate the ever-evolving field of corporate and marketing communications.

With kind regards,

Professor Sabine Einwiller

Dr. Ingrid Wahl

Conference Co-Chairs

The Effects of Parasocial Relationship on Source Credibility and the Consumer-Based Brand Equity Connection in the Context of Brand-Opinion Leader Collaborations on Social Media

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The emergence of social media networks (SMNs) has created new opportunities for brand owners to increase brand awareness and image through influencer marketing (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Although the use of brand-opinion leader collaborations on SMNs is increasing, there is still limited research on their effectiveness and contribution to Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) (Conde & Casais, 2023; Schouten et al., 2020). Scholars suggest exploring how social media enables celebrities to form closer connections with fans, an area that remains underexplored (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Wood & Burkhalter, 2014). Additionally, few studies directly compare established celebrities and influencers as endorsers, highlighting the need to understand their differing impacts on brand-related constructs like consumer-based brand equity (Schouten et al., 2020; Aw & Labrecque, 2020).

Researchers assert that parasocial relationships positively impact message acceptance (Yuan et al., 2016), brand trust, and credibility (Aw & Labrecque, 2020). Breves et al. (2019) suggest their effectiveness in altering brand perceptions and attracting new consumer segments. Notably, studies reveal that source credibility enhances parasocial relationships (Yuan et al., 2016) and positively influences customer-based brand equity when mediated by brand credibility (Spry et al., 2011). However, there's a gap in research regarding whether parasocial

relationships indirectly affect the connection between source credibility and consumer-based brand equity. Dwivedi et al. (2018) propose exploring if the consumer-endorser connection (parasocial relationship) mediates the effects of source credibility on customer-based brand equity, with potential implications for opinion leader-brand collaborations on social media. Additionally, factors like influencer type (Masuda et al., 2022; Yuan et al., 2016) and social media user gender (Al-Emadi & Ben Yahia, 2020; Rihl & Wegener, 2017) are suggested as potential contributors with varying outcomes on source credibility and parasocial relationships.

This research study aims to assess the impact of parasocial relationships on the connections between source credibility and consumer-based brand equity in the context of brand-influencer collaborations on social media. It also investigates the roles that SMN user gender and the type of opinion leader (celebrities vs. influencers) play in these collaborations. The conceptual research model of this study is provided in Figure 1. The research presents its limitations, proposes future research directions, and suggests practical implications for marketers and opinion leaders.

The study was conducted with 310 social media users in Lithuania who were asked to recall any previously seen collaborations on social media and, based on these, assess Source Credibility, Parasocial Relationships (PSR), and CBBE. This research utilized a non-probability convenience sampling technique to recruit participants. The sample comprised individuals who are active social media users and reside in Lithuania. This selection criterion is essential to the focus on opinion leader-brand collaborations in the context of social media. Those who did not use social media or could not recall influencers and influencer-brand collaborations were excluded from the sample.

The research found that source credibility has a positive direct effect on PSR and CBBE, and that PSR has a positive direct impact on CBBE. Furthermore, PSR was found to mediate the relationship between source credibility and CBBE. The type of opinion leader was not found to be a moderator in the relationship between source credibility and PSR, while the gender of SMN users does not moderate the relationships between PSR and CBBE. The results of the hypotheses testing are provided in Table 1.

The study addresses the limited scientific understanding of the effectiveness of brand endorsements by social media personalities and the factors influencing audience responses (Conde & Casais, 2023; Schouten et al., 2020). It contributes to existing literature by examining relationships between source credibility and parasocial relationships (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Breves et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2016), source credibility and consumer-based brand equity (Dwivedi et al., 2018; Hung et al., 2011; Spry et al., 2011). The study also explores the novel topic of the indirect effect of parasocial relationships on the connection between source credibility and consumer-based brand equity. Additionally, it investigates the impact of gender on parasocial relationships and CBBE relationships, as suggested by Al-Emadi and Ben Yahia (2020). Furthermore, it considers the influence of opinion leader type on the relationship between source credibility and parasocial relationships, aligning with Johns and English's

(2016) call to explore established celebrity endorsements on social media networks, an area insufficiently studied in the academic literature, with few comparisons between established celebrities and influencers as endorser types (Schouten et al., 2020; Wood & Burkhalter, 2014).

Several limitations should be noted for future studies. The sample is predominantly female (66.8%), with underrepresentation in age groups 45-55 years (9.0%) and 55+ years (2.3%). Future research should aim for a more balanced age representation. The assessment of parasocial relationships relies on participants recalling brand-opinion leader collaborations, lacking differentiation between long-term and one-time exposures. A more comprehensive, longitudinal study would provide a deeper understanding, but time constraints prevented its implementation. In the mediation analysis, the direct effect between source credibility and CBBE had a higher coefficient than the indirect effect through parasocial relationships, suggesting the presence of additional variables influencing the link between the independent and dependent variables. This finding contributes to the literature, but further research is needed to identify and evaluate these variables and their relationships.

Figure 1. Conceptual research model

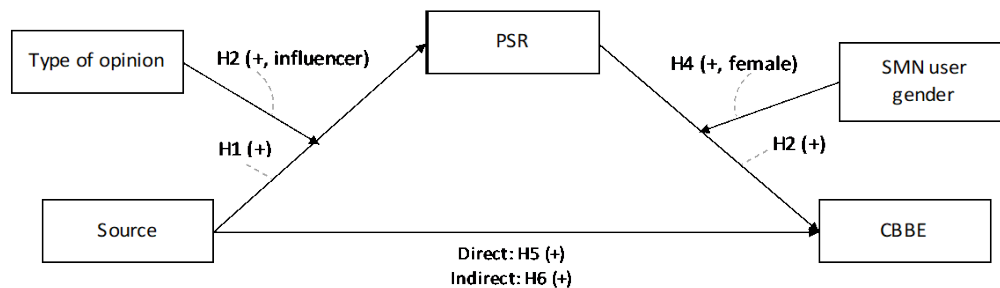


Table 1. Summary of hypotheses testing.

No.	Hypothesis	Status
H1	The credibility of the opinion leader has a direct positive impact on PSR.	Supported
H2	Influencer, as an opinion leader, moderates the effect of source credibility on PSR, such that SMN users are more likely to perceive influencers as credible and form a PSR with them.	Rejected
H3	PSR has a direct positive impact on CBBE.	Supported
H4	Gender of SMN user positively moderates the effect of PSR on CBBE, such that female SMN users are more likely to have better CBBE outcomes when a PSR is established.	Rejected
H5	The credibility of the opinion leader has a direct positive effect on CBBE.	Supported
H6	PSR mediates the relationship between source credibility and CBBE.	Supported

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