Investigating the Determinants of meme Behavior on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media has become one of the important things in people's daily life, and various meme activities on social media are a potential marketing approach to communicate with consumers. However, few studies focus on how to utilize the meme activity on social media for marketing promotion and thus there is an academic gap. Based on the two-step flow of communication theory and source credibility theory, this research chooses Instagram as the research target to investigate the effects of meme activities on viral advertising by conducting two studies. In Study 1, the results confirm that the indirect effect of advertising source on consumers' participation in meme activities via source credibility would be moderated by the condition of the account authenticity. In Study 2, the results verify that the indirect effect of advertising source (influencer vs. company) on consumers' participation and engagement in meme activities via source credibility would be moderated by product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian). The findings provide several implications. (1) This research extends the two-step flow of communication theory to the context of meme activity on social media and confirms the mediating role of source credibility and moderating roles of the verified badge and product type, (2) The different advertising sources have different effects on the source credibility, and when the advertising publisher's account has a verified badge, it can improve the source credibility and further enhance consumers' intentions of participation intention. (3) For practitioners, it is suitable to choose influencers as the advertising publisher when promoting hedonic products.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the Internet age, social media has become an important channel for people's information gathering and social interaction (Sharma et al., 2022). The employment of social media platforms by enterprises, institutions, sectors, and policymakers, in general, is progressively expanding, aiming to distribute pertinent information that encompasses both implicit and explicit aspects (Sreejesh et al., 2020). Among various social media activities, a very popular activity is the so-called meme, which represents a collection of digital entities that exhibit shared attributes in terms of content, structure, and perspective, and are intentionally generated with mutual awareness among creators (Miltner, 2018). The results of these memes are subsequently disseminated, replicated, and modified across the internet by a large number of users on the Internet (Shifman, 2013). Due to the remarkably swift transmission of information facilitated by meme activities, scholars have directed their focus toward the online propagation effect and the diffusion of information inherent in such activities (Benaim, 2018; Brubaker et al., 2018). Most previous studies of meme behaviors address on the characteristics of meme activities (e.g., Benaim, 2018; Brubaker et al., 2018). However, the utilization of meme activity in social media holds considerable potential as a robust marketing strategy (Razzaq et al., 2023), yet the exploration of its application for marketing promotion remains limited in the extant literature. Therefore, this research intends to fill the academic gap by investigating marketing promotion via meme activities on Instagram.

Due to the proliferation of Internet memes as a newly emerged and essential tactic for online communication (Mirsharapovna et al., 2022), it is justifiable to consider embracing the perspective of the two-step flow of communication theory derived from the field of communication studies (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). Two-step flow of communication theory posits that the majority of individuals do not obtain information directly from media outlets, but rather rely on interpersonal channels, highlighting the significance of social groups and influential individuals in the intermediary transmission of information (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Soffer, 2021). The prior endeavors to scrutinize the significance of the two-step flow of communication theory within the media landscape have predominantly concentrated on the socio-political functions fulfilled by opinion leaders in social

networks (e.g., Choi, 2015; Hong, 2016). Nevertheless, we posit that this theory holds potential for probing the domain of marketing promotion on social media platforms, because the influences on social media can be treated as the role of opinion leaders on the Internet (Fakhreddin and Foroudi, 2022).

Furthermore, the reason why influencers can become opinion leaders and have opinion leadership is highly related to source credibility (Breves et al., 2019; Jegham and Bouzaabia, 2022). While the notion of utilizing the perceived credibility of an information source to make informed decisions is not a new discovery (Leite and Baptista, 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020), the exploration of perceived source credibility in relation to the meme behavior remains unexplored within the academic realm. Therefore, this research integrates two-step flow of communication theory with source credibility theory to propose that perceived source credibility is an essential mediator in the research model. In addition, this research considers two moderators to deeply investigate the impacts of two-step flow communication and source credibility on the meme behavior. One moderator is the users' account authenticity which is represented as the feature of a verified badge on Instagram, potentially influencing the perception of source credibility. The other moderator is the product type which is confirmed as a critical contextual factor for marketing promotion (Liu et al., 2022; Park et al., 2016).

In sum, this research adopts the perspectives of two-step flow of communication theory (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) and source credibility theory (Hovland and Weiss, 1951) to investigate how to employ the meme activity on Instagram as the marketing advertisement. The research model explores the impacts of advertising message sources on Instagram users' participation intention of meme activity and also takes one mediator (source credibility) and two moderators (account authenticity and product type) into account. There are three research objectives in this research.

1. Understanding the impacts of different advertising message sources on Instagram users' meme behavior.

2. Examining the mediating effect of source credibility on the relationship between advertising message sources and Instagram users' meme behavior.

3. Exploring the moderating effects of account authenticity and product type on the relationship between advertising message sources and source credibility, which in

turn influence Instagram users' meme behavior.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review and Section 3 depicts the hypothesis development. Sections 4, and 5 describe two experiments. Finally, Section 6 discusses the results, including implications for researchers and practitioners, followed by some limitations and future research in Section 7.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Meme behavior

Meme behaviors can be delineated as a collective assemblage of digital artifacts exhibiting shared attributes in terms of content, structure, and perspective; conceived with mutual cognizance; and subsequently disseminated, emulated, and modified across the internet by numerous users (Shifman, 2013). In the capacity of a nascent category within the realm of social media linguistic discourse, meme behaviors serve as conveyors of numerous speech acts, catering to diverse communicative functions, including but not limited to disseminating information, inciting action, or articulating emotions across digital platforms (Grundlingh, 2018). A meme activity can be treated an interactive medium format encompassing three distinct components, specifically (a) content (intangible ideas or diverse fragments of information possessing value and benefits for recipients); (b) form (concrete representations such as images, texts, melodies, phrases, videos, and so forth); and (c) stance (the communication-oriented perspective adopted by meme behavior) (Razzaq et al., 2023). In the extant literature of meme behaviors, the predominant scholarly investigations center on scrutinizing the attributes of content (Lee et al., 2019; Teng et al., 2022) and form (e.g., image, text, video) (Brubaker et al., 2018; Tomaž and Walanchalee, 2020) in order to assess their influence on the formation of destination image. However, previous studies have commonly neglected to address the aspect of stance (i.e., the communication-oriented perspective). Therefore, to fill this academic gap, we intend to adopt the lens from the communication field, namely the two-step flow of communication theory, to investigate meme activity on the Internet.

The meme activities engender memetic connections by capitalizing on the technical infrastructure of specific social media platforms, such as Instagram, due to the unique digital affordances or design characteristics that facilitate the generation of posts resembling memes (Caliandro and Anselmi, 2021). Instagram focuses on impressing users with images and has powerful features such as verified badges, hashtags, stories, and advertising. Especially, the technical framework of Instagram enables the replication of photos and texts, fostering a digital participatory culture that arises from the routine cultural practices of the platform's users (Burgess, 2006; Yhee et al., 2021). Therefore, in this research, we adopt the social media platform Instagram as the research context.

The meme activities establish connections and cultivate relationships on social media within the wider context of participatory culture prevalent in these digital platforms (Razzaq et al., 2023). Participatory culture is distinguished by its emphasis on unrestrained expression, which is made possible by the proliferation of social media platforms, thereby enabling the general public to create and disseminate content, fostering global connections among individuals (Jenkins et al., 2009). The meme activities serve as an intermediary bridging the gap between the public and the participatory culture prevailing in social media, thus fostering transient brand relationships or associations (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016). Motivated by shared interests, individuals who engage in the creation and dissemination of meme activities on social media invariably assume the role of members within an imagined community, as they experience a sense of belonging to a collective entity (i.e., digital meme culture) despite lacking physical interactions (Anderson's, 2006; Weeks and Holbert, 2013). While meme activities have become a popular way to spread positive and negative word-of-mouth (WOM) (Tomaž and Walanchalee, 2020), user participation behavior is important for meme success. Accordingly, the users' participation intention is adopted as the independent variable in the research model.

2. Two-step flow of communication theory

The two-step flow of communication theory posited that the dissemination of information from the media to the public is mediated by opinion leaders, who are

inclined to have higher exposure to media messages and wield personal influence over the opinions and attitudes of their immediate associates (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). The mediated impact of mass communication content deviated from earlier theoretical conceptions revolving around the direct "stimulus-response" effect of mass communication (Laughey, 2007). The pertinent information and ideas initially flow from a specific information source to the opinion leader via mass media channels, subsequently disseminating to the public through the opinion leader (Soffer, 2021). The former constitutes the primary phase of information transmission, while the latter represents the secondary stage of interpersonal influence (Laughey, 2007). Opinion leaders form an inherent component of every social group and stratum, actively participating in its daily discourse and exchanges, while their viewpoints align closely with the beliefs of the individuals they inform and exert influence upon (Katz, 1957; Winter and Neubaum, 2016). The two-step flow of communication theory recognizes the importance of social contacts in mediating information from mass communication, thus revealing the pivotal communication function of opinion leaders (Chien et al., 2013). The two-step flow of communication theory has been adopted in several academic fields, such as climate change (Nisbet and Kotcher, 2009), political discussions (Choi, 2015), public diplomacy (Yang, 2016).

One important feature of the two-step flow of communication theory is that the opinion leaders may add their interpretation and supplementary message of their own opinions into the original information and then spread it to their followers in the second stage of two-step communication (Arndt, 1968). This phenomenon is similar to meme behavior, as meme behavior involves creatively modifying a cultural element and subsequently disseminating it through the Internet (Weber et al., 2021). In our research context, influencers on Instagram engage in meme behaviors, receiving advertising information from companies and adding their own opinions before posting on Instagram. Accordingly, the two-step flow of communication theory (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) is an appropriate theoretical foundation for this research.

3. Source credibility theory

Source credibility theory pertains to the message recipient's perception of the credibility associated with the message source, and the degree of source credibility significantly influences the persuasiveness of the message (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Wilson and Sherrell, 1993). Individuals have the tendency to place belief and acceptance in messages emanating from highly credible sources due to the phenomenon wherein the perception of source credibility engenders an inference of credibility implies correctness (Chang and Wu, 2014). Consequently, message recipients are inclined to deem a message from a more credible source as possessing greater validity (Kim, 2015). Source credibility has a certain degree of influence on the efficiency of message dissemination and is often viewed as the positive characteristics of the disseminator (Mohammadi et al., 2020). Furthermore, source credibility usually serves as a peripheral factor to affect individuals' attitude and judgment (Kang and Namkung, 2019). Previous studies confirm that source credibility is an important determinant of people's attitudes and behavioral intentions and often acts as a mediator in the research models (Alsheikh et al., 2021; Iyengar and Valentino, 2000; Landreville and Niles, 2019). In the context of social media, regardless of whether the advertising message comes from an influencer or a company, the credibility of the source is seen as a critical factor in influencing consumer intentions (Shin and Choi, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020).

In our research context, people's participation intention of meme activities may also be affected by the credibility of message source (i.e., influencer or company). Accordingly, source credibility theory is a suitable theoretical foundation for the current investigation of meme activities and the concept of source credibility is treated as a mediator in this research.

III. Hypothesis Development

For the advertisement on social media, the advertising source plays a vital role. Different advertising sources will not only affect consumers' perceptions but also affect their following responses (Shin and Choi, 2021). According to the two-step flow of communication theory (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955), the message is transmitted from the mass media to the public through opinion leaders. After the

message spread by opinion leaders, message recipients' attitudes toward the message may change (Karlsen, 2015). In the context of consumer behavior, opinion leaders exert a more substantial influence on consumers' product choices and decisions compared to marketers (Lawry, 2013). In a similar vein, the advertising messages disseminated by influencers are more likely to change their followers' intentions than the advertising messages spread by companies (i.e., marketers) because influencers play the role of opinion leaders of two-step flow of communication theory.

Moreover, source credibility assumes a critical role on social media, yielding noteworthy effects on users' attitudes and behaviors (Dedeoglu, 2019). All uncertain or false factors on social media will reduce consumers' perception of source credibility (Sun et al., 2023). When consumers have more understanding of account information and the higher the degree of information disclosure, their perception of the source credibility will be higher (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Previous studies show that diverse advertising sources bring varying degrees of credibility to customers, influenced by factors such as source attractiveness or expertise (Chekima et al., 2020; Heinberg et al., 2017). In the context of our research, the different message sources (e.g., influencer or company) of meme activities may bring different degrees of source credibility which in turn affect the intention of future participation. That is, we predict that source credibility is a mediator between advertising source and users' participation intention of meme activities.

In addition, an important feature of verified bag on Instagram is that the account has been officially approved, and there is a blue tick next to the account name. The presence of the verified bag can be used to represent the authenticity of one Instagram account. The concept of authenticity refers to a seeming spontaneity of action, interaction, demeanor, and selfhood (Goffman, 1955). Perceived authenticity is the perceived uniqueness, originality, and/or genuineness of an object, a person, an organization, or an idea (Molleda, 2010). In our research context, the account authenticity can be defined as the unique and authentic perception that the account of advertising source brings to consumers. The presence of a blue checkmark symbolizes institutional trust, signifying that individuals place confidence in third-party measures that facilitate counterparties in

meeting expectations (McKnight et al., 1998). However, within the realm of social media, malevolent users frequently employ fake accounts to participate in spamming, fraud, and various manifestations of system abuse, particularly targeting company accounts (Xiao et al., 2015). The official company accounts on Instagram serve as the primary conduit for disseminating advertising messages, consequently, Instagram accounts bearing verified badges hold the potential to significantly enhance consumers' perception of source credibility with regard to the advertising messages. In contrast, because followers are usually attracted by influencers' generated content rather than commercial products, we assume that verified badges would also enhance the source credibility of influencers' advertising sources, but this effect is not as great as for the companies. That is, the account authenticity may play the role of a moderator to affect the relationship between advertising source and source credibility. Based on the above discussions of advertising source, source credibility and account authenticity, we propose the following hypothesis to describe these factors' impacts on consumers' participation intention of meme activities. The research model of this hypothesis is shown in Figure 1.

H1: The interactive effect between message source and account authenticity affects participation intention indirectly through source credibility
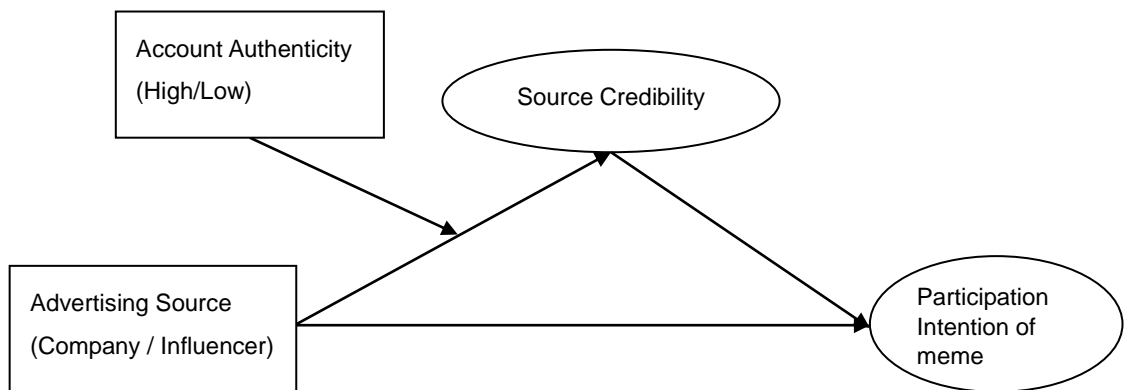

Figure 1. The proposed hypothesis associations in Study 1

The type of product plays an important role in determining the impacts of online advertising on consumes' perceptions and reactions (Kim et al., 2019). Especially, the classification of hedonic versus utilitarian products has been widely adopted as a moderator to understand consumers' attitudes toward online advertising (Stewart et al., 2019). Hedonic products are predominantly consumed with the objective of sensory gratification and for affective purposes, encompassing activities of fun, enjoyment, and experiential consumption, exemplified by items like ice cream, chocolate, or concert tickets (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). On the other hand, utilitarian products are characterized by their rational appeal and comparatively lower level of arousal, as they predominantly offer cognitively oriented benefits, exemplified by items such as washing powder or toothpaste, which are perceived as being more functional and instrumental in nature (Chang, 2012).

Consumers exhibit diverse responses concerning the extent to which a product delivers hedonic and utilitarian value (Im et al., 2015). In a similar vein, we suspect that the difference in product type can affect the effects of different advertising source on consumers' perception of source credibility. In marketing activities, utilitarian products tend to produce fewer emotional responses, and the evaluation and purchase decisions of these types of products are usually more rational and focus on clues related to the product itself (Pan et al., 2008). Therefore, the difference of source credibility between companies and influencers for the utilitarian products may be weak. In contrast, the consumption of hedonic products is fundamentally distinguished by an affective and sensory encounter involving esthetic or sensual pleasure, fantasy, and enjoyment (Huettl and Gierl, 2012). Given the challenging nature of evaluating hedonic products using parameters or specific standards, consumers often place greater reliance on influencers' recommendations to aid in their assessment and decision-making processes (Wang et al., 2022). In particular, influencers often add their own unique opinions or insights in meme activities to introduce the experiential aspect of hedonic products. Therefore, we predict that consumers are capable of attaining heightened emotional satisfaction from influencers concerning hedonic products and concurrently perceive a greater level of source credibility. In line with previous studies that have documented consumers' differential responses to hedonic and utilitarian products

(Estes et al., 2018; Filieri et al., 2023; Stewart et al., 2019), we adopt the category of utilitarian products and hedonic products as the moderator and Therefore and propose the following hypothesis. The research model of this hypothesis is shown in Figure 2.

H2: The interactive effect between message source and product type affects participation intention indirectly through source credibility
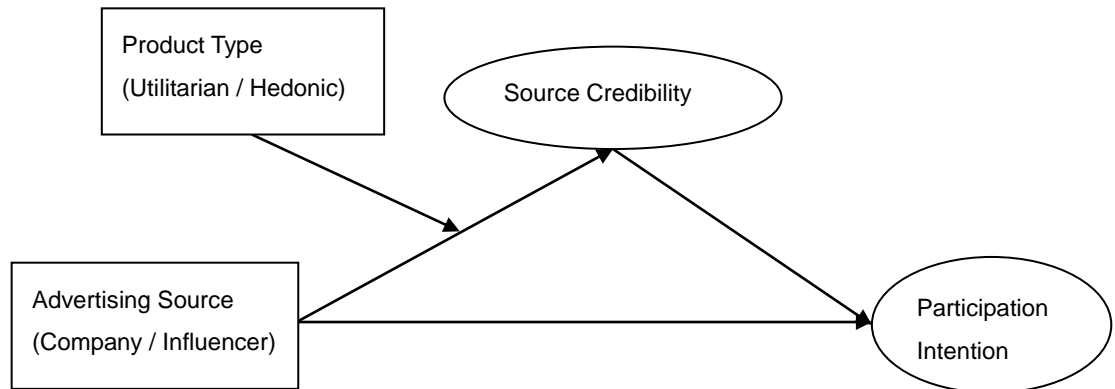

Figure 2. The proposed hypothesis associations in Study 2

In short, two research models are proposed with the theme of "the influence of different advertising sources on consumers' meme behavior" to explore the effects of advertising source on consumers' participation intention of meme activity. Furthermore, source credibility plays the role of a mediator while account authenticity and product type are the moderating variables.

IV. Study1

1. Pre-test

The purpose of pre-test was to choose the experimental influencers of Instagram. According to the starngage website (starngage.com, 2021), the top 10 influencers are Neymar Jr., Jennifer Lopez, Katy Perry, Ellen Lee DeGeneres, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Maluma, Dua Lipa, Ronaldo de Assis Moreira, Will Smith, and Ciara. Next, the participants checked the influencers that they were following

in the top influencer list. The top five influencers followed are Jennifer Lopez, Katy Perry, Will Smith, Ciara, Dua Lipa. Therefore, we selected these five influencers as the experimental influencers in this study.

2. Experimental design and procedure

Study 1 aimed to examine whether the interactive effect of message source and verified badge affected participation intention indirectly via source credibility (H1). We conducted an online experiment with a 2 (message source: company vs. influencer) × 2 (verified badge: yes vs. no) between-subjects design. A total of 160 valid participants (male = 50%) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions and followed the four sections of the experimental procedure. The advertising images on Instagram was adapted from De Veirman and Hudders (2020).

In the first section, participants were asked to answer some questions of Instagram usage. If participants did not have an Instagram account, they were directed to the end of the survey. In the second section, participants read the instructions of the fictitious brand "sjiro" which is a sunglasses company that provides many personalized and changeable sunglasses for consumers to choose. Participants also were informed the meaning of "verified bugs" in Instagram. According to the official Instagram instructions: "Verified badges"(as shown below) is a check that appears next to an Instagram account's name in search and on the profile. It means Instagram has confirmed that an account is the authentic presence of the public figure, influencer, or global company it represents. In the third section, participants watched the screen capture of Instagram. We manipulated the stimuli of message source and verified badge in the picture. For the group with message source from company, participants would see the Instagram ID (identity) is the fictitious brand "sjiro". In contrast, for the group with message source from influencer, the Instagram ID would be the name of an influencer. For the group with verified badge, participants would see a certificated symbol (i.e., blue tick) beside the Instagram ID. On the other hand, for the group without verified badge, a certificated symbol would not be displayed in the picture. After viewing the picture of stimulus, participants were asked to answer the questionnaire of source credibility, participation intention, and control variables of product involvement,

product knowledge, social stimulation, and extrinsic reward. Finally, in the fourth section, participants answered the questions of demographic data, such as gender, age, education level, etc.

3. Measures

The measure items were drawn from the literature. All items used a 7-point Likert-type scale. Six items of source credibility were adapted from Na et al. (2020). Three items of participation intention were adapted from Zhang et al. (2015). For control variables, three items of product involvement were adapted from Zaichkowsky (1994). Three items of product knowledge were adapted from Nepomuceno et al. (2014). Three items of social simulation and three items of extrinsic reward were adapted from Raybould (1998). The detailed questionnaire items can be addressed in Appendix A.

4. Result

For the manipulation checks, the result of a T-test showed that verified badges group was perceived as more authentic than non-verified badge group (M_{badge} = 5.97 vs. $M_{non\text{-}badge}$ = 3.42, $p < .001$). Therefore, the manipulation was successful. Furthermore, the Cronbach's α values of all constructs were greater than 0.6 to show the acceptable of reliability of measurement items (Nunnally, 1978).

To test H1, we used the moderated mediation bootstrapping technique (model 7) in PROCESS with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017) to test the moderating role of verified badge and the mediating role of source credibility by controlling product involvement, product knowledge, social simulation, extrinsic reward, gender, age, education, and monthly income. The results showed that the message source of influencer had a significantly stronger positive impact on source credibility than the message source of company (95% CI [Confidence Interval] = .9051, 3.1224). The results also showed that Instagram ID with verified badge had a significantly stronger positive impact on source credibility than the Instagram ID without verified badge (CI = .2106, 1.1431). Furthermore, the results showed that the index of moderated mediation was significant for participation intention (CI = .3613, 1.3468), Thus, H1 was supported. Additionally, we performed an

analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on source credibility, controlling the same eight control variables. The result showed that there was a significant interaction effect between message source and verified badge on source credibility ($F(1, 159) = 17.757$, $p < .001$) (see Figure 3).
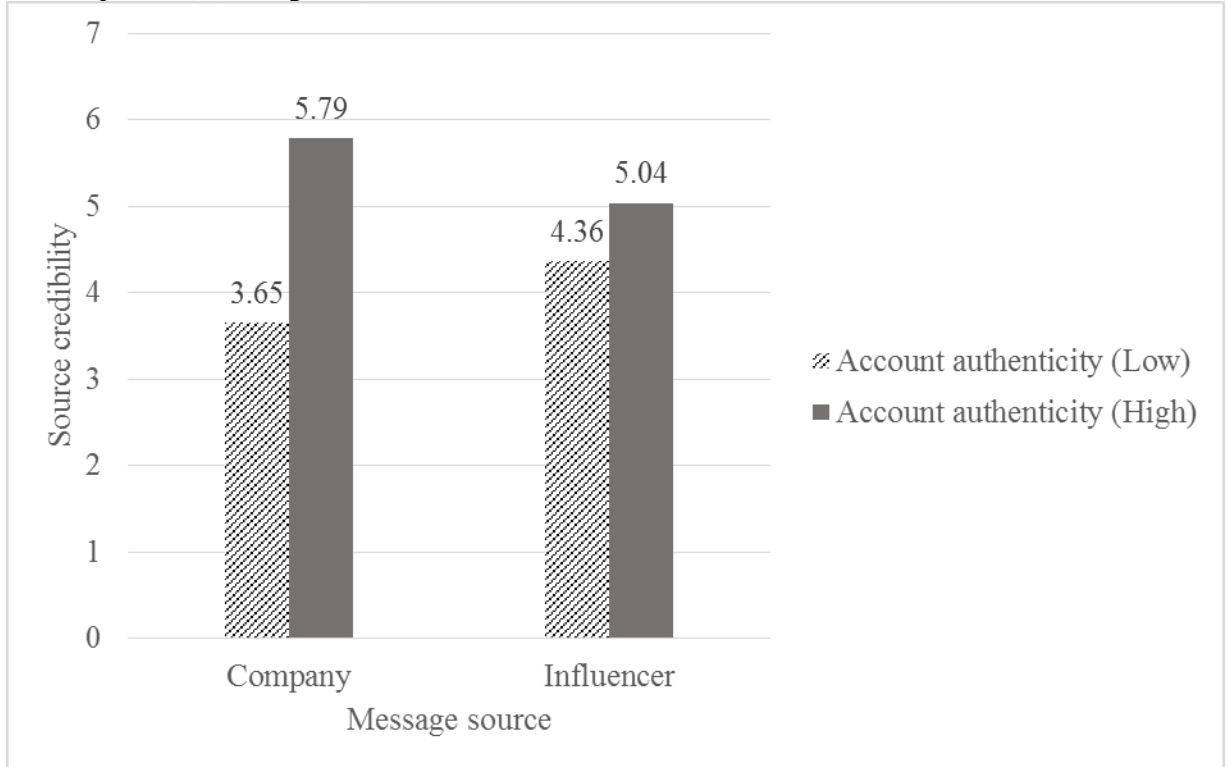

Figure 3. Interaction effect of message source ✕ account authenticity on source credibility (Study 1)

5. Discussion of Study 1

The results of Study 1 confirmed that when the message source is an influencer (vs. a company), consumers can perceive higher source credibility. The results also verified the moderating role of verified badge and the mediating role of source credibility. Furthermore, the results implied that when the message source is a company and its Instagram ID was verified, consumers would feel the highest source credibility (see Figure 3) and then have the higher participation intention of meme activity. Although the results of Study 1 showed the important effect of verified badge on source credibility and participation intention, the classification of

product type (e.g., utilitarian and hedonic products) that is a critical factor for social media advertisings may provide more insights by considering its moderating role (Li et al., 2022). Therefore, we further investigated the interactive effect between message source and product type on source credibility and participation intention in the context of verified badge.

V. Study2

1. Pre-Test

The purpose of pre-test was to decide the experimental products of Study 2. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to test the effectiveness of an advertisement for a product. Participants will then read descriptions about hedonic products and utilitarian products: A utilitarian product is one that people use to achieve other aims (e.g., for work, or other tasks), and a hedonic product is one that people use for its good feelings (e.g., for fun or enjoyment). Next, 15 products will be provided (i.e., 35mm camera, CD player, detergent, slipper, blue jeans, automobile, stereo, perfume, music album, battery, necklace, toilet paper, salt, electric bulbs, sunglasses,), and used the Likert 7-point scale to asked participants to answer about the product type. According to the responses, slipper was selected as the utilitarian product and necklace was selected as the hedonic product of this study. To avoid potential confounds, we designed fictitious company names to ensure that the person had no previous association with the company.

2. Experimental design and procedure

Study 2 aimed to examine whether the interactive effect of message source and product type affected participation intention indirectly via source credibility (H2). We conducted an online experiment with a 2 (message source: company vs. influencer) $\times$ 2 (product type: utilitarian vs. hedonic) between-subjects design. A total of 172 valid participants (male = 61.6%) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions and followed the four sections of the experimental

procedure that was similar to Study 1. The differences between Study 1 and Study 2 were the experimental products (i.e., slipper and necklace in Study 2) and all Instagram IDs had blue tick in Study 2.

3. Measures

All items used a 7-point Likert-type scale. All measurement items of source credibility, participation intention and control variables were the same as Study 1.

4. Result

For the manipulation checks, the result of a T-test showed that the slipper group was perceived as more utilitarian than the necklace group ($M_{slipper}$ = 5.44 vs. $M_{necklace}$ = 2.11, p < .001). In contrast, the result of a T-test showed that the necklace group was perceived as more hedonic than the slipper group ($M_{necklace}$ = 6.21 vs. $M_{slipper}$ = 2.31, p < .001). Therefore, the manipulation was successful. Furthermore, the Cronbach's α values of all constructs were greater than 0.6 to show the acceptable of reliability of measurement items (Nunnally, 1978).

To test H2, we employed the moderated mediation bootstrapping technique (model 7) in PROCESS with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017) to test the moderating role of product type and the mediating role of source credibility by controlling product involvement, product knowledge, social simulation, extrinsic reward, gender, age, education, and monthly income. The results showed that the message source of influencer had a significantly stronger positive impact on source credibility than the message source of company (95% CI [Confidence Interval] = .1378, 2.4978). Furthermore, the results showed that the index of moderated mediation was significant for participation intention (CI = .0604, .5516), Thus, H2 was supported. Additionally, we performed an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on source credibility, controlling the same eight control variables. The result showed that there was a significant interaction effect between message source and product type on source credibility ($F(1, 171)$ = 8.234, p <.01) (see Figure 4)
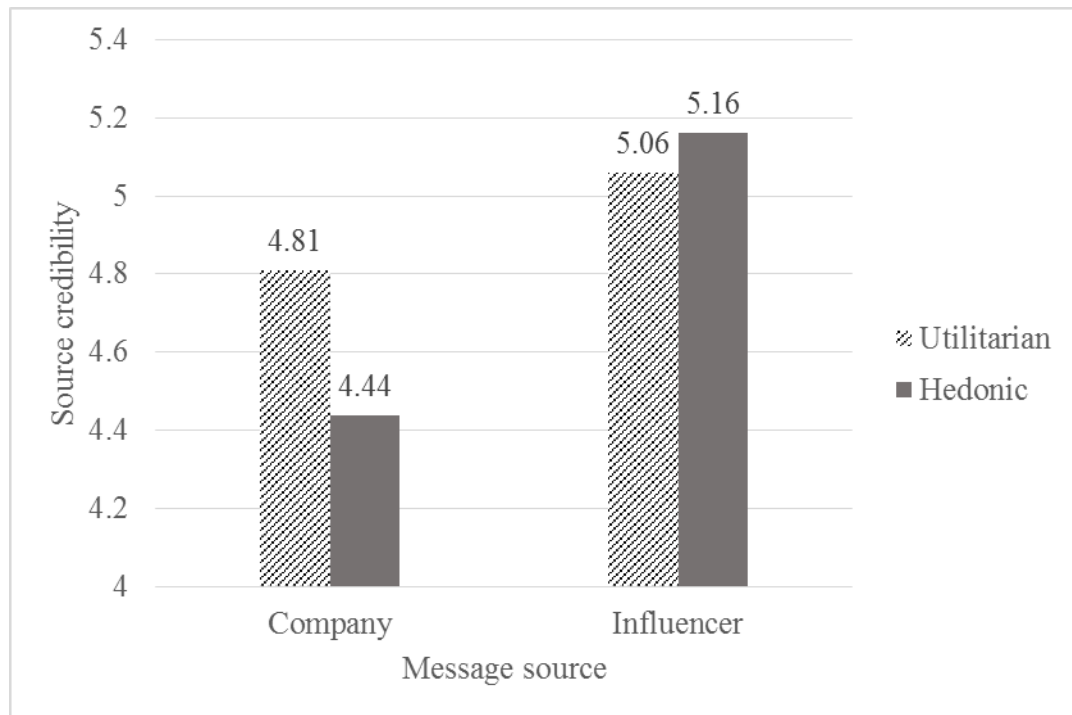
Figure 4. Interaction effect of message source ✕ product type on source credibility (Study 2)

5. Discussion of Study 2

The results of Study 2 showed that when the message source is an influencer (vs. a company), consumers can perceive higher source credibility. The results also confirmed the moderating role of product type and the mediating role of source credibility. Furthermore, the results indicated that when the message source is an influencer and product type is hedonic, consumers would feel the highest source credibility (see Figure 4) and then have the higher participation intention of meme activity.

VI. General Discussion

This research provides insights for influencer marketing by investigating the meme activity on social media. The findings complement the extant research on influencer marketing by integrating the theories of two-step flow of communication (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) and source credibility (Hovland and Weiss, 1951) in

the research model. This research also includes account authenticity and product type as moderators to investigate for their relevance in relation to participation intention. Therefore, our findings make contributes for the fields of influencer marketing and offer managerial implications for practitioners.

1. Theoretical Implications

Our findings offer several theoretical implications. First, the results verified that different advertising sources have different effects on the source credibility in the context of social media. Based on the viewpoint of two-step flow of communication theory (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955), When an advertising message is propagated through an influencer, consumers tend to perceive it as more credible compared to messages disseminated directly by a company, consequently leading to increased intention to participate in meme activities. The results of this research add knowledge to the emerging literature of the two-step flow of communication, by exploring the influence of different advertising sources in Instagram on advertising activities, the application scope of the theory is further expanded. In the past, of the two-step flow of communication theory was mainly applied in the general mass media (Abanoz, 2022). In our research, this theory was expanded from the original mass media to the emerging popular social media platform. Furthermore, the findings verify the mediating role of source credibility between the relationship between advertising source and meme participate intention. We successfully extend the source credibility theory (Hovland and Weiss, 1951) to the context of meme advertising context. In short, this research is a pioneering study to investigate the phenomenon of meme activities in marketing promotion by integrating two theories (i.e., the two-step flow of communication theory and source credibility theory).

Second, this research confirms the importance of account authenticity through the manipulation of verified badges and finds its moderating effect on source credibility. In the past scholars' research, mostly discussed the factors of Instagram, such as sponsorship posts, selfie posts, and public accounts (De Veirman and Hudders, 2020; Ridgway and Clayton, 2016). Few studies have discussed the feature of verified badge on Instagram. This research highlights the critical role of verified badge. In terms of verified badges on Instagram accounts, when there is no

verified badge, the source credibility of the influencer is higher than that of the company. In contrast, when there are verified badges, the source credibility of both the influencer and the company is improved, but the company benefits more. There are two possible explanations for the moderation results. One is that because the experimental company is a virtual company, if the company has verified badges, its source credibility will be greatly enhanced. The other is that when it comes to fake accounts on Instagram, there are more fake company accounts than influencer accounts. Therefore, after having a verified badge, the source credibility of the company will increase more than that of the influencer.

Third, the findings confirm the moderating role of product type (hedonic product vs. utilitarian product) to influence the relationship between advertising source and source credibility. The results show that when the advertising source is an influencer and the product type is hedonic, the consumers would perceive the highest source credibility. The possible explanations for this moderating result is that people follow influencers on Instagram for hedonic reasons (e.g., fun, enjoyment), to increase the interesting elements in their lives, or to get a happy feeling from the influencer (Roberts and David, 2023). Furthermore, in line with previous studies, when consumers are consuming utilitarian products, consumers are usually more rational and pay more attention to the information of the product itself (Pan et al., 2008). Therefore, in the context of utilitarian products, the advertising source is an influencer and thus the source credibility is enhanced, but the effect is not as strong as for hedonic products.

2. Managerial Implications

The findings empirical confirm that marketers can transform an advertisement into a meme, and if the meme attains virality, it can yield prompt responses and naturally foster customer engagement (Malodia et al., 2022). Therefore, the results offer the following several managerial implications for e-marketers. First, the results indicate that the officially verified badge of Instagram will enhance the influence of different advertising sources on the source credibility. Therefore, we suggest that if an influencer wants to enhance the source credibility on social media, he/she can obtain the verified badge through Instagram's official application steps,

to further increase the followers' willingness to participate in the meme activities.

Second, the findings show that if a company account has a verified badge, it will improve the credibility of the source and further enhance consumers' participating intention in meme activities. This provides a good reference for companies that want to use meme marketing on Instagram. Especially, when the company is not famous and brand value is not identified by consumers, the official social media account with blue tick can mainly increase consumers' perception of source credibility.

Third, the results show the different product type with different advertising sources will have different effects on source credibility. In this respect, e-marketers can effectively develop an influencer marketing strategy for different product types. According to the research results, if the advertising product is hedonic type, we suggest that e-marketers can choose influencers as the advertising publisher which can bring higher perception of source credibility.

VII. Limitation and Future Research

This research has some limitations that may provide suggestions for future research. First, the company used in this research is a fictitious company, and there will be some limitations to generalize our findings. Therefore, we suggest that future research can use real companies as the experimental content. Second, a potential limitation of this research was that we only focused on the impacts of verified badges on Instagram. However, there are other functions and information showed on Instagram, such as the number of followers. Future studies can consider other functions and information of Instagram in the research model. Third, our research examined the product type by hedonic products and utilitarian products. There are other classifications of product type, such as search vs. experience goods. Future research can take these different product types into account.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Scale measures

Construct	Measure items	Cronbach's α in Study 1	Cronbach's α in Study 2
Source credibility	1. I think the account is sincere. 2. I think the account is dependable. 3. I think the account is trustworthy. 4. I think the account is experienced. 5. I think the account is knowledgeable. 6. I think the account is qualified.	0.96	0.94
Participation intention	1. I intend to participate in this activity. 2. The likelihood that I participate in this activity is very high. 3. I am interested to participate in this activity.	0.97	0.97
Product involvement	1. I think sunglasses/slippers/necklaces are important to me. 2. I think sunglasses/slippers/necklaces are appealing to me. 3. I think sunglasses/slippers/necklaces are involving to me.	0.86	0.91
Product knowledge	1. I don't have much experience purchasing sunglasses/slippers/necklaces. 2. In general, my knowledge of sunglasses/slippers/necklaces is few. 3. I think I know a lot about sunglasses/slippers/necklaces.	0.71	0.75
Social stimulation	1. I participate in this activity to meet people with similar interests. 2. I participate in this activity to be with people who enjoy the same things I do. 3. I participate in this activity because I enjoy the activity crowd.	0.82	0.95
Extrinsic reward	1: I participate in this activity for the cash prizes. 2. I participate in this activity for the prizes. 3. I participate in this activity to win sunglasses/slippers/necklaces.	0.67	0.68

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探討社群媒體上迷因行為之決定因素

謝榮桂‧曾況華*

摘要

　　在現今網路時代，使用社群媒體已經成為了現代人每天必須做的事情之一，迷因活動也大量充斥在我們的生活中，但是在過去學術研究中，很少有學者關注迷因活動在社群媒體中的商業廣告應用情境。在本研究中，我們基於二級傳播理論與來源可信度理論，並以 Instagram 為研究平台，探討其使用者驗證標章功能及不同的產品分類對於迷因廣告活動之影響。本研究包含兩個實驗。實驗一，證實不同的廣告來源發布者(網紅或公司)在帳號確實性高或低的情況下對於來源可信度的影響，並進而影響消費者對於迷因活動的未來參與意願；在實驗二中，證實不同的廣告來源發布者在產品類別不同的情況下會來源可信度的影響，因而對消費者的迷因活動參與意願造成影響。本研究結果具有三點貢獻：(1)本研究證實迷因活動可以作為廣告行銷活動的形式之一，依據整合二級傳播理論與來源可信度理論的研究模型及其結果，顯示來源可性度會對廣告來源發布者與消費者參與迷因活動意願之關係產生中介影響。(2)不同的廣告來源發布者對來源可信度有不同的影響，且當發布者帳號擁有驗證標章時，可以提高來源可信度，並進一步提升參與迷因活動的意願。(3)不同的廣告發布來源者，搭配不同的產品類別，會對來源可信度產生不同程度的影響，其中當產品為享樂性的產品時，可以選擇網紅為迷因廣告的發布者。本研究結果為迷因活動的廣告應用研究提供學術貢獻，並且提供行銷從事者在社群媒體平台中進行迷因活動之實務建議。

關鍵字：迷因行為，二級傳播理論，來源可信度，網紅，Instagram

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