

Sponsorship disclosures by social media influencers reduce engagement, study finds

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Social media has become a significant branding and communication tool for companies selling products and services. With the increase in the value of social media, the value of influencers is increasing as well. In

fact, influencer marketing expenditures by companies are set to exceed \$16 billion in 2022.

Brands are constantly trying to find ways to mask advertising and persuasion attempts, and influencer marketing is one way that brands can covertly communicate with target markets through a voice that consumers trust.

A new study in the *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* by Parker Woodroof, Ph.D., assistant professor of marketing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Collat School of Business, looked at pet influencers marketing and the effect that certain textual and [visual cues](#) within sponsored posts have on [social media](#) engagement behaviors.

Woodroof's study found that mentions of sponsorships, using [brand](#) logos and overall saturation of sponsorships hinder social media engagement in pet influencer marketing.

The impetus behind this study, according to Woodroof, is an interest in different influencer marketing initiatives that remain under-investigated in a dominant marketplace. He and his co-author chose the pet industry because, to their knowledge, there was no preexisting data in this area.

"There are many different contexts that need to be explored, including pet and virtual influencers, to see if there are differences between these and human influencers," he said. "Considering the fact that pet influencers like Grumpy Cat can build a \$100 million empire from advertising and merchandise via sponsored posts, we figured it was a good idea to look into this type of influencer."

Woodroof points out that brands have experienced reputational damage in recent years and are using influencers as crucial and convenient advocates to rebuild trust.

"It's been shown that consumers trust influencers just as much as friends and family, and not only are pet influencers perceived as trustworthy, but they are also more cost-effective for brands relative to humans," Woodroof said. "More research should go into pet influencer marketing because it appears to be a sustainable way for brands to communicate their messages through extremely trustworthy voices."

According to Woodroof, pet influencers are a bright spot for the future of influencer marketing as they are a cost-effective alternative to human influencers. His study reveals specific ways in which pet influencer promotional posts can be designed to drive social media engagement.

"These findings should be well received by brands that partner with these social [media](#) influencers," he said. "They offer insights for brands seeking to create content that generates higher levels of engagement."

The study has future implications because data found proves that disclosures trigger persuasion knowledge, and it can be limiting to a brand's success. Therefore, brands will continue to explore ways that resonate with the audience to market their products.

"There is a fine line between covert advertising and manipulation, and those are some of the tactics that have contributed to the distrust of brands," Woodroof said. "Therefore, brands must be very careful with how they are designing these influencer campaigns because, although consumers trust influencers right now, they may not always."

More information: Susan Myers et al, The impact of Persuasion knowledge cues on social media engagement: a look at pet influencer marketing, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/10696679.2022.2093224](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2022.2093224)

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