

When influencers try to connect: Connectedness efforts, authenticity, and consumer engagement

SHIR HARPAZ
Tel Aviv University
Liat Hadar
Tel Aviv University

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Abstract

This research examines how social media influencers' efforts to build social connections with their followers shape perceived influencer authenticity and consumer engagement. We define connectedness efforts as influencer attempts to involve, respond to, and acknowledge followers in their content creation and personal lives. Across five experiments using varied influencer and product contexts, higher connectedness efforts increase participants' willingness to engage with the promoted product, and inferences that the influencer personally uses the product. These effects are mediated by perceived influencer authenticity, are robust across follower size, influencer gender, and content domain, and are stronger among followers with a higher need to belong. These findings highlight social connectedness as a key relational pathway to authenticity perceptions in influencer marketing.

Track: Consumer Behaviour