Driving Brand Engagement Through Online Social Influencers: An Empirical Investigation of Sponsored Blogging Campaigns

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Abstract

Influencer marketing is prevalent in firm strategies, yet little is known about the factors that drive success of online brand engagement at different stages of the consumer purchase funnel. The findings suggest that sponsored blogging affects online engagement (e.g., posting comments, liking a brand) differently depending on blogger characteristics and blog post content, which are further moderated by social media platform type and campaign advertising intent. When a sponsored post occurs on a blog, high blogger expertise is more effective when the advertising intent is to raise awareness versus increase trial. However, source expertise fails to drive engagement when the sponsored post occurs on Facebook. When a sponsored post occurs on Facebook, posts high in hedonic content are more effective when the advertising intent is to increase trial versus raise awareness. Effectiveness of campaign incentives is dependent on the platform type, such that they can increase (decrease) engagement on blogs (Facebook). The empirical evidence for these findings comes from real in-market customer response data and is supplemented with data from an experiment. Taken together, the findings highlight the critical interplay of platform type, campaign intent, source, campaign incentives, and content factors in driving engagement.

Keywords: brand engagement, social influence, influencer marketing, sponsored blogging, social media platform, advertising campaign intent, bloggers, consumer decision journey, Facebook advertising, social media influencers, social network sites

Statement of Intended Contribution

Under what conditions can influencer marketing strategies successfully increase online engagement? This study advances prior research by examining how social influencers can affect consumers at different stages of the consumer purchase funnel. This research suggests that type of social media platform moderates the impact of social influencer and post characteristics. This research also offers a unique contribution, in that we use real in-market customer response data and supplement these with data from an experimental setting. Practitioners employing an influencer marketing strategy should find the insights generated from this article both useful and compelling. The current influencer marketing strategy is a "one-size-fits-all" approach and leaves potential success on the table. By contrast, we develop a framework of strategies based on the type of social media platform and campaign intent that informs practitioners about the type of content and influencer that should be used under each condition. The findings have implications for practitioners who are choosing bloggers and show that the choice of bloggers should be guided by campaign intent. For example, we demonstrate that in awareness-building campaigns, high blogger expertise drives engagement while in trial campaigns, less expert (or novice) bloggers elicit greater engagement. We further highlight the role of social media platform differences (blog vs. Facebook) and the differential roles of source factors, content factors, campaign intent, and their interplay in driving brand engagement.

With consumers increasingly relying on peer-to-peer communications, influencer marketing has continued to grow in importance as a key component of firms' digital marketing strategies (Association of National Advertisers 2018). Nearly 75% of marketers today are using influencers to spread word of mouth (WOM) about their products and brands on social media. Influencer marketing is often considered critical to strengthening online brand engagement (Newberry 2018). Consequently, 65% of multinational brands have indicated plans to increase spending on influencer marketing, with spending expected to reach $10 billion by 2020 (Belton 2019; Mediakix 2018). However, despite the explosion of these social influencers, their effectiveness is still low; for an influencer on Facebook, the average engagement rate per post is .37%; on Twitter, it is even lower at .05% (Rival IQ 2018).

A large and important category of influencer marketing is sponsored blogging, in which companies solicit bloggers to post about specific products and brands (i.e., "sponsored posts") (Linqia 2018). Bloggers can help generate WOM about a brand, product, or service directly through the content of their sponsored posts. Firms have deployed sponsored blogging both successfully (i.e., Nokia's camera phone campaign in Finland) and unsuccessfully (i.e., Dr Pepper's "Raging Cow" campaign) (Corcoran et al. 2006). However, the field needs to develop a better understanding of what drives the success of influencer marketing as a whole and sponsored blogging in particular. Given the significant marketing expenditures dedicated to this strategy and the paucity of knowledge on success drivers, this is an important research gap worth addressing.

Sponsored blogging is a hybrid approach combining aspects of paid and earned media (e.g., Colicev et al. 2018; Lovett and Staelin 2016). We distinguish this phenomenon from a purely paid media strategy because influencers engage in WOM and have control over the ultimate message of the advertisement. As companies reimburse bloggers (with either cash or free goods) to generate posts on social media, influencer marketing is distinct from organically generated WOM. Because influencer

marketing blends elements of paid and earned media, we can distinguish this from prior research focusing on paid and owned media (e.g., De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang 2017; Lovett and Staelin 2016) or earned media, including online WOM (e.g., Hewett et al. 2016). We also extend the traditional advertising literature on the impact of source credibility and message content (Grewal et al. 1997).

We provide a comprehensive framework that examines the drivers of sponsored blogging strategies, including blogger characteristics, content characteristics, and campaign incentives, and, in doing so, contribute to the literature in three ways. First, this study advances prior research by examining how social influencers (or sponsored bloggers) can influence consumers at different stages of the consumer purchase funnel by examining different campaign intents (e.g., awareness vs. trial). Second, this research sheds light on the important role of campaign intent as a moderator of the impact of blogger (i.e., expertise) and content (i.e., hedonic value) characteristics on social media engagement. Third, we suggest that the type of social media platform (blogs vs. Facebook) can moderate the impact of these factors on engagement.

Our theoretical basis for predictions derives from the literature on the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). We focus on two moderators that indirectly affect consumers' ability and motivation to engage in effortful processing. The first involves social media platforms (blogs vs. Facebook), which vary in their level of distraction and involvement, implying differences in consumers' ability and opportunity to engage in effortful processing. The second is the stage of the consumer decision journey (CDJ) (awareness vs. trial), which may imply increasing levels of motivation closer to trial. Early in the CDJ, consumers process through the peripheral route, whereas later they process through the central route (Colicev et al. 2018). Taken together, we argue that both the platform and the stage of CDJ act as key moderators.

Our findings show that in a blog context, blogger expertise, campaign intent, hedonic value of post, and campaign giveaways are key drivers of engagement. In addition, blogger expertise exerts a greater impact in awareness (vs. trial) campaigns. On Facebook, hedonic value exerts a positive impact, and trial campaigns benefit more from the use of hedonic content. Campaign giveaways exert a negative impact, highlighting the potential cannibalizing role of one platform on another (blog vs. Facebook). Taken together, the findings shed light on various factors that govern how influencer campaigns elicit consumer engagement across multiple platforms. Panel A of Figure 1 presents our conceptual framework on the blogging platform, and Panel B presents the same for the Facebook platform.

This study advances prior research by examining how social influencers can affect consumers at different stages of the consumer purchase funnel. This research suggests that the type of social media platform moderates the impact of social influencer and post characteristics. We develop a framework of strategies based on the social media platform in use and the firm's campaign intent to inform practitioners about the type of content and influencer to use under each condition. The findings have implications for practitioners who want to employ influencers and show that the choice of bloggers should be guided by campaign intent.

This research uses real in-market customer response data, assembles a large data set of sponsored blogging campaigns, measures various characteristics, and links these to concrete brand engagement outcomes. Thus, our field data provide a unique vantage point and draw a richer picture of not only what constitutes an effective influencer marketing campaign but also how this varies across social media platforms. We supplement the findings by collecting data in a lab study.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Research on influencer marketing examines elements of sponsored advertising, product type, source characteristics, and sponsorship disclosure. The findings include differentiating impacts of expertise,

product involvement (Zhu and Tan 2007), customer involvement (Fu and Chen 2012), sponsorship

disclosure (Van Reijmersdal et al. 2016), and two-sided messages (Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez 2016).

Recent research on influencers indicates that information seekers' objectives and issue involvement

drive a blog's influence (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou 2019). Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrate the

importance of message content, source credibility, and homophily in influencer marketing. Table 1

provides a review of research on the key variables of influencer marketing.

Related research also examines native advertising, or the phenomenon of sponsored social media

posts or news articles disguised to resemble nonsponsored content. Wang, Xiong, and Yang (2019)

examine native ads and unveil how their effectiveness changes across serial positions by analyzing a

large-scale data set. Wu et al. (2016) examine how source credibility plays a critical role in perceptions

of native advertising. Other research has also examined the phenomenon of social dollars, or the effects

of online social connections on users' product purchases in an online community. Park et al. (2018)

demonstrate that social dollars vary depending on type of product (hedonic vs. functional), user

experience, and network density. Together, these findings shed light on the important role of influencers,

particularly those embedded in social networks, on consumer choices and purchase behavior.

Engagement

Our key dependent variable for the primary field study is social media engagement. We follow

Hollebeek (2011, p. 555) and define engagement as a "customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral

activities." More specifically, our focus is on indirect customer engagement, which includes incentivized

referrals, social media conversations about products/brands, and customer feedback to companies

(Pansari and Kumar 2017). These types of actions contribute to a firm's revenue, as referred customers

are typically more profitable than those not referred (Palmatier, Kumar, and Harmeling 2017; Van den

Bulte et al. 2018). This impact of engagement on profitability has also received empirical verification

across business-to-business (Kumar, Petersen, and Leone 2010) and business-to-consumer (Lee and Grewal 2004) contexts, and its benefits can derive from both cost reduction and revenue enhancement (Harmeling et al. 2017).

Consumer engagement literature highlights several potential factors that may influence consumer engagement, including emotionality, direct firm actions, and product involvement (Harmeling et al. 2017; Pansari and Kumar 2017). We derive our key factors from this literature and add new factors, such as overall campaign intent, influencer characteristics (i.e., source expertise and post content), and level of involvement elicited by the social media platform. The customer engagement activity we focus on is social media interactions with sponsored influencer content, and we operationalize this as likes and comments on sponsored posts.

Influencer Marketing on the Blogging Platform

Firms often launch influencer marketing campaigns on multiple platforms simultaneously. The blog platform constitutes the primary environment for sponsored bloggers to exert their influence. People who choose to interact with bloggers and their postings are typically followers of the blogger. Followers have opted to obtain information posted by bloggers and therefore are likely highly involved in the environment. This high involvement translates into several facets of blog campaigns that help strengthen engagement.

Platform differences. While there are various differences across social media platforms, a key difference is the rationale or motivation for consumers to engage with platforms. Some consumers seek out platforms (e.g., blogs) for their content, which implies a higher level of motivation to engage in effortful processing of content. Others may primarily use platforms (e.g., Facebook) to connect with others, implying a focus on relationship maintenance (Karal and Kokoç 2010). Another key difference is the level of distraction prevalent on a platform. Platforms such as Facebook are relatively less involving

and more distracting for each individual post because of the large amount of information and content provided (Yahyapour Jalali 2015). In our research, Facebook is a relevant platform (in addition to blogs) because many bloggers post links to their blog posts on Facebook.

To provide a priori evidence of the differences in social media platforms, we pretested blogs and Facebook (the two relevant platforms in this study) using a survey of participants (N = 264, M_{age} = 35.2 years, 50.0% male) on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two platform conditions: blog or Facebook. Recalling their last time on the platform, they reported how distracted they felt and the degree to which they were seeking specific content on the platform on scales from 0 to 100. Controlling for age and gender in both regression models, we found that distraction was higher on Facebook than blogs (F(3, 260) = 7.22, p < .01; M_{Blog} = 32.65, $M_{Facebook}$ = 42.83; $b_{platform}$ = − 10.67, p < .01), and specific content-seeking was higher on blogs than Facebook (F(3, 260) = 3.61, p < .01; M_{Blog} = 59.19, $M_{Facebook}$ = 48.14; $b_{platform}$ = 11.25, p < .01). These results lend support to our argument that platform distraction and content search differ between blogs and Facebook, with distraction being lower and content-seeking being more common on blogs. Therefore, Facebook should result in low-involvement processing of information.

Given the low-involvement nature of the Facebook platform, consistent with the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), there should be a greater emphasis on peripheral cues (e.g., number of followers, hedonic content, timing and number of posts). Conversely, in line with ELM predictions, in high-involvement platforms such as blogs, argument quality should exert a greater impact on persuasion; this implies that source expertise and post content should play important roles in eliciting engagement on blog platforms. We articulate these differences in our separate predictions we develop for blogs and Facebook platforms.

Campaign intent on the blogging platform. Broadly, influencer marketing campaigns have two goals: (1) to increase awareness and (2) to encourage trial. From a marketer's perspective, awareness campaigns are an easier-to-achieve goal and do not require any overt action on the part of consumers. Trial campaigns, which encourage consumers to make a purchase, are typically linked to consumer actions (e.g., purchase, app download) and therefore have a more overt persuasion intent and also a higher hurdle to generate customer engagement. These advertising goals (awareness vs. trial) can also affect the activation of persuasion knowledge of consumers, depending on whether there is a more direct advertising motive, as in the case of a trial campaign, or a less direct advertising motive, as in the case of an awareness campaign.

These campaign intents align with the beginning and end of the consumer's decision journey, which typically involves multiple stages in a hierarchy-of-effects, such as awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase. Prior research has examined this dichotomy of awareness versus trial intent in a traditional advertising context (e.g., Muller 1983). As noted previously, the processing route to persuasion differs depending on the stage of the CDJ, with early stages being processed through the peripheral route and later stages being processed through the central route (Colicev et al. 2018). We propose that campaign intent is a potential moderator that can influence engagement differently depending on the stage of the CDJ. We predict that trial intent versus awareness will have a greater impact on the blogging platform.

Main effect of blogger expertise. Source expertise refers to the level of credibility a source possesses. Expertise reflects the extent to which a consumer is qualified to discuss a subject (Alba and Hutchinson 1987), such as source qualifications (Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz 1969), competence, knowledge, education, expertise, and ability to share knowledge (Hinkin and Schriesheim 1989). This can derive from informational power, in which the expert has knowledge that others do not have

(Deutsch and Gerard 1955). Expert power can be knowledge within a specific domain (e.g., law) (French and Raven 1959). Endorsers are more likely to be considered experts if they are competent and have relevant knowledge (Homer and Kahle 1990).

Source expertise affects attitude change (Hovland and Weiss 1951; McCracken 1989; Ohanian 1991), level of confidence and positivity (Tormala, Briñol, and Petty 2007), and behavioral changes (Crisci and Kassinove 1973) and leads to higher levels of persuasion (Petty and Wegener 1998). Higher levels of persuasion are a result of high source expertise leading to a deeper processing of the advertising message (Homer and Kahle 1990). In an influencer marketing context, expertise increases behavioral intention toward products (Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez 2016). In a sponsored blogging context, consumers will prefer products endorsed or referred by a blogger with expertise because they perceive the message as more persuasive and credible (Kiecker and Cowles 2002; Zhu and Tan 2007). Thus:

> H_1: Blogger expertise has a positive impact on blog engagement. The higher the blogger's expertise, the higher is the number of blog post comments.

Interaction effect of campaign intent on blogger expertise. Both high- and low-expertise bloggers may be considered influential, under varying circumstances. Despite the expected positive impact of blogger expertise on engagement in a sponsored blogging context, source expertise can also have a neutral (or even negative) effect in some situations. Prior research suggests that in the presence of an extreme advertising claim, the positive impact of source expertise diminishes (Goldberg and Hartwick 1990). Depending on the context, type of claim, and stage in the decision-making process, source expertise may even have a nonsignificant (or negative impact) on engagement. The nonsignificant impact of source expertise also stems from the countervailing positive impact of low expertise bloggers (novice endorsers). Novice endorsements can be as effective as those from experts (Wang 2005). Therefore, we expect blogger expertise to vary in its impact depending on campaign intent.

Involvement affects blogger success, such that for low-involvement products, a blogger with low expertise can have greater success (Zhu and Tan 2007). Under different stages of the CDJ, we similarly anticipate blogger expertise to affect engagement differently depending on the level of involvement. The peripheral processing that occurs early in the CDJ gives more attention to peripheral cues, such as expertise. In the early stages of the CDJ, expertise becomes a more important influencer for persuasion than homophily (Wang et al. 2008). Regarding an awareness intent, early in the CDJ we expect high expertise to be beneficial. For trial campaigns that correspond to later in the CDJ process and lead to higher motivation for central processing, we predict the opposite effect. Regarding a behavioral versus attitudinal change, low-expertise (vs. high-expertise) sources can be more effective (Dholakia and Sternthal 1977). In line with this reasoning, audiences may perceive a source with higher expertise as less similar to them (i.e., less homophilous). For a campaign with a trial intent, we expect low-expertise (vs. high-expertise) bloggers to be more effective. In turn, this pattern of effects will result in a differential impact of higher blogger expertise depending on campaign intent. Thus:

> H_2: There is an interaction effect of campaign intent and blogger expertise. Specifically, (a) when blogger expertise is high, awareness campaigns are more effective in generating brand engagement; (b) when blogger expertise is low, trial campaigns are more effective at generating brand engagement.

Main effect of hedonic value of post. The hedonic value of a post refers to the enjoyment, emotions, and entertainment a consumer experiences from reading the post. Evidence suggests that hedonic content can have an impact on attitudes and WOM (Berger and Schwartz 2011; Kim, Ratneshwar, and Thorson 2017). In a traditional advertising context, researchers have shown that hedonic value captures attention (Teixeira, Picard, and El Kaliouby 2014) and influences attitude toward an ad (Kim, Ratneshwar, and Thorson 2017). Berger and Milkman (2012) suggest that specific emotions (e.g., awe, anxiety) trigger arousal, which in turn results in greater virality of online content. Ordenes et al. (2019) extend these findings and argue that consumers share expressive or assertive brand messages

more frequently than directive brand messages. Relatedly, Herhausen et al. (2019) indicate that hedonic

content can be a key factor in the virality potential of online firestorms. Building on these findings, we

expect a post featuring high hedonic value content to increase arousal, deepening customer engagement.

Therefore, we posit a general positive impact of hedonic content on the blogging platform.

H_3: Post content, in terms of hedonic value, is positively related to engagement in blog post comments.

Campaign incentives. Campaign incentives are marketing actions designed to elicit specific

responses and engagement from consumers. The purpose of a campaign incentive is "to give followers a

free item (or a chance to win a free item) in exchange for them sharing, liking, following, and/or

reposting a picture" (Nilo 2017). For example, Rafflecopter is a giveaway platform widely used by

sponsored bloggers, and the requirements to enter each giveaway are at bloggers' discretion. For some

campaign giveaways, bloggers require consumers to comment on the blog post itself, while others

require a different action (e.g., become a Twitter follower, share the giveaway) to enter the giveaway.

Campaign incentives are a direct firm action to increase customer engagement (Verhoef,

Reinartz, and Krafft 2010). Other benefits of giveaways include an increased desire to buy more, higher-

quality perceptions of the product, and increased WOM about the product (White 2013). In Berger and

Schwartz's (2011) study, consumers who received a free product talked about it 20% more than those

who did not receive the product for free. Therefore, we expect the presence of incentives to increase

blog engagement because they elicit consumer comments for a chance to win the giveaway.

H_4: Campaign incentives are positively related to engagement, such that inclusion of a campaign incentive leads to more blog post comments.

Influencer Marketing on the Facebook Platform

As mentioned, influencer marketing campaigns co-occur across platforms. The Facebook platform is a

secondary environment for sponsored bloggers to link to the posts on their respective blog pages. In

contrast with the blogging platform, people who encounter the Facebook post may or may not follow the blogger's blogging page. In other words, followers could come across the Facebook posts because they follow the person or because a friend has shared or interacted with the post. The Facebook platform is one example of a low-involvement, high-distraction social media platform. This lower involvement primes a different set of important features while diminishing the importance of others.

Campaign intent on the Facebook platform. As noted previously, we expect awareness and trial campaign intent to align with the CDJ. Engagement generated by sponsored posts may vary depending on campaign intent. In trial campaigns, we expect Facebook participants' willingness to engage in campaigns with overtly commercial intent to be low. Karal and Kokoç (2010) propose that the primary motivations for Facebook usage are to gain knowledge, acquire new connections, and strengthen existing relationships. An overtly commercial intent, as in the case of trial, can interfere with the intended usage of the platform and therefore be met with resentment by users. As gaining knowledge and encountering ideas and information are reasons to use Facebook, these are more in line with the awareness intent. The awareness intent is more of a helping motive associated with WOM communications in the network. Facebook users may spread WOM about awareness campaigns because doing so generates positive feelings and strengthens social connections (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Thus:

H_5: Campaign intent has a positive impact on engagement on the Facebook platform.

Specifically, awareness (vs. trial) campaigns generate more Facebook engagement (i.e., likes).

Hedonic value on the Facebook platform. Evidence shows that engagement on Facebook is positively related to hedonic content (Chiu et al. 2007). The primary rationale for this is that the hedonic value generates an emotional response (Dobele et al. 2007), which leads to higher arousal and a greater propensity to like and share in online settings (Berger and Milkman 2012; Fiore, Jin, and Kim 2005).

Research based on the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) indicates that when consumers are less involved with products, they use peripheral routes to process information (Fu and Chen 2012). On a low-involvement platform, we expect hedonic value to be more salient to the reader. Under low involvement, Cho (1999) finds that attention-getting online advertising appeals were more effective. Consequently, we predict that hedonic content associated with blog posts is highly relevant to low-involvement platforms such as Facebook, as it helps overcome low involvement by raising the interestingness of a post. In support of this idea, the in-store shopping literature (e.g., Babin and Attaway 2000) shows that the hedonic value of a shopping experience plays a key role in elevating involvement and inducing purchase behavior. For a low-involvement, high-distraction platform such as Facebook, peripheral cues, such as hedonic value, should be important. Thus:

H_6: The hedonic value of blog posts has a positive impact on Facebook engagement (i.e., likes).

Interaction effect of campaign intent and hedonic value on Facebook platform. In addition to the preceding main effect predictions, we anticipate an interaction effect of campaign intent and hedonic value on Facebook engagement. Hedonic content leads to a greater likelihood of message forwarding (Chiu et al. 2007) and increased private sharing of news articles (Berger and Milkman 2012), but these links are dependent on the context of sharing and type of outcome being studied (Tucker 2014). Ads viewed as too "outrageous" may result in lower purchase intent and persuasion, but this is not the case when the ad also leads to consumer responses such as comments (Tucker 2014).

As the Facebook platform is a low-involvement, high-distraction environment, in which people are predisposed toward information overload (Koroleva, Krasnova, and Günther 2011), opportunity and motivation to process become key components in information processing (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991). A sufficiency threshold dictates that the amount of processing a person is willing to undertake is dependent on the perceived risk involved (Chen, Duckworth, and Chaiken 1999;

Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). Under a trial intent, in which the perceived risk would be higher than in an awareness context, we anticipate a high sufficiency threshold and, thus, central processing.

In addition, a consumer's motivation to process an ad will be higher when there are more hedonic cues (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991). Boerman, Willemson, and Van Der Aa (2017) posit that when people identify a Facebook post as an advertisement, they develop feelings of distrust, which may imply a threat to the relationship. In this case, a highly hedonic post can alleviate this threat. Heuristic processing is likely to occur when the person views the information as agreeing with his or her beliefs (Giner-Sorolila and Chaiken 1997). Taken together, this would imply that for a trial intent, a post high in hedonic value could overcome the disposition to process more systematically. This suggests that when campaigns involve purchasing (e.g., trial), the hedonic value of the post will be valuable. Thus:

H_7: High (vs. low) hedonic value has a more positive impact on trial campaigns than awareness campaigns.

Study 1

Data

The data come from the Motherhood, a leading agency for sponsored blogging campaigns that focuses on "mommy" bloggers. The data consist of 1,830 sponsored posts written by 595 bloggers,[1] collected from September 2012 to December 2016.[2] These blog posts came from 57 different campaigns, including Awesome Avocados, Banner Alzheimer, Chef Boyardee Little Chef, Latte Love, and Barnes & Noble.

For each campaign, companies work with the blogging agency to coordinate campaign details, such as the intended message, target audience, and goals. Bloggers are recommended for the campaign

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[1] Our focus is only on one blogging agency, and several of these bloggers work with other blogging agencies as well, suggesting that their sponsored activities may include other campaigns outside the ones in this data set.

[2] As we subsequently describe, the data on blog posts involved coding across a variety of independent and dependent variables. In the process of coding data pertaining to the variables, we encountered some missing information for a few variables due to the nature of data collection from individual blog post websites (i.e., nonpermanent URLs). Thus, our final sample size for analysis is 1,237.

on the basis of their demographics, age of children, and expertise, and they can choose to work on

projects in line with their interests, availability, and willingness to work within the set budget. Bloggers

are required to disclose that they are sponsored bloggers either at the beginning or at the end of the blog

posts. Depending on the budget and requirements of a given campaign, each blogger receives

compensation (in the form of either money or free products). Bloggers then write and post content on

their own blog websites about the campaign; bloggers get paid more if they post something on multiple

social media channels.

Dependent Variables

Number of blog post comments. Every blog post had an option for blog readers to leave comments.

Comments of other readers are visible to any subsequent reader of the blog, but other readers do not

receive notification when a new comment has been posted. Our primary measure of engagement is the

number of comments each blog post received (see Table 2 for constructs, Table 3 for descriptive

statistics of the variables, and Table 4 for the correlations).

Number of Facebook post likes. Bloggers frequently used their social media outlets to post about

different blog campaigns. Facebook followers of a blogger can see the new post in their Facebook news

feed, while others need to seek out the post directly from the blogger's Facebook profile. To measure

Facebook engagement, we counted the number of Facebook post likes.

Independent Variables

Campaign intent. Companies typically divide campaigns into two categories, those designed to raise

awareness and those designed to increase trial. In our data set, of the 57 total campaigns, 29 had an

awareness intent and 28 had a trial intent. The awareness campaigns focused on increasing brand

recognition. For example, an AT&T Mobile School Safety campaign encouraged people to talk to their

children about using mobile phones safely. These campaigns were not directly trying to motivate people

to make a purchase but instead were focused on building brand awareness. By contrast, the trial

campaigns focused on increasing consumer trial for products or services. Examples of this type of

campaign included Church Hill Classics' diploma frames and Veritas Genetics' at-home BRCA test.

Campaign incentives. We identified campaigns (29%) in terms of whether they included a

campaign incentive (i.e., a giveaway). Giveaways typically request that readers like or share a blog post

to be entered for a chance to win a prize. For example, Johnson & Johnson's Donate-a-Photo campaign

had a giveaway prize of $100 worth of products.

Blogger average number of followers. The average number of Twitter and Facebook followers

represents a blogger's social media presence and is also an indication of blogger strength. We used

bloggers' Twitter and Facebook followers for two reasons: (1) Facebook and Twitter are two of the

largest social media platforms, and (2) the number of followers on the blog web pages themselves are

unavailable. We use the natural log of the average number of Twitter and Facebook followers in the

models to account for the large spread, and we mean-centered them to prevent any issues of collinearity.

We also use alternative operationalizations and reestimate the main model using these measures (for the

results, see the Web Appendix).

Blogger psychographic profile factors. First, we pulled the public profiles of each blogger in our

data set, as described on their blog pages. Second, three coders (blind to the hypotheses) examined the

bloggers' public profiles and listed key themes that captured their psychographic profiles (i.e., interests,

activities, and opinions; see the Web Appendix). This procedure revealed 14 main psychographic profile

dimensions, dummy coded as 1 if present in the profile and 0 if not. Third, we used factor analysis with

varimax rotation[3] to identify five overarching characteristics of bloggers.[4]

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[3] Details using tetrachoric as an alternative rotation are available in the Web Appendix.
[4] The analysis revealed five blogger characteristics: expertise, travel/foodie, persona, lifestyle, and values (for the rotated factor patterns, see the Web Appendix). Travel/foodie consists of travel and food & wine. Persona reflects professional

Blogger expertise. We measure blogger expertise by the presence of the person's educational affiliation and blogger credentials in his or her profile. Prior research has also used blogger profiles to manipulate source (Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez 2016). An educational affiliation includes reference to a specific higher education degree (e.g., "Bachelor of Arts"), while blogger credentials refer specifically to status as a credible blogger (e.g., "social media consultant," "Nielsen 50 Power Mom"). Blogger expertise, which ranges from 0 to 2, is the sum of the two measures.

Post Variables

Weekend post. Weekend post is an indicator variable for whether the post occurred on a weekend, coded as 1, or a weekday, coded as 0. We used this to capture weekend versus weekday seasonality. We incorporate this as a control variable for the temporal element.

Number of Facebook posts. The number of Facebook posts serves as a control variable. For sponsored blogging campaigns, bloggers will post on blogs and then post on Facebook linking to the blog post. To control for the number of Facebook posts, we include this as a variable in the model.

Hedonic and informational value associated with the blog post. Three coders classified the hedonic and informational value associated with a given blog post; we prequalified the coders to match the demographics of the bloggers' audiences. We based our measures on Yuvaraju, Subramanyam, and Rao (2014), who develop a 20-item emotion scale for advertisements. We used coders from Amazon Mechanical Turk to measure various aspects of sentiment on a seven-point scale (1 = "not at all," 7 = "extremely"), including how much the blog posting was attention getting, boring, creative, emotional, energetic, genuine/sincere, honest, humorous, informative, irritating, memorable, pleasant, strong, unique, warmhearted, relatable, understandable, believable, and relevant. We selected coders who were as similar to the blog audience as possible (i.e., they were also mothers with a child under 18 years in the

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reference, technology and social media reference, and brand affiliation. Lifestyle comprises homeschooling, an environmental affiliation, and a health affiliation. Finally, values are based on religious and political affiliations.

household). We solicited three coders for each blog post and asked them to code only a subset of blog posts (typically three posts each), suggesting that there are variations introduced across different blog posts from the varying identities of coders.

First, to measure the agreement between coders and calculate a more accurate alpha score, we used the methodology Shrout and Fleiss (1979) describe and computed the Shrout–Fleiss single ICC score agreement of .998, which is considered quite high (Koo and Li 2016). As a second approach to assess reliability, we estimated a standardized alpha within three coders for each sentiment value for each blog post, to account for the different coders on each post. We then averaged these standardized alphas and obtained an average reliability of .51 and a median reliability of .56.

Each blog post was coded for a variety of sentiment variables, some of which may be correlated. To reduce the dimensionality of the data and increase parsimony, we conducted a factor analysis. Factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (for factor loadings, see Table 5), which we labeled as "functional" and "hedonic." The variables that loaded most highly on perceived functional value were genuine/sincere, honest, informative, pleasant, relatable, understandable, believable, relevant, and benefits believable. The variables that loaded most highly on perceived hedonic value were attention getting, creative, emotional, energetic, humorous, memorable, strong, unique, and warmhearted.

Selection Model

Because bloggers are chosen to participate in campaigns, selection bias may occur. To address this potential problem, we implemented a Heckman (1979) selection model. The first-stage model used a Probit regression to predict a blogger's selection for a campaign. To achieve identification, the set of covariates in the Stage 1 Probit model must contain at least one variable that can supply the exclusion restriction—that is, it must affect blogger selection for a campaign but not directly affect the

engagement generated by the blogger (Gill, Sridhar, and Grewal 2017; Heckman 1979). Industry

practice is to match bloggers with common interests in and similarity to the focal campaign. In line with

this method, we use the bloggers' profile descriptions and employed varimax factor rotation to create a

psychographic index score using psychographic categories not directly related to the outcome of

engagement: travel/foodie, persona, lifestyle, and values.

The variable providing the exclusion restriction used in the Stage 1 Probit model is blogger

selection of most similar other bloggers. To determine the blogger most similar to the target blogger, we

created a blogger-by-campaign matrix. We multiplied this matrix by its transpose to create a blogger-by-

blogger matrix, which showed which bloggers coappeared (i.e., participated in the same campaign) most

frequently. We selected the blogger who appeared most often with the target blogger and used his or her

selection for a campaign as an independent variable in the Stage 1 Probit (for details of this procedure

and a specific example, see "Details on Stage 1 Probit Model" in the Web Appendix).

Table 6 provides the results of the Stage 1 Probit model. We find that the intercept (b = –2.2744,

$p < .01$), similar blogger selection (b = 1.5550, $p < .01$), and the travel/foodie blogger psychographic (b

= .0374, $p < .01$) are significant for selection in the Stage 1 Probit model. The exclusion criterion,

similar to the blogger selection, indicates that when a similar blogger to the target blogger is selected for

a campaign, the target blogger is more likely to be selected for the campaign. We then included the

inverse Mills ratio from the first stage as an independent variable in all second-stage models. The

inverse Mills ratio was not significant in the blog post comments ($z = 1.22$, $p = .223$) or Facebook post

likes ($z = –.060$, $p = .950$) models.

Model Choice

The dependent variables of interest, blog post comments and Facebook post likes, are count variables.

Therefore, we considered using either a Poisson distribution or a negative binomial distribution for

count data. A likelihood ratio test indicated that there was overdispersion in the data for the blog post

comments (χ^2 = 6,231, p < .001) and Facebook post likes (χ^2 = 31,000, p < .001) models. Thus, we used

a negative binomial model instead of a Poisson model. In addition, we find no correlation between the

error terms of the two models. The second-stage model equations are as follows:

ln(Blog post comments$_i$) =
$\beta_0 + \beta_1$(*ln[average number of followers]*) + β_2(*weekend post*) + β_3(*campaign intent [awareness vs. trial]*) + β_4(*blogger expertise*) + β_5(*functional value of post*) + β_6(*hedonic value of post*) + β_7(*giveaway*) + β_8(*awareness campaign*)(*ln[average number of followers]*) + β_9(*awareness campaign*)(*functional value of post*) + β_{10}(*awareness campaign*)(*hedonic value of post*) + β_{11}(*awareness campaign*)(*blogger expertise*) + β_{12}(*awareness campaign*)(*giveaway*) + β_{13}(*inverse Mills ratio*) + ϵ_i.

ln(Facebook post likes$_i$) =
$\beta_0 + \beta_1$(*ln[average number of followers]*) + β_2(*weekend post*) + β_3(*number of Facebook posts*) + β_4(*campaign intent [awareness vs. trial]*) + β_5(*blogger expertise*) + β_6(*functional value of post*) + β_7(*hedonic value of post*) + β_8(*giveaway*) + β_9(*awareness campaign*)(*ln[average number of followers]*) + β_{10}(*awareness campaign*)(*functional value of post*) + β_{11}(*awareness campaign*)(*hedonic value of post*) + β_{12}(*awareness campaign*)(*blogger expertise*) + β_{13}(*awareness campaign*)(*giveaway*) + β_{14}(*inverse Mills ratio*) + ϵ_i.

Model Results

Before we describe our full model results (see Table 7), several main effects results are worth noting. In

the main-effects-only model (see Web Appendix), we find that campaign intent exerts a differential

main effect on each platform, with awareness intent being more effective for Facebook and trial intent

being more effective for blogs. We conjecture that because of Facebook's lower commercial intent, an

awareness campaign is potentially more readily shared among peers in an organic fashion. The purpose

of campaign incentives (i.e., giveaways) is to encourage participation with specific tasks. The negative

impact of incentives on Facebook and the positive impact on the blog platform highlight the potential

cannibalizing effect of one social media platform on another.

   Blog post comments model. Table 7 reports the results of the second-stage model with blog post

comments as the dependent variable (N = 1,237). The Akaike information criterion for this model was

6,663, the Bayesian information criterion was 6,740, and the likelihood ratio test was significant (χ^2(13)

= 100.64, $p < .01$). Variance inflation factors (VIFs) were all below 1.09, with an average VIF of 1.04, indicating no issues with collinearity. We found a significant main effect of our control variable, average number of followers (b = .3514, $p < .01$), indicating that this factor significantly drives the number of blog post comments.

The main effect of campaign intent (awareness vs. trial) was marginally significant in the blog post comments model (b = −.2351, $p < .10$), while the main effect of blogger expertise was not significant in the final model incorporating interaction effects (b = −.1228, n.s.), which does not support H_1. The interaction between type of campaign (awareness vs. trial) and blogger expertise was positive in the blog post comments model (b = .7283, $p = .01$), in support of H_2. Further investigation of the interaction effect reveals that the simple slope for high blogger expertise was significant ($p < .05$), indicating that the impact of high blogger expertise varies by campaign intent, in support of H_{2a}. The simple slope for low blogger expertise was marginally significant ($p = .10$), suggesting no differences in effectiveness of low-expertise bloggers across awareness and trial campaigns; thus, H_{2b} is not supported (or receives weak support at $p = .10$). Figure 2, Panel A, summarizes the pattern of effects for the interaction between campaign type and blogger expertise. Perceived functional value of the post was not statistically significant, but the hedonic value of the post had a significant impact on the number of blog post comments (b = .2616, $p < .01$), in support of H_3. Campaigns that included campaign incentives also significantly increased the number of blog post comments (b = .4526, $p = .01$), in support of H_4.

The results indicate that high blogger expertise is beneficial when paired with awareness campaigns but has a lesser effect in the case of trial campaigns. While we initially hypothesized that for low-expertise bloggers, more engagement would occur under trial than awareness intent, we find no evidence of this relationship. We find that hedonic content is positively associated with an increase in blog post comments. We return to this point in the "Discussion" section.

Facebook post likes model. Table 7 also reports the results of the second-stage model with Facebook post likes as the dependent variable. The Akaike information criterion for this model was 5,508, the Bayesian information criterion was 5,582, and the likelihood ratio test was significant ($\chi^2(14)$ =221.91, $p < .01$). The VIFs were all below 1.06, with an average VIF of 1.04, indicating no issues with collinearity. The number of Facebook posts was significant (b = .5728, $p < .01$). We found a significant main effect of the average number of followers (b = .2055, $p < .05$), indicating that this drives Facebook post likes. Campaigns that included giveaways also significantly decreased the number of Facebook post likes (b = −.7840, $p < .01$).

Blogger expertise was not significantly related to the number of Facebook post likes (b = .0253, n.s.). The main effect of campaign intent (awareness vs. trial) was significant in the Facebook post likes model (b = .7416, $p < .01$), in support of H_5. We found a significant main effect of hedonic value (b = .2215, $p = .03$), in support of H_6. There was a significant, negative interaction effect of campaign intent and hedonic value (b = −.4824, $p < .01$). In light of the positive main effects of hedonic value and awareness campaigns, the negative interaction term implies that hedonic value is positively related to Facebook post likes for trial campaigns and negatively related to Facebook post likes for awareness campaigns, providing support for H_7. Panel of B of Figure 2, which plots the pattern of results, shows that posts low in hedonic value can weaken engagement, particularly for trial campaigns. Taken together, the results indicate that multiple factors can increase engagement in sponsored Facebook posts. Regarding the control variables, having more Facebook posts, posts on weekends, and a higher number of followers are all related to an increased number of Facebook post likes. Posts lower in hedonic content are particularly harmful when paired with trial campaigns on Facebook.

We find that the blog platform and Facebook platform exhibit differences in drivers of engagement. Campaign incentives negatively affect the Facebook platform but not the blog platform; we

conjecture that this is due to the cannibalizing effect of the blogging platform. Timing of the posts (weekends vs. weekdays) also positively affects Facebook, but this effect is not consistent for the blog platform model.

Discussion

In this study, we evaluated the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns using an empirical database of sponsored bloggers. The results provide support for most of our hypothesized effects (with the exception of H_1 and H_{2b}). Across both models, we find a positive impact of the number of followers. Controlling for the number of followers, we find that blogger expertise, campaign intent, hedonic value, and interactions among these variables influence engagement on blog and Facebook platforms. We also find differences in the success drivers of sponsored blogging campaigns across the platforms. High blogger expertise interacts with campaign intent on the blog platform but not the Facebook platform.

We find a significant interaction between campaign intent and hedonic value on Facebook platforms. Specifically, our findings indicate that hedonic value exerts a greater impact in trial campaigns, which supports the explanation that hedonic content may provide a reason for Facebook users to share information or like a blog post with an overtly commercial intent, confirming the compensatory role of hedonic value in mitigating the negative effect of a less desired post. In addition, we find a negative effect of campaign incentives on Facebook post likes for both awareness and trial campaigns, potentially due to cross-platform cannibalization of the Facebook platform by the blogging platform. Campaign incentives may cause participants to interact with a blog post more directly in the blogging environment, even though they may have first encountered the information on Facebook.

In addition, we estimated a series of alternative models for robustness checks, including examining when posts are cross-posted on blogs and Facebook, alternative measures of content sentiment, alternative specifications of number of followers, varying measures of post engagement, and

alternative coding for the varimax factor rotations. The robustness checks also included another version of the Stage 1 Probit model specification, models using Gaussian Copula, and fixed-effects negative binomial models. The results of these alternative specifications are consistent with our reported findings (for details, see the Web Appendix, as well as an overall summary of the robustness check results in the "Details on Stage 1 Probit Model" section).

Our results thus far have been based on data collected from a real-world context (actual campaigns featuring sponsored bloggers), providing high generalization and meaningful insights into the complex interplay of multiple factors that influence how these campaigns actually function in real life. However, field data limit our ability to manipulate key independent variables, creating the possibility that extraneous variables could account for the effects. To account for this possibility and improve our ability to draw meaningful conclusions from this research, we aimed to replicate our findings in a tightly controlled setting, by experimentally manipulating our key variables. We focused on finding additional support for a key interaction effect observed in the blog platform setting—namely, the interaction between campaign intent and blogger expertise in a blog setting.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to replicate one of the more counterintuitive results (i.e., the blogger expertise $\times$ campaign intent interaction on the blog platform) to provide further support for H_2. We posit that campaign intent will have a differential impact on purchase likelihood in the case of high-expertise bloggers but will not affect purchase likelihood in the case of low-expertise bloggers.

Pretests

Expertise pretest. This pretest served to (1) link blogger profile characteristics with perceived expertise and (2) check the strength of our manipulation of blogger expertise. We kept the sample population as similar to the target audience as possible. Those sampled were women with children under 18 years of age (N = 97). The pretest was a between-subjects design with two expertise levels (high and low)

manipulated using blogger profile descriptions (for details, see the Web Appendix). To create a robust measure of expertise, we used the items from Ohanian's (1990) scale to measure celebrity endorser expertise. On a scale from 0 ("strongly disagree") to 100 ("strongly agree"), participants rated whether they believed the blogger was expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified, and skilled. We averaged these five items together ($\alpha = .96$) to create an overall perceived expertise score.

We controlled for homophily to rule this out as an alternative explanation of the blogger expertise effects. Therefore, participants rated three items regarding blogger homophily (0 = "strongly disagree," 100 = "strongly agree"): "I feel that the blogger is similar to me," "I feel that the blogger is a peer," and "I feel that the blogger thinks like me." We averaged these three items together to create an overall homophily score ($\alpha = .95$). Controlling for age and homophily, we found that perceived expertise is higher under the high blogger expertise manipulation than the low blogger expertise manipulation ($M_{high} = 62.20$, $M_{low} = 59.37$; $F(3, 93) = 20.13$, $p < .01$). In addition, we found a difference in perceived homophily for high- versus low-expertise bloggers when controlling for age, such that homophily is higher in the case of low-expertise bloggers ($M_{high} = 46.89$, $M_{low} = 60.26$; $F(1, 94) = 7.50$, $p < .01$).

Campaign pretest. The goal of this pretest was to test the manipulation of campaign intent. This pretest was a three condition (campaign intent: awareness, trial, control) between-subjects design (N = 164).[5] Participants read a sponsored blog post; the awareness and trial campaigns were both about an educational mobile game targeted at middle schoolers. The posts were identical, except that the trial campaign had an additional message at the bottom that read "BUY NOW!!!" In the control condition, participants read an unrelated post about finding the right job.

We measured persuasion knowledge using scale items from Ahluwalia and Burnkrant (2004). Participants rated the author of the blog post on a nine-point bipolar scale for three items: good/bad, not pushy/pushy, and not aggressive/aggressive. We averaged these items to create a persuasion knowledge

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[5] Those sampled were women with children under 18 years of age.

measure for the source ($\alpha = .85$). Controlling for age, we found a significant difference in perception of the source based on the campaign intent manipulation ($M_{awareness} = 3.38$, $M_{trial} = 4.27$, $M_{control} = 3.35$; F(3, 160) = 2.81, $p < .05$). Using planned pairwise contrasts, we found a significant difference in persuasion knowledge between the trial and awareness campaigns ($p < .05$) and between the trial and control campaigns ($p < .05$). This indicates that persuasion knowledge is higher in trial campaigns than in either the awareness or control campaign conditions.

Method and Results

This experiment was a 2 (expertise: high, low) × 2 (campaign: awareness, trial) between-subjects design. The sample came from a Qualtrics panel of mothers (N = 395). Our context for this study is an educational paid app (Water Bears) targeted at middle schoolers (and their parents), designed to improve spatial reasoning. Participants read identical sponsored blog postings about Water Bears (similar to what was used in the pretest). In the trial condition, an additional phrase at the bottom stated: "BUY NOW!!!" The expertise conditions were identical to those in the pretest. Participants rated how likely they would be to purchase the Water Bears app on a scale from 0% ("not likely at all") to 100% ("very likely").

We analyzed the data using analysis of variance containing all the main effects (i.e., blogger expertise, campaign intent, and their interaction). The overall model was significant (F(7, 387) = 22.29, $p < .01$). The main effect of expertise was not significant (F(1, 387) = 0.95, $p = .33$), but the main effect of campaign intent was significant (F(1, 387) = 8.56, $p < .01$). In support of our hypothesized effect, the interaction between expertise and campaign intent was also significant (F(1, 387) = 8.88, $p < .01$). We controlled for age, homophily, whether participants had children in middle school, and whether they follow sponsored bloggers online. After controlling for these variables, the test of simple slopes indicated that, consistent with H_{2a}, the impact of high blogger expertise on purchase likelihood is stronger for awareness campaigns than for trial campaigns ($M_{awareness} = 34.10$, $M_{trial} = 20.66$; F(1, 387) =

13.32, $p < .01$). That is, when blogger expertise was high, participants expressed a higher purchase intent for the awareness campaign than the trial campaign. Next, examining purchase likelihood under low blogger expertise, we found no significant difference between awareness and trial campaigns ($M_{awareness}$ = 30.24, M_{trial} = 30.29; $F(1, 387) = .14$, $p = .7106$), which, consistent with our empirical results, fails to support H_{2b}. The impact of a low-expertise endorser on purchase likelihood does not depend on campaign intent. This pattern of findings confirms those from our empirical data set (see Figure 3).

Discussion

Study 2 provides additional, supplemental evidence for the interaction between source expertise and campaign intent on a blog platform. We show that in the case of high-expertise bloggers, awareness intent yields a higher purchase likelihood than trial intent. By demonstrating this effect using purchase likelihood in an experimental setting, we provide further support for the validity of this finding. However, the results in Study 1 are driven by high expertise, while the results in Study 2 are driven by differences due to low expertise. This may be because the outcome variable (purchase intent) is closer to the trial condition (which is driven by low expertise) while Study 1's outcome variable (engagement in the form of blog comments) is much closer to awareness building.

General Discussion

This research sheds light on the key drivers of success of influencer marketing campaigns and offers a novel contribution by examining the interplay of social media platforms and success factors. We find that while network, blogger characteristics, and content characteristics affect multiple types of sponsored blogger engagement, the level of platform involvement and the campaign intent matter for the degree of success. We use both field data based on a large data set of influencer marketing campaigns and a controlled experiment to show convergent evidence of the majority of the hypothesized effects. By

understanding this framework to increase engagement, companies can choose bloggers more effectively, matching their characteristics to campaign goals.

We expect the sponsored blogging results to differ from those for other social media and paid media for two reasons. First, the nature of influencer marketing is distinct from both WOM and traditional advertising because influencers blend elements of paid and earned media. From a motivation standpoint, while traditional advertising may have multiple goals to meet brand equity–based objectives, influencers have additional loyalty to their followers. Second, the influencer designs and implements the message, not the company. This is also distinct not only from traditional advertising and spokesperson marketing tactics, due to bloggers' creative freedom, but also from pure organic WOM, because bloggers are sponsored by the company. With these influencer nuances in mind, we expect that consumers will interpret the message and source differently depending on where and how it is presented.

Theoretical Contributions

Our key contributions involve understanding the interplay of post content characteristics (i.e., hedonic value of a blog post), source expertise, and campaign characteristics (i.e., campaign intent and incentives in an awareness-building or trial campaign) on campaign intent and social media platform. While campaign intent has received attention in advertising literature (Muller 1983), our study is the first to examine the impact of influencer marketing campaign intent on engagement. We find that campaign intent is an especially pertinent moderator to many of the relationships in our study. For example, campaign intent moderates the relationship between source expertise and blog post engagement. Campaign intent also moderates the relationship between hedonic content and Facebook post engagement. These findings suggest that the relationship among source, content, and engagement should not be assessed in isolation from campaign intent.

In addition, we contribute to the literature on blogger expertise by demonstrating conditions in which expertise has (1) a positive impact, (2) a negative impact, and (3) no impact. Specifically, we demonstrate that in some conditions, source expertise is positive, and in others, it is nonsignificant. Expert endorsement is beneficial under an awareness intent, while a novice endorsement is beneficial under a trial intent. This effect holds under high-involvement, low-distraction social media platforms. On low-involvement, high-distraction social media platforms, however, source expertise does not affect engagement. We provide a more nuanced explanation of expertise and its role in online brand engagement. Taken together, these findings provide a richer understanding of source expertise in the case of influencer marketing.

We extend prior research on influencer marketing by highlighting the importance of consumer skepticism differences, which may cause campaign intent (awareness or trial) aimed at different stages of the CDJ to function differently. At early stages in the CDJ, consumers are open to guidance from those with high perceived expertise. However, closer to trial, consumers are open to endorsements that originate from either less expert (presumably more homophilous) or more expert sources. This difference is only true in high-involvement platform settings such as blogs. Understanding the contextual effects guiding the impact of source expertise in online influencer marketing settings is a key contribution of this research. It extends prior works on influencer marketing settings that focus on either expertise (Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez 2016; Zhu and Tan 2007) or stage of the CDJ (Hudson and Hudson 2013) but do not examine their interplay.

We also argue that the motivations driving people to use social media platforms influence how they view different types of influencer marketing campaigns. In a blog environment, in which users are motivated to process information deeply and to engage with bloggers' information and content, trial campaigns are better received. In a Facebook environment, in which users' motivations are more

focused on sharing information with peers, awareness campaigns have a more positive impact. Given this general preference for awareness (vs. trial) campaigns on Facebook, hedonic value of a blog post takes on more significance in the context of trial campaigns.

Furthermore, our findings show that post content, i.e. hedonic value, is important in generating post engagement. We extend the findings of Berger and Milkman (2012), who argue that hedonic content increases social transmission and virality of online messages. We find that hedonic value has a significant effect on both blog and Facebook platforms. We also show that on low-involvement, high-distraction social media platforms, hedonic content can be beneficial when paired with trial campaigns, perhaps because of their overtly commercial intent. In awareness-building campaigns, in which user motivations involve sharing information, hedonic value may be distracting to the primary goal. Thus, hedonic content of online communications is not always beneficial to marketing campaigns.

Our findings are revealing on the impact of campaign incentives, which research has previously shown to increase WOM (Berger and Schwartz 2011) and enhance quality perceptions of a product (White 2013). We demonstrate that incentives (a *chance* to win a giveaway) generate WOM benefits in the form of increased engagement (i.e., blog post comments). This finding advances the literature by showing that increased WOM and engagement can be generated without giving a free product to every person; simply offering a chance to be the recipient is enough to induce the benefits of free products. This greatly reduces the costs associated with running a campaign with free product incentives, while still generating a similar response.

One potential rationale for why giveaways have a positive effect in a blog environment but a negative effect in Facebook posts is that giveaways are typically executed in a blog platform setting, and blogs cannibalize Facebook engagement. An alternative explanation, which could be the focus of further research, is that high-involvement platforms in general are more conducive to driving engagement

through free goods and incentives. Prior research suggests that when consumers are more involved, they want to minimize risk through information search in their decision-making processes (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 2001), and they might view free products or incentives as a way to lower the risk of a new purchase. This is worth examining under a broader understanding of customer engagement.

This article offers a unique contribution by examining the differences between social media platforms. While we empirically focused on blogs and Facebook, the findings can be extended to other social media platforms. As platforms continue to develop, the extent of involvement generated by a platform can help inform decisions on influencer marketing strategies. Moreover, the focus of this research was on online engagement, which sheds more light on customer profitability than a mere focus on customer attitudes or preferences. Furthermore, our examination of cross-platform impacts (i.e., blogs and Facebook) dovetails with other research examining how different advertising media may synergistically improve customer engagement and profitability. Kireyev, Pauwels, and Gupta (2016) investigate the dynamic interaction between paid search and display ads. We extend their findings by focusing on one form of social media marketing that straddles the earned and paid social media types. Therefore, our findings are of particular relevance in light of the increased blurring between these two types of social media marketing. The variations observed across social media platforms indicate that the type of platform can affect the profitability of digital marketing expenditures.

Managerial Implications

We offer novel insights to managers implementing influencer marketing campaigns. First, this article delineates best practices for sponsored bloggers based on marketing campaign intent and platform. When trying to bolster awareness campaigns on a blogging platform, managers should feature the expertise and credibility of the blogger. However, in the case of trial campaign intent, campaigns by both expert and novice sources will be equally successful.

Second, when implementing campaigns on Facebook or any other high-distraction platform, managers should vary content strategy depending on campaign intent. Trial campaigns can benefit from featuring posts with high hedonic value, particularly in high-distraction environments such as Facebook. Furthermore, when choosing bloggers to implement a strategy involving multiple high-distraction platforms, managers should focus on selecting bloggers with a large follower base to ensure the highest penetration and engagement.

Third, with regard to the impact of campaign intent on outcomes, we recommend that managers use the appropriate drivers of success for blog engagement (i.e., blogger expertise, campaign incentives) in awareness campaigns and rely on hedonic-valued content on blog platforms. We further recommend that managers avoid using campaign incentives on Facebook or other low-involvement, high-distraction platforms, such as Twitter or Instagram, and instead focus on the hedonic value of post content.

Return on Engagement

Researchers have begun examining the impact of social media expenditures on firm performance and shareholder value (e.g., Danaher and Dagger 2013). By examining sponsored blogging across social media platforms, we contribute to extant literature examining the differential profitability impacts of these platforms, thereby extending research that examines across-media profitability impacts of advertising expenditures (Sridhar et al. 2016). In addition, many companies have tried to quantify the value of social media engagement. Estimates range from $.33 to $8 per Facebook like, while social media shares are estimated at $8 per retweet and $14 per Facebook post share (Stout 2015). We conservatively estimated the dollar value of each type of engagement at $1 for a Facebook post like, $1 for a Facebook post comment, $2 for a Facebook post share, and $2 for a blog post comment. We multiplied the number of blog post comments and Facebook post likes, comments, and shares by an estimated dollar value for each type of engagement. We then summed these values and used them as the

revenue per campaign per blogger generated by engagement. Next, we calculated return on engagement (RoE) by dividing the total revenue generated by the total cost for each campaign by blogger. We modeled RoE using campaign intent, expertise, campaign incentives, and hedonic content. We found a marginally significant, positive relationship of expertise and a significant, positive relationship of campaign incentives on RoE (for details, see Web Appendix). This implies that both blogger characteristics and campaign intent can affect firms' bottom lines. By optimizing social influencer marketing strategies with these results, firms can increase RoE for influencer marketing campaigns.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research is subject to certain limitations, which may present new directions for further research. We examined only a limited set of outcome metrics associated with a particular blog post and did not directly test for the impact on return on investment (ROI). However, Kumar et al. (2013) show that both social media and customer WOM increase ROI, and Kumar and Pansari (2016) demonstrate the relationship between engagement and ROI. Further research could increase the set of outcome measures of a given campaign by considering the direct impact of a blog post on consequential outcomes, such as sales and ROI. Further exploration of why customer engagement could affect these performance outcomes is worth examining and would extend Harmeling et al.'s (2017) framework. Our measurement of key constructs, such as sentiment, relied on post hoc measures based on judges evaluating each blog post for factors such as creativity/uniqueness and personal relevancy. A more direct measure would involve having the audiences of a given blogger rate his or her posts for various aspects of sentiment. In addition, research could include a field experiment of blogger choice informed by this research versus the current methods for selecting bloggers for campaigns. In addition, this research uses the bloggers' network size at the time of the posts but does not formally take into account the entire past performance or longevity of the bloggers' careers. This could be an important variable to consider in future research.

Finally, we acknowledge the highly evolutionary nature of social media platforms. Therefore, while we explore the effects of campaign, source, and hedonic value in terms of two social media platforms, we recommend considering these findings in the light of platform characteristics versus specific platforms.

In general, sponsored blogging and influencer marketing have been the target of ethical debates in recent years. Some critics argue that social influencers fail to reveal their sponsorship by companies, thereby creating a perception that their sponsored posts are organic WOM. This type of deceptive marketing practice has been at the heart of various Federal Trade Commission investigations of Instagram posts in recent years (Ingram and Bartz 2017). The Federal Trade Commission (2017) has reached out to influencers directly and reiterated its requirements to disclose any endorser and advertiser connection. As noted, all sponsored posts in the current research included a declaration of sponsorship at the beginning of the blog post. Still, there is room for research on how sponsored blogging as an advertising medium is distinct from other forms of advertising that consumers view unambiguously as paid advertising.

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TABLE 1
Previous Research Related to Sponsored Blogging Key Variables

Authors (Year)	Independent Variables										Dependent Variables					
	Blogger Characteristics	Audience Characteristics	Product Type	Sponsorship Disclosure	Network Characteristics	Post Content	Brand Awareness	Campaign Intent	Social Media Platforms	Reader Review Valence	Behavioral Intention	Attitude	Effectiveness	Credibility	Trust	Engagement
Zhu and Tan (2007)	✓		✓	✓							✓	✓				
Magnini (2011)				✓									✓		✓	
Fu and Chen (2012)		✓								✓		✓				
Lu, Chang, and Chang (2014)			✓	✓			✓				✓	✓				
Colliander and Erlandsson (2015)				✓								✓		✓		
Ballantine and Yeung (2015)				✓						✓	✓		✓	✓		
Hwang and Jeong (2016)				✓										✓		
Rooderkerk and Pauwels (2016)	✓					✓								✓		✓
Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez (2016)	✓			✓		✓					✓		✓	✓		
Van Reijmersdal et al. (2016)				✓							✓	✓				
Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019)	✓				✓									✓		✓
Hollebeek and Macky (2019)						✓									✓	✓
Lou and Yuan (2019)	✓				✓									✓	✓	
This study	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓					✓

TABLE 2
Constructs

Construct	Definition	Operationalization
Facebook post likes	Primary measure of Facebook engagement is the number of likes each post received.	Count; the total number of likes per blogger per campaign
Blog post comments	Primary measure of engagement is the number of blog post comments each blog post received.	Count; the total number of comments per blog post, blogger, and campaign
Facebook posts	Number of Facebook posts per blogger per campaign.	Count; control variable
Followers	Represents blogger's social media presence and is also an indication of blogger strength.	Quantitative; the average number of twitter and Facebook followers that a blogger has in online network
Awareness campaign	Increases brand awareness and spreads information to consumers; occurs at an early stage in the purchase funnel because consumers are not yet trying to evaluate whether to purchase the product.	Categorical; campaign intent is focused on raising awareness about a specific brand
Trial campaign	Encourages consumers to make a purchase; typically linked to actions required of consumers (e.g., purchase).	Categorical; campaign intent is focused on increasing purchase or trial behavior
Expertise	Is indicative of how bloggers portray themselves as a source of information as a sponsored blogger.	Quantitative; a sum of the person's educational affiliation and blogger credentials. Range: 0–2
Functional	Functional value captures the believability and informativeness of a post.	Quantitative; a factor score of content that is genuine/sincere, honest, informative, pleasant, relatable, understandable, believable, and relevant, as well as usage consideration
Hedonic	Hedonic value of a post refers to the enjoyment, emotions, and entertainment a consumer experiences from reading a post.	Quantitative; a factor score of content that is attention getting, creative, emotional, energetic, humorous, memorable, strong, unique, and warmhearted
Giveaways	Marketing actions designed to generate specific responses and engagement from consumers.	Categorical; campaign-level variable, whether or not a giveaway was included as part of the campaign

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	M	SD
Number of Facebook post likes	1,398	17.53	100.64
Number of blog post comments	1,826	21.23	70.02
Average number of followers	1,267	21,246.10	24,812.43
Weekend post	1,830	14.8%*	0.4
Type of campaign: awareness	1,830	35.1%*	0.48
Type of campaign: trial	1,830	64.9%*	0.48
Expertise (sum of credentials and education)	1,816	0.36	0.63
Blogger travel/foodie	1,816	0	1
Blogger persona	1,816	0	1
Blogger lifestyle	1,816	0	1
Blogger values	1,816	0	1
Functional value of post	1,830	0	1
Hedonic value of post	1,830	0	1
Giveaway	1,825	25.5%*	0.44
Inverse Mills ratio	1,819	0.27	0.18

*Percentage of occurrences

TABLE 4
Variable Correlations

Variable	Number of facebook likes	Number of blog comments	Avg. no. of followers	Weekend post	Number of facebook posts	Awareness intent	Blogger expertise	Blogger travel/ foodie	Blogger persona	Blogger lifestyle	Blogger values	Functional value	Hedonic value	Giveaway
Number of facebook likes	1													
Number of blog comments	0.0028	1												
Avg. no. of followers	0.0775*	0.0067	1											
Weekend post	0.1082*	-0.0382	0.0480	1										
Number of facebook posts	0.0993*	-0.0078	0.0010	0.0513*	1									
Awareness intent	0.1550*	-0.0981*	0.0283	0.0230	0.0066	1								
Blogger expertise	-0.0737*	0.1761*	-0.0068	-0.0082	0.0824*	-0.1822*	1							
Blogger travel/foodie	-0.0072	0.0400	0.2400*	0.0258	-0.0654*	0.0115	0.0095	1						
Blogger persona	0.0188	-0.0016	0.1245*	0.0027	0.0007	0.0226	0.1687*	-0.0006	1					
Blogger lifestyle	-0.0103	0.0223	-0.1028*	0.0026	0.0290	0.0166	0.0423	-0.0034	0.0046	1				
Blogger values	-0.0090	-0.0040	-0.0951*	-0.0166	0.0223	0.0304	0.0001	-0.0102	-0.0047	-0.0010	1			
Functional value	0.0209	-0.0270	0.1124*	-0.0194	-0.0057	0.0792*	-0.0356	0.0443	-0.0136	-0.0078	-0.0054	1		
Hedonic value	-0.0297	-0.0491*	-0.0771*	0.0114	0.0297	-0.0290	0.0337	-0.0302	-0.0201	0.0002	-0.0063	0.0000	1	
Giveaway	-0.0432	0.2873*	-0.0242	-0.0166	-0.0043	-0.0531*	0.0533*	0.0160	0.1035*	0.0343	-0.0538*	-0.0608*	-0.0062	1

*Significant at $p < .05$.
Notes: The unit of analysis is the blog post.

TABLE 5
Varimax Factor Pattern Rotation for Blog Post Sentiment Variables

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Sentiment Variables	**Functional**	**Hedonic**
Attention getting	.44	**.66**
Boring	-.47	-.51
Creative	.33	**.78**
Emotional	.17	**.71**
Energetic	.35	**.70**
Genuine/sincere	**.69**	.49
Honest	**.73**	.43
Humorous	-.08	**.68**
Informative	**.66**	.34
Irritating	-.65	-.17
Memorable	.37	**.76**
Pleasant	**.61**	.56
Strong	.37	**.74**
Unique	.28	**.79**
Warmhearted	.53	**.64**
Relatable	**.66**	.48
Understandable	**.75**	.07
Believable	**.84**	.17
Relevant	**.67**	.27
Benefits believable	**.85**	.18
Consider using	**.68**	.37

TABLE 6
Stage 1 Probit Selection Model

Variable	Blogger Selection
Intercept	-2.2744**
	(.0188)
Similar blogger selection	1.5550**
	(.0283)
Travel/foodie	.0374**
	(.0144)
Persona	.0113
	(.0146)
Lifestyle	-.0169
	(.0136)
Values	.0100
	(.0152)
Model fit	LR $\chi^2(5)$ = 3117.20
	Pseudo-R^2 = .255

Notes: Standard error are in parentheses.
*Significant at $p < .05$.
**Significant at $p < .01$.

TABLE 7
Model Results Table

Variable	Blog Post Comments	Facebook Post Likes
Intercept	2.0403**	1.4032**
	(.1479)	(.1968)
Average number of followers (ln, mean-centered)	.3514**	.2055*
	(.0821)	(.0941)
Weekend post	-.1837	.7038**
	(.1641)	(.2168)
Number of Facebook posts	N/A	.5728**
	N/A	(.0891)
Campaign intent – awareness	-.2351+	.7416**
	(.1417)	(.1883)
Blogger expertise (sum of credentials and education)	-.1228	.0253
	(.2000)	(.2591)
Functional value of post	.0298	.0520
	(.0790)	(.0906)
Hedonic value of post	.2616**	.2215*
	(.0888)	(.1007)
Giveaway	.4526*	-.7840**
	(.1834)	(.2245)
Awareness × expertise	.7283*	-.4534
	(.2911)	(.3393)
Awareness × functional	-.1269	-.1533
	(.1185)	(.1308)
Awareness × hedonic	-.2167	-.4824**
	(.1323)	(.1356)
Awareness × giveaway	.4322	.5312
	(.3020)	(.3364)
Awareness × followers	-.1413	.1457
	(.1127)	(.1301)
Inverse Mills ratio	-.1255	.1255
	(.3601)	(.4343)
Overdispersion (α)	4.0632**	3.7449**
	(.1915)	(.1829)
AIC	6662.87	5581.87
BIC	6739.68	5505.78
–2 Log-likelihood χ^2	100.64**	221.91**

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses.
[+]Marginally significant at $p < .10$.
*Significant at $p < .05$.
**Significant at $p < .01$.

FIGURE 1
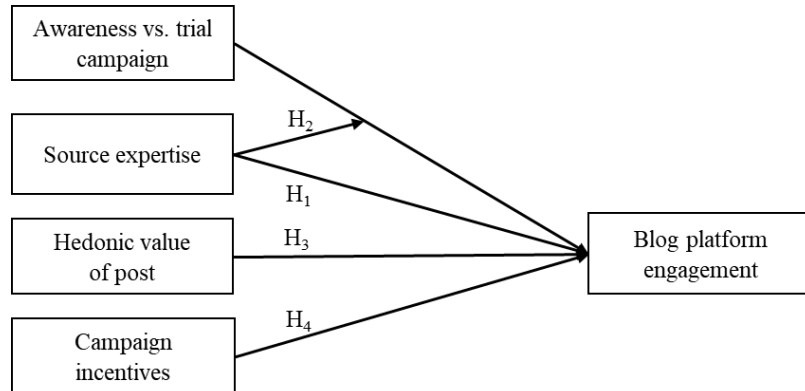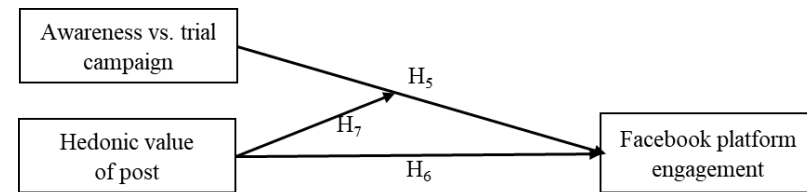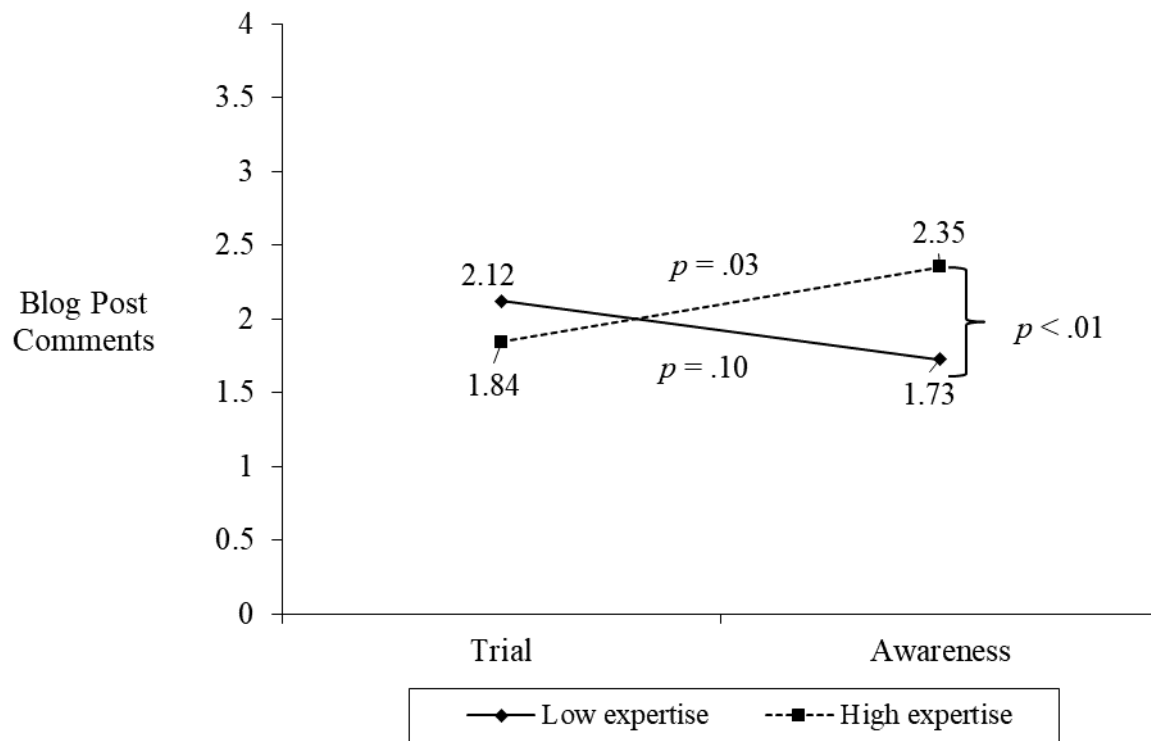Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Sponsored Blogging Campaign Effectiveness

A: Blog Platform Engagement

B: Facebook Platform Engagement

FIGURE 2
Blog Post Comments and Facebook Post Likes (Empirical Study)
A: Blogger Expertise and Campaign Intent on Blog Engagement

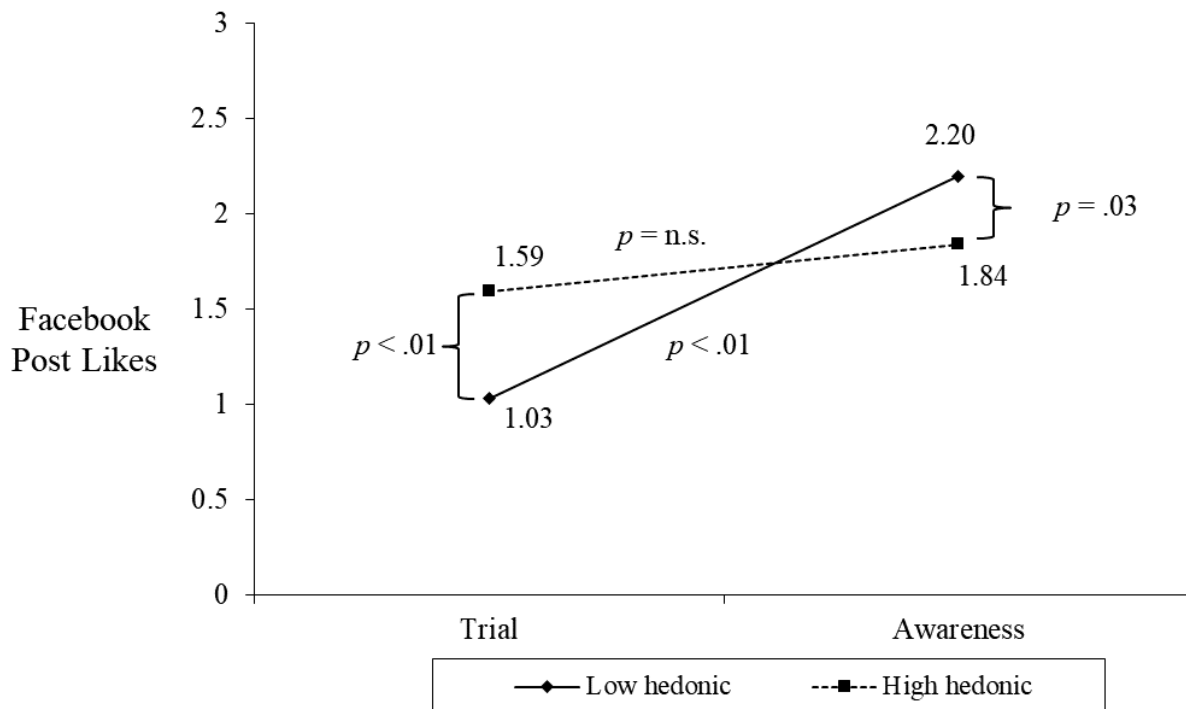B: Hedonic Content and Campaign Intent on Facebook Engagement

FIGURE 3

Blogger Expertise and Campaign Intent Effects on Purchase Likelihood (Study 2)