

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# The development of reputational capital – How social media influencers differ from traditional celebrities

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## Abstract

Social media influencers (SMI) have grown in importance as a promotional channel. However, little is known about how they build reputational capital and thus endorsement effectiveness, particularly compared to traditional celebrity endorsers. From a consumers' perspective, this research investigates both types of endorsers in different stages of the Celebrity Capital Life Cycle (CCLC). Across three studies, we find that parasocial relationships and interactions with consumers are paramount for SMIs reputational capital and endorsement effectiveness, yet not critical for traditional celebrities. Further, a consumer's perceived weak parasocial relationship/interaction with SMIs can be detrimental to their effectiveness yet has little impact on traditional celebrities' influence. We find that the positive effect of a SMI with high parasocial relationship/interaction with consumers on Word of Mouth (i.e., endorsers effectiveness) is mediated by expectation fulfillment and brand endorsers' credibility (i.e., reputation capital). This research discovers how important parasocial relationships with consumers are for SMIs in comparison to traditional celebrities; importantly this is the first research that empirically identifies how SMIs can gain and maintain reputation capital and subsequently be more effective as brand endorsers. Our findings have important implications for marketing professionals who are managing SMIs.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Brand endorsements on social media have increasingly gained investment, making them a 5–10-billion-dollar industry (Ballis, 2020; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Yet, the success of such endorsements remains controversial, particularly with respect to the effectiveness of social media influencers (SMI) compared to traditional celebrity endorsers (Schouten et al., 2019). Furthermore, the importance of reputational capital and subsequent endorsement effectiveness on social media, particularly for SMIs, remains largely unknown (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Jin & Phua, 2014; Spry et al., 2011). Although it is well documented that traditional celebrity endorsers gain

celebrity capital through achievements outside social media and are able generate positive impacts through their reputational capital (i.e., credibility) when endorsing brands (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), little is known about how SMI's can build reputational capital and why this is important for their ongoing success (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019).

Scattered evidence points towards the importance of parasocial relationships/interaction, a perceived close relationship between a SMI and a consumer, as a key influencing factor for acquiring and consolidating SMI's celebrity capital (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Unlike traditional celebrity status which is attained independently of a social media presence (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Escalas & Bettman, 2017),

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SIMs are associated with Internet fame and the use of social media interaction to create a profile (Khamis et al., 2016). Parasocial relationships in an online environment are associated with interactivity (Labrecque, 2014; Lou, 2021) due to the interactive nature of social media platforms (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Since social media platforms are the only vehicle for SIMs, parasocial relationships/interactions are potentially important for SIMs who need to acquire and maintain reputational capital (and thus celebrity capital) by leveraging the key benefits of social media platforms to gain reputation (Labrecque, 2014). In contrast, traditional celebrities have an established reputation outside social media and potentially do not need to rely on social media interaction and associated parasocial relationships as a vehicle to gain traction (Halonon-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010).

Previous research has found an overall positive impact of parasocial relationships on social media amongst endorsers (Chung & Cho, 2017; Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Munnukka et al., 2019; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Yuan et al., 2016). However, there is a lack of understanding on exactly how, when, and why parasocial relationships and parasocial interactions impact a follower's perception and subsequent behavior. Drawing from literature on social media (i.e., perceived interactivity), parasocial relationships/interactions, and the Celebrity Capital Life Cycle (CCLC) we address this gap in the literature. Across three studies we investigate the impact of parasocial relationships and interactions for different types of brand endorsers (SIMs vs. traditional celebrities) at two different stages (acquisition and consolidation) of the CCLC (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019). The CCLC consists of four stages—acquisition, consolidation, decline, and redemption and is a useful framework to study how celebrity endorsers (both traditional and SIMs) acquire and consolidate credibility and thus endorser effectiveness on social media. The acquisition stage is when a celebrity starts to gain media recognition, and the consolidation stage is when a celebrity has widespread media recognizability (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019), therefore, are important stages for developing parasocial relationships. This research is the first to empirically unpack the important issue of how SIMs acquire and consolidate reputational capital and what is required by SIMs compared to traditional celebrities at each of the two stages of the CCLC.

Our research makes valuable contributions to extant literature. Importantly, we contribute to the growing literature on brand endorsement on social media (De Veirman et al., 2017) and literature on parasocial relationships (Labrecque, 2014; Lou, 2021) by demonstrating that a strong perceived parasocial relationship and interaction is critical for SIM reputational capital which subsequently leads to endorsement effectiveness (i.e., high WOM/eWOM for endorsed brands). In contrast, traditional celebrities do not require high parasocial relationships and interactions (in terms of reputational capital and endorsement effectiveness). Additionally, a weaker parasocial relationship/interaction can hurt a SIM yet does not negatively impact a traditional celebrity. We also determine that the concept parasocial relationships needs to include interactivity in a social media environment (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lou, 2021). Significantly, we answer Carrillat and Ilicic's (2019) call to investigate the differences between SIMs and traditional celebrities and how and why they acquire and

consolidate reputational capital at different stages of the CCLC. Finally, this research contributes to literature on parasocial relationships by demonstrating that the concept needs to include interactivity in a social media environment (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lou, 2021). The key managerial implication is the need for SIMs and their brand endorsers/managers to invest substantial time and resources into nurturing parasocial perception by engaging in parasocial interactions with their followers/consumers to acquire and maintain their reputation and influence.

## 2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 | CCLC—reputational capital and endorsement effectiveness

Celebrity capital is the accumulated media visibility and recognition (Driessens, 2013, p. 17), that a celebrity gains through reputational capital in terms of “public awareness, their favorability, their personality, reputation, and the public's knowledge of past behaviors” (Hunter et al., 2009, p. 140). Reputational capital is how trustworthy and credible a source is (Hunter et al., 2009). Accordingly, a high reputational capital is critical for a celebrity's overall endorsement effectiveness (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019). Celebrity capital and reputational capital (which is more evaluative), therefore relies on aspects such as trustworthiness, likability, and credibility, that evolves over time (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Driessens, 2013). To reflect the notion that celebrity capital (and thus reputational capital) evolves over time Carrillat and Ilicic (2019) developed the CCLC framework which proposes different stages to obtain celebrity capital from acquisition (celebrity has limited but growing media visibility and recognition), consolidation (celebrity has widespread media recognizability and visibility), abrupt downfall/slow decline (celebrity has a decrease in media visibility), to redemption (celebrity returns and has an increase in media visibility and recognition).

#### 2.1.1 | Reputational capital and source credibility

A key part of reputational capital is credibility (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Driessens, 2013), a term more commonly used in the endorsement context (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Source credibility has been well documented in advertising and endorsement literature as an important factor that influences attitudes towards brands and purchase intentions in both traditional media and various online media (Dong et al., 2018; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Erdogan, 1999; Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Source credibility refers to the positive characteristics of the source (e.g., Celebrity or SIM) that are accepted by the receiver and generally includes three key components of the communicator: Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Expertise (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Ohanian, 1990). Trustworthiness and expertise are particularly important for reputational capital. Trustworthiness includes characteristics such as dependability, honesty, reliability, and

sincerity; and expertise considers how knowledgeable, qualified, and skilled the source is (Ohanian, 1990). All these elements are required to build reputational capital (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Driessens, 2013). The credibility of a celebrity endorser has a positive impact on the credibility of the endorsed brand. As a result, consumers associate the endorsed brand with the celebrity's level of trustworthiness and expertise (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

### 2.1.2 | Endorsement effectiveness

Further, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) show that a brand endorser's credibility is known to generate endorsement effectiveness by generating positive WOM. WOM is proven to be critical since customers often depend on WOM when purchasing goods and services (Hess & Ring, 2016). The continual growth of social media makes eWOM increasingly important, particularly because the effect of eWOM is expected to be greater than WOM due to its "convenience, scope, source, and speed of interactions" (Augusto & Torres, 2018, p. 3; Kutthakaphan & Chokesamritpol, 2013; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). eWOM refers to positive or negative statements made by consumers about a brand or company on electronic and/or digital platforms and can include recommendations, "talking up" the brand, and posting comments (Augusto & Torres, 2018; Park & Kim, 2014). According to Wolny and Mueller (2013) eWOM also includes non-textual communication, such as "liking" or "sharing." Together, WOM is an important measure of effectiveness, which can be impacted by an endorser's reputation (credibility). Yet, the question remains what makes different types of brand endorsers reputable and subsequently effective?

## 2.2 | Brand endorsers—traditional celebrities versus social media influencers

### 2.2.1 | Traditional celebrities

Traditional celebrities are well-known film stars, musicians, models, athletes, TV personalities, comedians, or politicians that have established themselves through traditional paths such as networking, going through agents, getting a "big break," that has led to gaining fame and becoming a public figure (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). These traditional celebrities endorse brands primarily because of their status, success, wealth, glamor, beauty, talent, and distinctiveness, where the meaning of these characteristics can then be transferred to the endorsed brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2017; Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010). It is these characteristics of traditional celebrities that make them credible sources and help build their reputational capital (Ohanian, 1990). In the context of social media endorsement, traditional celebrity status (thus reputational capital) is obtained independent of their social media endorsement activities (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). The use of media outlets such as YouTube, Tumblr, Vibe, Facebook, and Instagram has created a different type of celebrity group often referred to as SMI (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

### 2.2.2 | SMI

SMIs in comparison to traditional celebrities are "regular" people who have become known by creating and posting content on social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Essentially, SMIs are "associated with Internet fame," and use their activities on social media to build a profile (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019, p. 64). They are online personalities, across one or more social media platforms, who have obtained large numbers of followers by consistently posting photos that appeal to people with similar interests (Agrawal, 2016). Generally, SMIs have an interest or expertise in a specific area, such as healthy living, travel, food, lifestyle, beauty, or fashion, and are perceived to be authentic, accessible, and relatable (Nouri, 2018). Consumers relate to them because they have similar characteristics, personality, lifestyle, and demographics, and therefore are perceived to understand and resonate with the follower (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Consumers are influenced by the effortless sincerity, spontaneity, and authenticity, and therefore perceive them to be even more credible than traditional celebrities as brand endorsers on social media (De Veirman et al., 2017; Nouri, 2018). Recently, SMI have been defined as "individuals with big followings online which attract a large amount of engagement (i.e., likes) are able to use this popularity for marketing efforts in a specific industry" (Kay et al., 2020, p. 250).

The key distinction between a traditional celebrity and SMI is that the former gains status mostly through being a distinguished individual independent of social media, such as, an entertainer, movie star, athlete, or public figure, whereas SMIs are regular people who have gained fame through their social media presence and interaction with their followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). It is this key distinction—SMIs need to interact and develop perceived relationships on social media to gain reputation—that points towards the importance of parasocial interactions/relationships on social media.

### 2.3 | Parasocial relationships/interactions

Parasocial relationships are the illusory relationships between an audience and celebrity on traditional media (e.g., television and radio). The concept describes perceived close relationships between a media persona (presenter, actor, celebrity, etc.) and individual, whereby the individual can identify with and feel a deep connection and friendship with that person (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin et al., 1985). On social media parasocial relationships are perceived to be characterized as intimate, reciprocal, and interpersonal where consumers expect personal, honest, and authentic communication from celebrities when building parasocial relationships with them (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lou, 2021).

The parasocial relationship concept has often been used interchangeably with parasocial interaction, however, there are key differences between them. Namely, a parasocial relationship is a "perceived" bond of intimacy, whereas a parasocial interaction is an elusive interaction (Hu, 2016). Hartmann et al. (2008) proposed that parasocial interaction refers to "asymmetrical interactions that take

place in situational processes of character perception and elaboration during media exposure” (p. 25), while a parasocial relationship is “a cross-situational, stable, and schematic cognitive pattern of images and interactions scripts that includes affective aspects” (p. 26). Parasocial interaction is classified as a situational involvement (potentially more relevant to the acquisition phase) to with a persona that may lead to parasocial relationships as a long-term personal relationship (–potentially more relevant to the consolidation phase) with them (Wirth, 2006).

## 2.4 | Hypothesis development

Celebrity parasocial relationships and interactions on social media platforms need to be perceived as intimate, authentic, and reciprocal to be effective (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lou, 2021). Brand endorsers with similar characteristics to their target consumers are more persuasive, and hence more credible, because the consumer relates better to the endorser (Pradhan et al., 2016). SMI in comparison to traditional celebrities are expected to be more honest and personal in their communication on social media because they are mostly seen as “regular” people (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Together, the characteristics of parasocial relationships and interactions are closely aligned with how SMIs are expected to behave on social media through perceived interactivity (Labrecque, 2014; Lou, 2021). We argue that consumers have an expectation of SMIs to be parasocial (i.e., they facilitate the perception of interactivity). If SMIs are perceived to be interactive and parasocial this subsequently fulfills consumers' expectations of how SMIs should behave on social media. In contrast, SMIs that are not perceived as interactive and parasocial do not fulfill consumers' expectations. As for traditional celebrities that attained recognition outside social media activities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) consumers have no parasocial expectations of them, leading to hypothesis 1:

**H1.** Parasocial relationship/interaction moderates the effect of endorsement type and expectation fulfillment. Specifically, SMIs engaging in high (low) parasocial relationships or interactions have a positive (negative) effect on consumers' expectation fulfillment.

Expectancy has a significant effect on brand attitudes, in that a brand endorser is expected to correspond to a pattern of behavior related to the brand being endorsed (Fleck et al., 2012) and the expectations of consumers (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Pradhan et al., 2016). Brand endorsers that fulfill their target consumers' expectations are more persuasive and credible (Pradhan et al., 2016). Specifically in the social media domain, a match between SMI and followers' values and attitudes has shown to be beneficial (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Furthermore, research has shown that SMIs are seen as credible if they follow certain online behavior (e.g., responsive) and self-presentation (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Therefore, we argue that the fulfillment of expectations can evoke credibility, and thus, reputational capital (Kamins, 1990; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), leading to hypothesis 2:

**H2.** Higher expectation fulfillment leads to reputational capital (i.e., credibility).

Taking H1 and H2 together, we suggest that SMIs that engage in parasocial interactions and facilitate parasocial relationships fulfills the expectations of a SMI (H1) which subsequently translates into positive reputational capital (i.e., credibility) (H2). These predictions are in line with literature that regards reputational capital as mostly built on celebrity credibility (Carrillat & Illicic, 2019; Driessens, 2013). Endorser credibility is based on two key components: Trustworthiness and Expertise (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Ohanian, 1990). SMIs that are perceived to be experts and who frequently interact with consumers (i.e., higher parasocial interactions) on social media leads to greater trust (Schouten et al., 2019). Traditional celebrity endorsers gain celebrity capital through achievements outside social media and therefore generate positive impacts through their reputational capital (i.e., credibility) when endorsing brands without the need for strong parasocial relationships (Carrillat & Illicic, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). SMIs on the other hand are thought to build reputational capital on social media through strong parasocial relationships and this is important for their continued success (Carrillat & Illicic, 2019).

Further, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) demonstrate that a brand endorser's credibility is known to generate endorsement effectiveness by generating positive WOM. This is supported by claims that suggests higher reputational capital of endorser increases endorsement effectiveness (i.e., WOM and eWOM; Hwang & Zhang, 2018). We predict that celebrity endorsers with credibility (i.e., reputational capital) will influence high parasocial relationships/interactions they will increase the effectiveness of the brand endorser leading to the following hypothesis:

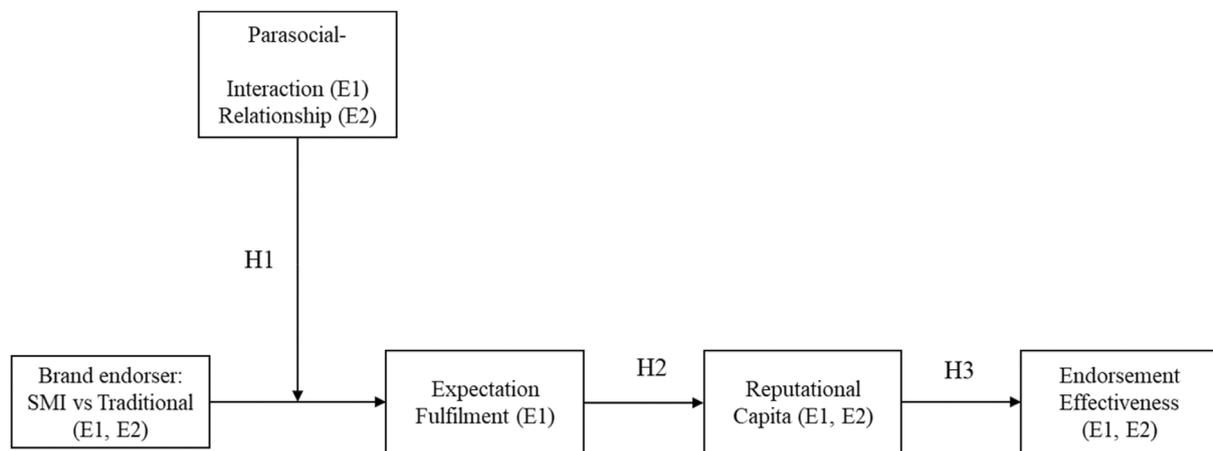
**H3.** Reputational capital (i.e., credibility) improves endorsement effectiveness.

Taken together, H1, H2, and H3 suggest that high parasocial interactions positively impact consumers' expectation fulfillment for SMIs but not traditional celebrity endorsers, which in turn influence reputational capital, and endorsement effectiveness (see Figure 1).

## 3 | EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW

This research proposes that consumers expect a SMI (but not a traditional celebrity) to facilitate a parasocial relationship/interaction. Expectation fulfillment then leads to reputational capital, which drives endorsement effectiveness (see Figure 1).

Three studies test our framework across two phases in the CCLC. Namely, in experiment 1 we investigate the “acquisition phase.” Namely, in this phase we investigate the full conceptual model (H1–H3) using an unknown SMI (vs. traditional celebrity) that uses parasocial interaction cues to fulfill expectations, which leads to reputation capital and endorsement effectiveness. Experiment 2a and b



Note: E1, E2 refers to the studies and associated constructs –E1: acquisition phase; E2 consolidation phase

**FIGURE 1** Conceptual framework and empirical overview

investigate the “consolidation phase,” where the endorsers are well known to the consumers and have an existing relationship. We do this by measuring parasocial relationship (opposed to parasocial interaction). Notably, “fulfillment expectation” is a construct hard to capture retrospectively. Oliver (1997) highlights that when expectations are measured after the fact took place (i.e., you have already been exposed to the celebrity for a while), they are generally biased towards that experience. Namely, measuring expectation delay, we face an interaction between actual outcomes (endorser’s known behavior) and prior expectations. Due to the nature of expectation fulfillment Study 2a and b cannot capture expectation fulfillment, hence the full conceptual model cannot be tested in the consolidation Phase, yet there is no theoretical reason to believe that the framework is not true for the consolidation Phase. In Study 2a and 2b we test the interaction between endorser type and parasocial relationship on endorser effectiveness with credibility as mediator.

## 4 | DESIGN AND RESULTS

Study 1 investigates the full conceptual model (combined H1–H3) using parasocial interaction (instead of relationships) to enhance effectiveness of SMIs. In doing so we address the interaction between endorser type and parasocial interaction in the acquisition phase when celebrities are unknown to followers. We also shed light on the underlying process—expectancy fulfillment and credibility (i.e., reputational capital).

### 4.1 | Study 1—acquisition phase

The main goal of Study 1 is to test the full conceptual model 1 (combined H1–H3) in the acquisition phase. Namely when followers are exposed to a new brand endorsement on social media there would be an interaction effect between the type of brand endorser (traditional

celebrity vs. SMI) and parasocial interaction, influencing expectancy fulfillment, reputational capital and subsequently endorsement effectiveness (i.e., WOM). In Study 1 we *manipulate parasocial interaction* using a scenario-based approach. In doing so we are using a fictitious endorser with no “history” between endorser and consumer, which reflects the acquisition phase in the CCLC. In Study 1 we manipulate endorsers’ parasocial interaction by using Labrecque’s (2014) method of describing social media actions as either interactive and open or not.

#### 4.1.1 | Design and procedure

Study 1 followed a 2 (parasocial interaction: low vs. high) × 2 (brand endorser type: SMI vs. traditional celebrity) between subject design. Data was collected by a professional market research company using an online consumer panel. The sample consisted of 227 participants (58% females) randomly assigned to the four experimental conditions. Using a scenario-based approach, we described either a traditional celebrity or a SMI as being either very open or responsive with their followers (high parasocial interaction) versus not open and not responsive with their followers (low parasocial interaction), endorsing a fictitious orange juice. See Appendix A for all four scenarios. The scenario took an average 61.41 s to read with a median of 47.81 s. After intense pre-testing of the scenario (we asked multiple colleagues to read the scenario as fast as possible and timed them) we set a very low threshold of 25 s (to ensure we did not exclude any speed readers) for participants to be disqualified. Any participants under 25 s were redirected to the panel company and disqualified. We also excluded participants that failed the instructor manipulation check (Oppenheimer et al., 2009;  $N = 36$ , with a final total sample of  $N = 191$ ).

After being exposed to the stimulus material, we measured endorsement effectiveness (i.e., WOM) by asking participants to indicate their likelihood to recommend the product on a 7-point scale

(1 = extremely unlikely; 7 = extremely likely). Also using a 7-point scale (1 = extremely unlikely; 7 = extremely likely), we measured willingness to engage with the post (i.e. eWOM, adapted from Augusto & Torres, 2018; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Park & Kim, 2014) by asking: “I would ‘like’ this post on Instagram,” “I would post a negative comment on Instagram (reverse coded),” “I would recommend the juice by sharing the post to lots of people,” “I would ‘talk up’ the juice on social media to my friends,” “I would post a positive comment on Instagram using a 7 point Likert scale” (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .833$ ). Additionally, we measured eWOM by asking: “I would share this post to my” (1) Facebook page, (2) twitter account, (3) to messenger, and (4) via mail (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .960$ ). Credibility of the brand endorser including trust (dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, trustworthy) and expertise (expert, experienced, skilled, qualified, and knowledgeable) (credibility Cronbach's  $\alpha = .96$ ) was measured using a 5-point bipolar scale adapted from Ohanian (1990). Expectancy fulfillment was measured by asking participants how well the description of the brand endorser (traditional celebrity vs. SMI) matches the characteristics of a typical brand endorser (traditional celebrity vs. SMI) using a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 = poor match to 7 = excellent match), with a high value indicating expectancy fulfillment. This measure was based on the premise that “expectations” of personality characteristics and behaviors are often “consistent with the individual's knowledge” of that personality (Heckler & Childers, 1992, p. 477) and therefore expectancy fulfillment is the “degree to which an item or piece of information fits into a predetermined pattern or structure” (Fleck et al., 2012, p. 653). In this study we were interested in measuring whether the description of each brand endorser (traditional vs. SMI) in the four scenarios (piece of information) matched the participants' expectations of the brand endorser's characteristics. Importantly, we refrain from testing expectation separately to avoid any possible impact on the expectation fulfillment measure. If both expectation and expectation fulfillment were measured respondents may provide similar ratings (when previously asked about their expectation) to be internally consistent, potentially ignoring their true fulfillment beliefs (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Perceived parasocial interaction (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ) was measured using a 7-point Likert scale adapted from Rubin et al., 1985; Escalas & Bettman, 2017). See Appendix B for all items. We also measured additional variables that are not further discussed in this study. A full list of all variables measured for all studies is available upon request.

## 4.1.2 | Results

### *Manipulation check*

We tested whether the description of high versus low open and interactivity (i.e., inducing perception of parasocial interaction) has been perceived differently according to the condition. We found that our high parasocial interaction condition was indeed perceived as higher in parasocial interaction ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) compared to the low parasocial interaction condition ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Next, we asked participants whether the person in the scenario was a SMI

or traditional celebrity. We found a significant association between experimental condition (endorser type) and manipulation check chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test ( $p < .05$ ) with 82.7% indicating the right endorser for its condition.

### *Testing the full model*

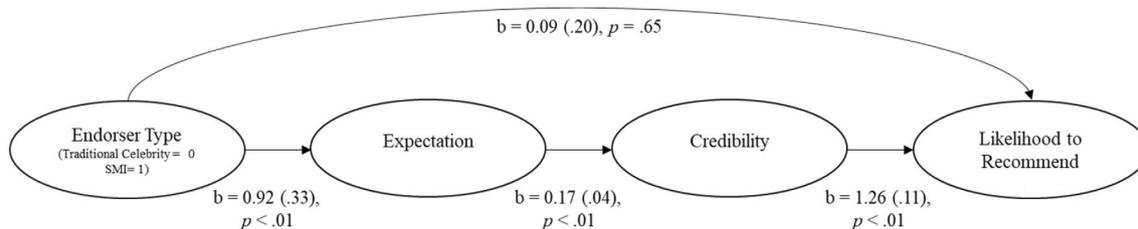
In our main analysis we tested H1–H3 (see Figure 1 for full conceptual framework) using a 95% percentile bootstrap based analysis (Model 83,  $N = 5000$  resample, Preacher & Hayes, 2008) with endorser type as independent variable (0 = traditional celebrity, 1 = SMI), parasocial interaction as moderator (0 = low parasocial, 1 = high parasocial), “expectation fulfillment” as first mediator and credibility as second mediator. We calculated the same model three times using three different dependent variables. Namely, we used likelihood to recommend (WOM), likelihood to interact with the post and likelihood to share posts using different social media platforms (eWOM) (Figures 2–4 features the serial mediation for high parasocial interaction). The full regression results for the mediation are in Appendix C–Table C1.

### *WOM (likelihood to recommend)*

First there was a significant brand endorser type condition by parasocial interaction on expectation fulfillment ( $b = 1.2726$ , 95% CI = 0.3713–2.1738). Specifically, being high in parasocial interaction had a positive effect on perceived expectation fulfillment for a SMI ( $b = 0.9185$ , 95% CI = 0.2729–1.5642). Low parasocial interaction and being a SMI had a negative yet insignificant effect on perceived expectation fulfillment ( $b = -0.3540$ , 95% CI =  $-0.9828$ – $0.2748$ )—aligning to H1. Second, perceived expectation fulfillment had a positive significant effect on credibility ( $b = 0.1655$ , 95% CI = 0.0853–0.2457)—aligning to H2; and this credibility then leads onto likelihood to recommend ( $b = 1.2551$ , 95% CI = 1.0342–1.4759)—aligning to H3. Third, and importantly, the index of moderated mediation for the serial indirect effect through both mediators—expectation fulfillment and credibility—was significant (95% CI = 0.0865–0.4830), indicating that the interactive effect of endorser type and parasocial interaction on likelihood to recommend was serial mediated by expectation fulfillment and credibility. Namely, the SMI (vs. traditional celebrity) → positive expectation fulfillment → credibility → likelihood to recommend was significant and positive when the celebrity showed high parasocial interaction ( $b = 0.2643$ , 95% CI = 0.0865–0.4830). Last, the direct effect of endorser type (X) on likelihood to recommend (Y) is not significant ( $p = .64$ , 95% CI =  $-0.2391$  to 0.4215) when controlling for the mediators (c path) indicating indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). Together, these results confirm the predicted moderated serial mediation (combined H1–H3).

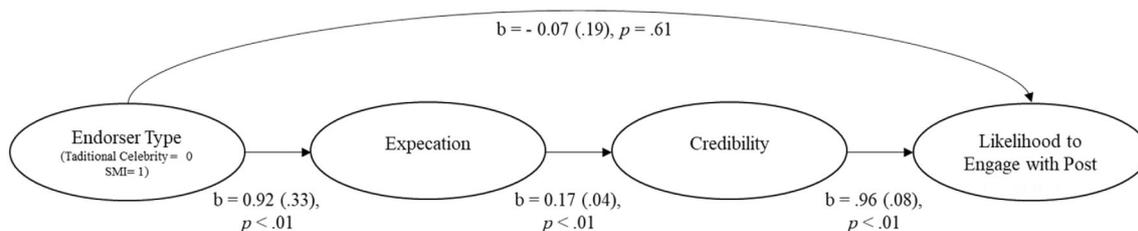
### *eWOM (likelihood to engage with post)*

The effect on expectation fulfillment and credibility were identical to the previous model (i.e., H1 and H2) (with likelihood to recommend as dv). Like the previous model, the effect of credibility on likelihood to positively engage with the post was positive and significant ( $b = 0.9606$ , 95% CI = 0.8009–1.1202)—aligning to H3. The index of moderated mediation for the serial indirect effect through both mediators—expectation



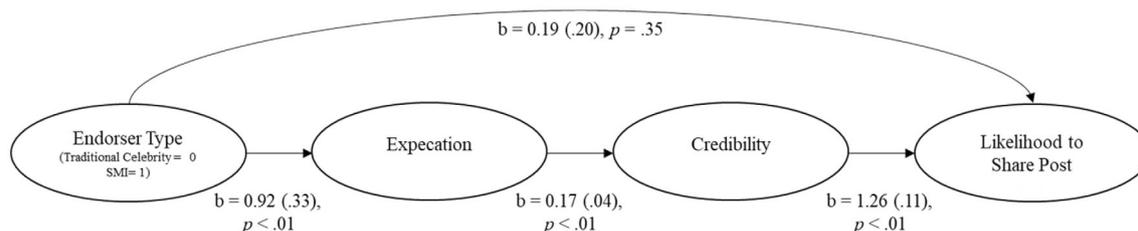
Notes: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors. *b* represents the unstandardized regression coefficient.

**FIGURE 2** The mediating effect of endorser type on expectation on credibility and likelihood to recommend post for high parasocial relationship



Notes: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors. *b* represents the unstandardized regression coefficient.

**FIGURE 3** The mediating effect of endorser type on perceived expectation on credibility and likelihood to engage with the post for high parasocial relationship



Notes: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors. *b* represents the unstandardized regression coefficient.

**FIGURE 4** The mediating effect of endorser type on perceived expectation on credibility and likelihood to share post on SM for high parasocial relationship

fulfillment and credibility—was also significant (95% CI = 0.0434–0.4061), confirming that the interactive effect of endorser type and parasocial interaction on likelihood to recommend was serial mediated by expectation fulfillment and credibility. Namely, a SMI (vs. traditional celebrity) that shows high parasocial interaction leads to an expectation fulfillment (H1) which then leads to credibility (H2) and subsequently to likelihood to recommend ( $b = 0.2023$ , 95% CI = 0.0434–0.4061; H3). Further, the direct effect of endorser type on likelihood to engage with the post is not significant ( $p = .6142$ , 95% CI = –0.3580 to 0.2121) when controlling for the mediators indicating indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010), confirming the combined H1–H3.

#### *eWOM (likelihood to share post)*

Identical to the previous two models, we found the same effect on expectation fulfillment and credibility (H1 and H2). Further,

credibility then leads to likelihood to share the post ( $b = 1.2549$ , 95% CI = 1.0297–1.4802). The index of moderated mediation for the serial indirect effect through both mediators—expectation fulfillment and credibility—was also significant (95% CI = 0.0605–0.5436), indicating that the interactive effect of endorser type and parasocial interaction on likelihood to recommend was serial mediated by expectation fulfillment and credibility. Namely, the SMI, compared to traditional celebrities, who show parasocial interaction, has a perceived expectation fulfillment (H1) which enhances credibility (H2) and subsequently leads to the likelihood to share a post ( $b = 0.1907$ , 95% CI = 0.0446–0.3833; H3). Last, the direct effect of endorser type on likelihood to recommend is not significant ( $p = .3469$ , 95% CI = –0.2098 to 0.5942) when controlling for the mediators (c path) indicating indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010), confirming H1–H3.

### 4.1.3 | Discussion

Study 1 confirms our framework (combined H1–H3) in the acquisition phase. Overall, the findings of Study 1 demonstrates that perceived parasocial interaction moderate the effect of brand endorser type on WOM and eWOM. This study shows that parasocial interaction is critical for SMI's reputation and effectiveness in the acquisition phase. Further, Study 1 confirms expectation fulfillments as a mediator (preceding credibility). In line with our hypothesis, being a SMI and high in parasocial interaction fulfills expectations on how a SMI should behave/interact (H1), which subsequently increases reputational capital (i.e., credibility, H2) and effectiveness (i.e., WOM/eWOM; H3). Correspondingly, high parasocial interaction does not impact expectation fulfillment for traditional celebrities and therefore is not relevant for a traditional celebrities' reputation nor effectiveness (credibility and WOM/eWOM).

## 4.2 | Study 2a and 2b—consolidation phase

The primary objective of Study 2a and 2b was to test our framework in the consolidation phase. Namely when followers are exposed to a known brand endorser on social media there would be an interaction effect between the type of brand endorser (traditional celebrity vs. SMI) and perceived parasocial relationship, influencing their endorsement effectiveness (i.e., WOM). Due to the nature of measuring expectation fulfillment Study 2a and b cannot capture expectation fulfillment, yet we are able to investigate the underlying process of reputational capital (i.e., credibility). Namely, in Study 2a and 2b we test the interaction between endorser type and parasocial relationship on endorser effectiveness with credibility as mediator. Study 2a and 2b applied the same design and procedure but used a different brand in the same product category—facial moisturizer (Study 2a = Garnier, Study 2b = Yves Saint Laurent) to address external validity and

generalizability of the findings (Lynch et al., 2012). To rule out that any results are linked to previously formed perceptions and emotion of the particular brand (Keller & Aaker, 1992), we used the same manipulation on two different brands. Importantly, since this study investigates the framework (Figure 1) in the consolidation phase—on to the consumer known real endorser, participants were recruited on social media. This method enabled us to reach participants that are active on social media and exposed to both social media and traditional endorsement platforms, enhancing the study's relevance and external validity.

### 4.2.1 | Study 2a—Garnier

#### *Procedure*

An online experiment was implemented to test our predictions. We invited participants by posting a link to an online survey on a variety of social media platforms. For this study we focused on female participants only (Abidin, 2016). The decision to only sample females is due to the nature of the product (i.e., moisturizer) chosen (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). The sample of Study 2a consisted of 64 females. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions based on brand endorser type—traditional celebrity or SMI (between subject design). Specifically, brand endorser type was manipulated by adapting a recall method previously used by Escalas and Bettman (2017). Essentially, we asked participants to name either their favorite *traditional celebrity* or their favorite *SMI* that they are following on Instagram. A description/definition of the respective brand endorser type was presented first. For instance, in the condition “traditional celebrity,” participants read: “A traditional celebrity is one that is famous prior to having a social media platform. These celebrities are generally known/famous for being film stars, musicians, athletes, TV personalities, comedians, or politicians.” Following the naming of their favorite endorser participants were instructed to imagine this person



***Please Read Carefully!***

*Garnier is a well-established drugstore skincare brands known for their range of products catered to all skin types. They are known for their understanding of skin aging, superior ingredients and formulations, and proven performance testing all whilst being affordable.*

*Garnier is launching a new facial moisturizer for improved skin texture.*

*Imagine your favorite Traditional Celebrity is endorsing Garnier's new facial moisturizer on their Instagram page. The price of this product is \$12.99.*

*Please answer the next few questions.*

**FIGURE 5** Study 2a: Stimulus material (traditional celebrity). The logo was retrieved from Garnier (n.d.) (<https://www.garnier.com.au/>) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

endorsing a new Garnier moisturizer product on Instagram (see Figure 5 for the stimulus material). The benefit of this recall method is that it enables the customization of the stimulus in a way that makes sense for each participant as well as ensures we are testing our framework in the consolidation phase where the brand endorser is known to the consumer. We exclude participants that did not follow the instructions and/or named or imagined the wrong type of brand endorser (i.e., a traditional endorser when they were supposed to name and imagine a SMI;  $N = 9$  with a total final sample of 55).

Once exposed to the stimulus material, participants were asked a series of questions relating to endorsement effectiveness (WOM), reputational capital (i.e., credibility) and parasocial relationships. WOM was measured by asking participants to indicate their likelihood to recommend this brand on a 7-point scale (1 = extremely unlikely; 7 = extremely likely; for a review on WOM see De Matos & Rossi, 2008). Similar to Study 1, credibility of the brand endorser included trust (dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, trustworthy) and expertise (expert, experienced, skilled, qualified, knowledgeable) (credibility Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ) was measured using a 5-point bipolar scale adapted from Ohanian (1990). Parasocial relationships (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ) was measured using a 7-point Likert scale adapted from Rubin et al., 1985; Escalas & Bettman, 2017). See Appendix B for all items. We also measured additional variables that are not further discussed in this study. A full list of all variables measured for all studies is available upon request.

### Results

Given the continuous nature of parasocial relationships, we conducted a regression analysis with likelihood to recommend as dependent

variable and brand endorser type (0 = traditional celebrity, 1 = SMI), parasocial relationship, and their two-way interaction as independent variables. Before creating the interaction term, we mean centered the parasocial relationship variable to increase interpretability of its main effect (Grewal et al., 2010). The results revealed a significant parasocial relationship and endorser type interaction ( $b = 1.705$ ,  $SE = 0.395$ ;  $t(51) = 4.319$ ,  $p < .00$ ). Because parasocial relationship was a continuous measure, we explored the interaction further using the Johnson-Neyman floodlight technique (Spiller et al., 2013). The results revealed a positive and significant effect of SMI (compared to traditional celebrity) on recommendation likelihood for high parasocial relationship (mean centered values above 0.88),  $BJN = 0.93$ ,  $SE = 0.46$ ,  $p = .05$ . In addition, we also found a negative and significant effect of the SMI (compared to traditional celebrity) on recommendation likelihood for low parasocial relationship (mean centered values below  $-0.11$ ),  $BJN = -0.75$ ,  $SE = 0.37$ ,  $p = .05$ . This analysis confirms the interaction between endorser type and parasocial relationship on endorser effectiveness. In other words, SMIs benefit greatly from having a high parasocial relationship but also “suffers” under a low parasocial relationship, while traditional celebrities are not impacted by parasocial relationship perception (in respect to recommendation likelihood; please see Figure 6).

In our next step we aimed to investigate whether this interaction effect is mediated by credibility. Bootstrapping techniques (Model 7, Preacher & Hayes, 2008,  $N = 5000$  resample) were employed to test conditional indirect effects to confirm the mediating role of credibility. The analysis revealed a significant indirect interaction effect of endorser type (traditional celebrity vs. SMI) and parasocial relationship on likelihood to recommend, mediated by credibility (index = 0.4344,

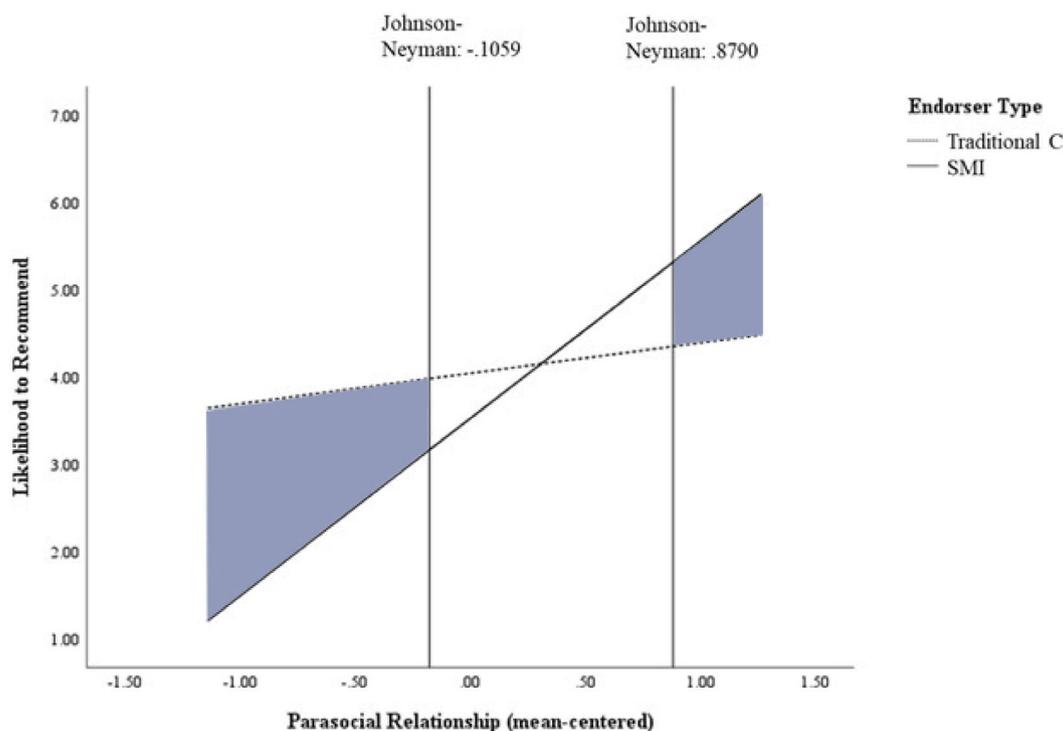


FIGURE 6 Results: Study 2a (floodlight analysis) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

SEboot = 0.2385, 95% CI = 0.059–0.9779), as the confidence interval (CI) did not include zero. The conditional indirect effect of endorser type on likelihood to recommend was significant and positive (0.8143) under high parasocial relationship—mean centered 1.21 (95% confidence intervals excluding zero; 0.2041–1.5968). The conditional indirect effect of endorser type on recommendation likelihood was negative yet not significant for low parasocial relationship—mean centered  $-1.0985$  (95% confidence interval includes zero;  $-0.9756$  to  $0.3841$ ; Preacher et al., 2007; Zhao et al., 2010). The direct effect of endorser type (X) on likelihood to recommend (Y) is no longer significant ( $b = -0.44$ ;  $SE = 0.46$ ;  $p = .32$ ) when controlling for the mediator (c path) indicating indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). The full regression results for the mediation are in Appendix C—Table C2. Together, we confirm the interaction between endorser type and parasocial relationship on endorser effectiveness with credibility as mediator.

#### 4.2.2 | Study 2b—Yves Saint Laurent

##### Procedure

Following the same procedure as Study 2a, participants ( $N = 68$ , females only) were asked to imagine their favorite celebrity was endorsing a new Yves Saint Laurent moisturizer (please see Figure 7 for stimuli). Again, we excluded participants that did not follow instructions and named and/or imagined the wrong type of brand endorser ( $N = 6$ , with a total final sample of 62). Further, the procedure and measurement of the variables were the same as those in Study 2a (likelihood to recommend, credibility Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ , parasocial relationship Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ), we also included a measurement for perceived luxuriousness of the product and a question on how long participants have been using Instagram (also included in Study 2a). We also measured additional variables that are not further discussed in this study.

##### Results

In order to test our conceptual framework (Figure 1) we calculated a bootstrap analysis (Model 7, Preacher & Hayes, 2008) with recommendation likelihood as a dependent variable and the mean centered parasocial relationship and endorser type as independent variables. Credibility served as mediator in this model. Since Yves Saint Laurent (which carried a relatively high price tag) might be associated for some participants with a different level of luxuriousness, we included perceived luxuriousness of the brand as a control variable. We also included duration of Instagram usage in the analysis as a control variable. Confirming our previous results (Study 2a), our bootstrap analysis (Model 7, Preacher & Hayes, 2008,  $N = 5000$  resample) revealed a significant indirect interaction effect of endorser type and parasocial relationship on likelihood to recommend that was mediated by credibility (index = 0.4344, SEboot = 0.2385, 95% CI = 0.0114–0.9871), as the confidence interval (CI) did not include zero. The conditional indirect effect of endorser type on likelihood to recommend was significant and positive (0.8837) under high parasocial relationship—mean centered 1.15 (95% CI = 0.0789–1.9478). The conditional indirect effect of endorser type on recommendation likelihood was negative yet not significant for low parasocial relationship—mean centered  $-1.06$  (95% CI =  $-0.4832$  to  $0.3946$ ). The direct effect of endorser type on likelihood to recommend is no longer significant ( $p = .13$ ) when controlling for the mediator indicating indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). The full regression results for the mediation are in Appendix C—Table C3. Together, in our analyses we confirm the interaction between endorser type and parasocial relationship on endorser effectiveness with credibility as mediator.

#### 4.2.3 | Discussion

Study 2a and 2b confirmed our conceptual framework (minus expectation fulfillment) on a real brand using a “real” celebrity endorser that have

YVES SAINT LAURENT

***Please Read Carefully!***

*YSL is a well-established luxurious skincare brands known for their exclusive range of products catered to all skin types. They are considered a high-end lavish company known for their understanding of skin aging, superior ingredients and formulations, and proven performance testing whilst justifying a higher price tag.*

*YSL is launching a new facial moisturizer for improved skin texture.*

*Imagine your favorite Traditional Celebrity is endorsing YSL's new facial moisturizer on their Instagram page. The price of this product is \$250.*

*Please answer the next few questions.*

**FIGURE 7** Study 2b: Stimulus material (traditional celebrity). The logo was retrieved from Yves Saint Laurent (n.d.) (<https://www.ysl.com/en-en>)

established reputational capital and therefore are in the consolidation phase of the CCLC. First, we were able to show, as predicted, that there is an interaction between endorser type and the level of perceived parasocial relationship on WOM. Second, we could show that the positive effect of parasocial relationships (for SMI) was mediated by credibility. In Study 2b we aimed at replicating the results, demonstrating that the effect holds for a different brand. In doing so we minimize the risk that the results are impacted by existing brand awareness. In addition, by replicating Study 2a we ensure higher accurate estimates.

## 5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Across three studies using different brands and product categories we consistently demonstrate an interaction effect between parasocial (relationship/interaction) and brand endorser type (using a fictional brand endorser in Study 1 that had no pre-existing profile—mirroring the acquisition phase, and real-life endorsers in Study 2—mirroring the consolidation phase) on not only WOM but also on eWOM.

Study 1—acquisition phase—demonstrates that followers are much more likely to recommend a brand that is endorsed by a SMI who engages in parasocial interaction. However, being high in parasocial interaction as a traditional celebrity does not have an impact on brand recommendations. Study 1 sheds light into the process and mechanisms of parasocial interactions on social media. Specifically, our results demonstrate that a fulfillment expectation between brand endorser type and parasocial interaction, and subsequent perceived credibility, are the key underlying mechanisms driving the effects.

Study 2—consolidation phase—demonstrates that consumers are much more likely to recommend a brand that is endorsed by a SMI when there is a perceived high parasocial relationship which is driven by credibility. However, having a high parasocial relationship with a traditional celebrity does not have an impact on brand recommendations.

### 5.1 | Theoretical contributions

Our research makes three key contributions to extant literature. First, we contribute to the growing literature on brand endorsement on social media (De Veirman et al., 2017). Interestingly our study reveals that brand endorser type did not have a significant main effect on recommendation likelihood (WOM or eWOM). Our results show that traditional celebrities are just as effective as brand endorsers on social media as SMIs by generating positive WOM and eWoM (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). WOM and eWoM is critical since consumers often depend on these when purchasing goods and services (Hess & Ring, 2016). The growth of social media makes eWOM an increasingly important aspect to understand and measure (Augusto & Torres, 2018, p. 3; Kutthakaphan & Chokesamritpol, 2013; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Second, this research contributes to literature on parasocial relationships (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lou, 2021). The important finding is

that SMIs need to foster parasocial relationships on social media to be effective whereas traditional celebrities do not. Additionally, a weaker parasocial relationship/interaction can hurt a SMI yet does not negatively impact a traditional celebrity. We propose that this is due to fulfillment expectation, that is, consumers (followers) expect SMIs to engage on social media sharing their everyday lives and opinions on various topics including products and brands (Abidin, 2016). Therefore, SMIs are seen as relatable “regular” people (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019) who are expected to be more accessible on social media (Labrecque, 2014; Lou, 2021; Nouri, 2018). Whereas traditional celebrities, often held in high esteem and perceived as distinguished individuals, are not expected to be as accessible on social media (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Although research has shown that source credibility of a traditional celebrity positively influences perceptions of parasocial relationships (Yuan et al., 2016), no research has determined whether fostering parasocial relationships on social media is critical for traditional celebrities. Despite many traditional celebrities interacting with their followers on social media, we find that it is not critical for traditional celebrities to nurture parasocial relationships. These are important findings enabling traditional celebrities to be more resourceful in their social media presence. Furthermore, we reveal that interactivity on social media is an important aspect for fostering parasocial interactions and consequently parasocial relationships (Chung & Cho, 2017). Furthermore, SMIs need to be particularly cognizant of interacting with their consumers on social media, whereas traditional celebrities do not need to be as interactive.

Thirdly, and most importantly, this research answers Carrilat and Ilicic's (2019) call to shed light into the underlying process of endorsement effectiveness (i.e., WOM of an endorsed brand) and CCLC. We extend the concept of celebrity capital and CCLC by providing insights into how reputational capital can be gained and maintained on social media through parasocial interactions/relationships. Specifically, we show that nurturing parasocial interactions, by being interactive and responding to consumers on social media platforms, can drive reputational capital (i.e., credibility) leading to endorsement effectiveness. As previously highlighted parasocial interactions are critical for SMIs effectiveness, as this fulfills consumers' expectations. Fulfillment of expectations can evoke credibility, and thus, reputational capital (Kamins, 1990; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Importantly, we find for SMIs focusing on perceived short-term parasocial interactions at the acquisition stage of the CCLC is fruitful (Hu, 2016), whereas, developing a perceived parasocial relationship is critical for the consolidation phase (Hartmann et al., 2008). Although traditional celebrities do not need to actively interact to achieve parasocial interaction/relationship credibility is still important to maintain for reputation capital (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

### 5.2 | Practical contribution

Our findings have clear implications for practitioners dealing with their social media marketing as well as celebrities being on social media serving as brand endorsers. First, to be influential on social

media, SMIs need to foster parasocial relationships by being open and responsive to their followers. In contrast, it is not critical for traditional celebrities to exhibit parasocial relationship actions. This has implications on the resources invested in fostering and managing relationships with followers on social media. Traditional celebrities can save on costly resources (i.e., hiring agencies to look after their social media presence), time and/or even their privacy, whereas a SMI needs to invest heavily to maintain relationships with their followers. Brand managers need to look beyond the numbers of followers a SMI has and instead make decisions on brand endorsement based on how a SMI interacts with their followers. Explicitly, if a SMI exhibits openness and responds to their followers, then they could potentially be more effective than a traditional celebrity and SMI with a larger following but lower perceived parasocial relationship. This might be relevant for deciding whether to choose an unknown SMI at the early stage of the CCLC. If choosing a relatively new SMI it is important that they engage in parasocial interactions early-on, as this has the potential to help them acquire reputational capital. In contrast, exhibiting parasocial interaction on social media is not so important if brand managers decide to use a traditional celebrity to endorse their brand on social media.

### 5.3 | Limitation and future research

This paper has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, in our framework we propose two underlying mechanisms (fulfillment expectation and reputation capital/credibility). Realistically we cannot test fulfillment expectation (due to the nature of the construct) in the consolidation phase, yet we do believe that the full conceptual model is true for both phases of the celebrity life cycle. For instance, we can empirically provide evidence for the interaction effect as well for credibility as one underlying mechanism in the consolidation phase. In addition, in our research we developed a framework for the acquisition and consolidation phase. However, there might be situations when the two stages differ from each other in terms of reputation capital. Finding those situations would be an exciting avenue for future research. Next, even though credibility is an integrated part of reputation capital, it can encompass other attributes, such as, likeability, awareness, ethicality and favorability. Future research may want to expand on those additional characteristics. Second, our research shows there is a negative effect of having a low parasocial relationship for the SMI. However, even though there is a directional effect due to a “unfulfillment of expectations,” these effects are not statistically significant in this study. Further research could further investigate those effects and their underlying mechanism. Third, our research shows what is important for a SMI. Yet, we still do not identify what drives success for traditional celebrities, particularly on social media. Fourth, in our study we investigate the SMI irrespective of the number of followers (i.e., micro/ macro influencer). Future studies could address this by investigating the impact of parasocial relationships between micro and macro influencers. Last, we test our framework using different brands in two different product categories (cosmetic products and orange

juice). However, there might be other types of brands such as experiential and service brands that are not suitable for SMI. Future research could investigate the effect of different types of brands on consumers' perception. In addition, in Studies 2a and 2b we utilize existing known brands, which are associated with brand reputation and brand familiarity. In this research we minimize the risk that the results are impacted by existing brand awareness (by replicating Study 2a with 2b), yet it is important to acknowledge that these associations pose some limitations to this research. Furthermore, there are possibly other moderating factors present. Future research might want to rule out some alternative explanation by including additional control variables and moderating variables.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## APPENDIX A

### A.1 | SCENARIO—STUDY 1

#### A.1.1. | Traditional celebrity/high parasocial interaction.

Please take your time reading the following description about a famous movie celebrity. Please imagine this person as vivid as possible. After you have read the description we will ask you a few questions!

Imagine you are following a famous celebrity on Instagram. This famous celebrity is a well-known movie star who became famous because they acted in a number of movies. This celebrity is very active on Instagram and enjoys interacting with their followers. They post lots of pictures and comments about their day to day activities and are very open about personal aspects of their life. Their communication tends to be two-sided. When a follower posts a comment to the celebrity's Instagram account the celebrity usually responds personally.

Now imagine this celebrity is endorsing the following new brand of orange juice called IAJ (It's All Juice) on their Instagram account. They post pictures and comments about the brand and show themselves drinking the orange juice in various lifestyle settings. A 500 ml bottle of IAJ's orange juice is retailing at \$3.50.

#### A.1.2. | Traditional celebrity/low parasocial interaction.

Please take your time reading the following description about a famous movie celebrity. Please imagine this person as vivid as possible. After you have read the description we will ask you a few questions!

Imagine you are following a famous celebrity on Instagram. This famous celebrity is a well-known movie star who became famous because they acted in a number of movies. This celebrity is very active on Instagram posting on their account. They post lots of pictures and comments about their day to day activities but generally keep them neutral, that is, they are not open about personal aspects of their life. Their communication tends to be one-sided. When a follower posts a comment to the celebrity's Instagram account they usually do not respond personally.

Now imagine this celebrity is endorsing the following new brand of orange juice called IAJ (It's All Juice) on their Instagram account. They post pictures and comments about the brand and show themselves drinking the orange juice in various lifestyle settings. A 500 ml bottle of IAJ's orange juice is retailing at \$3.50.

#### A.1.3. | SMI/high parasocial interaction.

Please take your time reading the following description about a social media influencer. Please imagine this person as vivid as possible. After you have read the description we will ask you a few questions!

Imagine you are following a social media influencer on Instagram. This social media influencer has achieved fame through the social media platform Instagram by posting selfies and other lifestyle posts. This social media influencer is very active on Instagram and enjoys interacting with their followers. They post lots of pictures and comments about their day to day activities and are very open about personal aspects of their life. Their communication tends to be two-sided. When a follower posts a comment to the social media influencer's Instagram account the influencer usually responds personally.

Now imagine this social media influencer is endorsing the following new brand of orange juice called IAJ (It's All Juice) on their Instagram account. They post pictures and comments about the brand and show themselves drinking the orange juice in various lifestyle settings. A 500 ml bottle of IAJ's orange juice is retailing at \$3.50.

#### A.1.4. | SMI/low parasocial interaction.

Please take your time reading the following description about a famous social media influencer. Please imagine this person as vivid as possible. After you have read the description we will ask you a few questions!

Imagine you are following a social media influencer on Instagram. This social media influencer has achieved fame through the social media platform Instagram by posting selfies and other lifestyle posts. This social media influencer is very active on Instagram posting on their account. They post lots of pictures and comments about their day to day activities but generally keep them neutral, that is, they are not open about personal aspects of their life. Their communication tends to be one-sided. When a follower posts a comment to the social media influencer's Instagram account they usually do not respond personally.

Now imagine this social media influencer is endorsing the following new brand of orange juice called IAJ (It's All Juice) on their Instagram account. They post pictures and comments about the brand and show themselves drinking the orange juice in various lifestyle settings. A 500 ml bottle of IAJ's orange juice is retailing at \$3.50.

## APPENDIX B

Scale–parasocial interaction (Study 1)/relationship (Study 2a and 2b).

Thinking of this social media influencer/traditional celebrity, how much do you agree or disagree with the following:

1. This social media influencer/traditional celebrity makes me feel comfortable as if I was with a friend
2. This social media influencer/traditional celebrity comes across as a down-to-earth person
3. I would look forward to the next Instagram post or video from this social media influencer/traditional celebrity
4. If this social media influencer/traditional celebrity appeared on a different social media platform such as YouTube, Twitter, Vine, Snapchat or Facebook, I would most likely follow them there as well
5. If there was news on this social media influencer/traditional celebrity on any social media platform, I would read it
6. I would like to meet this social media influencer/traditional celebrity in person
7. I imagine this social media influencer/traditional celebrity to be attractive
8. I would follow what this social media influencer/traditional celebrity is saying and doing on Instagram
9. If there were a story about this social media influencer/traditional celebrity in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it
10. I feel sorry for my favorite celebrity when she makes a mistake
11. When my favorite celebrity shows me how she feels about something, it helps me make up my own mind about the issue

Note: Item 9 was solely used for Study 1; Items 10 and 11 were solely used for Study 2a and b. Wording for 1–9 differed slightly in Studies 2a/b.

## APPENDIX C

**TABLE C1** Study 1: Moderated serial mediation results—DV likelihood to recommend

Predictor	Criterion	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	95% CI		
					LL	UL	
Constant	M1: Expectation	5.120	0.222	<.001	4.682	5.558	
Endorser type		−0.354	0.319	.268	−0.983	0.275	
Parasocial relationship		−1.020	0.333	.003	−1.68	−0.363	
Endorser type × Parasocial relationship		1.273	0.457	.006	0.371	2.174	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		0.056					
Constant	M2: Credibility	2.280	0.212	<.001	1.862	2.698	
Endorser type		0.048	0.130	.715	−0.209	0.304	
Expectation		0.166	0.041	<.001	0.085	0.246	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		0.083					
Constant	Y: Likelihood to recommend	−0.714	.413	.086	−1.529	0.102	
Endorser		0.091	0.200	.649	−0.303	0.485	
Expectation		0.061	0.065	.353	−0.068	0.189	
Credibility		1.255	0.112	<.001	1.034	1.476	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		0.437					
Indirect effect							
Endorser → Expectation → Likelihood to recommend		0.077	0.093		−0.098	0.281	
Endorser → Credibility → Likelihood to recommend	0.060	0.168		−0.260	0.397		
Endorser → Expectation → Credibility → Likelihood to recommend	0.264	0.121		0.066	0.544		

Note: Endorser type (0 = traditional, 1 = SMI), parasocial relationship (0 = high, 1 = low).

**TABLE C2** Study 2a: Moderated mediation results

Predictor	Criterion	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	M: Credibility	3.184	0.102	<.001	2.980	3.388
Endorser type		0.257	0.157	.108	−0.059	0.573
Parasocial relationship		0.241	0.095	.014	0.051	0.431
Endorser type × parasocial relationship		0.387	0.171	.028	0.044	0.730
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		0.419				
Constant	Y: Likelihood to recommend	0.454	1.023	.659	−1.599	2.507
Endorser		−0.441	0.444	.324	−1.331	0.449
Credibility		1.123	0.315	<.001	0.491	1.755
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		0.197				
Indirect effect						
Endorser → Credibility → Likelihood to recommend	0.434	0.239		0.059	0.978	

Note: Endorser type (0 = traditional, 1 = SMI).

**TABLE C3** Study 2b: Moderated mediation results

Predictor	Criterion	Estimate	SE	p	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	M: Credibility	4.6851	0.4539	<.001	3.7759	5.5944
Endorser type		0.5982	0.1565	.0003	0.2847	0.9116
Parasocial relationship		-0.0426	0.1297	.7437	-0.3024	0.2172
Endorser type × parasocial relationship		0.5518	0.1664	.0016	0.2184	0.8851
Perceived luxuriousness		0.0341	0.0581	.5594	-0.0823	0.1506
Instagram usage		-0.0158	0.0050	.0025	-0.0257	-0.0058
R <sup>2</sup>		0.4443				
Constant	Y: Likelihood to recommend	1.0429	1.5213	.4958	-2.004	4.089
Endorser		-0.7078	0.4552	.1256	-1.619	0.204
Credibility		0.7184	0.3021	.0208	0.1135	1.3234
Perceived luxuriousness		-0.3746	0.1536	.0179	-0.6822	-0.0670
Instagram usage		0.0186	0.0112	.1023	-0.0038	0.0411
R <sup>2</sup>		0.1792				
Indirect effect						
Endorser → Credibility → Likelihood to recommend		0.3964	0.2576		0.011	0.987

Note: Endorser type (0 = traditional, 1 = SMI).