

Enhancing prosocial behavior through influencer marketing. The role of partnership congruity and consumers' prosocial identity.

Authors

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Abstract

This research examines the impact of influencer activism on consumers' intention to engage in prosocial behaviors, focusing on the role of congruity between influencers and their partners, whether brands or nonprofit organizations (NPOs), drawing on social influence theory, signaling theory, and prosocial identity. The study comprises two online experiments using fictional influencer posts to assess consumer responses to collaborations with either brands or NPOs. Findings reveal that higher congruity between an influencer and a partner encourages prosocial actions, such as gathering information about a specific issue, subscribing to a newsletter, and signing a petition to support a cause. Additionally, prosocial identity moderates the relationship between congruity and prosocial behavioral intentions in brand partnerships, but this effect is absent in NPO collaborations. These findings offer theoretical contributions to social influence and signaling theory and provide practical insights for managers seeking to enhance consumer engagement in prosocial initiatives through congruent influencer partnerships. The study emphasizes the importance of congruity for both brands and NPOs and the role of consumers' prosocial identities in brand collaborations.

Keywords

Influencer activism; Partnership; Congruity; Prosocial behavior; Prosocial identity.

1. Introduction

In the fast-changing world of digital marketing, social media influencers have become powerful figures capable of shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. While influencers are often linked to commercial and brand promotion activities, where they post sponsored content in exchange for payment (Harrigan et al., 2021; Campbell & Grimm, 2019), their influence goes beyond just advertising. Many influencers work on building their own personal brands that reflect their values and beliefs (Scharff, 2023). Moreover, they use their platforms to engage in sociopolitical discussions, supporting causes such as environmental sustainability, gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, and social justice. An example is Xiye Bastida, a young Indigenous climate activist from Mexico who not only advocates for environmental justice but also shares her cultural heritage on social media, often wearing traditional clothing at public events to symbolize her deep connection to the earth. Influencers like Xiye exemplify how social

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media can be a powerful tool for amplifying voices and mobilizing global communities toward meaningful action.

This phenomenon, known as influencer activism, has gained traction and has drawn the attention of brands or nonprofit organizations (NPOs) looking to collaborate with socially conscious advocates who offer authenticity and credibility (Thomas & Fowler, 2023; Ballestar et al., 2022). For example, Jameela Jamil, an actress and activist known for her advocacy for body positivity and mental health, has partnered with sustainable fashion brands to promote ethical fashion choices and raise awareness about the environmental costs of fast fashion. Particularly, she has worked with brands like Reformation to highlight its commitment to sustainability and encourage her followers to make more environmentally conscious fashion choices. Through social media posts, sponsored content, and public appearances, Jamil has used her platform to advocate for sustainable fashion and challenge industry norms. Nikkie de Jager, a well-known beauty influencer and advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights, has partnered with The Trevor Project, an NPO dedicated to suicide prevention and mental health support for LGBTQIA+ youth. Nikkie's collaboration with The Trevor Project includes fundraising efforts, awareness campaigns, and direct support for the organization's mission, leveraging her influence to foster greater visibility and support for LGBTQIA+ mental health initiatives.

For an influencer and a brand or NPO, choosing the right partner can have important consequences regarding image, impact on society, and economic performance (Aw & Agnihotri, 2023; Ye et al., 2021). Hence, a central factor in the success of such activism-driven collaborations is the congruity between the influencer and their partner. Congruity refers to the degree of coherence between the influencer's persona and the values of the partner they endorse. High congruity strengthens perceptions of authenticity, trust, and credibility, leading to more favorable consumer responses (Belanche et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021), whereas low congruity may prompt skepticism, undermining trust and damaging both the influencer and the partner.

Drawing on social influence theory (Kelman, 1961), signaling theory (Spence, 1973), and prosocial identity, this study investigates whether individuals exposed to influencer activist content are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior. It also examines how the nature of the partnership—whether with a brand or an NPO—affects individuals' perceptions and behavioral intentions. Additionally, it explores the moderating effect of the individuals' prosocial identity on the intention to engage in prosocial behavior. To address these objectives, the study employs an experimental design, with Study 1 focusing on influencer-activist partnerships with brands and Study 2 examining partnerships with NPOs.

2. Literature background and hypotheses development

2.1. *Influencer activism*

Influencer activism refers to social media influencers using their platforms to promote causes aligned with sociopolitical issues, such as racial inequality, mental illness, and sexual freedom (Thomas & Fowler, 2023). Unlike the traditional approach to influencer marketing, who are primarily associated with consumer marketing, activist influencers engage their audiences with content centered on prosocial issues, leveraging their reach

to inspire societal change and influence other's attitudes or behaviors (Knupfer et al., 2023; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This type of advocacy reflects a shift toward more conscious consumerism and a heightened expectation for brands to align with values-driven influencers (Camarota et al., 2023; Vredenburg et al., 2020). In this discourse, influencers can be considered brands themselves (Malik et al., 2023).

Influencer activism embodies a modern type of civic engagement, where digital platforms enable individuals to share personal stories and inspire others through collective action (Thomas & Fowler, 2023; Marino & Lo Presti, 2019). Despite its growing prevalence, the intersection of activism and influencer marketing presents unique challenges. Activism is often seen as disconnected from commercial interests, raising questions about influencers' sincerity when they engage in advocacy alongside paid partnerships (Scharff, 2023).

Influencer activism can positively shape follower attitudes and behaviors; however, the nature of commercial partnerships may raise suspicions and undermine the perceived authenticity of these activist efforts (Thomas & Fowler, 2023; Audrezet et al., 2020). In this regard, influencers' authenticity is often reinforced when there is high congruity between the influencer and the partnering brand or organization (Kim & Kim, 2021). For instance, influencers known for advocating environmental causes are more likely to be seen as authentic when collaborating with eco-friendly brands. Conversely, partnerships with brands misaligned with the influencer's values may be perceived as insincere and cause online backlash and boycott (Mahy et al., 2022; Sibai et al., 2021). Consequently, congruence between influencers and their partners can lead to positive outcomes, such as increased engagement and purchase behavior (Han & Balabanis, 2023; Belanche et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2019; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955).

2.2. Prosocial behavior

Prosocial behaviors refer to actions individuals perform to benefit others (Holmgren et al., 1998). These behaviors encompass a wide array of activities, such as assisting those in need (Holland et al., 2012), donating time, money, advice, or other resources (Savary et al., 2015), sharing personal effects, volunteering skills, cooperating with others, supporting eco-friendly or sustainable products (e.g., Goldsmith et al., 2020), and signing a petition (McKeever et al., 2019). Genuine prosocial behaviors involve a personal cost, such as time or resources, that is willingly incurred to benefit others directly. Therefore, prosocial actions are altruistic, carried out to help others, even at a personal expense (Labroo et al., 2023).

Recent research has increasingly focused on the potential of influencers to shape consumer behavior in prosocial contexts (Li et al., 2024; Ballestar et al., 2022; Pittman & Abell, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). According to Cho et al. (2024), NPOs can use influencer marketing to promote fundraising and charitable causes in the new digital landscape. Similarly, brands can collaborate with social media influencers who discuss and support a specific issue to promote prosocial behaviors (Jacobson & Harrison, 2022).

2.3. Hypotheses development

From a theoretical perspective, this study explores influencer activism using the lenses

of social influence theory, signaling theory, and prosocial identity. Social influence theory posits that people adopt beliefs and behaviors based on their interactions with influential individuals or groups (Kelman, 1961). In the context of influencer activism, followers are more likely to internalize messages from influencers they perceive as credible and authentic. Congruity between an influencer and their partner enhances this perception of credibility, as the partnership is seen as a natural extension of the influencer's values. This congruity fosters internalization where followers adopt beliefs and behaviors because they align with their own values.

In line with signaling theory (Spence, 1973), influencers, through their actions and partnerships, send signals about their activist commitment. Particularly, a high-congruity partnership acts as a positive signal, suggesting that the influencer genuinely supports the cause or brand they endorse. This enhances individuals' intention to engage in prosocial behaviors. As per recent literature (Knupfer et al., 2023; Thomas & Fowler, 2023), influencer activists have the potential to engage in partnerships with both commercial brands and NPOs. Although collaborations with NPOs differ inherently from those with brands, they could still involve compensation. Understanding the potential variance in consumer reactions to these partnership types is crucial for analyzing this phenomenon. Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: High (low) congruity between the influencer and a brand positively (negatively) impacts individuals' intention to engage in prosocial behaviors.

H1b: High (low) congruity between the influencer and a nonprofit organization positively (negatively) impacts individuals' intention to engage in prosocial behaviors.

Prosocial identity refers to a domain-specific self-concept that emphasizes the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as “prosocial” (Grant et al., 2009). Existing research indicates that a prosocial identity positively influences prosocial behavior (Ramarajan et al., 2017). For instance, adopting an altruistic identity, such as that of a donor, can enhance the frequency, magnitude, and consistency of one's donations to others. Drawing from this, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2a: Prosocial identity moderates the relationship between influencer-brand congruity and individuals' intention to engage in prosocial behaviors.

H2b: Prosocial identity moderates the relationship between influencer-nonprofit organization congruity and individuals' intention to engage in prosocial behaviors.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model.

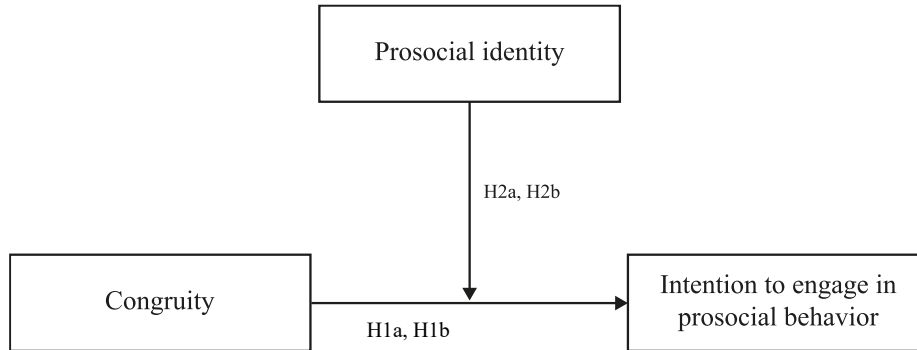


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

4. Methodology

4.1 Materials and manipulations

This research is composed of two studies. Study 1 examines partnerships with brands, while Study 2 focuses on partnerships with NPOs. Both studies are 2 (high congruity vs. low congruity) x 1 (socio-political issue) between-subjects online experiments. The experiments were conducted in May 2023, employing an Italian sample. Analysis was carried out using SPSS 29 and Process (model 1).

For this research, we first designed an Instagram profile employing a fictional influencer, to avoid any bias due to previous experiences. The profile included details such as the number of posts, followers, and following and a brief description of the influencer. From the profile's bio, the participant can read that she focuses on sexual freedom and is dedicated to encouraging prosocial behavior among her followers. After that, we created a series of fictional Instagram posts to serve as research stimuli. While the visual elements of the posts remained constant, the text was modified according to the experimental conditions. Sexual freedom was chosen as the topic of the post. Moreover, we selected the popular dating app Tinder for the high-congruity condition between the influencer and the brand partner, whereas for the low-congruity condition, we used the fashion brand Uniqlo. Similarly, for the high-congruity condition between the influencer and the NPO partner, we chose the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest LGBTQIA+ advocacy group in the US, while the low-congruity condition featured the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an international environmental advocacy group. The texts for the Instagram posts were modified to showcase the various forms of the independent variable. Each post maintained a consistent format, which included an introduction, a presentation of the collaboration, a call to action, and specific structural elements (e.g., “*paid partnership*” label, partner profile tag, and relevant hashtags).

For the prosocial behavioral intention, we employed specific action based on previous literature (e.g., Cammarota et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2022; Korschun et al., 2020), rather than generic intentions. The identified actions are the following: reading information and exploring resources about a specific issue (*Information*), subscribing to a newsletter (*Newsletter*), and signing a petition to support a cause (*Petition*). To this

end, we designed three landing pages for each action that mimic real web pages. Keeping all other elements fixed, we changed only the specific content related to each prosocial action.

4.2 Procedure

Study 1 and Study 2 share the same procedure, while the manipulations differ according to the study objective and focus. At the beginning of the experiments, all participants were instructed that they would view the Instagram profile of the activist influencer and, after that, one of her posts. We randomly assigned participants to two conditions: high congruity (HC) and low congruity (LC).

After viewing the stimulus, for the manipulation check, participants were required to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) their degree of disagreement or agreement with the following statement: “*There is a high congruity between the influencer and the brand (organization)*”.

Next, participants were shown the images of the landing pages. Each of them viewed only one of three actions, randomly assigned, and was requested to express the level of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with specific statements adapted by Basil et al. (2008). For the *Information* webpage, the statements were: “*I am willing to get more information about this issue*”; “*After seeing this post, I am willing to get more information about this issue*”. For the *Newsletter* webpage, the statements were: “*I would like to subscribe to this newsletter*”; “*After seeing this post, I want to subscribe to this newsletter*”. For the *Petition* webpage, the statements were: “*I would like to sign this petition*”; “*After seeing this post, I want to sign this petition*”.

Before participants completed demographic characteristics and descriptive elements questions, we measured the prosocial identity variable via two items adapted from Becerra et al. (2023). Participants were required to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) their degree of disagreement or agreement with the following statements: “*I think of myself as a prosocial activist*”; “*To engage in prosocial activism is an important part of who I am*”.

5. Results

5.1 Study 1

420 Italian consumers participated in the study, randomly assigned to the two conditions: 210 to high congruity (HC), and 210 to low congruity (LC). For each of the two conditions, 70 respondents were assigned to the *Information* webpage, 70 to the *Newsletter* webpage, and 70 to the *Petition* webpage. **Table 1** provides a summary of the demographics of the samples of Study 1.

The brands employed in the manipulation have a similar good level of awareness ($M_{\text{Tinder}} = 5.25$, $SD_{\text{Tinder}} = 0.87$; $M_{\text{Uniqlo}} = 5.24$, $SD_{\text{Uniqlo}} = 0.71$). According to the results of the One-Way ANOVA conducted for the manipulation check, the differences between the two scenarios are statistically significant ($M_{\text{HC}} = 5.24$, $SD_{\text{HC}} = 0.95$; $M_{\text{LC}} = 2.67$, $SD_{\text{LC}} = 1.00$; $F [1, 418] = 725.894$; $p < 0.001$).

The result of the One-Way ANOVA shows that the higher the congruity between the influencer and the brand, the higher the intention to engage in prosocial behaviors: M_{HC}

= 5.13, $SD_{HC} = 0.97$; $M_{LC} = 3.94$, $SD_{LC} = 1.10$. Thus, H1a is supported. Levene's test of equality of error variances shows p-values more than 0.05. The between-subject effect test was significant ($F [1, 418] = 139.077$; $p < 0.001$).

Table 1. Demographic of Study 1.

Gender	Male	156 (37.1%)
	Female	264 (62.9%)
Age	18-24	110 (26.2%)
	25-34	65 (15.5%)
	35-44	174 (41.4%)
	45-54	31 (7.4%)
	55-64	39 (9.3%)
	65+	1 (0.2%)
Education level	High school diploma	136 (32.4%)
	Bachelor's degree	139 (33.1%)
	Master's degree	39 (9.3%)
	Other	106 (25.2%)
Occupation	Student	106 (25.2%)
	Employed	309 (73.6%)
	Unemployed	4 (1.0%)
	Retired	1 (0.2%)
Instagram profile	I have an Instagram profile, but I don't use it	60 (14.3%)
	I have an Instagram profile and use it regularly	360 (85.7%)

Table 2 presents detailed results for each prosocial behavior. The between-subject effect test was significant ($F [5, 414] = 35.350$; $p < 0.001$). The intention to consult resources and information related to the issue is higher in the HC condition than in the LC one. A similar phenomenon is observed for the intention to sign a petition and subscribe to a newsletter.

Table 2. Results for the analyzed prosocial behaviors Study 1.

Prosocial behavior	High congruity	Low congruity
<i>Information</i>	5.19 (0.89)	4.13 (0.85)
<i>Newsletter</i>	4.92 (1.07)	3.46 (1.09)
<i>Petition</i>	5.29 (0.92)	4.24 (1.16)

Note: Standard deviation in parenthesis

According to the results of the moderation analysis, the model is statistically significant ($R-sq = 0.3732$; $F = 82.5596$, $p < 0.0001$). Congruity positively and significantly affects prosocial behavior ($\beta = 0.325$, $SE = 0.031$, $p < 0.001$). Individuals with a higher prosocial identity are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior, regardless of congruity ($\beta = 0.197$, $SE = 0.056$, $p = 0.0005$). Finally, the effect of congruity on prosocial behavioral intention is moderated by prosocial identity ($\beta = 0.204$, $SE = 0.033$, $p < 0.0001$). Thus, the impact of congruity becomes stronger as prosocial identity increases. Individuals with higher prosocial identities are more influenced by congruity

in their intention to engage in prosocial behaviors. Hence, H2a is supported.

5.2 Study 2

420 Italian consumers participated in the study, randomly assigned to the two conditions: 210 to high congruity (HC), and 210 to low congruity (LC). For each of the two conditions, 70 respondents were then assigned to the *Information* webpage, 70 to the *Newsletter* webpage, and 70 to the *Petition* webpage. **Table 3** provides a summary of the demographics of the samples of Study 2.

Table 3. Demographic of Study 2.

Gender	Male	167 (39.8%)
	Female	253 (60.2%)
Age	18-24	119 (28.3%)
	25-34	65 (15.5%)
	35-44	171 (40.7%)
	45-54	29 (6.9%)
	55-64	36 (8.6%)
Education level	High school diploma	131 (31.2%)
	Bachelor's degree	141 (33.6%)
	Master's degree	33 (7.9%)
	Other	115 (27.4%)
Occupation	Student	116 (27.6%)
	Employed	304 (72.4%)
Instagram profile	I have an Instagram profile, but I don't use it	60 (14.3%)
	I have an Instagram profile and use it regularly	360 (85.7%)

The NPOs employed in the manipulation have a similar good level of awareness ($M_{HRC} = 3.37$, $SD_{HRC} = 0.98$; $M_{NRDC} = 3.41$, $SD_{NRDC} = 0.90$). According to the results of the One-Way ANOVA conducted for the manipulation check, the differences between the two scenarios are statistically significant ($M_{HC} = 5.29$, $SD_{HC} = 0.73$; $M_{LC} = 4.46$, $SD_{LC} = 1.07$; $F [1, 418] = 86.738$; $p < 0.001$).

The result of the One-Way ANOVA shows that the higher the congruity between the influencer and the NPOs, the higher the intention to engage in prosocial behaviors: $M_{HC} = 4.92$, $SD_{HC} = 1.10$; $M_{LC} = 3.79$, $SD_{LC} = 0.99$. Thus, H1b is supported. Levene's test of equality of error variances shows p-values more than 0.05. The between-subject effect test was significant ($F [1, 418] = 122.989$; $p < 0.001$).

Finally, **Table 4** presents detailed results for each prosocial behavior. The between-subject effect test was significant ($F [5, 414] = 31.502$; $p < 0.001$). Similarly to Study 1, the intention to consult resources and information related to the issue is higher in the high congruity condition than in the low congruity one. A similar phenomenon is observed for the intention to sign a petition and subscribe to a newsletter.

According to the results of the moderation analysis, the model is statistically significant ($R\text{-sq} = 0.0403$; $F = 5.8165$, $p = 0.0007$). However, the overall explanatory power is

relatively low, since it explains less of the variance in prosocial behavioral intention compared to Study 1. Congruity has a positive and significant effect on prosocial behavior ($\beta = 0.221$, $SE = 0.057$, $p < 0.0001$), with a smaller effect size than Study 1. However, in this study, prosocial identity does not significantly affect prosocial behavioral intention ($\beta = -0.083$, $SE = 0.056$, $p = 0.135$). In other words, the level of a person's prosocial identity does not significantly influence their intention to engage in prosocial behaviors in the case of an influencer-NPO partnership. Finally, prosocial identity does not moderate the relationship between congruity and prosocial behavioral intention in Study 2 ($\beta = -0.002$, $SE = 0.053$, $p = 0.972$). This result contrasts with the first study, where prosocial identity strengthened the effect of congruity. Hence, H2b is not supported.

Table 4. Results for the analyzed prosocial behaviors Study 2.

Prosocial behavior	High congruity	Low congruity
<i>Information</i>	5.10 (0.92)	3.89 (1.17)
<i>Newsletter</i>	4.41 (1.24)	3.76 (1.01)
<i>Petition</i>	5.24 (0.95)	3.72 (0.72)

Note: Standard deviation in parenthesis

6. Discussion

This research investigated the role of congruity between influencer activists and their partners (brands or NPOs) in shaping prosocial behavioral intention. The findings provide significant insights into how influencer activism can foster consumer engagement in prosocial actions and how congruity and prosocial identity influence such behaviors.

In Study 1, high congruity between the influencer and the brand positively impacted participants' intention to engage in prosocial behaviors, such as seeking more information on the issue, signing petitions, and subscribing to newsletters. Study 2 examined partnerships between influencers and NPOs, yielding similar patterns. High congruity between the influencer and the organization was associated with a greater intention to engage in prosocial actions. These results are consistent with previous studies, such as those by Belanche et al. (2021) and Han & Balabanis (2023), which found that high congruence in influencer partnerships enhances perceptions of authenticity and, in turn, consumer engagement.

Moreover, this finding reinforces the theoretical underpinnings of social influence theory (Kelman, 1961), which posits that congruence strengthens internalization, making followers more likely to adopt the influencer's values and behaviors. In contrast, low congruity negatively impacted prosocial behaviors, suggesting that incongruence may cause skepticism or diminish perceived authenticity and, consequently, the intention to engage in prosocial actions. These results align with prior research, such as Audrezet et al. (2020), who noted that misalignment between an influencer's persona and their commercial partnerships could lead to questions about sincerity, potentially undermining prosocial engagement.

However, while in both studies a higher congruity between influencers and their partners significantly enhances consumers' intention to engage in prosocial actions, the role of prosocial identity in moderating this effect varies between the two partnership types, revealing interesting insight.

In Study 1, the moderation analysis shows that prosocial identity amplifies the positive relationship between congruity and consumers' prosocial behavioral intentions. This suggests that individuals who strongly identify as prosocial are more sensitive to the congruity between an influencer and a brand. When an influencer collaborates with a brand that aligns with their values, consumers with a strong prosocial identity perceive the partnership as authentic, leading to increased engagement in prosocial behaviors. In contrast, the results of Study 2 show no significant moderation effect of prosocial identity on the relationship between congruity and prosocial behavioral intention. While congruity still has a positive and significant impact on consumers' intentions to engage in prosocial behaviors, prosocial identity does not amplify this effect as it does in brand partnerships. A possible explanation is that consumers have different expectations for a partnership with NPOs. Brands have profit-driven motives that can lead to consumer skepticism. Thus, in brand partnerships, congruity plays a more relevant role in brand partnerships, especially for consumers with strong prosocial identities, who are more sensitive to misalignments between influencers and brands. In contrast, NPOs are inherently associated with social causes. As a result, consumers may not rely as heavily on their prosocial identity to assess the authenticity of NPO-influencer partnerships. NPOs benefit from congruent partnerships, but the perceived need for congruity may be less influenced by the consumer's prosocial identity. This divergence suggests that the prosocial identity may serve different functions depending on the context: in brand partnerships, it is a more relevant factor, whereas in NPO partnerships, it does not play a crucial role in shaping consumers' responses. The findings contribute to the literature on social influence theory and signaling theory by demonstrating that the effects of prosocial identity are not uniform across different types of partnerships. Hence, these findings align with those of recent studies, such as Knupfer et al. (2023), which highlight that NPO collaborations, though impactful, may be perceived differently due to the inherent nature of nonprofit causes.

6.1. Managerial implications

The findings from this research offer several important managerial implications for brands, NPOs, and social media influencers looking to leverage prosocial activism in their marketing strategies. First, both studies emphasize the critical role of congruity between an influencer and their partner in shaping consumer engagement with prosocial campaigns. Brands and NPOs should carefully consider the alignment between their values and those of the influencers they collaborate with, as this congruity plays a crucial role in fostering trust, authenticity, and positive consumer responses. Selecting influencers whose personal values authentically reflect the causes promoted by the organization—such as an environmental sustainability campaign partnered with an influencer advocating for eco-friendly practices—is essential for avoiding consumer

skepticism and backlash (Kim & Kim, 2021; Thomas & Fowler, 2023; Han & Balabanis, 2023).

Second, congruity is a key driver of consumer engagement in influencer partnerships, particularly when promoting prosocial behaviors. Partnerships with misaligned influencers can undermine the perceived authenticity of both the influencer and the organization, potentially damaging their reputations. Managers must invest in evaluating influencers, ensuring their past activities, values, and advocacies align with the organization's mission (Audrezet et al., 2020). Furthermore, influencers should maintain transparency with their audiences to reinforce the authenticity of their advocacy (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Third, while congruity is essential in prosocial campaigns, the relationship between congruity and prosocial behaviors may differ depending on the nature of the partnership. For commercial brands, high congruity may be crucial for engaging consumers with strong prosocial identities, as these individuals are particularly responsive to value alignment. However, while congruity remains important in nonprofit contexts, its role may be less relevant, as prosocial identity independently promotes prosocial actions among a broader audience (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Ren et al., 2023). Therefore, managers should tailor their strategies based on the type of partnership, recognizing that greater congruity may be required in commercial settings to enhance consumer engagement in prosocial behaviors.

7. Limitations and future research

Despite the interesting insights gained from this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study utilized a fictional influencer to avoid potential biases associated with pre-existing influencer familiarity. While this approach allowed for more controlled experimental conditions, it may have reduced the realism of the participants' responses. Future studies could replicate the research with real influencers to increase external validity.

Second, the research focused on a single sociopolitical issue—sexual freedom. While this topic was relevant and allowed for controlled comparisons, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to other causes or domains. Different prosocial issues, such as environmentalism or racial equality, may evoke different consumer reactions, which could affect the influence of congruity and prosocial identity.

Third, the sample was composed solely of Italian consumers, which may limit the cultural generalizability of the findings. Cultural differences could influence how congruity, prosocial identity, and activism are perceived, potentially yielding different results in other contexts.

Finally, the studies employed self-reported measures of prosocial behavior, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Participants may have reported higher intentions to engage in prosocial actions than they would in real-life scenarios. Future studies could address this limitation by incorporating behavioral data or field experiments to capture actual prosocial behavior.

There are several avenues for future research that could build on the findings of this study. First, future research could investigate the effects of long-term collaborations between influencers and their partners, as well as the impact of repeated exposure to congruent versus incongruent partnerships on consumer behavior. Understanding how sustained influencer partnerships evolve and influence consumer engagement over time would provide valuable insights for both brands and NPOs.

Second, expanding the research to include different sociopolitical issues would allow for a deeper understanding of how cause-specific congruity affects prosocial behavior. For example, partnerships focused on environmental activism or racial justice may generate different consumer responses compared to those related to sexual freedom.

Third, future studies could explore the role of cultural factors in influencer partnerships and prosocial behavior. Cross-cultural comparisons could reveal how different societies perceive congruity, prosocial identity, and activism, contributing to a more global understanding of influencer activism.

Finally, examining the role of other psychological variables, such as emotional engagement or moral identity, could provide further insight into the mechanisms through which congruity and prosocial identity influence behavior. Understanding how these factors interact in the context of influencer partnerships could help brands and organizations better design campaigns that resonate with diverse audiences.

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