Optimizing influencers' influence: which brands to promote where?

Whose opinion about running shoes would you trust more? Someone loyal to one brand or someone who mixes and matches up their exercise gear? Research by Isabelle Engeler points to the latter.

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Whom would you trust more: A social media influencer wearing Nike shoes, a Puma shirt and Asics shorts, or one dressed head-to-toe in one brand?

As influencer marketing takes off, managers are increasingly interested in knowing how best to win over observing consumers. Holding constant the actual influencer personality, how

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should brands best position themselves — quite literally — in order to maximize the influencer's influence?

In their paper "From Mix-and-Match to Head-to-Toe: How Brand Combinations Affect Observer Trust," Isabelle Engeler and Kate Barasz address this question via nine studies. The studies cover an array of product categories (running gear, clothing, toiletries, electronic devices, baby gear) and stimuli (Instagram posts, product images, logos, product lists, blog posts). And their results indicate that observers tended to trust a multi-brand user's recommendations more than a mono-brand user.

But what if managers prefer not to dilute their own brand by mixing it with others? This novel research suggests that insisting on one brand as the sole protagonist might diminish its credibility in the eyes of consumers.

That's not to say that mono-brand posts are never beneficial in raising brand awareness and visibility; rather, when it comes to trustworthiness, marketers should be aware that multi-branding can make a consumer appear as though they have made a thoughtful choice, which may actually yield a better response.

If you are interested in this type of research and see an application for your own company, you can contact the authors to explore ways to collaborate. Contact: professor Isabelle Engeler.

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