

**Success Factors of Social Influencers – Multiple Dimensions and Contingencies of a
Prosperous Campaign**

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Abstract

Social influencers have developed into a powerful means of marketing communication. In fact, the level of expenses for social influencer marketing nowadays surpasses traditional advertising (such as television commercials, print or billboard advertising). In light of the huge impact that social influencers can have on consumers, the question arises on how to carry out a successful influencer campaign. First approaches have suggested to consider engagement variables – e. g. the amount of an influencer’s followers. However, these approaches have often enough turned out to be too plain and unidimensional. In fact, the success of an influencer endorsement may rest in a complex system of requirements whose importance may vary contingently. These include but are not limited to factors lying in the person of the influencer, the interplay between influencer and consumer, the setup of influencer and brand, product or cause, the communication style of the influencer and the avoidance of influencer misconduct. These elements can be interrelated and also may stand in mutual conflict. This dissertation is dedicated to explore this complex system and fill research gaps.

The first module lays a foundation by exploring the three factors attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness. In the second module, which comprises two research papers the interplay between influencer, consumer and brand/product is addressed. The first paper focuses on personality and explores the match of influencer personality with consumers’ actual and desired self as well as with the brand personality. Thereby, the moderating role of product involvement is considered. In the second paper, the interplay of influencers’ and consumers’ attractiveness and gender is explored. The third module (4 papers) focuses on an influencer’s success factors for different product kinds or endorsement causes; thereby a strong connection to the communication of the influencer is developed. Paper 1 and 2 draw a basic line between hedonic and utilitarian products and explore the importance of influencers’ communication style, factuality, expertise and demographic similarity. The third paper explores the role of influencers’ attractiveness and expertise for attractiveness and non-attractiveness related products. The fourth paper finally discusses the specialties of an influencer endorsement for a non-profit cause. In the last module (one paper), the dark side of influencer marketing, namely the disruptive effects of scandals are explored.

This dissertation illustrates the diversity and contingency of factors affecting a successful influencer endorsement. All factors have to be regarded and discussed against each other; differences such as the addressed target group or endorsed product/cause play a major role in

this context. The findings provide valuable practical implications for practitioners of many industries to successfully design and implement their influencer campaigns. The findings likewise opens up many perspectives for future research. A large research potential may lie in a qualitative complement of the conducted quantitative studies. In this way, the thoughts, feelings and intended actions of influencers, consumers and practitioners, which build the antecedents of the results at hand could be unveiled.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Consumer Behavior

Zusammenfassung

Social Influencer haben sich zu einem mächtigen Mittel der Marketing-Kommunikation entwickelt. Gegenwärtig übersteigt die Höhe der Ausgaben für Social Influencer Marketing die der traditionellen Werbung (wie Fernsehspots, Print- oder Plakatwerbung). Angesichts des großen Einflusses, den Social Influencer auf Konsumenten haben können, stellt sich die Frage, wie man eine Influencer-Kampagne erfolgreich durchführt. Erste Ansätze haben Engagement-Variablen berücksichtigt - z. B. die Anzahl der Follower eines Influencers. Allerdings haben sich diese Ansätze oft genug als zu schlicht und eindimensional erwiesen. Tatsächlich beruht der Erfolg eines Influencer-Endorsements auf einem komplexen System von Erfolgsfaktoren, deren Bedeutung variieren kann. Dazu gehören unter anderem Faktoren, die in der Person des Influencers liegen, das Zusammenspiel zwischen Influencer und Zielgruppe, das Setup von Influencer und Marke/Produkt, der Kommunikationsstil des Influencers und die Vermeidung von Influencer-Fehlverhalten. Diese Elemente können miteinander verbunden sein und auch in gegenseitigem Konflikt stehen. Die vorliegende Dissertation widmet sich der Erforschung dieses komplexen Systems und der Schließung von Forschungslücken.

Das erste Modul (1 Beitrag) legt ein Fundament, indem die drei Faktoren Attraktivität, Expertise und Vertrauenswürdigkeit untersucht werden. Im zweiten Modul, das zwei Forschungsarbeiten umfasst, wird das Zusammenspiel zwischen Influencer, Konsument und Marke/Produkt behandelt. Das erste Paper fokussiert die Persönlichkeit und untersucht die Übereinstimmung der Influencer-Persönlichkeit mit dem tatsächlichen und gewünschten Selbstkonzept des Konsumenten sowie mit der Markenpersönlichkeit. Dabei wird auch die moderierende Rolle des Produktinvolvements berücksichtigt. Im zweiten Beitrag wird das Zusammenspiel von Influencer- und Konsumentenattraktivität sowie Geschlecht untersucht. Das dritte Modul (4 Beiträge) konzentriert sich auf die Erfolgsfaktoren für verschiedene Produktarten bzw. Endorsement-Anlässe; dabei wird ein starker Bezug zur Kommunikation des Influencers hergestellt. Paper 1 und 2 ziehen eine grundsätzliche Grenze zwischen hedonischen und utilitaristischen Produkten und untersuchen die Bedeutung von Kommunikationsstil, Faktizität, Expertise und demographischer Ähnlichkeit. Der dritte Beitrag untersucht die Rolle der Attraktivität und Expertise von Influencern für attraktivitätsbezogene und nicht-attraktivitätsbezogene Produkte. Der vierte Beitrag schließlich diskutiert die Besonderheiten eines Influencer-Endorsements im Non-Profit-

Kontext. Im letzten Modul werden die Schattenseiten des Influencer-Marketings, nämlich die schädliche Wirkung von Skandalen, in einem Beitrag beleuchtet.

Diese Arbeit verdeutlicht die Vielfalt und Kontingenz der Faktoren, die ein erfolgreiches Influencer Endorsement ausmachen. Alle Faktoren müssen gegeneinander abgewogen und diskutiert werden; dabei spielen Unterschiede wie die angesprochene Zielgruppe oder das beworbene Produkt bzw. Anliegen eine große Rolle. Die Ergebnisse liefern wertvolle Implikationen für Praktiker vieler Branchen, um ihre Influencer-Kampagnen erfolgreich zu gestalten und umzusetzen. Ebenso eröffnen die Ergebnisse viele Perspektiven für zukünftige Forschung. Ein großes Forschungspotenzial kann in einer qualitativen Ergänzung der durchgeführten quantitativen Studien liegen. Auf diese Weise könnten die Gedanken, Gefühle und Handlungsabsichten von Influencern, Konsumenten und Praktikern, die die Grundlage der vorliegenden Ergebnisse bilden, aufgedeckt werden.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Konsumentenverhalten

Preface

1 Motivation and Research Objectives

1.1 Research Gaps and Goals

Influencer marketing is an exponentially growing trend in marketing communication (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Bevilacqua and Del Giudice, 2018) It is nowadays a dominant marketing communication channel and even superior to traditional advertising, the big communication channel of yesteryear: Indeed, influencer marketing has the potential to generate eleven times more revenue than traditional advertising (Kirkpatrick, 2016; Gretzel, 2018).

The term social influencers refers to individuals in social networks with a large number of followers (Veirman *et al.*, 2017) who can create valuable content and have high reputation in their specific field (Cha *et al.*, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017). Influencers can be further subdivided based on their amount of followers and influence as either mega-influencers, macro-influencers, micro-influencers or nanoinfluencers (Geysler, 2017).

This popularity of influencers is no wonder. Influencer marketing offers a couple of advantages: First, influencers' communication is actively requested and consumed by consumers (in contrast to traditional advertising). Moreover, their communication is superior in terms of customization to the target group (Kumar and Gupta, 2016). Social media are more diversified, specialized and fragmented than traditional media such as newspapers or television. Consequently, social media can target the interests of a very specific audience (Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia, 2017). Furthermore, consumers follow influencers of their own free will, in contrast to, advertising, which consumers try to avoid (Childers *et al.*, 2019). Finally, influencers' messages appear to come from a "person like you or me" and not from a potentially distrusted company that may be viewed as aiming to con consumers into buying its products (Jahnke, 2018b; Nirshl and Steinberg, 2018).

Despite the importance and advantageousness of social influencer marketing, at the time of the beginning of this dissertation, practitioners were fairly ignorant on this issue: As Childers *et al.* (2019) put it, "*agency professionals are still wrestling with the questions of what influencer marketing is, what its value is, and how it should be managed.*" – arguably, this opens a large field of research.

As a starting point, the two basic processes of endorsement effectiveness (1) endorser credibility and (2) identification with the endorser (Basil, 1996; Ohanian, 1991; Schouten *et al.*, 2019) were considered. In this context, the challenge arises on how to conceptualize

credibility and whether general concepts also apply to social influencers. For example, Ohanian's (1990) famous Source-Credibility model states that individuals who are more attractive will be perceived as *more* credible. Does this assumption, presumably developed with an offline celebrity endorser in mind also hold for online social influencers? The possibilities of modern technology may act as a game changer: Findings from online dating actually advance that users who are more attractive can be perceived as *less* credible! The reason for this is that users appearing highly attractive are suspected to have manipulated their profile pictures in order to look better (McGloin and Denes, 2018; Lo *et al.*, 2013).

Concerning the second major process, similarity, the challenge arises on which level similarity between influencer and consumer should prevail. Is it the personality (Schouten *et al.*, 2019), the appearance (Bekk *et al.*, 2017) or something else ...? Some of these variable can be further subdivided, e. g. the personality into the actual self and desired self which may stand in conflict with each other (Sirgy, 1982). Others may open up a field of conflict with the elaborations on credibility mentioned in the previous paragraph: For example, should an influencer be *highly attractive* (to possibly achieve credibility) or *similarly attractive to the users* (to possibly allow for identification) (Bekk *et al.*, 2017; Ohanian, 1990)? To make matters more complicated, extant studies sometimes produced surprising results which contradicted the researchers' intuition and theoretical predictions (Schouten *et al.*, 2019).

In the course of time, influencer endorsements have spread to a wider range of products and issues. For example, influencer marketing is not only employed for fashion (Jahnke, 2018a), beauty (Meyer, 2018; Primbs, 2016) or travel (Jahnke, 2018c) but also for financial services, science (Jahnke, 2018a) and even B2B-marketing (Lewinski, 2018). Against this backdrop, practitioners are not always sure how to select an appropriate influencer for their specific industry (Jahnke, 2018a).

Notwithstanding the euphoria for influencers, one must bear in mind that influencers may also pose a risk if they are involved into a scandal. The absence of scandals has been identified as the first and most important requirement for the success of any celebrity – above all other requirements (Amos *et al.*, 2015). For influencers in particular, scandals have the potential to be especially detrimental. As influencers' main field of activity is the Internet, a major scandal may become a worldwide event in a matter of hours (Piazza and Jourdan, 2018). Moreover, "The Internet never forgets" (Pieper and Pieper, 2017). A scandal caused by an influencer is likely to become dangerous for an endorsed brand. It will be considered "guilty by association" (Kintu and Ben-Slimane, 2020; Appel *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the ultimate

objective consists in exploring how a scandal can affect influencer and brand to limit the resulting hazardous effects.

The goal of this dissertation was to close the aforementioned research gaps. To this aim, eight studies were carried out. All of them were among the first – if not even the first - to explore the specific issue. To adopt a systematic approach the framework of Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2018) on the success factors of celebrities was taken a basis – it provides a broad overview on all kinds of success factors of celebrities. The framework structures the success factors into the six layers (A) Celebrity Distinctive Factors, (B) Celebrity-Target-Group-Fit, (C) Celebrity-Brand/Product-Fit, (D) Management Factors, (E) Advertising Design Factors and (F) Risks. In the course of this dissertation these were adopted, and adapted to the specialties of social influencer marketing.

Research Objective 1: The Distinctive Factors – Building a Solid Foundation

At the beginning of writing this dissertation the know-who on social influencers was fairly scarce (Childers *et al.*, 2019). Against this backdrop in the first paper, the three basic endorsement criteria (1) attractiveness, (2) expertise and (3) trustworthiness from the Source-Credibility Model for offline celebrity marketing (Hovland *et al.*, 1982; Ohanian, 1990) were adapted on influencer marketing.

Research Objective 2: Contingencies on Consumers

Once the foundation was built in module 1, the question on the total generality of the requirements arose. In fact, it may be assumed that an influencer campaign could benefit from an adaptation to the target group (Schouten *et al.*, 2019). In two papers, influencer and consumer were juxtaposed and the benefits of a match or mismatch of different criteria were analyzed. These included numerous variables referring to personality, appearance and demography.

Research Objective 3: Contingencies on Products

Another big issue for distinction may be different product kinds (Jahnke, 2018a). In four papers, the interplay of product kind and influencer requirements were analyzed. In this spirit, lines between fundamentally different product kinds (e. g. fashion and household appliance) were drawn. As some products may exist in different configuration (e. g. a hotel may be a holiday hotel *or* a business hotel), the possibility of inner differentiation was also taken into account. In a final step, a wider horizon was opened by investigating the success factors of influencer marketing not for a product in the proper sense, but for a social cause. The relative

importance of selected requirements such as attractiveness or communication style were discussed.

Research Objective 4: The Hazards of Influencer Marketing

Where there's light there is also shadow – this principle is true for social influencer marketing. Against the numerous advantages of social influencers it may not be overlooked that influencers also have the potential to seriously harm an endorsed brand if they are involved into a scandal (Kintu and Ben-Slimane, 2020). Against this backdrop, in one paper the damage potential of various scandals stemming from the categories (1) misinformation, (2) hate speech and (3) sharenting were explored.

1.2 Methods

In order to attain the aforementioned research goals, this thesis focusses on online experiments (for data collection) and (partial-least square based) structural equation modelling (for data analysis). These methods offer numerous advantages for the specific research context of this dissertation, stated as follows:

1.2.1 Online Experiments

Online experiments refer to experiments that are carried out over the Internet (Hergueux and Jacquemet, 2015). Traditionally they are considered in comparison to onsite experiments (Hooley *et al.*, 2014; Krantz and Dalal, 2000) and laboratory experiments (Gould *et al.*, 2015). Overall, online experiments are considered as a highly valuable tool for researchers (Hooley *et al.*, 2014; Krantz and Dalal, 2000). Especially, they usually offer better ecological validity than laboratory experiments (Dandurand *et al.*, 2008).

In the context of this dissertation it could be assumed, that the online experiment comes quite close to an onsite experiment, as the experiments consist of evaluating influencers' content – something that obviously occurs online. Moreover, the experiments did not have any characteristics that might have required or been facilitated by a physical experiment environment (e. g. access to population with low digital literacy/access or necessity of physical interaction between people/materials) (Hooley *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, online experiments were high suitable for the research of this thesis.

The fact that the researcher is not physically present while participants are carrying out the online experiment produces further advantages. Especially, the observer-expectancy effect, is avoided. This is caused through subtle cues and subconscious influence by the experimenter, which bias the participant. For example, instructions, procedures or trials provided by the experimenter can lead the participant to anticipate the hypotheses or purpose of the experiment (Howell, 2022; Reips, 2000).

Finally, online experiments offer a couple of amenities for participants, resulting in advantages for the quality of data: Subjects stay anonymous (Hooley *et al.*, 2014). The experiment is brought to the subject, instead of the opposite. Consequently, cost and time exposure of transportation are eliminated. Participants are free to choose time and location. Numerous subjects can participate simultaneously (Reips, 2000; Reips, 2002). These

amenities facilitate access to a diverse participant population, resulting in access to large samples with high statistical power and high external validity (Reips, 2000; Reips, 2002).

1.2.2 Structural Equation Modeling

Structural Equation modeling is a statistical model that allows estimating and testing relationships between dependent variables and independent variables as well as the hidden structures in between. In this way, it can be checked whether hypotheses assumed for the model are consistent with the given variables (Hair, 2014). Thereby, it estimates latent variables via observed variables (Byrne, 2013). Structural equation modeling is heavily praised for discovering the best fitting models and theory development, as it allows to easily discover new connection between variables (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2012)

Due to its numerous advantages, structural equation modelling is a very expedient method for addressing the underlying challenges of this thesis. First and foremost, structural equation modelling allows the analysis of numerous dependent and independent variables simultaneously (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). In this way it becomes possible, to analyze data sets with complex patterns of relationships (Werner and Schermelleh-Engel, 2009), many series of different linkages and assumed indirect effects (Tarka, 2018). Using other analysis methods the analysis of such complex models would usually require the use of many separate analyses (Werner and Schermelleh-Engel, 2009). This advantage was especially useful for research papers including numerous layers of dependent and independent variables such as *“Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula?”*

Furthermore, structural equation modeling allows making use of several indicator variables per construct. This increases the validity of the conclusions on the construct level. Other methods would produce less clear conclusions or would require numerous separate analyses (Werner and Schermelleh-Engel, 2009).

An additional advantage of structural equation modeling consists in the explicit assessment of measurement error. Latent variables are measured with indicators. Although their quality is carefully evaluated, they can never be expected to be totally free of errors. These measurement error threatens the validity of findings (MacKenzie, 2001; Musil *et al.*, 1998). Most multivariate techniques ignore measurement error by not explicitly modeling it (Byrne, 2013). Musil *et al.* (1998) demonstrate that the ignorance of measurement error has the potential to heavily skew the results. In contrast to other multivariate techniques. structural

equation modelling estimates the error variance parameters (Byrne, 2013). Therefore, inferences about relationships between constructs are not contaminated by measurement error, and are equivalent to relationships between variables with perfect reliability (Werner and Schermelleh-Engel, 2009).

Partial-least square structural equation modeling encompasses some further benefits. First, it is able to manage data considered as challenging (e. g. non-normal, incomplete, multi-level and longitudinal data, heteroscedasticity) (Tomarken and Waller, 2005; Shanmugam and Marsh, 2015; Vinzi *et al.*, 2010). Second, it has no lower bound of indicators per construct – it is even able to handle only one single indicator per construct (Hair, 2014). This was especially useful for papers working with a single-item scale such as “*The complex triad of congruence issues in influencer marketing*”. Finally, partial-least square structural equation modeling in SmartPLS allows for carrying out multigroup analyses. A multi-group analysis is a way to test groups to determine whether significant differences exist in group-specific parameter estimates (Hair, 2014; Henseler and Chin, 2010). This analysis is a huge advantage over standard approaches that merely examine a single structural relationship at a time by simply testing moderations (Hair *et al.*, 2012; Matthews *et al.*, 2018). The multigroup analysis was e. g. required to discover the different perceptions between females and males in the paper “*The role of fashion influencers’ attractiveness – a gender-specific perspective*”.

2 Description of Research Articles

2.1 Module 1: Influencer Distinctive Factors

In the first research paper “*Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula?*”, these three fundamental requirements are tested for social influencers with an online experiment. At the beginning of writing this dissertation, there was considerable uncertainty on the entire issue of influencer marketing (Childers *et al.*, 2019). Against this backdrop, building a foundation of selection criteria for influencers seemed imperative. For traditional offline celebrity endorsements, the Source-Credibility model has been developed. It establishes three fundamental criteria that any celebrity must fulfill in order to carry out a successful endorsement – (1) Attractiveness, (2) Expertise and (3) Trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990). The impact of the three requirements on Brand Satisfaction, Brand Image, Brand Trust, Purchase Intention and Willingness to pay a Price Premium were tested. The results reveal that trustworthiness is the most important requirement of social influencers, followed by attractiveness. The relevance of expertise is negligible. Hence, social influencers should be selected first based on their trustworthiness and secondarily based on their attractiveness. On the other hand, influencers do not need to have much expertise on the product they endorse. The results allow the conclusion that trustworthiness is a major asset of influencers, which they need to maintain, in order to set themselves apart from less trustworthy advertising communication. On the other hand, influencers are also viewed with a superficial eye. Consumers rely rather on the easily processible information of attractiveness than on expertise. Perhaps consumers expect influencers to have the perspective of a naïve but honest user, not of a professional product tester.

2.2 Module 2: Contingencies on Consumers

In the second module, a contingency approach is adopted by examining necessary refinements of an influencer campaign to the consumer. Research paper 2 examines the impacts of Influencer-Brand Congruence as well as the congruence between influencer and consumers’ actual-self and ideal-self on post attitude, post belief, brand trust and purchase intention. Thereby, the moderating role of consumers’ involvement is considered. Research paper 3 examines how similarity of influencer and consumer on the level of attractiveness and gender affects likeability and credibility of the influencer as well as purchase intention.

Research paper 2 “The complex triad of congruence issues in influencer marketing” is based on Kelman's (1961) theory on opinion change, Kahle *et al.*'s (1986) social adaptation theory

to explore the interplay of influencer, consumer and brand personality. Basically, there are three personalities that the influencer can match. (1) The personality of the endorsed brand (Basil, 1996; Kelman, 1961), (2) the consumer's actual-self (the actual personality of the consumer) (Basil, 1996) and (3) the consumer's desired self (how the consumer would like to be) (Choi and Rifon, 2012). The aim of the paper is to explore which of these matches are most beneficial to the endorsement. According to Petty *et al.*'s (1981) elaboration likelihood model this is highly dependent on the level of consumer involvement. The experiment reveals that a match between influencer and brand personality is most important. This applies to all involvement levels. Congruence with the consumer's desired self is beneficial under low involvement conditions (e. g. when the endorsed product is relatively cheap). In contrast in high involvement conditions (e. g. when the endorsed product is relatively expensive) congruence with the consumer's actual self becomes more beneficial. This allows the conclusion that an influencer should always match the personality of the endorsed brand. Under low involvement conditions, consumers are more influenced by the superficial stimulus of an influencer who reflects their desired selves. When the involvement level rises consumers are more devoted to find out what is right for them and therefore are influenced in a stronger way by an influencer who reflects their actual personality

Research paper 3 "The role of fashion influencers' attractiveness – a gender-specific perspective" investigates how the attractiveness level and gender of an influencer impact receivers' reaction depending on the users' own attractiveness and gender. It juxtaposes different jarring effect mechanisms around attractiveness. The Cialdini (2011) principle of Likeability states that the (1) attractiveness and (2) similarity of an individual boosts his/her likeability and influence on others. However, similarity can also occur on the level of attractiveness (Cialdini, 2011). Hence, the question arises whether it is more advantageous to use a *highly attractive influencer* or an *influencer whose attractiveness level is similar to the one of the user*. To make matters more complicated the theory of anti-attractiveness bias comes into play and further contradicts the universal superiority of attractiveness by stating that individuals may be envious of other members of the same gender being more attractive than themselves. Negative reactions would be the consequence (Agthe *et al.*, 2010). The question is hence which of these effects dominates. The introduced variable of gender may also play an independent role in terms of Cialdini's (2011) similarity principle – though its role remains unclear (Cialdini, 2011; Putrevu, 2004). In an experiment, clarification on these contradicting theories was provided. The results demonstrated that in most of the cases high attractiveness was most advantageous. However, for male influencers targeting male

users, the positive effect of high attractiveness was significantly smaller than for female influencers so that a small anti-attractiveness bias may have happened. Moreover, both male and female consumers were more favorable towards a female influencer. This allows the conclusion that choosing a highly attractive influencer is usually the right decision. Female influencers are a better choice than male influencers, irrespective of the gender of the targeted users.

2.3 Module 3: Contingencies on Products

In the third module, a contingency approach is adopted by examining necessary refinements of an influencer campaign to the product. Research Paper 4 and 5 examine the fundamental dividing line between hedonic and utilitarian products. In paper 4 the impact of influencers' expertise and (utilitarian/hedonic) argument style on influencer trust, product attitude, purchase intention and price premium are compared between hedonic and utilitarian products. Paper 5 compares the impacts of demographic similarity and factuality of communication on influencer attitude, product attitude, purchase intention and price premium for hedonic and utilitarian products. Paper 6 takes into account that many extant studies on influencer marketing have been carried for attractiveness-related products; however, nowadays influencer marketing has spread to a broader range of issues including *attractiveness-unrelated* products (Jahnke, 2018a). In this spirit, the paper compares the importance of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness for attractiveness and non-attractiveness-related products. The impacts on trustworthiness, brand attitude, positive WOM and price premium are compared. Finally, paper 7 dares a change of perspectives by examining the specialties of social influencer endorsements for a social cause. The impacts of influencers' attractiveness and sportiness on post attitude, engagement and diet improvement intention were examined. Thereby, the moderating role of involvement was considered.

Paper 4 "*The counterintuitive case of influencer marketing for hedonic and utilitarian services*" as well as Paper 5 "*The relevance of demographic similarity and factuality in social influencer communication– A comparison between hedonic and utilitarian conditions*" examine the four requirements expertise, (utilitarian/hedonic) argument style, demographic similarity and factuality based on Lin *et al.*'s (2018) theoretical concept for online opinion leaders. The experiments reveal that product-specific expertise appears to be more important under hedonic than utilitarian conditions. The results do not support a universal superiority of a hedonic argument style (as the chain of arguments by e. g. Gill, 2008, Chitturi *et al.*, 2008 and Okada, 2005 infer). Demographic similarity between influencers and consumers appears

to be more important under utilitarian conditions than under hedonic conditions. Moreover, there is no significant difference in the importance of factuality between hedonic and utilitarian conditions. A negative moderating effect of demographic similarity on the impact of factuality was likewise observed. These findings allow the conclusion that consumers attach higher importance to an expert influencer in hedonic than utilitarian consumption goal conditions. The argument style of the influencer should stay in line with the consumption goal. Consumers have a stronger preference for an influencer who is demographically similar to them when their consumption goal is utilitarian. Generally, for both consumption goal conditions, consumers prefer an influencer to present facts rather than emotions. However, when the influencer is demographically similar to the consumer, a more emotional style becomes more acceptable.

Paper 6 “*Aristotele meets social influencers – implications of ancient philosophy for modern marketing communications*” compares the impacts of attractiveness on the perception of influencer trustworthiness and expertise between attractiveness and non-attractiveness related products. The experiment reveals that attractiveness has a stronger impact on perceived expertise for attractiveness-related products. However, the impact on influencer trustworthiness is not stronger. This demonstrates that a high influencer attractiveness is of importance for both, attractiveness and non-attractiveness related products. Overall, the impact for attractiveness related products is higher.

Paper 7 “*Social Influencers and Healthy Nutrition – The Challenge of Overshadowing Effects and Uninvolved Consumers*” broadens the horizon by investigating into some specialties of influencers for a social cause, namely healthy nutrition. The experiment employs two suitable influencer archetypes that fit well with the cause, namely a highly attractive “beauty-influencer” and a very sporty “fitness-influencer” (Brierley *et al.*, 2016; Cuenca-García *et al.*, 2013). Pioneering results are produced. The attractive influencer elicits a small overshadowing effect (i. e. the influencer benefits more from the endorsement than the cause Erfgen *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the attractive influencer can only further improve the diet behavior of consumers already interested in healthy nutrition. The sporty influencer, in contrast, can only improve the diet behavior of those who are *not* interested in healthy nutrition. Influencer campaigns for healthy nutrition can strongly benefit from these findings as those who are not interested in healthy nutrition are those who most need to improve their

diet (McDermott *et al.*, 2005) and therefore should constitute the first target group of the campaign.

2.4 Module 4: The Hazards of Influencer Marketing

Paper 8 “*The Scandalous Lives of Social Influencers*” addresses an often overlooked issue - the damage potential of scandals caused by social influencers. Based on models on scandals of other celebrities (e. g. Abeza *et al.*, 2020; Ekström and Johansson, 2008; Thompson, 2013) and general scandals on social media (DePaula *et al.*, 2018) ten social influencer scandals stemming from three fields are analyzed on their immorality, as well as damage potential on influencer (trust, like, following behavior) and endorsed brand (purchase intention). The scandals include

- (1) Misinformation & Lie-Based Scandals (*Undisclosed sponsored post, Endorsement without conviction, Manipulated Photo, Being a Fictional Character*)
- (2) Hate Speech & Bad Language Scandals (*Gossiping, Insulting Followers, Common Use of Swearwords, Racism and Extremism*)
- (3) Power Scandals (*Sharenting*)

The experiment reveals that all scandals have a similar damage potential on both, influencer and endorsed brand. Even presumably minor scandals such as sharenting (Dobson and Jay, 2020) or the use of swearwords (Beers Fägersten, 2017) have the potential to seriously harm the influencer and the brand. In every aspect worst are extremism and racist slurs.

3 Conclusion and Implications

3.1 Main Contributions

Even though social influencers have advanced to one of the most popular means of marketing communication, everyone has been quiet at a loss when it came to the question how to carry out proper influencer campaigns (Childers *et al.*, 2019). Early approaches focused on findings from computer science suggesting to use engagement variables such as the number of followers, likes, shares etc (Veirman *et al.*, 2017; Kwak *et al.*, 2010; Cha *et al.*, 2010). These criteria may be a starting point – however, they are certainly not sufficient as an example by Ki and Kim (2019) shows. They provide the example of an influencer who had amassed a very high number of followers, 50 million, but nevertheless not deployed the best marketing effects because his content was not visually appealing. In this dissertation a holistic perspective is adopted to systematically tackle and fill the research gaps. Thereby, the insights of marketing and its different subdisciplines such as consumer behavior and brand management as well as the ancillary disciplines psychology and sociology are employed for an attainment of deeper insights. As one of the few research projects, this dissertation does not only consider the perspective of the endorsed brand, but also the benefits of an endorsement for an influencer. Interestingly, sometimes the influencer benefits much more than the endorsed cause.

The first contributions of this dissertation lie in establishing a basic foundation on general requirements for social influencer in order to overcome the original uncertainties of practitioners and researches. The second and third contribution lies in a twofold refinement. The first refinement centers around different consumer-related variables (e. g. psychography, demography, appearance). The second refinement occurs with regard to the product related variables (e. g. hedonic/utilitarian product, aesthetic reference). At the end of this process, a multidimensional overview has formed which shows how influencer marketing can be granulated. Based on the characteristics of the targeted consumer group and the endorsed brand it has become possible to tell how an influencer campaign should be carried out to maximize the success. The fourth contribution lies in an overview on the hazards of social influencer marketing. Equipped with this knowledge a protective shield can be built around an influencer campaign to avoid that the success is thwarted.

Based on a well-founded theoretical background, fundamental and pursuing questions are clarified and problems solved. The results contribute in clarifying contradicting results; it becomes apparent that in parts, extant theories and models have to be refined to account for

the specialties of social media marketing. Likewise, what we know on other types of endorsers does not “one-to-one” apply to social influencers. Sometimes, results are counter-intuitive. This dissertation demonstrates that when systematically (1) accounting for the specialties of social influencers, refining to the characteristics of the (2) desired target group and (3) product as well as (4) avoiding all kinds of hazards, influencer marketing is no longer a daunting issue.

3.2 Limitations

On the methodological side, the limitations of online experiments have to be mentioned. Although online experiments provide access to a diverse participant population (Reips, 2000), their results cannot be considered to be fully representative (Rice *et al.*, 2017). Especially, the experiments were carried out in Germany, i. e. a Western cultural context. The relevance of identification and aspiration might be different in an eastern context (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the perception of physical attractiveness has also been identified as highly culture-specific (Ert and Fleischer, 2020). Therefore, in order to further generalize and globalize the results, replication studies in other cultural context could be very expedient.

Furthermore, some factors can entice participants to deliver skewed answers in online experiments. These include low engagement and distraction (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009) (e. g. through noise Howell, 2022). Some participants might also have attempted fraud, i. e. participation only for the sake of the incentive while giving random answers (Rice *et al.*, 2017; Konstan *et al.*, 2005), or multiple submissions by a single participant in order to maximize the chance of winning the incentive (Reips, 2002; Konstan *et al.*, 2005). Nonetheless, it has been tried to minimize the contamination of the data set by rigorous data cleaning using the algorithm Time:RSI which detects invalid data sets based on the criteria speed and consistency (Leiner, 2019).

A further possible limitation can result from the fact that no researcher is present to answer participants' potential comprehension questions or clarify misunderstandings. It has, though, also been tried to minimize the occurrence of misunderstandings by intensively pretesting the questionnaires (Michalak and Szabo, 1998). This limitation could alternatively be healed by a laboratory experiment, in which the experiment is present and has control on the setting (Howell, 2022; Michalak and Szabo, 1998). Finally, the online experiment might have influenced results for those who might have been unfamiliar with an electronic questionnaire interface differently than for those who might be familiar. In this way the intercorrelations among them could have been inflated or deflated resulting in common method bias (Williams and Brown, 1994). In order to mitigate this effect, in the some of the papers it was ensured that no common method bias was present by checking the model with Harman's (1976) single factor method.

This dissertation has carved out numerous affective, cognitive and conative-behavioral reactions of users. Thereby (mainly structural equation modeling) were used. The methods used for evaluating the measurement and structural model are subject to change and are continuously updated. For example the first paper, “Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula?” discriminant validity was determined by means of the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and the exclusion of cross-loadings following Hair *et al.* (2014). However, the Fornell-Larker criterion suffers from some limitations: (1) the overestimation of indicator loadings by variance-based structural equation models (e. g. Hui and Wold, 1982, Lohmöller, 1989) and (2) compounded inflation in loading estimates (Henseler *et al.*, 2015; Rigdon, 2014; Bollen and Lennox, 1991). Therefore, nowadays, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratios have become the more acknowledged method for assessing discriminant validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). Unlike the Fornell-Larker criterion, this method assesses discriminant validity by means of the average of the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of the indicators across constructs measuring different phenomena) relative to the average of the monotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of the indicators within the same construct) (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, supplemental methods could be employed to discover potential non-linear relationships. Although in some cases it was attempted to check for potential non-linear relationships by nonlinear structural equation modeling (Dimitruk *et al.*, 2007) and no such relationships appeared to be present, further methods could prove to be expedient for this purpose. Especially, nonlinear relationships could also be carved out by means of neural networks (Scholz *et al.*, 2007). These are based on connected (artificial) neurons which loosely model the neurons in a biological brain (Vanneschi and Castelli, 2019). Additionally, due to their high noise tolerance, neural networks could also prove to be very expedient to properly handle partially incomplete or noisy data (Singh and Chauhan, 2009), that is inevitable in online experiments (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009).

The findings could also be further deepened through a qualitative supplement. Special benefits of this approach would consist in getting a greater depth of information (Lapan *et al.*, 2012) (e. g. *why* is a specific influencer requirement of very low/very high importance in a specific context)). Moreover, qualitative research would be helpful to carve out new, previously not considered information (Piore, 2006; Bewley, 2002) (such as additional requirements) and in this way generate an important theoretical contribution.

Finally, this work focused mostly on success factors from the layers Influencer Distinctive Factors, Perceiver Congruence Factors, Brand Congruence Factors and Risks. Management Factors and Communication Factors were only scarcely considered although being highly important. In section 3.4 some future research issues on these layers will be suggested.

3.3 Implications for Marketing Practice

As of 2019, social media managers were still fairly ignorant even on the basics of social media marketing. At the beginning they tried to adapt traditional advertising models (perhaps designed with offline celebrities in mind) – with at best modest success (Childers *et al.*, 2019). As an answer to this deplorable situation, this dissertation provided practitioners with a holistic and at the same time contingent view on the success factors of influencer marketing. At first, it is to note that there are some requirements, which are in a certain sense universal, i. e. there is no situation where they were found to be irrelevant or deploy negative effects. These are the trustworthiness of the influencer, the fit with the brand personality and the absence of scandals. However, other requirements may be depending on contingencies of the consumer or endorsed product. Based on the findings of this dissertation practitioners can design a multi-dimensional matrix with specifications of the target group and endorsed product. This would allow them to tell accurately which influencer requirements are of high, moderate or of no importance. The findings of this study also allow practitioners to adjust their influencer campaign to their respective endorsement goals such as generating a better brand attitude or higher purchase intention.

This dissertation enables social media managers to take the right decision in controversial situations or dilemmas. E. g. Is it more important that the consumer *identifies with* or *admires* the influencer? Or: Should an influencer be *similarly* or much *more* attractive than a consumer? By answering questions of this type, this dissertation provides practitioners with information on what to prioritize if two goals seem hardly compatible and their initial uncertainty is reduced. It also becomes apparent that practitioners need to take decisions that appear counter-intuitive. For example, attractiveness is also an important requirement if the endorsed product is not related to attractiveness. This is a finding that is not reflected in results on traditional advertising (e. g. Kamins, 1990). It has to be emphasized, that these kinds of results were no random findings but actually rooted in theory or the specific characteristics of social influencers and well justifiable.

However, even if social media managers select the best suited influencer for their specific cause, they may not underestimate the damage potential of scandals – even small transgressions such as the frequent use of swearwords are not negligible as they can have negative impacts on the brand. This dissertation also considers these hidden traps and provide practitioners with a detailed overview of the damage potential of numerous scandals. This information could be used by practitioners to design the specifications of a moral clause,

which punishes the influencer (financially) if he or she becomes involved into a scandal. These type of agreements are not unusual for other type of celebrities (Tellis, 1998; Ofori-Okyere and Asamoah, 2015).

This dissertation also considers issues outside “the box” and offers a change of perspectives to social media managers. For example, as one of few research projects this dissertation did not only consider the benefits of an influencer endorsement on the brand but also the benefits for the influencer him/herself. These can be measured e. g. in the form of engagement such as new followers, likes or shares. It becomes apparent that sometimes, influencers also strongly benefit from an endorsement – occasionally even much more than the brand itself. Practitioners may bear this finding in mind when negotiating the reward of an influencer.

3.4 Implications for Research

The findings of this dissertation provide new insights for a better understanding of the mechanisms of influencer marketing in diverse contexts. It picks up on research gaps suggested in literature and includes a comprehensive set of influencer related requirements. These new insights also provide further essential future research directions. Although interesting and “hot” issues based on practitioners concerns were addressed (e. g. Jahnke, 2018a) further contingencies regarding consumer and product characteristics could be considered to further refine the overall picture; likewise further hazards should be considered. For example, the issue of overshadowing was only scarcely considered; the regard of other potential antecedents of overshadowing in influencer marketing could be a worthwhile option. Further layers of the celebrity model by Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2018) could be adapted to influencer. In particular, this refers to communication and management factors. This could lead to interesting research topics like the use of humor in influencer marketing or the determination of a reasonable price of an endorsement campaign. A further differentiation could be drawn between different social networks and types of content (e. g. story vs. post).

This research has shown there is a clutter of numerous requirements and contingencies. Against this backdrop, it may be hard for social media managers to keep track. Therefore, the findings could be merged into a decision support system. In this context, the possibilities of artificial intelligence could be used to assist practitioners in their decisions. The goal may be to develop system, which recommends an ideal influencer based on specific circumstances such as target group, product kind and advertising goals.

Social influencers have – to some extent – displaced traditional advertising (Kirkpatrick, 2016; Gretzel, 2018) and also specific forms of advertising such as offline celebrity endorsements (Schouten *et al.*, 2019). As mentioned in the introduction the success of influencer marketing is the result of some societal trends. Future research could explore the continuity of these trends. Hereby it could be looked for signals that indicate the end of the influencer boom. In this way, an early warning system could be developed so that practitioners are aware of a turning point. In this context, the question arises: What will be after influencer marketing?

Future research should also take care of relevant microscopic trends. Indications are that a parasocial relationship may stop being an important asset of influencers. The very recent

findings of Aw and Chuah (2021) suggests that users perhaps do not expect influencers anymore to be an “ordinary person” and to foster a parasocial relationship. Against this backdrop, the question arises whether influencers could develop into the direction of traditional celebrities – the type of endorser that they initially supplanted. In this way influencers could become more “fictional characters” whose life shown on social media is completely disconnected from their true life. The question may arise whether influencer content may be consumed more for entertainment purposes than for authentic endorsements. It would also offer the valuable opportunity for brands to create a fictitious influencer with ideal characteristics.

In the end, it can be seen that a great leap forward has been accomplished. This dissertation has contributed to reduce practitioners’ former basis uncertainty regarding influencers. Initial ignorance was overcome and practitioners are now provided with a systematic and contingent approach to maximize the success of their influencer campaigns.

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Research Articles

Module 1: Influencer Distinctive Factors

- A1. Klaus-Peter Wiedmann; Walter von Mettenheim (2020):** Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula?, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. July 20, 2020. DOI: 10.1108/JPBM-06-2019-2442 ISSN: 1061-0421

Based on the following previous version:

Wiedmann, K.-P., & von Mettenheim, W. (2019): An adaptation of the source credibility model on social influencers, paper presented at the 22nd Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) World Marketing Congress (WMC), Edinburgh, Scotland, July 9-12, 2019.

Module 2: Contingencies on Consumers

- A2. von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K.-P. (2021):** The complex triad of congruence issues in influencer marketing, *J Consumer Behav.* 2021; 1– 20. DOI: doi.org/10.1002/cb.1935

Based on the following previous version:

Wiedmann, K.-P., & von Mettenheim, W. (2019): The interaction of consumer, endorser and brand personality in social influencer marketing, paper presented at the 47th Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual Conference, Vancouver, Canada, May 29-31, 2019.

- A3. von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K.-P. (2021):** The Role of Fashion Influencers’ Attractiveness – A Gender-Specific Perspective, *Communication Research and Practice*, 7:3, 263-290, DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2021.2013087

Based on the following previous version:

von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K.-P. (2021): Why Brands Should Use Female Influencers to Endorse Male Fashion, paper presented at the 50th Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual Conference, Virtual, June 1-4, 2021

Module 3: Contingencies on Products

- A4. von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K.-P. (2021):** The counterintuitive case of influencer marketing for hedonic and utilitarian services, *Tourism Culture & Communication*.. Submitted and under Review

Based on the following previous version:

von Mettenheim, W. & Wiedmann, K.-P (2020): Social Influencers in Hedonic and Utilitarian Conditions, paper presented at the 2020 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual (Virtual) Conference, December 14-19, 2020.

- A5. von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K-P. (2021):** The relevance of demographic similarity and factuality in social influencer communication – A comparison between hedonic and utilitarian conditions. International Journal Of Internet Marketing and Advertising. Submitted and under Review

Based on the following previous version:

von Mettenheim, W. & Wiedmann, K.-P (2020): The Relevance Of Demographical Similarity And Factuality In Social Influencer Marketing, paper presented at the 2020 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual (Virtual) Conference, December 14-19, 2020.

- A6. von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K-P. (2021):** Aristotele meets social influencers – implications of ancient philosophy for modern marketing communications. Atlantic Journal of Communication. Submitted and under Review

- A7. von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K.-P. (2022):** Social Influencers and Healthy Nutrition – The Challenge of Overshadowing Effects and Uninvolved Consumers, Journal of Food Products Marketing. DOI: 10.1080/10454446.2022.2028692

Based on the following previous version:

von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K-P. (2022): How to Employ Social Influencers for Improving Consumer's Diet, paper presented at the 2022 AMA Winter Academic Conference, February 18-20, Las Vegas, Nevada, 2022.

Module 4: The Hazards of Influencer Marketing

- A8. von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K-P. (2021):** The Scandalous Lives of Social Influencers. Journal of Media Economics. Submitted and under Review

A1. Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula?

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in Journal of Product & Brand Management

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Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers' winning formula?

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Abstract

Purpose – The importance of influencer marketing is constantly growing. However, little empirical research has examined influencers' success requirements. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring whether the requirements of influencers' attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness are relevant for online influencer campaigns. An entry-level luxury fashion brand is the focus of the experiment.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 288 participants completed an online survey evaluating the profiles of influencers who varied in terms of the three abovementioned requirements. The impacts of these requirements on brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust as well as purchase intention and price premium were tested via structural equation modeling.

Findings – The results show that the most important requirement is trustworthiness, followed by attractiveness; surprisingly, the relevance of expertise is virtually nil.

Research limitations/implications – To date, practitioners are still struggling with the success requirements of influencer marketing. They have focused on traditional advertising models and numeric requirements such as the amount of followers. However, regarding merely these requirements can result in wrong decisions. Considering the two requirements, attractiveness and trustworthiness, in a stronger way can provide a remedy to this struggle. In future research, the relevance of the requirements in different involvement conditions and for non-attractiveness-related products might be investigated.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is one of the first to explore the success requirements that are directly related to influencers (e.g. attractiveness) rather than numeric requirements of their profiles (e.g. page rank) and the impacts of those requirements on brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust as well as purchase intention and price premium. It adapts the Source-Credibility Model for influencers and shows that its requirements interact in a unique way that is counterintuitive and different from other endorser types such as celebrities or salespersons.

Keywords Luxury marketing, Influencer marketing, Social media marketing, Attractiveness, Expertise, Trustworthiness

Paper type Research paper

In the era of *digitization, sensory overload, social distrust* and *individualization*, traditional advertising is losing its effectiveness, and online influencers have become a powerful means of marketing communication (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). The power of these individuals, who are primarily characterized by their ability to create valuable content, their high reputations in specific fields (Cha *et al.*, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017) and their large number of followers in online social networks (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017), is rooted in the fact that their messages are actively requested and consumed (in contrast to traditional advertising). Moreover, their communications are superior in terms of customization to the target group (Kumar and Gupta, 2016). Social media are more diversified, specialized and fragmented than traditional media such as newspapers or television. Consequently, social media can target the interests of a very specific audience (Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia, 2017). Furthermore, consumers follow influencers of their own free will, in contrast to, e.g. advertising, which consumers try to avoid (Childers

et al., 2019). Finally, influencers' messages appear to come from a "person like you or me" and not from a potentially distrusted company that may be viewed as aiming to con consumers into buying its products (Jahnke, 2018; Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018).

Against the backdrop of these advantages, brands must know how to conduct a successful online influencer campaign. The major academic research on what drives the success of influencers has mostly focused on *numerical requirements such as the number of followers, retweets or page rank*. The number of followers may be the only criterion for remuneration (Cole, 2018). Intuitively, these requirements may seem to be excellent for predicting the success of an influencer campaign; however, as the following example shows, they are not sufficient for guaranteeing a successful endorsement. In 2016, the brand Boo Tea Shake sent an email to its influencer Scott Disick. The email included text that he was supposed to post to his followers as well as confidential content such as instructions from the brand. Accidentally, Disick posted not only the text but also the confidential information to his 16 million followers.

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/1061-0421.htm>



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The consequence was scorn and eventually a failed campaign (O'Toole, 2016). Disick scored high on traditional requirements such as number of followers or page rank; however, he lacked a crucial virtue – credibility. Against this backdrop, this study will investigate the relevance of source credibility for influencers. It will explore whether the three requirements of credibility in the Source-Credibility Model by Hovland *et al.* (1982) – specifically, attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness – apply to influencers.

Studies analyzing requirements have obtained partially conflicting results (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Martensen *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, they have mainly focused on the impacts of these requirements on the influence strength or persuasiveness of the influencer. This work contributes to further clarification by analyzing the impacts of the three requirements on brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust as well as purchase intention and price premium with the example of the luxury entry-level fashion brand BOSS. The hypotheses will be tested with structural equation modeling in Smart PLS.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Influencer marketing

1.1.1 Definition

Influencer marketing is a communication strategy using popular and influential users in online social media (Gillin, 2009). Influencers are regarded as special individuals who can create *valuable content*, have *high reputations in specific fields* (Cha *et al.*, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017) and are followed by *a large number of users* in online social networks (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). Reputation can accrue from influencers' expert qualification in their field of expertise and consumers' trust in them. Influencers' success and influence can be determined by engagement, which describes the ability to obtain reactions from consumers on a post (Arora *et al.*, 2019; Freberg *et al.*, 2011). In this way, influencers can connect brands with existing and prospective customers (De Vries *et al.*, 2012). One method of measuring engagement is to compute the numbers of likes, comments, shares, retweets and favorites on an influencer's post based on different time spans such as monthly, daily or hourly periods (Arora *et al.*, 2019).

1.1.2 Demarcation

The research on influencers is still nascent. Some requirements for the success of influencers have been developed; however, they have not all been empirically validated (Kilian, 2017; Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018; Simmet, 2013). Therefore, in this paper, hypothesis development will rely on:

- relevant general work from the cosmos of psychology; and
- marketing-relevant findings on endorser types other than influencers including salespersons, sales avatars, anonymous models, electronic word-of-mouth and, in particular, celebrities.

It is important to understand the similarities and differences between these latter types and influencers. A central issue is thus whether the requirements developed for other types of endorsers can be transferred to influencers. In the following, the term requirements will be used to designate any influencer-

based variables/constructs/attributes/characteristics that might contribute to the success of an influencer campaign.

Influencers' fame accrues from their own social media efforts. This includes their numbers of followers, shares, likes and comments (Jin and Muqaddam, 2019). These requirements are more significant for influencers (compared with celebrities) because an influencer's high number of followers and likes can be attributed to his or her active engagement, openness to audiences and popularity in the online community (Van Der Heide and Lim, 2016). By contrast, celebrities' high numbers followers and likes can be an extension of the popularity they already have in the offline world (Jin and Muqaddam, 2019).

The perspectives of Friedman and Friedman (1976, 1979) on *celebrity endorsers* highlight a major contrast between the roots of the fame of celebrities and influencers: celebrity endorsers are recognized and famous persons who have *not* gained their fame through advertised products. Influencers either endorse products by means of non-sponsored posts/stories (which usually show the pros and cons of products/brands) and influencers' sponsored ads (which mainly focus on pros; brands pay influencers for these ads rather than only sending free samples). At least in the context of non-sponsored posts, influencers may represent their true selves and act in a creative, self-expressive way (Audrezet *et al.*, 2018; Boerman *et al.*, 2017). Thus, influencers appear authentic (Cohen and Tyler, 2016; Marwick, 2013). Celebrity endorsement, by contrast, constitutes a comparatively shallow form of endorsement as celebrity endorsers usually do not provide such in-depth elaborations. Moreover, although influencers have acquired fame, their familiarity lags behind that of celebrities. Rankings classifying the most famous individuals in the world [e.g. "The Most Influential People in 2019" by Ranker (2019) or "Top Ten Most Famous People" by The Top Tens® (2019) (which actually includes more than 300 individuals)] mainly feature actors, singers, fashion models, athletes, entrepreneurs, politicians, aristocrats and religious leaders but no genuine influencers. Influencers and celebrities have certain similarities but also major differences. Therefore, the requirements for one endorser type may not be transferable to another. However, the extant findings can serve as one of many sources to develop hypotheses requiring empirical verification.

Influencers also differ among one another in terms of reach (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018). A differentiation can be made between micro influencers (10,000–150,000 followers) and mid-to-top-tier influencers (more than 150,000 followers). Against this backdrop, influencer marketing offers the opportunity for brands to gain influencers' audiences and to maximize their reach (Childers *et al.*, 2019). This study will focus on the so-called microinfluencers because they are considered to be a strategic priority for fashion brands. The reasons for this can be found in the lower costs of endorsement and higher perceived authenticity (Boyd, 2016; Owen and Napoli, 2016). Because of their relatively low number of followers, such influencers differ most notably from celebrities in terms of fame.

Overall, influencer marketing can increase the visibility of a company and lead to greater reach. However, the concepts of influencer reach and engagement are not free of limitations. Practitioners should consider whether the reach and

engagement of an influencer accrues from the desired target group (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018). Moreover, practitioners should not succumb to the temptation of merely relying on these relatively easily collectable and quantifiable requirements while ignoring other requirements that are less easy to collect and quantify such as attractiveness (Ki and Kim, 2019).

1.2 Determining requirements for influencers

1.2.1 Requirements and impacts of influencer marketing

The academic research on what makes up the success of influencer marketing remains relatively scarce. Major works stemming from the sphere of computer science or business informatics mainly focus on numeric requirements. In this way, requirements such as the *number of followers* (De Veirman et al., 2017) *page rank* and the *number of retweets* (Kwak et al., 2010) or *mentions* (Cha et al., 2010) have been identified. In a marketing context, notable pioneering work was carried out by Martensen et al. (2018) who showed that two requirements of the Source-Credibility Model, specifically, expertise and trustworthiness (as well as three further requirements: likability, similarity and familiarity), could positively affect influencers' persuasiveness. Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) analyzed the impacts of the three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) on influencers' influence strength. Jin and Muqaddam (2019) analyzed how source type (brand versus influencer) and product placement type (explicit versus moderate product placement) affect the three requirements.

As the elaboration in the course of hypothesis development will show (Section 2), some of the studies produced contradictory results. Moreover, the contribution of this work lies in the direct manipulation of all three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model. The extant studies have either focused on the impacts of the requirements on influencer-content-related requirements or treated the requirements as dependent variables. In this study, the impacts of the requirements on brand satisfaction, brand image and brand trust are investigated, which are of crucial importance for fashion brands. In this way, the emphasis is on directly showing whether and to what extent a brand can benefit from fulfilling these requirements. The three requirements are selected because their high relevance has also been identified, at least in partial form, for other types of endorsers such as celebrities (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Ohanian, 1990; Santos et al., 2019; Silvera and Austad, 2004; Spry et al., 2009). The results of this study can be compared with those of studies on other types of endorsers to identify similarities and differences, e.g. in terms of hierarchy.

1.2.2 Source-Credibility model

The *Source-Credibility Model* created by Hovland et al. (1982) and further substantiated by Ohanian (1990) will be the core of the upcoming analysis. Counterintuitively, credibility is not synonymous with trustworthiness. Rather, a core tenet of the model is that, to be credible, a source should encompass three requirements: *attractiveness*, *expertise* and *trustworthiness*. In the model, credibility is thus a general term that includes all three requirements:

- 1 *Attractiveness* refers to the physical attractiveness of an individual: Is the source good-looking or ugly? Patzer

(1983) stated that in most research, *attractiveness* is defined as “the degree to which a stimulus person's facial features are pleasing to observe.” That view will be adopted in this study on influencers.

- 2 *Expertise* describes the source's level of knowledge. It is defined in terms of peak or at least high levels of knowledge, experience and problem-solving skills within a given domain. An expert is capable of performing in a domain at a high level that can be achieved by few others (perhaps by only a small percentage of the general population). Becoming an expert requires hard work, long-term training, experience and/or practice. Individuals recognize the difference between expertise and average or low performance in any domain by considering what the expert knows as well as what he or she has done or achieved (Bourne et al., 2014; Garrett et al., 2009). Along these lines, Crisci and Kassino (1973) showed that the perceived expertise of a psychologist was higher when he was referred to as “Dr” instead of “Mr.” For influencers, this means that expertise can be manipulated by the amount of knowledge they have on the product they endorse. To signal the expertise of a source, it is hence useful to describe whether a source is well versed on a specific issue.
- 3 Finally, *Trustworthiness* addresses the question of whether an individual is believable: Does the source express his or her honest opinion, or is he or she influenced by third parties? In the introductory example, Disick's endorsement failed because of a lack of trustworthiness (one of the three requirements for conveying credibility). Disick's erroneous post brought to light that he was not expressing his honest opinion; rather, he was following instructions from the brand in exchange for a reward. Given that the central driver of trustworthiness is selflessness (Walster et al., 1966), in this study, trustworthiness will be considered to address the question of whether an influencer is judging a brand in an objective way or is biased by financial/material rewards offered by the brand in exchange for a positive endorsement.

1.3 BOSS – an entry-level luxury fashion brand

Influencers are most commonly used for products stemming from the fashion industry (Halvorsen et al., 2013). This phenomenon may be related to the fact that the interest in new fashion trends develops online (Kim and Ko, 2012). Consequently, in the present paper, the hypotheses will be tested by means of influencers who endorse the fashion brand BOSS. BOSS is an *entry-level price range luxury brand* by HUGO BOSS AG. Since the new orientation of the HUGO BOSS AG brand portfolio for the spring/summer season 2018, the brand BOSS has superseded the former entry-level price range brands *BOSS Orange* and *BOSS Green* (HUGO BOSS AG, 2018).

An *entry-level price range luxury brand* distinguishes itself from a genuine luxury brand primarily through *lower prices*. In this way, a brand becomes affordable for broad social layers and joins the trend of the “democratization of luxury” (Morace, 2010; Phau et al., 2014). Because of the lower prices it offers, the brand must lower its sights to other features of luxury such

as *financial, functional, individual* and *social value* (Phau *et al.*, 2014; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2007). The brand thereby waives exclusivity and becomes more suitable for endorsement by means of a mass medium such as online social networks. Influencers have developed into a fundamental part of luxury brands' marketing strategies, and companies have increased their budgets for influencer campaigns (Brouwer, 2017).

In the cosmos of luxury entry-level fashion brands, *brand satisfaction* [the cognitive evaluation of whether the exchange relationship with the brand is rewarding (Esch *et al.*, 2006)] and *brand image* (consumers associations about a brand (Burmam *et al.*, 2008)) are particularly relevant because fast-changing design trends increase the risk of brand change (Büttner *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, because of proliferation and short life cycles, brand-specific associations such as *brand trust* [willingness to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001)] are important for fashion brand success (Lee *et al.*, 2003).

2. Hypothesis development

In the following, an overview of works analyzing all three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model will be given. Subsequently, theories and studies focusing on individual requirements will be presented. Based on the findings, hypotheses will be developed.

The attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser for a political party may positively affect the *brand image* of the party (Smith, 2001). All three requirements can also positively affect *brand trust* in the context of a celebrity endorsement for a telecom service (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2013).

Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencers' attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness could positively affect consumers' brand awareness. Trustworthiness and attractiveness (but not expertise) enhanced followers' trust in branded content. Sakib *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that weight loss influencers' trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness had a positive impact on para-social interaction. In a comparative study on celebrities and influencers, Schouten *et al.* (2019) found that influencer endorsement led to higher perceived trustworthiness than celebrity endorsements, but failed to demonstrate such an association in terms of expertise. Similarly, the authors were unable to demonstrate that perceived trustworthiness and expertise mediate the relationship between influencer endorsements versus celebrity endorsements and attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product and purchase intention. Ki and Kim (2019) demonstrated that the extent to which a target individual identifies an influencer's content as visually appealing and showcasing expertise was positively associated with the perception of the influencer as a taste leader.

2.1 Attractiveness

Selected findings from the attractiveness research may be of special relevance for influencer marketing. First, attractive communicators reach greater opinion agreement (Horai *et al.*, 1974). Miller (1970) builds on these findings by expressing that attractive individuals are viewed as:

[...] individuals who behave with a sense of purpose and out of their own volition, whereas unattractive individuals are more likely to be seen as coerced and generally influenced by others or by environmental conditions.

This phenomenon may imply that a positive message issued by an attractive influencer about a brand or product is more persuasive. Moreover, attractive individuals gain greater popularity (Dion *et al.*, 1972). This may be a special asset for influencers because, according to congruity theory, a positive attitude toward a communicator entails a more positive evaluation of the message (Joseph, 1982; Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955). Furthermore, individuals who are associated with an attractive individual are evaluated more favorably by others (Sigall and Landy, 1973). Consequently, followers may adhere to the message of attractive influencers to build an association with them. Finally, attractive individuals are viewed as being more in line with a desirable normative profile (Lorenzo *et al.*, 2010). Thus, attractive influencers may be endowed with aspirational power, which is one way to exert influence on others (Raven, 1965). These findings are also reflected by social adaptation theory, which suggests that comparing one's physical attractiveness with an attractive testimonial can be helpful for self-evaluation and self-improvement (Martin and Kennedy, 1994). The match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990) suggests that an endorsement is more effective when the endorser and product fit. For attractiveness-related products, the endorser's attractiveness is a creator of match-up (Till and Busler, 1998). Hence, an advantage for *attractive* influencers associated with luxury fashion brands may be that they enhance the product's appeal by building an association with their attractiveness (Jin and Muqaddam, 2019). Kahle and Homer (1985) argue that the match-up hypothesis is linked to social adaptation theory (Kahle and Argyle, 2013). According to this argument, the adaptive significance of information will determine its impact. Thus, information may have adaptive significance in guiding a consumer's brand evaluation and choice. An attractive endorser may serve as an effective source of information for a product that is attractiveness-related (Kahle and Homer, 1985).

The research backs the theory that an attractive source is effective for changes in attitude toward issues, products and ads (Caballero and Pride, 1984; Chaiken, 1979; Horai *et al.*, 1974; Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kulka and Kessler, 1978; Mills and Harvey, 1972). The sexual attractiveness of a person giving a testimonial has a positive influence on the *brand satisfaction* of women in relation to cosmetic brands (Apaolaza-Ibáñez *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, attractive celebrity endorsers can positively impact *brand satisfaction* and *brand attitude* in the context of pens and colognes (Till and Busler, 1998, 2000). The attractiveness of a celebrity endorser also positively influences *brand image* in relation to men's apparel (Malshan and Weerasiri, 2016).

In the context of beauty blogs, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) failed to demonstrate that the requirement of attractiveness could affect the "perceived influence" or the "influence to brand purchase." However, a marginal relevance may exist under high-involvement conditions. For luxury fashion brands, Lee and Watkins (2016) found that the attractiveness of a vlogger increases para-social interaction. In the context of beauty-related influencer videos on YouTube, Behm-Morawitz (2017) demonstrated that the attractiveness of the influencer motivated viewers to create their own videos.

Overall, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1. The attractiveness of an influencer significantly positively influences (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand image and (c) brand trust.

2.2 Expertise

A source that demonstrates expertise is more persuasive than one that does not (Andersen and Clevenger, 1963). Indeed, individuals tend to agree more with the opinions of experts than with those of non-experts (Horai *et al.*, 1974). Expertise, also referred to as expert power, is embedded in Raven's (1965) framework of five power bases and describes a way of exerting influence on others. According to the balance model, an endorser's expertise is helpful in communicating a bond with the product (Mowen, 1980). Moreover, the Heuristic-Systematic model defines expertness as a persuasion cue that triggers individuals to use cognitive heuristics such as "statements by experts can be trusted" (Chaiken, 1979, 1980; Rameshwar and Chaiken, 1991). The aforementioned match-up hypothesis can also be used to explain the relevance of the requirement, as demonstrating expertise is a way to build a link to the endorsed product (Till and Busler, 1998).

The expertise of diverse types of endorsers has been analyzed in marketing contexts. The expertise of a celebrity endorser was found to have a positive effect on brand attitude for an energy bar (Till and Busler, 2000). Spokes-avatars who are perceived as experts were found to generate higher *brand satisfaction* and *brand attitude* in the context of a fictitious clothing brand (Jin and Sung, 2010). Martensen *et al.* (2018) found that expertise enhanced the persuasiveness of a fashion brand influencer. However, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) failed to demonstrate that beauty influencers' expertness had an impact on the "perceived influence" or the "influence to purchase," although it was marginally significant if consumers were in specific situations in which they depended strongly on the influencer's expertise (an example could be a situation in which a consumer has particularly low expertise). These somewhat contradictory results pinpoint the necessity of verifying this requirement:

H2. The expertise of an influencer significantly positively influences (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand image and (c) brand trust.

2.3 Trustworthiness

A basic tenet of attribution theory is that any source that is perceived as biased will be dismissed (Kelley, 1973). This theory is based on De Soto and Kuethe's (1959) grouping schema, which states that feelings such as liking or trust are assumed to occur and spread within groups of individuals. If a consumer *trusts* an influencer and the influencer *likes* a brand, the consumer will also *like* the brand. Moreover, according to the balance model, trustworthiness sustains the link between endorser and message (Mowen, 1980).

Findings from the marketing research tend to validate the relevance of the trustworthiness requirement. Spokes-avatars who are perceived as trustworthy were found to generate higher *brand satisfaction* and *brand attitude* in the context of a fictitious clothing brand (Jin and Sung, 2010). Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) presupposed the native trustworthiness of word-of-

mouth following the work of Chatterjee (2006), Godes and Mayzlin (2004) and Mayzlin (2006); based on this hypothesis, they demonstrated a positive effect of electronic word-of-mouth on *brand image* and *purchase intention* in the case of the automobile industry. Martensen *et al.* (2018) found that influencers' trustworthiness enhanced their persuasiveness, whereas Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) could not demonstrate that influencers' trustworthiness had an impact on "perceived influence" or "influence to purchase," although trustworthiness was marginally significant under higher issue involvement conditions or when consumers pursued a goal that depended strongly on it. In the context of sex education videos, Ferchaud *et al.* (2018) demonstrated that the authority of YouTube stars is based on viewers' trust. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. The trustworthiness of an influencer significantly positively influences (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand image and (c) brand trust.

2.4 Effects on purchase intention and price premium

The findings are heavily divided concerning the issue of whether the three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model not only affect *brand satisfaction*, *brand image* and *brand trust* but also have a positive impact on *purchase intention* and *price premium*.

The *attractiveness*, *expertise* and *trustworthiness* of a celebrity endorser were found to have a positive impact on *purchase intention* (Kahle and Homer, 1985; Till and Busler, 2000; Tzoumaka *et al.*, 2014). A positive effect of *attractive* female sales representatives on *purchase intention* in the context of direct mail advertising for a book has been demonstrated (Caballero and Solomon, 1984). Similarly, the attractiveness of female athlete endorsers has been found to positively impact *purchase intention* (Liu and Brock, 2011). The *expertise* of a salesperson has been found to positively affect *purchase intention* for a "head and capstan cleaner kit" (Woodside and Davenport, 1974). *Trust* in an influencer has been found to positively influence *purchase intention* in the context of online shopping (Hsu *et al.*, 2013). Similar findings were produced by Haron *et al.* (2016) in relation to influencers characterized as opinion leaders in the context of fashion, skincare, gadgets and foodstuffs.

However, other findings partly contradict the abovementioned effects. In the abovementioned work of Haron *et al.* (2016), influencers' *expertise* had no effect on *purchase intention*. Wu and Lee (2012) could not demonstrate an effect of the *trustworthiness* of blogs on *purchase intention* in the context of beauty and medical products. Ohanian (1970) argued that celebrities' *trustworthiness* did not affect *purchase intention*.

A closer consideration of the extant interconnections might help clarify the contradictory results and pave the way for the investigation at hand. The literature states that in the case of positive *brand image* and *brand satisfaction*, *purchase intention* increases, and customers are prepared to pay a *price premium* (Dennis and Martenson, 2007; Farris *et al.*, 2010; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2014). In light of the ambiguous results and the information on the relationship between the interconnections, the three requirements of the Source-Credibility Model must

not have a *direct* effect on *purchase intention* and *price premium*; rather, *brand image* and *brand satisfaction* may have an effect on *purchase intention* and *price premium*. These findings lead to the following two hypotheses (Figure 1):

- H4. The brand satisfaction induced through influencers has a significant positive influence on (a) purchase intention and (b) price premium.
- H5. The brand image induced through influencers has a significant positive influence on (a) purchase intention and (b) price premium.

3. Method and data

The investigations in this work were performed in the following sequence:

- 1 To select appropriate pictures of attractive/unattractive, low-expertise/high-expertise and trustworthy/untrustworthy stimulus material for use in the influencers' profiles in the main investigation, *pretests* were carried out. For this purpose, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used.
- 2 The *empirical investigation* included *manipulation checks* and *hypothesis testing*:
 - Manipulation checks were carried out by means of an ANOVA.
 - Hypothesis testing was performed with *structural equation modeling*.

3.1 Pretest

3.1.1 Pretest on attractiveness

The empirical investigation used the stimulus material of attractive and unattractive influencers of both genders. According to Joseph (1982) and Dion et al. (1972), in scientific approaches, the attractiveness of an individual is determined by the assessment of third parties. Following the findings of Patzer (1983), who stated that attractiveness refers to facial attractiveness in most research, a pretest ($n = 107$) was conducted to select attractive and unattractive pictures of female and male individuals. The participants were presented with pictures of the faces of 12 unspecified individuals to determine which pictures would be used for the influencer profile pictures. Six of the presented individuals were female. All pictures were from free image databases.

The participants rated the attractiveness of the faces on a six-item five-point Likert-type scale adapted from Peetz (2012). To assess the quality of the attractiveness construct, a factor analysis using varimax rotation was performed. Beforehand, the factor analysis was confirmed to be appropriate for the set of items (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion = 0.913, $p_{\text{Barlett's test}} = 0.000$) (Dziuban and Shirkey, 1974). Subsequently, a high importance of all item variables for the factor attractiveness was determined (factor loadings = 0.896–0.936) (Kline, 2014). The contribution of the item variables to the explanation of the total statistical scattering was high (average variance extracted: 73.395%) (Brosius, 2013; Hair, 1995). The internal consistency was given, and the set of item variables was suitable for measuring the factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.926$) (Nunnally, 1978).

To assess the differences in perceived attractiveness, two ANOVAs followed by Scheffé post hoc tests were executed, one for the six female and the other for the six male stimulus subjects.

The ANOVA for the female stimulus subjects was significant ($p < 0.000$). The Scheffé post hoc test for the female stimulus subjects showed the greatest $M_{\text{Diff}} = 0.839$ (SE = 0.065) between Female Stimulus Subjects #3 ($M = 3.706$; SD = 0.489) and #5 ($M = 2.866$; SD = 0.513). The difference between the two was significant ($p < 0.000$). Those two female subjects were consequently selected as attractive and unattractive stimulus material for creating the profile pictures in the subsequent empirical investigation.

The ANOVA for the male stimulus subjects was significant ($p = 0.000$). The Scheffé post hoc test for the male stimulus subjects showed that the greatest $M_{\text{Diff}} = 0.79751$ (SE = 0.074) existed between Male Stimulus Subjects #2 ($M = 3.403$; SD = 0.498) and #4 ($M = 2.606$; SD = 0.488). This difference was significant ($p = 0.000$). Therefore, those two male subjects were selected as attractive and unattractive stimulus subjects for creating the profile pictures in the subsequent empirical investigation.

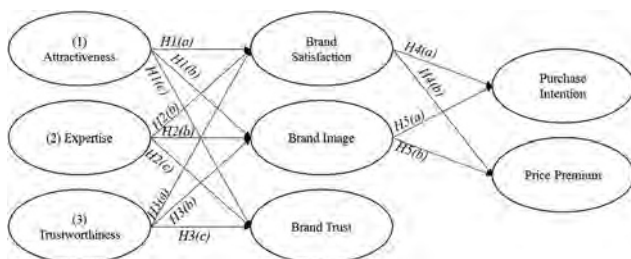
3.1.2 Pretest on expertise and trustworthiness

The empirical investigation included posts and profile information exposing the influencer as expert/non expert and trustworthy/untrustworthy. To test the intended stimulus material, a second pretest ($n = 85$) was carried out. The participants were presented with post and profile information exposing the influencer as either trustworthy or untrustworthy and either expert or non-expert.

Expertise was rated on a five-item Likert-type scale adapted from Peetz (2012). *Trustworthiness* was rated on a five-item Likert-type scale adapted from Ohanian (1990).

To assess the quality of the expertise and trustworthiness construct, a factor analysis using varimax rotation was performed. Beforehand, factor analysis confirmed the appropriateness of the set of items (Expertise: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion = 0.901, $p_{\text{Barlett's test}} = 0.000$; Trustworthiness: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion = 0.848, $p_{\text{Barlett's test}} = 0.000$) (Dziuban and Shirkey, 1974). Subsequently, the item variables were found to have a high importance for their respective constructs (Expertise: factor loadings = 0.893–0.956; Trustworthiness: factor loadings = 0.778–0.921) (Kline, 2014). The contribution of the item variables to the

Figure 1 Hypotheses development



explanation of the total statistical scattering was high (Expertise: average variance extracted: 87.307%; Trustworthiness: average variance extracted: 86.249%) (Brosius, 2013; Hair, 1995). An internal consistency was obtained, and the set of item variables was found to be suitable for measuring the factor (Expertise: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.964$; Trustworthiness: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.960$) (Nunnally, 1978).

To assess the differences in perceived expertise and trustworthiness, two ANOVAs were executed. The ANOVA for expertise was significant ($p < 0.000$). The difference between the low ($M = 2.020$) and high expertise stimulus ($M = 3.814$) was $M_{\text{Diff}} = 1.795$ ($SE = 0.049$). The ANOVA for trustworthiness was similarly found to be significant ($p < 0.000$). The difference between the low ($M = 1.949$) and high trustworthiness stimulus ($M = 3.257$) was $M_{\text{Diff}} = 1.308$ ($SE = 0.065$). Hence, a successful manipulation was confirmed.

3.2 Subjects, materials and procedure

3.2.1 Product category

The investigation was based on a fictitious scenario in which HUGO BOSS AG planned to present its entry-range brand BOSS by means of influencers after having conducted a new orientation of its brand portfolio for the spring/summer 2018 term.

A pair of jeans was the product to be endorsed. Because a pair of jeans is a gender-specific product, an adjustment to the influencers' and participants' genders was considered to be relevant. Performing this adjustment ensured that the product version for (fe)males was presented by a (fe)male influencer to (fe)male participants. Otherwise, it might have been confusing if an influencer had communicated about his or her experience with an item of clothing designed for a member of the opposite gender.

3.2.2 Study design

The study had a 2 (high versus low attractiveness) \times 2 (high versus low expertise) \times 2 (high versus low trustworthiness) experimental design.

The manipulation occurred by means of influencer Facebook profiles with an integrated post endorsing a pair of jeans by BOSS. Facebook was chosen because this social network allows for a focus on the elements that are of high relevance for this study, specifically, the profile picture of the influencer, the comments and the profile information (compared to other networks such as Instagram or Pinterest, where the emphasis lies more strongly on the image-based staging of the product) (Lin et al., 2018). Through the pictorial and textual elements of these profiles and posts, eight combinations of the three requirements were conveyed to the participants – attractiveness (high versus low), expertise (high versus low) and trustworthiness (high versus low) – as described in the following (Appendix). The stimulus material is based on the results of the pretests in Section 4.1:

- To vary *attractiveness*, the pictures of the attractive and unattractive female and male individuals selected in the pretest were used as profile pictures.
- *Expertise* relates to the endorser's ability to accurately select elegant and stylish clothing. According to the aforementioned elaborations on expertise, this requirement can be manipulated by means of the

influencer's fashion-related education. Hence, high expertise was signaled by revealing that the influencer studied fashion design in a master's program at a prestigious and exclusive fashion academy in Düsseldorf, Germany, and had won the renowned Audi Fashion Award. Influencers with low expertise stated they studied computer science. This field of study has no connection to fashion; moreover, students of this subject are stereotyped as badly dressed nerds with no interest in their outward appearance (García-Crespo et al., 2008).

- Building on the aforementioned findings that a central driver of *trustworthiness* is selflessness (Walster et al., 1966), this requirement was manipulated as follows. Influencers with high trustworthiness presented the product in a well-balanced way including both praise and (slight) criticism. They stressed the product was loaned to them by the brand and would be returned to the brand after the endorsement. It became apparent they were intrinsically motivated to test the product and enjoyed discovering its strengths and weaknesses. Influencers with low trustworthiness presented the product in an excessively positive way that seemed implausible and gave the impression of being an attempt to con their followers into buying the product. Moreover, it became clear that the influencers were allowed to keep the product and reaped handsome financial rewards for their endorsement.

3.2.3 Questionnaire

The data were collected via a web survey that was shared on research platforms. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: In the *first step*, the participants' demographic data (most notably, gender) were collected. In the *second step*, the participants were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental groups. They were shown the profile of an influencer of the same gender with an integrated post endorsing a pair of jeans by BOSS. The profile and post conveyed one of the eight combinations of *attractiveness* (high versus low), *expertise* (high versus low) and *trustworthiness* (high versus low), as described in the previous paragraph.

Based on the stimulus material viewed by the participants, they were asked to assess the influencer's level of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (for manipulation checks). In the *third step*, the participants' views on *brand image* (H1), *brand satisfaction* (H2) and *brand trust* (H3) as well as *purchase intention* (H4) and *price premium* (H5) in relation to the profile and post were queried.

3.2.4 Measures

Attractiveness and *expertise* were rated on two Likert-type scales with five items each adapted from Peetz (2012). *Trustworthiness* was queried by a five-item Likert-type scale adapted from Ohanian (1990). Likert-type scales by Wiedmann et al. (2014) were used to assess brand satisfaction (two items), brand image (two items), brand trust (three items), purchase intention (three items) and price premium (two items).

The quality of the scales was assessed by means of a factor analysis. For all constructs encompassing more than two items, the value of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion was 0.728–0.910. For all constructs that included two items, the value of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion was 0.5. However, if a small

number of items is used, such a relatively low value is uncritical (Bühner, 2008). Furthermore, $p_{\text{Barlett's test}} = 0.000$ applied for all constructs. Thus, all items were suitable for building the respective factors. All sets of item variables were of high importance for their respective construct (factor loadings = 0.790–0.978) (Kline, 2014). For all constructs, the contribution of the respective item variables to the explanation of the total statistical scattering was high (average variance extracted: 76.920%–95.717%) (Brosius, 2013; Hair, 1995). Internal consistency was given for all factors, and the sets of item variables were suitable for measuring the respective factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.923$ –0.961) (Nunnally, 1978). Hence, all scales used were appropriate for measuring their respective constructs.

3.3 Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks were carried out to verify whether the manipulation of the stimulus material in terms of *attractiveness* ($N_{\text{Attractive}} = 141$, $N_{\text{Unattractive}} = 147$); *expertise* ($N_{\text{High-Expertise}} = 142$, $N_{\text{Low-Expertise}} = 146$) and *trustworthiness* ($N_{\text{High-Trustworthiness}} = 142$, $N_{\text{Low-Trustworthiness}} = 146$) was perceived as intended. For this purpose, three ANOVAs were performed to compare the groups that fulfilled the respective requirements and those that did not. Thus, the respective group assignment was the independent variable. The respective evaluation of the requirement was the dependent variable. The ANOVAs all ascertained significant differences between the compared groups ($M_{\text{Diff}} = 0.801$ –1.175, $p < 0.000$), thereby confirming successful manipulation.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Sample characteristics

The data collection was conducted in Germany via a randomized online student survey from February through May 2018 and shared on research platforms. Data on 319 participants were collected. After running the rigorous algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers by means of criteria speed and consistency (Leiner, 2013), valid data from 288 participants (70.3% female) were used. The participants' average age was 25 years (18–25 years: 47.2%; 26–35 years: 41.5%; 36–45 years: 5.0%; 46–55 years: 4.4%; 56–65 years: 1.3%; 66–75 years: 0.3%).

Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses. SmartPLS software, a leading application for PLS path modeling analysis, was used. The evaluation of the model followed a two-step approach of *measurement model evaluation* and *structural model evaluation* before the results were analyzed.

3.4.2 Measurement model evaluation

For all reflective measurement constructs, the *factor loadings* must be examined. Item reliability is considered adequate when the factor loading is greater than 0.707 on its respective construct (Hulland, 1999). A bootstrapping procedure indicated that the factor loadings were 0.821–0.978 ($p < 0.001$) across the set of items (Table 1).

The *average variance extracted* measures the amount of variance a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount of variance explained by measurement error. A model can be considered convergent when the average variance extracted surpasses 0.500 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In this

model, the average variance extracted was 0.766–0.957 across the set of constructs (Table 1).

Composite reliability assesses the correlation between indicators and constructs; thus, it reflects whether a factor is suitable for explaining its components. It should be greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). In the present case, the composite reliability was 0.942–0.978 across the set of constructs (Table 1).

Discriminant validity indicates the extent to which a construct is different from others. The level of discriminant validity can be determined by means of the *Fornell–Larcker Criterion* and the exclusion of cross-loadings (Hair et al., 2014a). The *Fornell–Larcker Criterion*, according to which the average variance of each latent construct must outpace the construct's highest squared correlation with any other latent construct (Hair et al., 2012), was similarly fulfilled.

3.4.3 Structural model evaluation

To evaluate the goodness of fit of a model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of every endogenous construct should exceed the value of 0.19 in all cases (Marcoulides, 2009). In the present model, R^2 was 0.264–0.726 across the set of endogenous constructs (Table 1), thus fulfilling the criterion.

The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was evaluated by Stone–Geisser's Q^2 , which should be larger than zero (Hair et al., 2014b). A blindfolding procedure showed that, in the present model, Q^2 was 0.246–0.643 (Table 1) across the set of endogenous constructs. Thus, the predictive relevance was confirmed.

To prevent redundancy, the degree of multicollinearity of the predictors indicating a specific dependent variable in the model should be evaluated. The risk of multicollinearity is low if the variance inflation factor (VIF) value is below the threshold of five (Kline, 2016). In the present model, the VIF was 1.274–2.635 (Table 2). Hence, the assumption was fulfilled.

A core part of a structural measurement model is the hypothesis test. In this context, the path coefficients and significance levels must be considered (Table 2). Path coefficients express the relationship between two latent constructs. A path coefficient can be viewed as being influential if its value exceeds 0.100 (Lohmöller, 1989). For more rigor, path coefficients should be at least as high as 0.200 (Kock and Hadaya, 2018). The path coefficients were calculated by a bootstrapping procedure, which yielded the following results. The path coefficient between *attractiveness* and *brand satisfaction* accounted for 0.167 ($p < 0.01$), yielding partial support for *H1a*. The path coefficients linking *attractiveness* to *brand image* and *brand trust* were 0.241 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.211 ($p < 0.001$), respectively. Thus, *H1b* and *H1c* were supported. Concerning *expertise*, the path coefficient to *brand satisfaction* was 0.163 ($p < 0.01$), partly supporting *H2a*. The path coefficients from *expertise* to *brand image* and *brand trust* were beneath the threshold of 0.100 and not significant. *H2b* and *H2c* were consequently rejected. The path coefficients from *trustworthiness* to *brand satisfaction*, *brand image* and *brand trust* were 0.315 ($p < 0.001$), 0.352 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.433 ($p < 0.001$), respectively. Therefore, *H3a*–*H3c* were supported. The path coefficients from *brand satisfaction* to *purchase intention* and *price premium* were 0.298 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.285 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, supporting *H4a* and *H4b*. Finally, the path coefficients from *brand image* to *purchase intention* and *price*

Table 1 Evaluation of reflective measurement model and structural model

	Factor loadings	Level of significance (t-statistics)	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability	R ²	Q ²
Attractiveness						
AT_1	0.912	60.652*	0.766	0.942		
AT_2	0.821	35.371*				
AT_3	0.904	55.084*				
AT_4	0.827	37.116*				
AT_5	0.906	59.939*				
Expertise						
EX_1	0.912	98.685*	0.846	0.965		
EX_2	0.935	103.162*				
EX_3	0.930	106.594*				
EX_4	0.903	52.892*				
EX_5	0.918	77.365*				
Trustworthiness						
TW_1	0.904	66.618*	0.865	0.970		
TW_2	0.938	96.111*				
TW_3	0.939	111.819*				
TW_4	0.930	98.226*				
TW_5	0.939	117.501*				
Brand satisfaction						
BS_1	0.965	184.256*	0.929	0.963	0.264	0.281
BS_2	0.963	164.355*				
Brand image						
BI_1	0.964	135.263*	0.931	0.964	0.307	0.297
BI_2	0.966	154.356*				
Brand trust						
BT_1	0.964	194.194*	0.886	0.959	0.333	0.246
BT_2	0.959	169.862*				
BT_3	0.899	59.211*				
Purchase intention						
PI_1	0.957	104.997*	0.887	0.959	0.726	0.634
PI_2	0.942	102.625*				
PI_3	0.926	81.728*				
Price premium						
PP_1	0.977	237.172*	0.957	0.978	0.663	0.643
PP_2	0.979	284.976*				

Note: *Significant at level $p < 0.001$

premium were 0.597 ($p < 0.001$) and 0.570 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, in support of *H5a* and *H5b*.

3.5 Results and discussion

The results show that social media managers seeking to implement an influencer campaign should primarily pay attention to influencers' *trustworthiness*, followed by their *attractiveness*. The importance of *expertise* is negligible.

Overall, this study allows brand managers to gain more fine-grained insight into the specific effects of the requirements. Trustworthiness has the strongest and most significant impact on brand image, brand trust and brand satisfaction. Attractiveness has a significant effect on brand image and brand trust; brand satisfaction is influenced only at a low significance level by attractiveness. Finally, expertise has a small effect only on brand satisfaction. Expertise does

not have an effect on brand image or brand trust. Brand managers can use this information to prioritize specific requirements depending on the goal of their endorsement.

Brand image and brand satisfaction also have an effect on price premium and purchase intention. This suggests that attractiveness and trustworthiness might have an indirect effect on price premium and purchase intention. As influencer marketing is aimed at persuading consumers to purchase the advertised goods (Lee and Park, 2014), and purchase intentions are a critical predictor of actual purchase behavior (Kalwani and Silk, 1982; Notani, 1997), enhancing audiences' perceptions of endorser trustworthiness and attractiveness leading to an advantageous brand image and brand satisfaction could lead customers to ultimately purchase the advertised goods. However, to be able to claim this with confidence, a pursuant investigation on indirect effects should be carried out.

Table 2 Evaluation of structural model – path coefficients, *t*-values and VIF

	Path coefficients	Level of significance (<i>t</i> -statistics)	VIF
Attractiveness → Brand image	0.241	3.979*	1.274
Attractiveness → Brand trust	0.211	3.400*	
Attractiveness → Brand satisfaction	0.167	2.841**	
Brand image → Price premium	0.570	8.613*	2.635
Brand image → Purchase intention	0.597	9.875*	
Brand satisfaction → Price premium	0.285	4.333*	2.635
Brand satisfaction → Purchase intention	0.298	4.678*	
Expertise → Brand image	0.091	1.614	1.371
Expertise → Brand trust	0.045	0.756	
Expertise → Brand satisfaction	0.163	2.855**	
Trustworthiness → Brand image	0.352	5.835*	1.298
Trustworthiness → Brand trust	0.433	7.219*	
Trustworthiness → Brand satisfaction	0.313	5.121*	

Notes: *Significant at level $p < 0.001$; **significant at level $p < 0.01$

The results of this study can be compared with those of the previous studies on the Source-Credibility Model in general and with celebrities in particular. First, it is noteworthy that in early versions of the Source-Credibility Model, only two requirements were included, specifically, *expertise* and *trustworthiness* (Bowers and Phillips, 1967). The results of this study suggest that for influencers, the model could also be narrowed down to two requirements: *attractiveness* and *trustworthiness*. In contrast to the results of this study, the (general) findings of McGuire (1985) indicated that expertise was the most important dimension of source credibility in a general sense. Amos *et al.* (2015) carried out a meta-study on numerous requirements for celebrity endorsement. With regard to the requirements of the Source-Credibility Model, they ranked trustworthiness second, expertise third and attractiveness fourth (the greatest importance was ascribed to “negative celebrity information”). The comparably high importance of expertise is also highlighted by the findings of Premeaux (2005, 2009), who argued that, for celebrities, expertise was a particularly crucial requirement that could compensate for weaknesses in terms of trustworthiness. However, the results may be supported by the (general) finding of McGinnies and Ward (1980) that a trustworthy communicator is more persuasive regardless of whether he or she is an expert. Overall, the results show that the requirements are ranked differently for influencers and celebrities. This is an important note for brand managers designing influencer campaigns because, in the absence of models on influencer, they often use models developed for celebrities (Childers *et al.*, 2019).

4. Implications

4.1 Implications for management and research

Influencers could refine their objectives in light of the results of this study. Virkkunen and Norhio (2019) found that social influencers estimated that the most important requirements to their success were being accessible, authentic, honest and social. Abert *et al.* (2019) identified trust, continuity, variation, competence development and

network as crucial requirements to success from the perspective of social influencers. Virkkunen and Norhio (2019) as well as Abert *et al.* (2019) have thus demonstrated that influencers have well recognized the importance of trustworthiness. On the other hand, attractiveness seems to be a requirement that they do not give enough considerations. Finally, influencers seem also to assume that expertise is an imported requirement to success [reflected by competence development in Abert *et al.*'s (2019) study]. In light of the results of this study, influencers can be advised to care more for attractiveness and less for expertise.

The results could also serve as a decision support for brand managers. A study by Childers *et al.* (2019) has developed an overall concept about how influencer marketing is handled currently. Brand managers are still struggling with the questions of what influencer marketing is, what its value is and how it should be managed. They partially use traditional advertising models, which obviously produce some limitations with reference to influencer marketing, notably regarding credibility. Overall, huge uncertainty exists among practitioners about the use of social influencers. Credibility has been recognized as a success requirement; however, practitioners are not very comprehensive or clear about how to achieve it (Childers *et al.*, 2019). It should be noted that practitioner-oriented guides and indices of influencers have been developed. These indices regularly focus on requirements related to requirements that can very easily be expressed in figures (e.g. number of followers, engagement rate with the community, number of mentions and the ratio of the number of comments/likes to the number of followers) (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Arous *et al.*, 2020). For example, the social influencer index by Aggrawal *et al.* (2018) considers engagement, reach, sentiment and growth. Arora *et al.*'s (2019) index uses 39 requirements stemming from the categories Overall Footprint, Engagements and Outreach, Hourly Engagement Velocity, Daily Engagement, Velocity Audience Sentiment and Posting Rate. However, this set of requirements has been found to be often insufficient (Arous *et al.*, 2020).

Merely adhering to the aforementioned requirements may entice brand managers to make suboptimal decisions. Fred

(2015) found that the size of an influencer's viewership is negatively related with his or her trustworthiness. Bearing in mind that trustworthiness is a very relevant requirement according to the result of this study, selecting an influencer with a high viewership may hence also have negative consequences for the brand. This pinpoints the necessity of considering and analyzing the "entire picture" of requirements.

Ki and Kim (2019) also argue that practitioners set suboptimal priorities. They provide the example of an influencer who has high expertise in his/her specific field and has amassed a very high number of followers, 50 million, but might nevertheless not deploy the best marketing effects because his/her content is not visually appealing. They suggest that practitioners should instead select another influencer with visually appealing content, even if that influencer has fewer followers.

The results of this study support this line of reasoning and suggest that the two requirements of trustworthiness and attractiveness should be integrated into the set of relevant requirements that should be fulfilled by influencers, particularly in terms of influencer indices (perhaps as antecedent requirement) or suggestions to practitioners on how to achieve credibility. The requirement of expertise can be given less consideration.

The high importance of *trustworthiness* may actually be good news for social media managers. As selflessness is a major driver of trustworthiness (Walster *et al.*, 1966), social media managers should select influencers who act in a selfless way. Suitable influencers should endorse a product because they are sincerely convinced of its worth and not (merely) because they will be paid. This result means that the best influencers may be those to whom the contracting brand must pay the least money, which represents considerable savings potential. Today, influencer campaigns without financial remuneration are realistic (Nirschl and Steinberg, 2018). Moreover, to appear more trustworthy, influencers should always communicate through two-sided messages [consisting of both positives and negatives (Kamins *et al.*, 1989)]. A further driver of trustworthiness in influencer marketing is transparency. It can be achieved by giving full information about products, the formation of opinions and partnerships (Audrezet *et al.*, 2018). In future research, it could be investigated whether language features affect trustworthiness (Larrimore *et al.*, 2011).

The *attractiveness* of the influencer is a further requirement to which social media managers should pay attention. They can be advised to evaluate influencers' attractiveness through pretests or scientific algorithms (Bernini-Hodel *et al.*, 2017). Influencers should signal attractiveness to their followers, e.g. by dressing in an advantageous way or by using professional photos that show them at their best (Lou and Yuan, 2019). The relatively high importance of attractiveness may be rooted in the fact that although BOSS is a luxury brand, it is also an entry-range brand offered at an affordable price, which may have led the participants to assume a *moderate-involvement situation*. Concerning avatars, under moderate-involvement conditions, attractiveness was more persuasive than expertise (Holzwarth *et al.*, 2006). In further research, the importance of attractiveness and expertise could be reappraised under high-involvement conditions. Finally, although attractiveness is

commonly equated with facial attractiveness (Patzner, 1983), in the specific case of clothing, other potential expressions of attractiveness, such as body attractiveness or even "inner beauty" (Langmeyer and Shank, 1994), could also be considered.

The close-to-minuscule importance of *expertise* means that social media managers need hardly be concerned with this requirement. This finding is surprising and counterintuitive against the backdrop of the abovementioned studies' general findings and findings specifically related to celebrities. Four possible assumptions for the surprisingly low importance of expertise and the lack of support for most of the related hypotheses in the specific context of this research may be provided by the following frameworks, shedding light on the case-dependent relevance of attractiveness and expertise:

- Social adaptation theory (Kahle and Homer, 1985) suggests that the adaptive significance of information determines its impact. Thus, information has adaptive significance in guiding a consumer's brand evaluation and choice. Kamins (1990) refined social adaptation theory into his attractiveness match-up hypothesis for celebrity endorsers. This implies that the message conveyed by the image of an endorser and the image of the product should converge to create advantageous product- or ad-related effects. Hence, an attractive endorser could serve as an effective source of information for a product that is attractiveness-related. For an attractiveness-unrelated product, the match-up between endorsers' physical attractiveness and relationship to the attractiveness of the product is not present, and the success of the endorsement thus has to be motivated by other requirements such as expertise (Smith and Hunt, 1978). An unattractive endorser could then even be more advantageous (Bower and Landreth, 2001; Caballero and Solomon, 1984). However, these considerations must be regarded with caution, because Till and Busler (2000) could not empirically support them. Overall, Kamins (1990) attractiveness match-up hypothesis may also be applied in the context of this research as BOSS' products are *attractiveness-related*. In future research, an investigation into the case-dependent relevance of attractiveness and expertise might be carried out.
- A further reason for the low importance of expertise might be that consumers might consider an influencer as a "person stemming from the middle of the society" (compared to a traditional celebrity endorser) (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2010). After all, influencers not only endorse products but also communicate about their everyday lives and offer the possibility of personal contact. These characteristics create a feeling of nearness. Hence, consumers might not expect to be provided with an expert endorsement by a professional product tester. Instead, they might expect the influencer's view to be one of an unprofessional user. This presumption is further substantiated by the findings of Huang and Chen (2006) who argue that consumers rely more on the perceptions of other consumers than on the perceptions of experts.

- Lou and Yuan (2019) assume that influencers are by default attributed a certain degree of expertise; therefore, this requirement would not be a parameter that affects the perceivers' reactions to their content.

Overall, practitioners should continuously monitor consumers' perceptions of influencers' attractiveness and trustworthiness (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Further matters of interest might be the possible interconnections. In terms of celebrities, the findings of Friedman *et al.* (1978) indicate correlations among all three requirements at different significance levels.

4.2 Conclusion

This investigation has provided practitioners with an overview on which of the requirements of the Source-Credibility Model are relevant for influencers and their hierarchy. Unlike the extant work (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Jin and Muqaddam, 2019), it has focused on the impacts of the requirements on the brand. It was revealed that influencers' trustworthiness primarily and attractiveness secondarily can positively affect brand satisfaction, image and trust. Brand satisfaction and image are positively related to purchase intention and price premium. In contrast, the relevance of expertise is almost nil. Social media managers should be aware of this hierarchy.

The results contribute to the clarification of contradictions between extant studies (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Martensen *et al.*, 2018). Overall, it becomes apparent that attractiveness and trustworthiness are relevant requirements that should find their proper place next to traditional, more numeric requirements such as number of followers. As noted, merely using the traditionally established requirements might entice brand managers to make suboptimal decisions.

This study joins the collection of works that have analyzed the Source-Credibility Model in partial or total form for diverse types of endorsers such as celebrities, anonymous models or sales avatars. It shows that influencers have their own hierarchy of requirements.

Three major issues should be addressed in future research: whether the structure of requirements might be different for other types of products (products from industries other than fashion and with different involvement), whether the requirements are interconnected and whether there are further relevant requirements.

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Further reading

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Appendix

Table A1 Stimulus material

Item	Item chart			Average Variance extracted	Cronbach's α
	Factor Loadings	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	$p_{\text{Barlett's Test}}$		
<i>a) Attractiveness scale (AT) adapted from Peetz (2012) (five items)</i>					
AT_1: [Name of social influencer] is attractive	0.933	0.873	0.000	76.920%	0.925
AT_2: [Name of social influencer] is charismatic	0.790				
AT_3: [Name of social influencer] is good-looking	0.928				
AT_4: The physical makeup of [name of social influencer] is admirable	0.806				
AT_5 [Name of social influencer] is beautiful	0.917				
<i>b) Expertise scale (EX) adapted from Peetz (2012) (five items)</i>					
EX_1: [Name of social influencer] has a good understanding of fashion and style	0.917	0.910	0.000	84.526%	0.955
EX_2: [Name of social influencer] is an expert in fashion and style	0.907				
EX_3: [Name of social Influencer] is knowledgeable in fashion and style	0.935				
EX_4: [Name of social influencer] is qualified in fashion and style	0.927				
EX_5: [Name of social influencer] has experience in fashion and style	0.914				
<i>c) Trustworthiness scale (TW) adapted from Ohanian (1990) (five items)</i>					
TW_1: [Name of social influencer] is dependable	0.905	0.888	0.000	86.521%	0.961
TW_2: [Name of social influencer] is honest	0.937				
TW_3: [Name of social influencer] is reliable	0.940				
TW_4: [Name of social influencer] is sincere	0.930				
TW_5: [Name of social influencer] is trustworthy	0.938				
<i>d) Brand Satisfaction Scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (two items)</i>					
In light of this social influencer campaign					
BS_1: ... I would be very satisfied with the brand BOSS	0.964	0.500	0.000	92.895%	0.923
BS_2: ... the brand BOSS would meet I' expectations absolutely	0.964				
<i>e) Brand image scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (two items)</i>					
In light of this social influencer campaign					
BI_1: ... I would like the brand BOSS very much	0.965	0.500	0.000	93.111%	0.926
BI_2: ... I would find the brand BOSS to be really likable	0.965				
<i>f) Brand trust scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (three items)</i>					
In light of this social influencer campaign					
BT_1: ... I would trust the brand BOSS very much	0.962	0.728	0.000	88.649%	0.936
BT_2: ... I would find the brand BOSS to be very good	0.957				
BT_3: ... I would rely very much on the brand BOSS	0.904				
<i>g) Purchase intention scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (three items)</i>					
In light of this social influencer campaign					
PI_1: ... I would be ready to buy products by the brand BOSS in the future	0.958	0.750	0.000	88.678%	0.936
PI_2: ... I would have the intention to buy products by the brand BOSS in the future	0.944				
PI_3: ... I would plan to buy products by the brand BOSS if they have the financial possibility	0.923				
<i>h) Price premium scale adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) (two items)</i>					
PP_1: ... I would be willing to pay a higher price to buy a product by the brand BOSS	0.978	0.500	0.000	95.717	0.955
PP_2: ... the products of the brand BOSS would be worth a higher price than other products to me	0.978				

Table A2 Item table

High expertise	My name is [Name of social influencer] and I study fashion design in the master programme at the Fashion Design College Düsseldorf. In 2018, I won the Audi Fashion Award for my collection On my profile and my YouTube channel you can find the latest reviews for high quality fashion brands
Low expertise	My name is [Name of social influencer] and I am studying computer science in the master programme at the HS Düsseldorf On my profile and my YouTube channel you will regularly find the latest reviews on the topic of computer games and gamer equipment
High trustworthiness	<i>Post of the influencer:</i> My review of the BOSS Jeans Red Cast Denim/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans – a great pair of jeans, with small weaknesses <i>Commenter:</i> Thank you very much, it is really cool that you report objectively and balanced on the jeans with all the strengths and weaknesses <i>Reply of the influencer:</i> Exactly, I get the products only on loan. It is much more fun to test the products objectively and to discover strengths and weaknesses. If I got the product as a gift, it would be something like bribery to me
Low trustworthiness	<i>Post of the influencer:</i> My review of the BOSS Jeans Red Cast Denim/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans/BOSS ESSENTIAL Jeans – Best Jeans ever!!! Need to get it! <i>Commenter 1:</i> Thank you very much, are there also negative things about these Jeans? <i>Reply of the influencer:</i> No, they are absolutely perfect. Go and get one <i>Commenter 2:</i> [Name of Commenter 1], no, you know that [Name of Social Influencer] is a social influencer. . . S/he gets the clothes from the brand for free and is paid to write positive posts

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A2. The complex triad of congruence issues in influencer marketing

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ACADEMIC PAPER

WILEY

The complex triad of congruence issues in influencer marketing

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Abstract

Finding a fitting endorser has proven to be one of the most delicate and critical tasks of influencer marketing. This research explores the relevance of the congruency of the influencer personality with (1) brand personality and consumers' (2) actual/ (3) ideal selves. Additionally, the (4) moderating role of involvement is considered, the impacts on post attitude/belief, brand trust and purchase intention are thereby studied. The novelty of this study lies in the integral examination of the types of congruencies and involvement in the context of influencer marketing as well as the consideration of their impact on the brand-related variables. Based on an online survey with 547 participants analyzed by means of structural equation modeling in SmartPLS, partly counterintuitive findings were produced. When the involvement level rises, congruence with consumers' actual selves becomes more important. Under low-involvement conditions, practitioners should pay more attention to influencers' fit with consumers' ideal selves. An adequate fit between brand and endorser is paramount and becomes even more important under high-involvement conditions. Overall, this study reveals that the three types of congruency and involvement interact in a very unique way in the context of influencer marketing.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Influencers are a robustly growing marketing communication channel. This is no wonder as they offer advantages over other modes of marketing communication. Compared with traditional advertising, they provide value by communicating more purposively with the target group and are perceived as more believable and less annoying (W. Li & Huang, 2016; Schouten et al., 2019). Even better, influencers offer a cost advantage (Gretzel, 2018; Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018).

However, conversely, these advantages also present challenges. A particularly large challenge is the question of finding a well-fitting influencer. As of 2019, the vegan influencer Alyse Parker endorsed the meat deliverer "Butcher Box." This poor fit of influencer and brand displeased both the fans of Alyse Parker and Butcher Box

(Parker, 2020). It is no wonder, however, that this failure occurred. As little research has been conducted on the congruence issue, practitioners are often baffled. Lacking alternatives, they wonder whether they can simply adapt the models that have been developed for traditional (celebrity) marketing (Childers et al., 2019). This approach might go wrong as celebrities and influencers differ in terms of some essential characteristics. While hybrids that share the characteristics of celebrities and influencers do exist (Chen, 2020), it can be stated that in contrast to celebrities, at least micro influencers are perceived and expected to be more authentic, closer to consumers and provide a more interactive communication experience (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In this work, the focus lies on micro influencers employing social posts as these are regarded as the future of influencer marketing (Geysler, 2017).

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In addition to this research gap, studies on congruence issues with influencers or celebrities have mostly not considered the role that product involvement might play. For example, as high-involvement products elicit consumers to process product-related messages more intensively, they might more strongly respond to a possible mismatch between the brand and endorser (J. G. Lee & Park, 2014). However, such speculations must be viewed with skepticism as theoretical elaborations suggest that involvement functions in very individual ways for influencer campaigns, which differ from other endorsement types (Ekstam & Bjurling, 2018; Trivedi & Sama, 2019). Taking these multiple research gaps together, the following question arises. What is the importance of congruence in the context of influencer marketing? What is the role of involvement in this context? Congruence can thereby be expanded into (1) congruence with the brand, (2) congruence with the actual self and (3) congruence with the ideal self of the user. When considering this diversification, it becomes apparent how differences between influencers and celebrities might affect their relevance. For example, the finding that “pure” influencers are considered to be “[people] like you and me” while “pure” celebrities are perceived to exist on a societal level that is far removed from its audience suggests that actual self-congruence might be of much greater importance for “pure” influencers whereas actual self-congruence is better suited to “pure” celebrities (Temperley & Tangen, 2006; Wiedmann et al., 2010).

Hence, the ultimate contribution of this study lies in the investigation of the aforementioned relationships with regard to influencers. An overarching framework encompassing all three types of congruencies is developed. Practitioners are provided with a holistic overview of the effects of the different types of congruence, which has not yet been provided by the extant studies. This framework becomes more refined by the fact that the impacts on post- and influencer-related variables are considered. In the prior research on influencer-related congruence issues, the focus has often been merely on influencer-related variables (Hermanda et al., 2019). Brand-related variables might nevertheless be relevant for a brand as the tangible consequences on it are an indicator of the success of the endorsement (Jin & Ryu, 2020).

In the remainder of this work, we first outline a conceptual framework including the three reference points of congruence and involvement based on Kelman's (1961) theory on opinion change, Kahle et al.'s (1986) social adaptation theory and Petty et al.'s (1981) elaboration likelihood model. The hypotheses are tested with data from an online survey of 547 participants. The analyses employ structural equation modeling using smart PLS. The results reveal that brand congruence appears to have a large effect on post-related variables. When the involvement level increases, the effect of brand congruence on post attitude increases. The impact of ideal self-congruence decreases with rising involvement, while the impact of actual self-congruence increases. The latter finding is a surprising contribution as it is not predicted by the theory. Overall, social media managers are provided with the contribution of a concept that enables them to select the appropriate appeal by matching congruity type with the audience's route to persuasion.

2 | CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Influencers

Influencers are individuals who create *valuable content*, have *high reputations in specific fields* (Cha et al., 2010; S. Kim et al., 2017) and are followed by *a large number of users* on online social networks (De Veirman et al., 2017).

As influencer marketing has become more popular in recent years, scholars have investigated its success factors. Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2018, 2020) presented an overview of the success factors of endorsers and influencers in particular and suggested five main categories of success factors: (a) endorser distinctive factors, which describe factors that are inherent to the endorser (e.g., attractiveness, trustworthiness); (b) perceiver congruence factors, which involve the interplay of the endorser with a targeted audience; (c) brand/product congruence factors, which describe the interplay of the endorser with the brand; (d) management factors, which include “behind-the-scenes” administrative issues such as the financial constraints of the endorsement and, finally, (e) communication factors, which are related to the issue of whether an endorser can communicate in an adequate way, for example, the suitability of his or her voice. Given the goals of the current work, the literature review will focus especially on literature addressing the categories of (a) perceiver congruence factors and (b) brand/product congruence factors. Influencer can be classified based on their amount of followers and influence as either mega-influencers, macro-influencers, micro-influencers or nano-influencers. While the “bigger” types of influencers resemble celebrities, the smaller types of influencers (Geysler, 2017), on which the focus lies in the course of this research differ from celebrities by being perceived as to be more authentic, closer to consumers and provide a more interactive communication experience (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Moreover, issues regarding brand congruence has been outlined to be of particularly high importance for them as the endorsement of appropriate brands is part of their self-conception (Geysler, 2017).

The congruence of the influencer with the following constructs will be the subject of this research:

Brand personality is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). It embodies knowledge and shapes brand perceptions (Freling & Forbes, 2005). Models conceptualizing brand personalities similar to those of humans have been developed (e.g., Aaker, 1997). Brand personality is regularly used as a vehicle to assess how similar (or dissimilar) a brand is to another entity (a new product category, another brand, an event, or an individual) (Fleck & Quester, 2007; Maille & Fleck, 2011). In this way, it also appears to be well suited for a comparison between a brand and an influencer.

The actual self is defined as the authentic self, which is related to who an individual is at present. Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) emphasized that the need for self-congruity accrues from the motivation to “[maintain] the coherence of a personal conceptual

system" (Epstein, 1992). Once such a set of beliefs is established, individuals strive to maintain it (Klipfel et al., 2014). The ideal self, in contrast, is defined as the individual's idea of how he or she would like to be (Dolich, 1969). It is shaped by an individual's imagination of ideals and aspirational goals (Lazzari et al., 1978; Wylie, 1979).

2.2 | Current research situation

In the extant research on (a) perceiver congruence factors, many questions remain unanswered. While there is a tendency to affirm that the actual self-congruence between a user and an influencer can positively affect the influencer and the brand (e.g., Shan et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), the relevance of the desired self remains much more obscure. At best, the findings of Schouten et al.'s (2019) comparative study shed some light on this issue. Against their hypothesis, they found that influencer endorsements led to more wishful identification than celebrity endorsements. However, a study examining the desired self-congruence of an influencer as an independent variable and its impacts on influencer and brand-related constructs is still missing. Concerning the moderating effect of involvement, the current research situation is similarly very scarce. In particular, to date, no study has analyzed the moderating effect of involvement and desired self-congruence in the context of influencer marketing.

Concerning the (b) product-related factors, the extant body of literature has obtained conflicting results on whether influencer-product congruence is beneficial or unimportant (Breves et al., 2019; De Cicco et al., 2020; D. Y. Kim & Kim, 2020), and it has pinpointed the need for further research on this issue. Moreover, no study has examined the potential moderating effect of involvement in the context of influencer-product congruence.

In conclusion, the following key gaps in the research can be identified: The impacts of ideal self-congruence and product endorser-congruence in particular appear to be underexplored. Similarly, the moderating role of involvement on the different types of congruence has been very scarcely considered. It should be stressed that adapting findings developed for celebrities does not appear to be a solution in this context as the differences in the action mechanisms of the variables are not yet well understood and are often found to be very remote from that suggested by theoretical considerations and researchers' intuition (Schouten et al., 2019; Trivedi & Sama, 2019; Xiao et al., 2018).

2.3 | Basic theories

The relevance and methods of operation of three forms of congruence - (1) the brand, (2) the actual self or (3) the ideal self - are explained by two theories: (1) Kelman's (1961) theory on opinion change and (2) Kahle et al.'s (1986) social adaptation theory. Involvement is conceptualized by (3) Petty et al.'s (1981) elaboration likelihood model.

These theories have been found to work well together (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and have also been used simultaneously in the prior research (e.g., Y. Lee & Koo, 2016).

2.4 | Theory on opinion change

The theory on opinion change explains the impacts of the actual self and the ideal self. It is a fundamental theory of opinion formation and is designed to help investigators identify the motivations that underlie opinion-changing processes. The effect of brand endorsement on advertising effectiveness is determined by identification (with the endorser). When consumers believe that they share interests, values, or characteristics with an endorser, they are more likely to adopt the endorser's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. This belief can accrue either from *congruence with the actual self*, which is the degree to which individuals perceive that they have commonalities with another individual, or from *congruence with the ideal self*, which is the desire to be like another individual (Basil, 1996; Kelman, 1961).

2.5 | Social adaptation theory

Social adaptation theory illustrates the remaining form of congruence, specifically, the congruence between endorser and brand. This implies that the adaptive significance of information will determine its impact. The processing of information is based on the usefulness of adaptation. If a perceiver finds that a particular source of information does not facilitate adaptation, he or she will stop processing that source (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Based on this reasoning, Kamins (1990) demonstrated that the physical attractiveness of a celebrity endorser positively affects consumers' evaluations of a brand used to enhance one's attractiveness but is of no use if a brand's product has no relationship to physical attractiveness. In general, it can be assumed that when endorsers exhibit any type of high brand congruence, a high level of expertise and credibility is assumed by perceivers (Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013; Y. Lee & Koo, 2015).

2.6 | Elaboration likelihood model

The elaboration likelihood model explains the interplay of involvement with the three forms of congruence. It is based on two basic assumptions: (1) People are motivated to hold correct attitudes. (2) Although people want to hold correct attitudes, the amount and nature of issue-relevant elaboration in which people are willing or able to engage to evaluate a message vary with individual and situational factors.

The amount of cognitive processing performed for an attitude change depends on the involvement. Attitude changes occur through two routes: a peripheral route that minimizes cognitive processing and a central route that requires intense processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Low involvement occurs when the interest in a stimulus is low (Antil, 1984). The importance of persuasive arguments is small while superficial characteristics are important (Holzwarth et al., 2006; Petty et al., 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Attitude change travels through the peripheral route along with simple cues associated with the issue (Roozen & Claeys, 2010). In contrast, in high-involvement conditions, consumers search for information more intensively (Coulter et al., 2003). They are devoted to learning about the true merits of a product and exert the necessary cognitive effort to process issue-relevant arguments (Petty et al., 1983). Elaboration becomes more likely. In this case, the attitude travels through the central route whereby a person exercises diligent consideration of the information (Roozen & Claeys, 2010). The research in cognitive and social psychology provides strong support for the view that, sometimes, people engage in “controlled,” “deep,” “systematic,” and/or “effortful” analyses of stimuli, and, other times, their analyses are better characterized as “automatic,” “shallow,” “heuristic,” and/or “mindless” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

2.7 | Theory integration

The elaboration likelihood model can serve as a bracket that helps to tie together Kelman's (1961) theory on opinion change and (2) Kahle et al.'s (1986) social adaptation theory. Petty et al. (1981) suggested that many theories of attitude change could be roughly placed along the elaboration continuum. In their 1986 work, Petty and Cacioppo discuss their elaboration likelihood model with numerous other theories. They thereby convey information on how to harmoniously integrate other theories into their elaboration likelihood model. They provide the general statement that many other theories consider *either* only (1) low involvement situations, where attitude change travels along a peripheral route or (2) high-involvement conditions, where attitude travels along a central route. Therefore, when integrating a theory in the elaboration likelihood model, it must be checked for whether it is based on (1) low or (2) high involvement conditions. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) explicitly mention Kelman's (1961) theory on opinion change and classify it as a theory whose assumptions and conditions describe a process of attitude change driven by simple affective cues. Therefore, it would operate under low involvement conditions. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) do not refer to Kahle et al.'s (1986) social adaptation theory (probably because both works were published in the same year). Therefore, based on Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) general statement, in the course of hypothesis development, it will be explored whether the theory classifies as *either* superficial, symbolic information with no data on the true merits of the product or as argumentative, evidence-based information. An important addition to this issue is provided by the works of Y. Lee and Koo (2016) and Handriana and Wisandiko (2017), which forge a link between the elaboration likelihood model and social adaptation theory. For example, Y. Lee and Koo's (2016) work on celebrity endorsement uses both theories to infer that product endorser congruence on the level of expertise and

physical attractiveness is more intensively processed under high-involvement conditions.

3 | HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In the following hypotheses, the roles of the three types of congruence will be introduced based on the example of the endorsement of “Butcher Box” by Alyse Parker. As most of the subjects of this study have not yet been investigated for influencers, other types of endorsers, especially celebrities and different types of online endorsers (e.g., online reviewers, bloggers), will be considered.

Although the findings on these types of endorsers can provide some clues, one must not lose track of their differences from influencers. Celebrities are regularly considered to be more aloof and distant from users than influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2019). However, other types of online endorsement (user-generated content, e.g., online reviewers) can be understood as being more grounded and similar to an average user (Schach, 2018). Overall, influencers can be located between celebrity endorsement and other forms of user-generated content (Newman, 2015). In the course of hypothesis development, it will be investigated whether such differences can impact the expected outcomes.

3.1 | The effects of congruence with the brand, the actual self and the desired self

The endorsement of the meat deliverer “Butcher Box” by the vegan influencer Alyse Parker angered the brand's fans. They stated that they found the endorsement incongruous and ridiculous (Parker, 2020). The reasons for this can be found in social adaptation theory, which states that the effectiveness of an endorsement is tied to the degree to which the image, personality, or expertise of the endorser fits the advertised product or brand (Basil, 1996; Kelman, 1961). Even a simple match between the physical characteristics of spokespersons and the perceived characteristics of brands produces effects in product evaluations (d'Astous & Bitz, 1995; Kanungo & Pang, 1973; McSweeney & Bierley, 1984).

Consumers utilize a source of information only to the extent that it facilitates adaptation to environmental conditions. If there is a match between endorser and brand, the endorser becomes an effective source of information with regard to the effectiveness or benefits of the brand (Kamins, 1990). However, if congruence is lacking, unfavorable product evaluations will result because consumers must change their cognitive structures (Kanungo & Pang, 1973).

Numerous scholars have argued that celebrity-brand congruence is a determinant of endorsement effectiveness (e.g., Till et al., 2008; Till & Busler, 1998, 2000). Notably, Choi and Rifon (2012) argued that congruity enhances ad attitude while Kahle and Homer (1985) showed that congruity increases the trustworthiness of communication. However, the process of how and to what extent these findings transfer to influencers is unknown. In theory, there are two opposing schools of

thought arguing *either* for a *very high* or *very low* importance relative to other endorser types (Breves et al., 2019). Proponents of a *very high* importance of congruence argue that influencer marketing is experienced as regular communication without (pure) persuasive intentions. If media users notice a mismatch between the brand and the influencer, they might cognitively stumble over the unsuitable affiliation and consequently perceive the influencer and his or her message to be less credible. They are likely to assume a persuasive and commercial intent as they feel that the influencer wants to palm off the product on them (Evans et al., 2017; Koernig & Boyd, 2009). Therefore, congruence between influencers and brands would be of very high importance. Opponents of this line of thought argue that brand congruence is overshadowed by interpersonal connection. As media users perceive an influencer as one of them, they will seek highly personal advice. As long as this is provided, an actual connection between the influencer and the brand will be irrelevant (Breves et al., 2019).

In the empirical research, Schouten et al. (2019) hypothesized that this type of congruence will be *more pronounced* for influencers than celebrities. This was presumed to be the case because influencers are viewed as representative of particular domains of interest, such as “beauty vloggers,” while celebrities will not have developed such a distinct, exclusive specialty (Balog et al., 2008; Schouten et al., 2019) However, Schouten et al. (2019) could not confirm this hypothesis.

Overall, it must be noted that there are high theoretical discrepancies regarding the relevance of brand congruence. To make matters more complex, empirical results have been shown to work in a different way than scholars have predicted based on theory, which highlights the relevance of further investigating this issue.

H1. Congruence between the influencer and the brand has a positive effect on (a) *post attitude* and (b) *post belief*.

The endorsement of the meat delivery service “Butcher Box” by the vegan influencer Alyse Parker also incensed her followers. Her vegan followers stated that they could no longer identify with her (Parker, 2020).

This finding may be explained by the theory on opinion change. It states that a person who identifies with an endorser is more likely to adopt modeled behaviors and to engage in advocated behaviors (Basil, 1996). Individuals like similar sources more than dissimilar ones (Byrne, 1971). This preference facilitates the flow of information as perceived communication barriers are lower and communication volume becomes higher. Individuals also feel more comfortable choosing a similar source due to presumed common needs (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). Additionally, bearing in mind that consumers use brands to signal their identity and reaffirm their self-image (Bodner & Prelec, 2005; Dunning, 2005), actual self-congruence with the endorser facilitates perceivers to adopt their (positive) perception of the brand.

In the event of actual self-congruence, the persuasiveness of a celebrity endorser increases (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Pradhan et al., 2014). This should be even more true for influencers. In contrast to celebrities, influencers are perceived as people “like you and me” (Kamps & Schetter, 2018; Wiedmann et al., 2010). In Djafarova and

Rushworth's (2017) qualitative interviews on the differences between celebrities and influencers, the participants expressed that it was highly important that an influencer was similar to them (e.g., in terms of personal taste, income or any other reference point). This was not true for celebrities who were perceived as aloof individuals who inhabit another world. This finding was reflected by Shan et al. (2020) who argue that the extent of consumers' actual self-congruence with an influencer leads to a more positive attitude toward brand content.

As research on the effect of similarity for genuine influencers is relatively scarce, further insight can be gained by considering other types of online endorsers: Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) argued that a blogger who was perceived as similar to the information seeker was more influential. Electronic word of mouth (EWOM) stemming from demographically similar sources is more influential than information from dissimilar sources (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Similarity is crucial in determining credibility perceptions and attitudes toward user-generated content (Ayeh et al., 2013). Of course, it cannot be definitively stated whether these findings developed for other, smaller types of online endorsers apply to influencers with the same strength (Schach, 2018).

H2. Actual self-congruence between the consumer and the influencer has a positive effect on (a) *post attitude* and (b) *post belief*.

Alyse Parker's endorsement of “Butcher Box” enraged a third group of followers. These were the followers striving toward a vegan diet. They expressed that they could no longer admire her as their role model and were highly disappointed (Parker, 2020). In light of these findings, the question arises as to the role played by identity in the context of an influencer endorsement. According to the theory on opinion change, individuals also identify with models that fit their perception of how they would like to be. These models are defined as an actual or imaginary individual conceived as having significant relevance upon an individual's evaluations, aspirations, or behavior (Park & Lessig, 1977). Hence, in an attempt to achieve their ideal self-image, consumers tend to conform to attitudes and behaviors if an endorser's image is congruent with their ideal self-image (Choi & Rifon, 2012).

Empirical findings show that consumers reject brands endorsed by celebrities who do not match their ideal self (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Congruence with the desired self induces favorable responses to an advertisement (Choi & Rifon, 2012) and positively impacts ad attitude (Çakır & Çakır, 2015). It is, however, not guaranteed that these findings can be adapted to influencers. Celebrities are generally labeled as representing an aspirational reference group for consumers (Dwivedi et al., 2014). They are perceived as highly superficial individuals who exist on a level that consumers would like to reach but cannot actually do so (Temperley & Tangen, 2006). In contrast, consumers perceive influencers as being closer to themselves, less superficial and more down-to-earth, endowing them with great powers of persuasion (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) expressed that the promotion of fitness DVDs to address weight-related problems was more persuasive if carried out by influencers than

by celebrities. They argued that an influencer was likely to be perceived as having been overweight while a celebrity was considered to be above such ordinary problems. These findings, however, are refuted by Schouten et al. (2019), who found that desired self-congruence was even more important for influencers than celebrities. In light of these conflicting results, the verification of the relevance of ideal self-congruence appears to be a matter of high relevance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3. Ideal self-congruence with the influencer has a positive effect on (a) *post attitude* and (b) *post belief*.

3.2 | The moderating effect of involvement on congruence with the brand, actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence according to the elaboration likelihood model

The elaboration likelihood model suggests that, under high-involvement conditions, strong arguments offer more cues to remember than weak arguments and are thus more persuasive. In contrast, under low-involvement conditions, peripheral cues such as admiration of the source are likely to have great impact on persuasion regardless of the argument's strength. Because in high-involvement situations, individuals are more motivated to devote cognitive resources to the cognitively taxing and incremental process of assessing an endorsement of a brand, they pay attention to the quality of an argument and make inferences about the relationship between the brand and its endorser (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; J. G. Lee & Park, 2014; Sirgy & Su, 2000).

Empirically, it has been found that the impacts of endorser-product match develop in a stronger way when consumers are motivated and able to elaborate on information (J. G. Lee & Park, 2014; Peracchio & Tybout, 1996). These findings suggest that the congruence between brand and endorser requires a high amount of cognitive processing so that persuasion travels through the direct route. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4. The level of involvement positively moderates the impact of congruence between the influencer and the brand on (a) *post attitude* and (b) *post belief*.

In their discussion, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) indicated that actual and ideal self-congruence might be more relevant under low rather than high involvement conditions. Although this is an issue that has been acknowledged to be theoretically relevant, relatively little consideration has been given to it. It has been generally stated that studies exploring the interplay of involvement and personality issues are limited (Ekstam & Bjurling, 2018). Fleck et al. (2012), for example, have mentioned that it might be relevant to refine their results on the questions of congruence of celebrity endorsers for different involvement conditions. The role of involvement might even vary among types of social media endorsements. For example, under high involvement conditions, endorsements by influencers have been found to generate higher brand

attitudes than other forms of social media endorsements (Ekstam & Bjurling, 2018). It is thus apparent that involvement is a variable that varies individually, and the question of how it interacts with the three types of congruence in influencer marketing is relevant.

Johar and Sirgy (1991) used the elaboration likelihood model to introduce their concept of the “self-congruity route.” The self-congruity route to persuasion describes a psychological process in which consumers focus on source cues and match those cues to their actual and/or ideal self-concept. This route is employed when the involvement level is low as actual/ideal self-congruity classifies as lowly cognitively taxing, holistic and simplistic criteria (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). However, there are also examples of contradictions to this theory. Under high-involvement conditions, consumers tend to rely more on cues; require more information and, in general, think harder. Therefore, it is possible that consumers also process the forms of the actual self and the ideal self in a stronger way (Racherla et al., 2012). In the context of online product reviews, Racherla et al. (2012) found that the effect of perceived similarity between consumer and reviewer was *even greater* under high involvement conditions.

We are now faced with the contradictory scenario of the findings of Johar and Sirgy (1991) and those of Racherla et al. (2012). Against this backdrop, it has to be discussed which of these studies developed the most pertinent results. It becomes apparent that while Johar and Sirgy (1991) consider *multiple variables*, Racherla et al. (2012) merely focus on manipulating *the one and only variable* actual self-congruence. Against this backdrop, it can be assumed, that Racherla et al.'s (2012) participants only processed actual self-congruence in a stronger way because the other relevant information that would normally have been processed under high involvement conditions were missing. Perhaps actual self-congruence was used as a proxy to guess this information. Hence, based on this discussion, it can be supposed the evaluation of the actual and ideal self-congruence of the endorser does not require much cognitive processing and is therefore based on symbolic information. This contradictory situation renders an investigation into this issue highly interesting, and to verify our assumption, we propose the following hypotheses.

H5. The level of involvement negatively moderates the impact of actual self-congruence with the influencer on (a) *post attitude* and (b) *post belief*.

H6. The level of involvement negatively moderates the impact of ideal self-congruence with the influencer on (a) *post attitude* and (b) *post belief*.

3.3 | From post perception to brand behavior

Was the anger of the fans of “Butcher Box” or Alyse Parker a rather superficial occurrence, affecting mainly the single endorsement, or did it have deeper, more lasting consequences for the brand?

In reviewing the literature reviews of influencer endorsements in the context of congruence issues, it becomes apparent that most

studies have focused on the impacts on the perception of the influencer or the post. In contrast, the impacts of influencers on brand trust and purchase intention have been found to be underexplored (Hermada et al., 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kolarova, 2018). However, for the brand's decision regarding the endorsement, the tangible consequences of that decision are also a matter of high relevance (Jin & Ryu, 2020). In particular, purchase intention can be understood as a widely used marketing tool to estimate the effectiveness of a marketing strategy, which can be used to predict sales and market share (Morwitz, 2012). Therefore, we go a step further in exploring the effects on brand trust and purchase intention.

Trust in a brand can be built through engagement and relationships with the brand (Habibi et al., 2014); however, trust can also be transferred. Trust transfer occurs when initial trust in a target (a person, a group, or an organization) turns into trust in another target (Stewart, 2003). For example, consumers' trust in another consumer's communication in a social media brand community can be transferred to trust in an associated brand (Liu et al., 2018). Trust can alter the favorableness of consumers' opinions and increase the perceived trustworthiness of the endorsed brand (F. Li & Miniard, 2006). This suggests that trust in a social media influencer could also transfer to a brand that the influencer uses or recommends (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

Interestingly, the fundamental question of whether purchase intention can be impacted by influencers is controversial. Some scholars affirm this possibility (Lisichkova & Othman, 2017; McCormick, 2016) while others negate it (Hermada et al., 2019).

To reconcile these positions, it has been supposed that influencers generally do not directly influence purchase intention; however, there could be an indirect effect through perceptual or behavioral variables (Jamil & Rameez ul Hassan, 2014; Johansen & Guldvik, 2017). Therefore, it can be suggested that brand trust could work as a variable impacting purchase intention as brand trust can be a building block for purchase intention (Dodds et al., 1991).

H7. (a) Post attitude and (b) post belief have positive effects on *brand trust*.

H8. Brand trust has a positive effect on *purchase intention*.

4 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1 | Analyzed brands: Nike and Mercedes

To select suitable brands, a pretest ($n = 30$) was conducted. In the course of the pretest, the participants assessed eight brand scenarios for the perceived level of involvement on a six-item scale adapted from Laurent and Kapferer (1985). All brands were famous throughout Germany where the present research was performed (Junker, 2018). This factor is an important prerequisite because perceptions of brand personality traits are formed by a consumer's prior contact with a brand (Plummer, 1985). The results revealed that the involvement

level differed the most and with the highest significance level for the two following scenarios: A Nike unisex sports bag as a low-involvement product ($\text{Nike}_{\text{involvement}} = 1.980$, $\text{SE}_{\text{Nike}} = 0.084$, $\text{Mercedes}_{\text{involvement}} = 3.997$, $\text{SE}_{\text{Mercedes}} = 0.069$, $p < .05$, $t = 2.101$). A subsequent variance analysis comparing the brands by means of Mäder's (2004) personality scale identified that significant differences between the brand personality of Mercedes and Nike were perceived ($p < .01$).

4.2 | Pretest and stimulus material

The stimulus material consisted of an influencer profile including a post about the endorsed product. To avoid legal issues, profile pictures of existing influencers were simulated with images of similar-looking individuals from image databases. These pictures were completed with the characteristics of the influencers (e.g., field of interest, life motto) inspired by the real role models.

The investigation required influencers to fit well (badly) with the analyzed brands Mercedes and Nike. To select an appropriate set of influencers, a pretest was conducted ($n = 30$), in which the participants assessed the personalities of the Mercedes and Nike brands as well as a set of 12 influencers on a scale adapted from Mäder (2004). The scale includes five personality constructs: "Attractiveness," "Reliability," "Temperament," "Stability" and "Naturalness." This scale was explicitly developed to measure the personality of a brand and an endorser, offering an advantage for the present study (e.g., the scale of Aaker, 1997).

To assess the fit of the brands and influencers, the squared Euclidean distance of the perceived differences of all five personality constructs was calculated (Pradhan et al., 2014). The pretest revealed the following results: the well-fitting endorser of Nike (Nr. 3, inspired by the real influencer "Chick'N'Kicks") was a sporty-looking young woman. Her life motto was "good vibes, good kicks and power." The well-fitting endorser of Mercedes (Nr. 1, inspired by the real influencer "Grey Fox") was an elegantly dressed gentleman. His field of interest was high-quality products of refined design and fine artisanship. Finally, influencer Nr. 2 (inspired by the real influencer "Hawtchocolate Christina"), who was predetermined to be a bad fit for Mercedes and Nike, was a shy-looking young woman whose main interest was food products, especially chocolate. (The stimuli can be found in Figure 1.)

4.3 | Survey design

The study employed an online survey with five-point scales to measure the answers of the subjects. Overall, eight variables were considered: Brand Congruence, Actual Self-congruence, Ideal Self-congruence, Involvement, Post Attitude, Post Belief and change in Brand Trust and Purchase Intention. Change was explicitly selected to avoid skewing the results by prior attitudes/intentions or a subjective previously developed desire for the concrete product. In the context of the Mercedes brand, a hypothetical purchase intention ("If I could



FIGURE 1 Stimulus material [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

afford...") was applied as not all of the participants had the necessary solvency. Actual and Ideal self-congruence were measured on one-item scales adapted from Reed (2004). Involvement was measured with a six-item scale adapted from Laurent and Kapferer (1985). A four-item scale adapted from Aaker (2000) was used to measure post attitude. Beltrami's (1982) six-item scale was employed to measure post belief. Finally, two-item scales adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014) were used for Brand Trust and Purchase Intention.

4.4 | Data collection and analysis

The data collection occurred in Germany via a randomized online survey shared on the popular German research platforms SurveyCircle, PollPool and Thesius as well as among students of German universities from May through September 2019. Only participants who stated that they knew and followed at least one social influencer were eligible for participation. Data on 605 participants were collected. After running the rigorous algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers by means of the criteria of speed and consistency (Leiner, 2013), valid data from 547 participants (65.3% female, average age: 25 years) were employed. The age distribution was as follows: Age₁₈₋₂₀: 12.6%, Age₂₁₋₂₅: 54.9%, Age₂₆₋₃₀: 24.3%, Age₃₁₋₃₅: 3.3%, Age_{older than 35}: 4.7%. The distributions of occupations were as follows: Student: 58.9%, Employee, 31.0%, Self-employed: 4.3%, Retiree: 1.2%, Other: 4.6%. The relatively young average age and the higher relative proportion of females may be rooted in the fact that influencer marketing appeals more to the younger generation and to women (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018).

Manipulation checks were carried out by means of variance analysis in SPSS. To reveal the relationships between the variables, we then built a reflective structural equation model in SmartPLS. PLS SEM was appropriate due to its ability to solve the entire system of

equations simultaneously through iteration using maximum likelihood (ML) rather than estimating the parameters of each equation independently (Hayes et al., 2017). This consisted of an obvious advantage in light of the complexity of our model involving numerous sequential constructs. Moreover, SEM also has the non-negligible advantage of accounting for random measurement error when estimating relevant effects involving latent variables (Hayes et al., 2017).

4.5 | Theoretical model

We examine and build on our conceptual framework (Figure 2a-c). We assess the effect of brand congruence, actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence on brand trust in analysis 1 (Figure 2a). In analysis 2, we examine the effect of brand congruence, actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence on the intermediary variables post attitude and post belief and their impact on brand trust (Figure 2b). In analysis 3, we extend our conceptual model (Figure 2c) to examine the moderating role of involvement on the relationship among brand congruence, actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence on the one side and post attitude and belief on the other side.

4.6 | Manipulation checks

In the course of the questionnaire, the participants were randomly assigned (1) to a group with either high or low personality congruence between influencer and brand and (2) to a *high* or *low* involvement group.

To verify whether the manipulation of the stimulus material in terms of (1) personality congruence between the influencer and the brand as well as (2) involvement level was perceived as intended, manipulation checks were performed using ANOVAs. The ANOVA on personality congruence between influencer

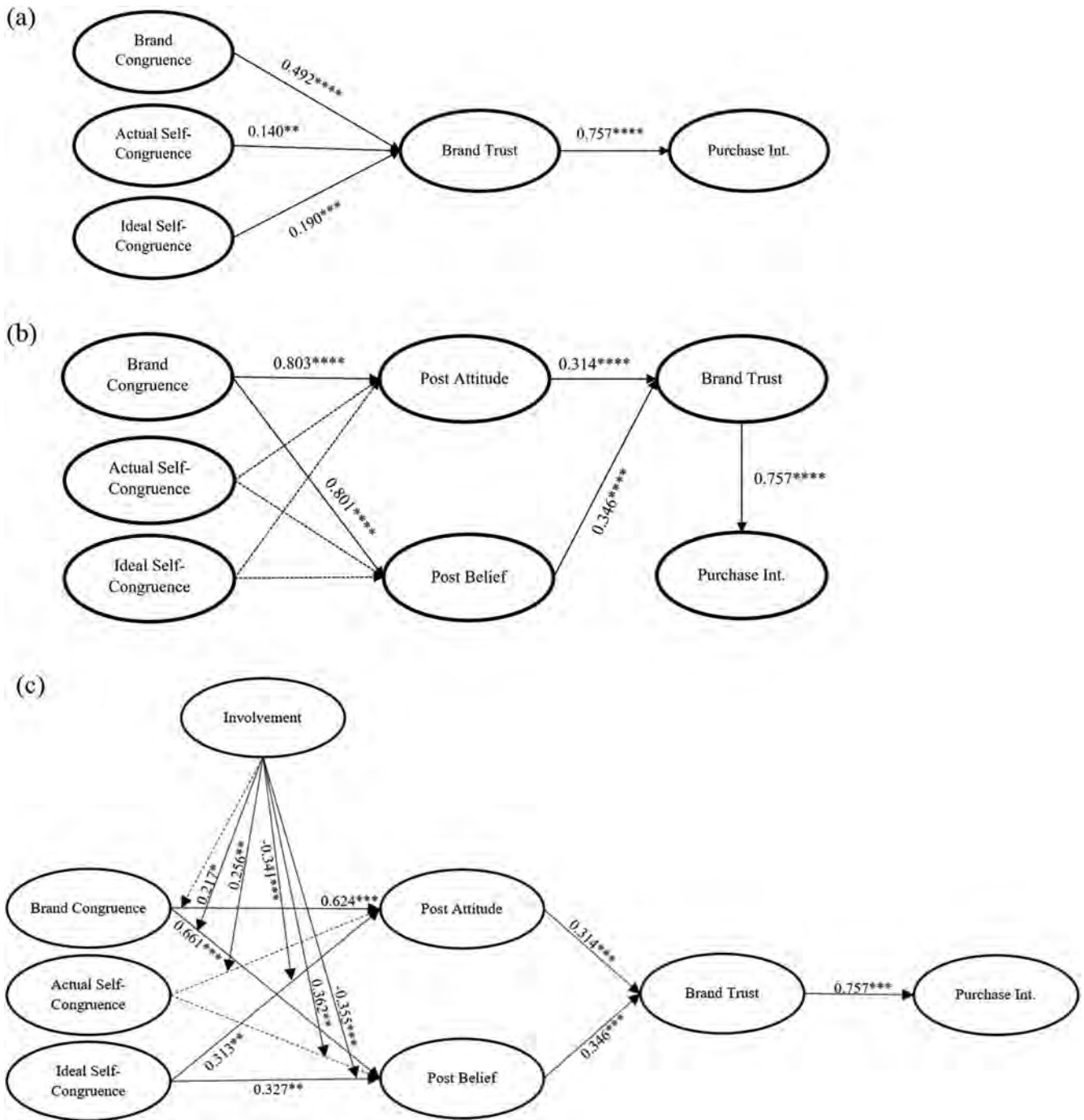


FIGURE 2 (a) Results of study 1. (b) Results of study 2. (c) Results of study 3. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$. **** $p \leq .0001$

and the brand ($N_{\text{Low Congruence}} = 280$, $N_{\text{High Congruence}} = 267$) ascertained a significant difference among the compared groups ($M_{\text{Low Congruence}} = 1.757$, $SE_{\text{Low Congruence}} = 0.060$, $M_{\text{High Congruence}} = 4.075$, $SE_{\text{High Congruence}} = 0.059$, $p < .0001$, $t = 455.339$). Similarly, the ANOVA on involvement ($N_{\text{Low Involvement}} = 282$, $N_{\text{High Involvement}} = 265$) produced significant results ($M_{\text{Low Involvement}} = 2.358$, $SE_{\text{Low Involvement}} = 0.051$, $M_{\text{High Involvement}} = 3.081$, $SE_{\text{High Involvement}} = 0.060$, $p < .0001$, $t = 152.149$).

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | Model validation

5.1.1 | Reliability and validity

Combining the hypotheses with the results, the structural equation models displayed in Figure 2a-c can be obtained. The model evaluations are displayed in Tables 1-5.

	Cronbach's alpha	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability
Post Attitude	0.956	0.884	0.968
Post Belief	0.943	0.816	0.957
Brand Trust	0.969	0.970	0.985
Involvement	0.614	0.623	0.908
Purchase Intention	0.949	0.949	0.974

TABLE 1 Measurement model evaluation**TABLE 2** R² and Q²

	R ²	Q ²
Study 1		
Brand Trust	0.381	0.253
Purchase Intention	0.572	0.543
Study 2		
Post Attitude	0.686	0.454
Post Belief	0.679	0.444
Brand Trust	0.408	0.396
Purchase Intention	0.572	0.543
Study 3		
Post Attitude	0.692	0.571
Post Belief	0.685	0.514
Brand Trust	0.408	0.396
Purchase Intention	0.573	0.543

The models were first checked for common method bias by means of Harman's (1976) single factor method. The common factor explained 43% of the variance; this was smaller than 50%, and no common method bias was present (Eichhorn, 2014).

To evaluate the internal validity of the experiment, the age and gender composition of the experimental groups were evaluated. The results indicated that there were no significant differences across the conditions with respect to participant age ($F(1, 547) = 0.347, p = .932, \eta^2 = 0.005$). A frequency analysis revealed that participant gender was approximately evenly distributed across experimental groups ($\eta^2 = 1.717, p = .424$).

We then checked the reliability and validity of the models. As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of each variable was 0.614–0.969, indicating moderate to excellent reliability (Cronbach, 1951). Composite reliability was 0.908–0.985 across the set of constructs indicating internal consistency (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Netemeyer et al., 2003). The average variance extracted was 0.623–0.949 (Table 1) across the set of constructs signaling the model's convergence (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All of the factor loadings were greater than 0.7, which means that the questions are highly correlated with the corresponding variables (Hulland, 1999).

The level of discriminant validity was determined by means of the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the exclusion of cross-loadings and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014; Henseler et al., 2015). The Fornell–Larcker criterion, according to which the

average variance of each latent construct must outpace the construct's highest squared correlation with any other latent construct (Hair et al., 2012), was fulfilled in all models (Table 3a–c). Moreover, all models were free of cross loadings. However, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of Ad Attitude/Post Belief was problematic as it was >0.850 in model 2 and model 3. All other ratios were between 0.108–0.790 in model 1, 0.108–0.790 in model 2, and 0.042–0.836 in model 3 (Table 4a–c), affirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

5.1.2 | Model fit and evaluation

As shown in Table 2, the coefficient of determination (R²) of all variables ranged from 0.31–0.572 in model 1, 0.408–0.686 in model 2 and 0.408–0.692 in model 3; this indicates moderate explanatory power in model 1 and moderate to substantial explanatory power in models 2 and 3 (Henseler et al., 2009). The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was high in all models as Q² was 0.253–0.543 in model 1, 0.395–0.543 in model 2 and 0.396–0.571 in model 3 (Table 2) across the set of endogenous constructs (Hair, Ringle, et al., 2014; Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014). The risk of multicollinearity was low as the VIF value was 1.000–2.108 in model 1, 1.000–4.263 in model 2 and 1.000–4.238 in model 3. It thus remained beneath the critical threshold of 5 in all models (Kline, 2016).

Most path coefficients and moderating effects were influential, significant ($p < .05$) and had small-to-large effect sizes. Exceptions were actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence on brand trust in model 1; actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence on post attitude and post belief in model 2 and, in model 3, the paths from actual self-congruence to post attitude (H2a) and post belief (H2b) as well as the moderating effect of involvement on the relationship between brand congruence and post attitude (H4a) (Table 5a–c).

A key finding from analysis 1 is that - without taking into account involvement - brand congruence seems to be the only impactful form of congruence.

Analysis 2 reproduces these results with respect of the impacts of the three forms of congruence on post attitude and post belief. Only brand congruence is able to impact these two constructs if involvement is not considered. This indicates support only for H1a and H3a.

From key findings from analysis 3, it can be stated that brand congruence and ideal self-congruence both have significant positive effects on post attitude (H1a, H3a) and post belief (H1b, H3b) while

TABLE 3 Squared correlations among latent variables

(a) Model 1					
	Brand trust	Ideal self-congruence	Actual self-congruence	Brand congruence	Purchase intention
Brand Trust	1.000	-	-	-	-
Ideal Self-congruence	0.137	1.000	-	-	-
Actual Self-congruence	0.109	0.526	1.000	-	-
Brand Congruence	0.288	0.025	0.012	1.000	-
Purchase Intention	0.572	0.117	0.101	0.207	1.000

(b) Model 2							
	Actual self-congruence	Brand congruence	Brand trust	Ideal self-congruence	Post attitude	Post belief	Purchase intention
Actual Self-congruence	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Brand Congruence	0.012	1.000	-	-	-	-	-
Brand Trust	0.109	0.288	1.000	-	-	-	-
Ideal Self-congruence	0.526	0.025	0.137	1.000	-	-	-
Post Attitude	0.040	0.672	0.380	0.056	1.000	-	-
Post Belief	0.036	0.667	0.385	0.053	0.765	1.000	-
Purchase Intention	0.101	0.207	0.572	0.117	0.293	0.293	1.000

(c) Model 3								
Latent variable	Post attitude	Ideal self-congruence	Brand trust	Brand congruence	Actual self-congruence	Involvement	Post belief	Purchase intention
Post Attitude	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideal Self-congruence	0.056	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Brand Trust	0.380	0.137	1.000	-	-	-	-	-
Brand Congruence	0.672	0.025	0.288	1.000	-	-	-	-
Actual Self-congruence	0.040	0.526	0.109	0.012	1.000	-	-	-
Involvement	0.002	0.018	0.000	0.009	0.024	1.000	-	-
Post Belief	0.765	0.053	0.385	0.667	0.036	0.005	1.000	-
Purchase Intention	0.293	0.117	0.572	0.207	0.101	0.006	0.293	1.000

actual self-congruence were *not* found to have an effect (H2a, H2b). The level of involvement *positively* moderates the effects of brand congruence and ideal self-congruence on post belief and the effect of ideal self-congruence on post attitude (H4b, H6a, H6b). It *negatively* moderates the effect of ideal self-congruence on post attitude and post belief (H5a, H5b). It has no moderating effect on the relationship of brand congruence on post attitude.

Post attitude and post belief have a positive effect on brand trust (H7a, H7b), which in turn has a positive effect on purchase intention (H8).

6 | DISCUSSION

6.1 | Theoretical implications

In this study, the effects of influencers' congruence with a brand as well as the actual and ideal self of the consumer on post attitude and believability were investigated. The moderating effects of

involvement were recorded. In addition, the subsequent effects of post attitude on post believability on brand trust as well as the effect of brand trust on purchase intention were substantiated.

In line with social adaptation theory, brand congruence was found to have a significant positive effect on post attitude and belief. The effect of brand congruence is the strongest compared to those of the other two types of congruencies. In this way, a controversial question of influencer marketing has been answered. Breves et al. (2019) outlined that congruence between brand and influencer might be either of *very high* or *very low* importance for the influencer. Our research is in line with the arguments of the proponents of very high importance, stating that any mismatch of influencer and brand would heavily disrupt viewers' trust as they would assume a purely commercial endorsement motive (Evans et al., 2017; Koernig & Boyd, 2009).

In contrast to what the theory on opinion change had predicted, actual self-congruence was not found to have an effect. Due to a relative lack of prior research on this issue, this hypothesis was also based on other forms of online endorsements such as user-generated content; however, the findings of Schach (2018) should be considered as

TABLE 4 Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio

(a) Model 1		Actual self-congruence	Brand congruence	Brand trust	Ideal self-congruence	Purchase intention				
Actual Self-congruence										
Brand Congruence		0.108								
Brand Trust		0.336	0.545							
Ideal Self-congruence		0.725	0.159	0.375						
Purchase Intention		0.327	0.467	0.790	0.352					
(b) Model 2		Actual self-congruence	Brand congruence	Brand trust	Ideal self-congruence	Post attitude	Post belief	Purchase intention		
Actual Self-congruence										
Brand Congruence		0.108								
Brand Trust		0.336	0.545							
Ideal Self-congruence		0.725	0.159	0.375						
Post Attitude		0.205	0.836	0.64	0.242					
Post Belief		0.194	0.841	0.648	0.236	0.920				
Purchase Intention		0.327	0.467	0.79	0.352	0.568	0.572			
(c) Model 3.		Post attitude	Ideal self-congruence	Brand trust	Brand congruence	Actual self-congruence *	Brand congruence *	Ideal self-congruence *	Post believability	Purchase intention
Post Attitude										
Ideal Self-congruence		0.242								
Brand Trust		0.64	0.375							
Brand Congruence		0.836	0.159	0.545						
Actual Self-congruence		0.205	0.725	0.336	0.108					
Involvement		0.036	0.161	0.071	0.071	0.194				
Brand Congruence *		0.093	0.051	0.069	0.039	0.062	0.042			
Actual Self-congruence *		0.078	0.132	0.033	0.062	0.206	0.077	0.16		
Involvement		0.037	0.118	0.007	0.052	0.134	0.123	0.211	0.781	
Ideal Self-congruence *		0.037	0.118	0.007	0.052	0.134	0.123	0.211	0.781	
Involvement		0.037	0.118	0.007	0.052	0.134	0.123	0.211	0.781	
Post Believability		0.92	0.236	0.648	0.841	0.194	0.055	0.081	0.097	0.05
Purchase Intention		0.568	0.352	0.79	0.467	0.327	0.123	0.068	0.033	0.572

TABLE 5 Model evaluation

(a) Model 1									
	β /Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	Confidence interval (2.5%-97.5%)		t	f ²	VIF	
				lower limit	upper limit				
Actual Self-congruence -> Brand Trust	0.140**	0.139	0.054	0.134	0.144	2.600	0.015	2.108	
Brand Congruence -> Brand Trust	0.492****	0.492	0.031	0.489	0.495	15.756	0.380	1.026	
Brand Trust -> Purchase Intention	0.757****	0.757	0.026	0.755	0.759	29.551	1.339	1.000	
Ideal Self-congruence -> Brand Trust	0.190***	0.190	0.055	0.185	0.195	3.441	0.027	2.138	
(b) Model 2.									
	β /Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	Confidence interval (2.5%-97.5%)		t	f ²	VIF	
				lower limit	upper limit				
Actual Self-congruence -> Post Attitude	0.070	0.070	0.037	0.067	0.073	1.906	0.007	2.108	
Actual Self-congruence -> Post Belief	0.060	0.060	0.035	0.057	0.063	1.692	0.005	2.108	
Brand Congruence -> Post Attitude	0.803****	0.803	0.018	0.801	0.805	44.379	1.997	1.026	
Brand Congruence -> Post Belief	0.801****	0.801	0.017	0.800	0.802	46.211	1.946	1.026	
Brand Trust -> Purchase Intention	0.757****	0.757	0.026	0.755	0.759	29.479	1.339	1.000	
Ideal Self-congruence -> Post Attitude	0.058	0.058	0.036	0.055	0.061	1.619	0.005	2.138	
Ideal Self-congruence -> Post Belief	0.058	0.058	0.036	0.055	0.061	1.610	0.005	2.138	
Post Attitude -> Brand Trust	0.314****	0.314	0.073	0.308	0.320	4.300	0.039	4.263	
Post Belief -> Brand Trust	0.346****	0.346	0.074	0.340	0.352	4.710	0.048	4.263	
(c) Model 3									
	β /Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	Confidence interval (2.5%-97.5%)		t	f ²	VIF	
				lower limit	upper limit				
Post Attitude -> Brand Trust	0.314****	0.313	0.072	0.308	0.320	4.361	0.039	4.238	
Ideal Self-congruence -> Post Attitude	0.313**	0.322	0.121	0.303	0.323	2.654	0.016	2.143	
Ideal Self-congruence -> Post Belief	0.327**	0.325	0.124	0.317	0.337	2.642	0.016	2.143	
Ideal Self-congruence * Involvement -> Post Attitude	-0.341*	-0.354	0.15	-0.354	-0.328	2.345	0.01	2.42	
Ideal Self-congruence * Involvement -> Post Belief	-0.355*	-0.354	0.154	-0.368	-0.342	2.328	0.01	2.489	
Brand Trust -> Purchase Intention	0.757****	0.756	0.026	0.755	0.759	29.201	1.336	1	
Brand Congruence -> Post Attitude	0.624****	0.639	0.085	0.617	0.631	7.316	2.013	1.044	
Brand Congruence -> Post Belief	0.661****	0.677	0.083	0.654	0.668	7.956	1.933	1.045	
Brand Congruence * Involvement -> Post Attitude	0.217*	0.2	0.095	0.209	0.225	2.315	0.013	1.043	
Brand Congruence * Involvement -> Post Belief	0.164	0.147	0.094	0.156	0.172	1.761	0.006	1.046	
Actual Self-congruence -> Post Attitude	-0.126	-0.125	0.142	-0.138	-0.114	0.938	0.013	2.216	
Actual Self-congruence -> Post Belief	-0.216	-0.199	0.139	-0.228	-0.204	1.549	0.01	2.214	
Actual Self-congruence * Involvement -> Post Attitude	0.256*	0.256	0.171	0.242	0.270	1.557	0.006	2.462	

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

(c) Model 3								
	β /Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	Confidence interval (2.5%-97.5%) lower limit	Confidence interval (2.5%-97.5%) upper limit	t	f ²	VIF
Actual Self-congruence * Involvement -> Post Belief	0.362**	0.341	0.169	0.348	0.376	2.142	0.01	2.53
Involvement -> Post Attitude	-0.052	-0.044	0.07	-0.058	-0.046	0.912	0.019	1.06
Involvement -> Post Belief	-0.094	-0.077	0.08	-0.101	-0.087	1.233	0.019	2.53
Post Belief -> Brand Trust	0.346****	0.346	0.072	0.340	0.352	4.789	0.047	4.238

* $p \leq .05$.** $p \leq .01$.*** $p \leq .001$.**** $p \leq .0001$.

this work warned that the mechanisms used to derive these findings might not be adaptable to influencers. In fact, influencers can be seen as closer to celebrities, for whom congruence with the ideal self, not with the actual self, is more important. This also aligns with Schouten et al. (2019), who found no significant difference in similarity issues between influencers and celebrities, which, consequently, contradicts Djafarova and Rushworth (2017).

This presumption might also be reflected by the fact that, in line with social adaptation theory, ideal self-congruence was found to have significant relevance. Again, a contribution to clarifying a controversial question was presented. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) argued that congruence with the ideal self was not expected from influencers. However, Schouten et al. (2019) found that congruence with the ideal self is not only relevant for influencers but even more relevant than for celebrities. Overall, the predictions of the theory on opinion change can only be partially confirmed. These findings, at first glance, stand in conflict with the results of Sokolova and Kefi (2020) who found that actual self-congruence was relevant for influencers. Although they did not control for involvement, it can be assumed that their results are relevant for high-involvement products as they analyzed influencer endorsements for luxury brands. This would be in line with our results as the importance of actual self-congruence was demonstrated to rise with the level of involvement.

The role of involvement in the context of congruence issues was found to be underexplored even for traditional celebrity endorsers (Fleck et al., 2012). Moreover, involvement was supposed to function differently for influencers than for other endorser types (Ekstam & Bjurling, 2018; Trivedi & Sama, 2019). In accordance with the elaboration likelihood model, a positive moderating effect of involvement on brand congruence and a negative effect on ideal self-congruence were found. However, in contrast with the predictions, the moderating effect on actual self-congruence was positive. These findings are in line with a relatively isolated study by Lin and Yeh (2009) on celebrity endorsements. As an explanation/interpretation of these results, it was stated that for high-involvement products, consumers make the cognitive effort to determine what truly suits *themselves* due to the

relatively high financial risk of the investment (Choi et al., 2005; Zhu et al., 2019). Alternatively, the considerations of Racherla et al. (2012) may provide an explanation as they state that under high involvement conditions, consumers generally consider a greater variety of information including actual self-congruence.

Finally, the subsequent effects on brand trust and purchase intention were similarly investigated. In this way, clarification was provided of an issue that has been found to be underexplored (Hermenda et al., 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Kolarova, 2018) but of high relevance for brands (Jin & Ryu, 2020). The results essentially confirm that *attitude toward* and *trust* in a post have an effect on brand trust; brand trust, in turn, can positively impact purchase intention. In this way, it was shown, at least indirectly, that influencers can have an impact on purchase intention.

6.2 | Managerial implications

Brand managers continue to struggle with questions of how influencer marketing is defined, what its value is, and how it should be managed. Against this backdrop, they use partially traditional advertising models (e.g., designed for celebrities) (Childers et al., 2019), which obviously produce some limitations with reference to influencer marketing. The findings of this study suggest various strategies that can be effectively employed to enhance consumers' attitudes and trust in influencers' brand-related posts as well as brand trust and purchase intention.

Based on the results of this study, to increase post attitude and post belief, social media managers can be given the following advice: Under low involvement conditions, they should primarily consider congruence with the brand. As a secondary objective, congruence with the ideal self should be envisaged. Conversely, congruence with the actual self does not need to be considered.

However, when the involvement level rises, social media managers *should* consider influencers' congruence with the actual self while congruence with the ideal self can be given less consideration.

Similarly, the impact of congruence with the brand on post belief (but not on post attitude) becomes more important under high involvement conditions.

The findings on the impacts of the three types of congruence on post attitude and post belief should also be acknowledged by influencers when considering whether to accept an endorsement. Influencers may be tempted to accept any endorsement in exchange for an endorsement fee (Breves et al., 2019). However, this study shows that a misfit of certain types of congruence might elicit unfavorable perceptions of their posts.

Furthermore, brand managers should be aware that post attitude and post belief can indeed have a positive impact on brand trust. In turn, brand trust has a positive impact on purchase intention. In this way, brand managers can be reassured that influencers can indeed increase brand trust and purchase intention.

6.3 | Limitations and future research

This study was conducted in Germany, that is, in a Western cultural setting. Therefore, specific cultural values might have impacted the results. Research from an eastern cultural perspective in the context of celebrities has suggested that the relevance of actual self and desired self might vary among eastern and western cultural contexts (Zhu et al., 2019). Therefore, in future research, the results of this study could be compared with one performed in an eastern cultural context.

In further research, more than two (extreme) levels of congruence could be employed. Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) suggested that a moderate level of incongruence between an expectation and an object could be beneficial if it is perceived as unexpected and interesting. This might even elicit a positive effect on ad and brand attitude (Harmon-Kizer, 2014). Against this backdrop, it could be investigated whether a mismatch may have contradictory effects in the context of influencer marketing.

Our study introduced involvement as a moderating variable. However, it also did not exclude the existence of further moderators of the three types of congruence. For example, long-term bonding might decrease the effect of congruence between influencer and brand (Breves et al., 2019).

Our research has shown that favorable influencer marketing not only impacts post perception but that it also has an impact on brand-related constructs. Future research could go a step further and consider the impacts on the revenues of a brand. In this way, interesting questions such as “What is the financial value of finding an influencer who is more congruent with the brand?” could be answered. To go a step further, it would be expedient to develop an algorithm that assesses the three types of congruence and can suggest influencers based on the brand and the target group.

An important limitation of this study is that we considered only material goods. In future research, service endorsements could also be considered. The extant research on influencers in the context of service marketing has suggested that due to their intangible nature (it is impossible to touch or see a service) and the impossibility of returning it,

consumers perceive the consumption of a service as riskier and therefore devote more cognitive processing to its purchase (Meffert et al., 2018). Against the backdrop of our study, whether brand congruence and actual self-congruence are more important for services could be investigated. Moreover, future studies could seek to replicate the reported results using divergent types of influencers, including more diverse brands, and incorporating different settings to generalize the findings.

This study represents consumers' viewpoints on influencer communication. However, to explore the process from a different perspective, it would be worthwhile to also record the opinions of influencers and practitioners on congruence issues. Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) indicated that the perceptions of consumers, influencers and practitioners on the success factors of an endorsement might vary.

Furthermore, the possibility of personality transfer from an influencer to a brand or vice versa could be investigated. As it is possible that the repeated pairing of the two subjects could provoke a perceived convergence (Ambroise et al., 2014), brands may “shape” an influencer's personality over time by means of repeated endorsements (or vice versa). It could also be investigated whether congruence could be to some extent staged. The research on celebrities has demonstrated that the perception of congruence with a brand can be impacted by the script of the advertising object (Pringle, 2004; Pringle & Binet, 2005).

7 | CONCLUSION

Brand congruence and ideal self-congruence are relevant success factors of influencers. When involvement increases, the importance of brand congruence increases. Actual self-congruence becomes more important when involvement rises while the importance of ideal self-congruence decreases. In this way, controversial and underexplored issues of influencer marketing have been addressed. In further research, the results of this study could be generalized and expanded by considering further types of congruence, more settings and more product types as well as other moderators and success factors.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and/or ethical restrictions.

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APPENDIX A.

Items (Manifest Variables) Overview

Involvement_1:	I attach great importance to [name of brand product].
Involvement_2:	[name of brand product] interests me a lot.
Involvement_3 (reverse):	[name of brand product] leaves me totally indifferent.
Involvement_4:	It would give me pleasure to purchase [name of brand product] for myself.
Involvement_5:	When you buy [name of brand product], it is a bit like giving a gift to yourself.
Involvement_6:	When you purchase [name of brand product], you are never certain you made the right choice.
Please describe your overall feelings toward the post	
Post_Attitude_1:	bad <-> good
Post_Attitude_2:	unpleasant <-> pleasant

Post_Attitude_3:	unfavorable <-> favorable	Brand_Trust_1:	I trust the brand in a stronger way.
Post_Attitude_4:	negative <-> positive	Brand_Trust_2:	I rely on the brand in a stronger way.
Post_Belief_1 (reverse):	convincing <-> unconvincing	Purchase_Intention_1:	I am more likely to purchase a product by the brand if I have the financial possibility.
Post_Belief_2:	not credible <-> credible	Purchase_Intention_2:	It is more probable that I would consider the purchase of a product by the brand (if I have the financial opportunity).
Post_Belief_3:	unacceptable <-> acceptable		
Post_Belief_4:	untruthful <-> truthful		
Post_Belief_5:	believable <-> unbelievable		

A3. The Role of Fashion Influencers' Attractiveness – A Gender-Specific Perspective

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The role of fashion influencers' attractiveness: A gender-specific perspective

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we investigate how the attractiveness and gender of an influencer impact receivers' reaction depends on the users' own attractiveness and gender. In social media, these variables may play different roles for individuals in varying contexts. To analyse these issues, a survey including 374 observations was conducted and analysed through structural equation modelling in SmartPLS. The results of our quantitative investigation were partially counter-intuitive. In most cases, a highly attractive influencer is more advantageous than an influencer of low attractiveness. More surprisingly, for male fashion, a female influencer appears to be more advantageous. Explanations are provided; based on the findings and implications for practitioners and influencers are proposed.

KEYWORDS

Influencer marketing; social media; fashion; attractiveness; Cialdini principles; antiattractiveness bias

Introduction

The physical attractiveness of an influencer is considered a major success factor of a campaign. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the relevance of influencers' attractiveness for brands has been investigated by numerous scholars (e.g. Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019; Jin & Muqaddam, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sakib, Zolfagharian, & Yazdanparast, 2020; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). However, in the previous literature, attractiveness was considered a unidimensional requirement without considering (potential) contingencies, which has left some research gaps and unanswered questions. According to the attractiveness dimension of the famous Cialdini (2011) 'liking principle', the high attractiveness of a communicator is a universal advantage for persuasion and appearing likeable. However, if the receiver is of low attractiveness, this statement clashes with another dimension of the liking principle (i.e., similarity). As receivers tend to prefer communicators who are similar to them and attractiveness-related similarity is a relevant subdimension of similarity (Bekk, Spörrle, Völckner, Spieß, & Woschée, 2017), a conflict occurs. Furthermore, the advantageousness of attractiveness may also depend on the gender of the endorser and receiver. In this context, it is important to clarify that gender is not a binary construct of just female and male but allows for a range of gender identities (Mizock & Lundquist, 2016). Many individuals have eschewed binary gender expression, in favour of other constructs that better represent their true identities (Elias & Colvin, 2020). Our study is, however, limited to female and male genders and the

upcoming elaborations should be understood with this limitation in mind. According to The Theory of Anti-Attractiveness Bias, highly attractive individuals of the same gender may be perceived unfavourably in the context of cisgender identities (Agthe, Spörrle, & Maner, 2010). Finally, according to the similarity dimension of the Cialdini (2011) liking principle, similarity can also occur at the gender level. Most fashion endorsers comply with this principle, as they merely endorse fashion for consumers of their gender. However, in some cases, influencers endorse fashion for consumers of the opposite gender. For example, the female influencer Sonya Glyn Nicholson focused on endorsing menswear from a female perspective. Is such an endorsement completely absurd? Or is it worth knowing what a member of the opposite gender thinks appears attractive on oneself?

In this study, based on the Cialdini liking principle and the theory of antiattractiveness bias, the effects of influencers' and receivers' attractiveness and gender on influencer likeability, credibility and brand purchase intention are investigated. A survey including 374 observations was carried out and analysed by structural equation modelling in SmartPLS. The core of the survey was the posts of fictive influencers endorsing a pair of jeans. Two models on female (F) and male (M) receivers were designed and statistically compared by a multigroup analysis. Thereby, some counterintuitive results emerge. For example, surprisingly, for male fashion, a female influencer appears to be more advantageous. Explanations for these rather unexpected findings are provided; based on the findings, the implications for practitioners and influencers are provided.

Theory

Extant research and research gaps

Influencers are individuals who create valuable content, have a high reputation in specific product areas and are followed by a large number of users in online social networks (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Attractiveness is a common research objective in studies concerning influencers. It refers to the physical appearance of an individual (Ohanian, 1990) and is defined as 'the degree to which a stimulus person's facial features are pleasing to observe' (Patzner, 1983). Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencers' attractiveness positively affects brand awareness and enhances followers' brand trust. Sakib et al. (2020) demonstrated that weight loss influencers' attractiveness had a positive impact on parasocial interaction. Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) analysed the impacts of attractiveness on the strength of beauty bloggers' influence. Jin and Muqaddam (2019) examined how the source type (fashion brand versus influencer) and product placement type (explicit versus moderate product placement) affect attractiveness. Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2020) found that the attractiveness of fashion influencers could positively impact brand satisfaction, brand image and brand trust.

Overall, extant research concerning influencer attractiveness has clearly perceived attractiveness as a unidimensional requirement; (i.e., no differentiation was observed with regard to the user's own attractiveness or gender). As the hypothesis development will show, these contingencies may be crucial. In this study, we extend such research by

considering the contingency effects elicited by receivers' attractiveness and gender based on the Cialdini liking principle (Cialdini, 2011) and the theory of antiattractiveness bias (Agthe et al., 2010).

Gender-related aims and scopes

As this work examines the role of gender, it is important to note the scope and limitation of the conception of this term in the context of this research. In cisgender identities, an individual's sex, (e.g., female), corresponds to the gender identity that is dominantly assumed to match this sex, (e.g., girl/woman) (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Importantly, though, sex and gender are not always identical. Individuals' gender identities or expressions can differ from their physical sex. For example, one can be male at birth but live as a woman (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), 2004). Moreover, intersex persons are born with any of several sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of the male or female body (Enzendorfer & Haller, 2020). Finally, nonbinary individuals have gender identities that are neither male nor female (Murchison et al., 2016; Richards et al., 2016).

Individuals may also have differing sexual orientations: Sexual orientation refers to enduring patterns of romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or to both sexes or more than one gender. These attractions are generally subsumed under the terms heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality (American Psychiatric Association, 2021; American Psychological Association, 2015, 2021).

In the context of these multiple expressions and combinations of sex and gender identities, this study presumes that participants are cisgender and heterosexual and more broadly presumes/understands sex and gender as conflated.

What is beautiful is good?

Operating in a visually based medium (Highfield & Leaver, 2016), most influencers on social media inevitably reveal their physical attractiveness. The finding that attractive people are associated with positive attributes, such as likeability and credibility, is most prominently reflected in the Cialdini liking principle. Research in the field of neurology has demonstrated the underlying mechanisms of action. The human face provides a canvas allowing people to scrutinise and 'read' others to make evaluations of their characteristics (Martelli, Majaj, & Pelli, 2005; Porter, Ten Brinke, & Gustaw, 2010). Rapid assessments of credibility, which originated in the distant evolutionary past, allowed our ancestors to assess the best course of action for survival (Smith, 2004). The perception of attractiveness depends on easily accessible superficial cues, whereas credibility involves more complex, inner personality traits. Hence, attractiveness could be used as a shortcut to assess credibility, which is consistent with a cognitive economy mechanism (i.e., to minimise processing effort when addressing information complexity). Reliance on easily observable attractiveness cues could ease the cognitive load required for making complex credibility decisions regarding less accessible credibility information (Calvo, Gutiérrez-García, & Beltrán, 2018). Willis and Todorov (2006) demonstrated that individuals infer the credibility of others almost instantaneously upon seeing their face after only 100 ms of exposure.

Notably, attractiveness is neurally processed earlier than credibility, which is consistent with behavioural findings showing that attractiveness judgements have lower detection thresholds and shorter decision latencies than credibility judgements (Gutiérrez-García, Beltrán, & Calvo, 2019). The time course advantage of attractiveness discrimination suggests that attractiveness might prime (and possibly bias) credibility judgements (Calvo et al., 2018).

These findings are reflected by Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) in the theory of *'what is beautiful is good'*, which suggests that personality traits influence one's appearance. A calm, relaxed person may develop fewer lines and wrinkles than a tense, irritable person. Second, stereotypes regarding the personalities of beautiful or ugly individuals mould individuals' personalities. An individual's self-concept develops from observing what others think about himself or herself. If acquaintances assume that attractive individuals are more sincere, noble, and honest than unattractive persons, attractive individuals should be trusted more than unattractive persons. Thus, if attractive individuals are consistently treated as credible and likeable, they may develop these traits.

Examples from practice support these theoretical considerations. Attractive defendants are more likely to be considered innocent (Shechory-Bitton & Zvi, 2015). Experiments involving credibility games have found that players are more willing to trust attractive players than less attractive players (Zhao, Zhou, Shi, & Zhang, 2015). Attractive people are generally perceived as more likeable (Antil, Burton, & Robinson, 2012). Attractive politicians obtain better election results (Smith, 2001).

What is beautiful is bad (or at least irrelevant)?!

The perception that what is beautiful is good is not shared by all scholars. Some scholars hold a rather neutral position or even argue for the negative effects of attractiveness.

Joseph's (1982) literature review of attractive communicators refuted that attractive communicators are perceived as more credible. In the context of beauty bloggers, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) found that attractiveness could not affect the 'perceived influence' or the 'influence on brand purchase'. However, marginal relevance may exist under high-involvement conditions. Regarding female fashion, Kim and Choo (2019) found that influencers' attractiveness had no effect on followers' behavioural intention.

Other scholars even argue that attractiveness has negative effects. Consumers may feel socially threatened by attractive endorsers (Bekk et al., 2017). Bower and Landreth (2001) provided evidence of negative consumer responses to attractive endorsers. Menon and Thompson (2007) argued that individuals may be hated for their attractiveness.

How can these conflicting positions (what is beautiful is good vs. what is beautiful is bad) be reconciled? It seems that there is no generally applicable rule regarding whether attractiveness is good or bad; thus, examining some contingencies could provide clarification.

Contingency 1: Receivers' attractiveness

Another dimension of the Cialdini Principle, i.e., similarity, may explain the first attractiveness contingency. The Cialdini principle of similarity states that people trust other people who are highly similar to them ('birds of a feather stick together') because they feel

a connection to and understand such individuals, which reduces their uncertainty (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010). This similarity includes a similar level of attractiveness (Feingold, 1988). As similarity leads to liking and attraction (Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Cialdini & Rhoads, 2001), individuals are expected to prefer people with similar levels of attractiveness (Feingold, 1988). In extant research on influencers, however, attractiveness-related similarity has not yet been investigated. Nonetheless, similarity on other levels such as lifestyle has emerged as an asset of influencers (e.g. Shan, Chen, & Lin, 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021); thus, similarity on the level of attractiveness might also be advantageous for influencers.

Bekk et al. (2017) argued that both high attractiveness and attractiveness similarity are advantageous. Thus, the following three pairs of attractiveness-endorser-receiver combinations could be favourable:

- (a) Highly attractive receivers faced with highly attractive endorsers (positive effect through high attractiveness and attractiveness similarity)
- (b) Receivers of low attractiveness faced with highly attractive endorsers (positive effect through high attractiveness)
- (c) Receivers of low attractiveness faced with endorsers of low attractiveness (positive effect through attractiveness similarity).

However, this system might not apply in a one-to-one manner in fashion influencer marketing in the context of this research as follows:

First, a basic assumption of the system is that endorsers and receivers are of the same gender (Bekk et al., 2017). If the genders are different, the principle of similarity might be violated. However, Bekk et al. (2017) postulate that the assumptions might be even more true when endorsers and receivers are of opposite genders. Research concerning romantic relationships can perhaps provide further clarification as follows: individuals with similar levels of social desirability tend to pair together in romantic relationships (Berkowitz & Hatfield, 1976). However, an experiment involving students revealed that regardless of their own attractiveness, the participants dated the most attractive partners available (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). Hence, the findings are ambiguous. Baker and Churchill (1977) attempted to clarify these findings by stating that individuals' romantic choices are influenced by matching considerations. On the one hand, individuals choose partners of approximately their own social worth. On the other hand, individuals also attempt to attract partners who are more desirable than themselves. Thus, there is a compromise between one's desire to capture an ideal partner and one's realisation that one must settle for the best available option.

Second, the system was designed without focusing on a specific product or considering the specialities of fashion products. In the context of fashion, relevant specialities might occur. Given that fashion products are attractiveness-related products (products able to impact their users' physical attractiveness (Praxmarer, 2011)), the attractiveness of an endorser of fashion products is more relevant and has stronger effects on consumer perception and behaviour than the attractiveness of an endorser of nonattractiveness-related products (Kamins, 1990).

Third, the system was designed for traditional offline communication. However, in an online context, individuals can easily modify their profile pictures to appear better; thus, the relationship between an online picture and its credibility might be questionable. McGloin and Denes (2018) suggested that in online dating, individuals with a highly attractive profile picture are perceived as less credible because viewers trace their high attractiveness to the presumption that the picture was artificially processed to improve appearance. Lo, Hsieh, and Chiu (2013) found that individuals whose profile pictures were rated as physically attractive were also viewed as less authentic, and the raters were more likely to believe that the profile picture was not an accurate representation of the person's true physical characteristics. These authors conclude that highly attractive profile pictures are less credible. McGloin and Denes (2018) found that women rated more attractive men as more credible. In contrast, men rated less attractive women as more credible. Despite these decreased perceptions of trust, men still preferred to date more attractive women.

Overall, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1 A highly attractive influencer will have a positive effect on the (a) likeability and (b) credibility of the influencer and the (c) purchase intention towards the endorsed brand among receivers who are also highly attractive.

H2 A highly attractive influencer will have a positive effect on the (a) likeability and (b) credibility of the influencer and the (c) purchase intention towards the endorsed brand among receivers of low attractiveness.

H3 An influencer of low attractiveness will have a positive effect on the (a) likeability and (b) credibility of the influencer and the (c) purchase intention towards the endorsed brand among receivers who are also of low attractiveness.

Contingency 2: Interplay between endorsers' and perceivers' gender

The aforementioned dimension of similarity of Cialdini's (2011) liking principle also includes gender-related similarity. Putrevu's (2004) sex-role identification concept explains how similarity in terms of gender works. Cisgender children first identify with their own gender. In the course of time, children validate their identification by aligning themselves with the attitudes of members of their gender.

Hansen, Erlandsson, and Mokhtari (2013) found that men preferred male endorsers because a celebrity should be a person to whom they can relate. Men do not identify with female celebrities. Men and women both agree that celebrity endorsers should evince characteristics to which they can relate (Hansen et al., 2013).

Hsu and McDonald (2002) and Peetz, Parks, and Spencer (2004) suggested that perceivers highly trust celebrities of the same gender. Female adolescents perceive female celebrities as more credible than male celebrities. However, other scholars do not support and even refute the aforementioned findings. Male adolescents evaluated female celebrities higher than male celebrities (Mishra, Dhar, & Raotiwal, 2001). Boyd and Shank (2004) found that male athlete endorsers were more likely than female endorsers to

influence purchase intentions regardless of the gender of the receiver. Bhutada and Rollins (2015) argued that the gender of the receiver or endorser had no effect on consumers' attitudes and behaviours. Most notably, Klaus and Bailey (2008) argued that female celebrity endorsers are evaluated more favourably than male celebrity endorsers and that ads featuring female celebrities are evaluated more favourably than ads featuring male celebrities.

In the context of this research, the following related specification has to be addressed: can an influencer endorse an item of clothing for the opposite gender? As previously mentioned, this situation has occurred in practice; however, questions regarding the credibility of such an influencer endorsement may arise. This precise situation has not been addressed in previous research. However, Mishra et al. (2001) argued that some products are strongly associated with members of one gender. For example, cigars and ties are male products, whereas bracelets and sweet-smelling colognes or beauty products are considered feminine products (Gannon & Prothero, 2018; Mishra et al., 2001; Wilkie, 1995). Studies suggest that the gender of a product should match the gender image of the product (Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Mishra et al., 2001). Importantly though, the gender link is diminishing, and the line between 'male only' and 'female only' products is blurring (Mishra et al., 2001). Overall, both advantages and disadvantages can be found regarding the issue of whether an endorsement of an item of clothing by a member of the opposite gender is credible as follows:

One argument against this concept is that a member of the opposite gender may have no experience with the fashion product. H/she has certainly not attempted to wear the product.

However, the opinion of a member of the opposite gender regarding appealing fashion might be perceived as a relevant assessment if an individual dresses to allure members of the opposite gender.

In general, fashion could be considered a 'female' product (Barry & Phillips, 2016); thus, the opinion of women might globally be more credible. However, this line of thought was found to decline (Ostberg, 2012).

After considering all arguments, we considered the following hypothesis to be the most theoretically sound:

H4 An influencer who is of the same gender as the receiver will be perceived as more credible.

Contingency 3: Interaction between attractiveness and gender

The theory of antiattractiveness bias (Agthe et al., 2010) suggests that heterosexual people respond more negatively to attractive members of their own gender than they do to members of the opposite gender. Attractiveness signals mating-related characteristics (Rhodes, 2006), and thus, highly attractive persons of the same gender can serve as potent intrasexual competitors. Vigilance towards attractive intrasexual competitors has been shown to be both powerful and automatic (Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, & Miller, 2007; Maner, Miller, Rouby, & Gailliot, 2009). Consequently, concerns regarding intrasexual rivalry lead people to display negative responses to highly attractive same-gender

individuals (Maner et al., 2007, 2009). Attractive same-gender individuals evoke negative emotional responses and derogatory personal attributions. In contrast, positive emotional responses and personal attributions are elicited by attractive opposite-gender targets (Agthe & Spoerrle, 2009; Agthe, Spörrle, & Försterling, 2008; Försterling, Preikschas, & Agthe, 2007). Even in the absence of an explicit mating context, highly attractive same-gender individuals elicit perceptions of a threat (Agthe et al., 2010).

In advertising, both females and males rate ads depicting attractive members of the opposite gender more favourably (Reichert, Latour, & Kim, 2007). Agthe et al. (2010) investigated evaluations of prospective job candidates and demonstrated that for males and females, an antiattractiveness bias exists for same-gender candidates.

The specialities of influencer marketing potentially affect antiattractiveness bias as follows:

Most studies concerning antiattractiveness bias were carried out in surroundings classified as a ‘tangible environment’ (e.g. on the job). However, influencers are a part of the ‘media environment’ (Gröppel-Klein & Spilski, 2019). It can be speculated that in this context, less competitive thinking occurs. After all, is an influencer truly likely to become a competitor in mating?

However, empirical evidence suggests that a type of rudimentary antiattractiveness bias exists in social media. Haferkamp and Krämer (2011) stated that when exposed to pictures of attractive individuals on social networks, receivers feel dissatisfied with their own situation. People who view profile photographs of physically attractive users are likely to have a more negative emotional state afterwards than people who view profile photographs of unattractive users.

Overall, the theoretical foundation seems to justify the development of the presumption of an antiattractiveness bias in influencer marketing, and the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5 When influencers and receivers are of the same gender, the effect suggested in H1 and H2 on (a) likeability and (b) credibility will be weaker.

The antiattractiveness bias is especially common among heterosexual women; this female antiattractiveness bias is referred to as queen bee syndrome (Henshaw, Estes, & Olsen, 2018). Heterosexual women tend to be more hostile to each other than they are to men (Bleske-Rechek & Lighthall, 2010; Chesler, 2009; Haas & Gregory, 2005; Henshaw et al., 2018; Jack, 1999; Simmons, 2011). From an early age, heterosexual women demonstrate aggression and hostility almost exclusively towards their female peers (Chesler, 2009; Simmons, 2011), which could encourage women to elevate themselves above other women. In this circumstance, heterosexual women feel threatened by other, more attractive women. This competitive environment could cause an attractive woman to decline in social status and popularity among other women (Haas & Gregory, 2005; Loya, Cowan, & Walters, 2006; Simmons, 2011). In practice, Henshaw et al. (2018) found that, as a female political candidate’s attractiveness increased, her perceived likeability among other women declined. Against this backdrop, we assume that the antiattractiveness bias will be more pronounced for women than it is for men.

H6 The effect suggested in H5 will be more pronounced for females than males.

Effects of likeability and credibility on brand purchase intention

Brand purchase intention is an antecedent of buying behaviour (Chen, Hsu, & Lin, 2010). Hence, purchase intention has an impact on the economic achievements of a company, such as earnings, revenue and contribution margins (Chen et al., 2010). Brand purchase intention could potentially be affected by influencers' likeability and credibility. According to attribution theory, any source perceived as biased will be dismissed (Kelley, 1973). A greater spokesperson credibility elicits greater attitude change (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Harmon & Coney, 1982; Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978). Hence, credibility sustains the link between the endorser and the message (Mowen, 1980). Feelings, such as liking or trust, occur and spread within groups of individuals (De Soto & Kuethel, 1959). Consequently, if a consumer trusts and likes an influencer and the influencer likes a brand, the consumer will also trust and like the brand (Burmman, Schaefer, & Maloney, 2008).

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) demonstrated the positive effect of credible electronic word-of-mouth on brand image and purchase intention in the case of the automobile industry. Linnér, Taha, and Carlsson (2018) found that the credibility of an Instagram fashion influencer was the only influential characteristic impacting brand purchase intention. There is a positive relationship between Instagram fashion influencers' likeability and consumers' online purchase intention (Der Stroth, Michael, & Sedov, 2019). However, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) could not demonstrate that the credibility of influencers had an impact on the 'perceived influence' or 'influence on purchase intention', although credibility was marginally significant under more pressured conditions.

Overall, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7 The (a) likeability and (b) credibility of an influencer will have a positive effect on brand purchase intention.

Control variables

The following control variables were included: According to the famous source-credibility model, in addition to attractiveness, the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of a source are potential relevant predictors of credibility (Ohanian, 1990); thus, the perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise of the influencer were also considered. Moreover, the receivers' involvement in fashion and age, which have a potentially relevant impact on decision making in fashion, were controlled (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Rocha, Hammond, & Hawkins, 2005).

Materials and methods

Pre-test

For the manipulation, influencer models of high and low attractiveness were required. A pre-test study (n = 84) was conducted to verify the stimulus material. The pre-test study was completed by students at German universities. To select influencers with low and high attractiveness, the subjects evaluated the physical attractiveness of 20

individuals (whose images were drawn from free image databases) using an eleven-point Likert scale adapted from Ohanian (1990). All scales had eleven points. The perceptions were compared by an ANOVA. The results of the pre-test were used to form pairs of influencers and participants ($M_{\text{Unattractive Female}} = 4.308$, $M_{\text{Attractive Female}} = 9.408$, $p < 0.000$; $M_{\text{Unattractive Male}} = 3.918$, $M_{\text{Attractive Male}} = 8.151$, $p < 0.000$).

The images used as stimulus material can be described as following: (1) The attractive female was a young woman with long blond hair. She had a symmetrical face with very pure, lightly tanned skin. (2) The female of low-attractiveness was a young woman with long brown hair. She had a pale face with mild acne. (3) The highly attractive male was a young man with full, voluminous brown hair. His face was symmetrical, with a prominent cheekbone and jawline. His skin was clear and lightly-tanned. He wore a short, well-groomed beard. (4) The male of low attractiveness was a young, clean-shaven brown-haired man with receding hairline. His skin was pale and featured mild acne.

No significant difference was observed between the perception of the female and male participants, i.e. gender did not impact the rating of the attractiveness level of the stimuli.

Integrated design and measures

Hypothesis testing was performed using structural equation modelling. The model is displayed in Figure 1. The data collection was performed using an online survey from January to February 2020 distributed to students attending German universities. For data cleaning, the algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers (Leiner, 2013), was used. Ultimately, 374 data sets ($M_{\text{age}} = 27$ years, 63.4% female) were employed. The age distribution was as follows: Age₁₈₋₂₅: 65%, Age₂₆₋₃₀: 28.3%, Age₃₁₋₃₅: 2.4%, and Age_{Over 35}: 4.3%. The structure of the questionnaires was as follows. First, the subjects' demographic data were collected. Additionally, the participants evaluated their own attractiveness using a scale adapted from Ohanian (1990). The self-evaluation of attractiveness is considered a valid procedure producing accurate results (Bekk et al., 2017). Second, the participants viewed the stimulus material consisting of an influencer endorsing a pair of jeans via an Instagram post. Instagram was chosen as it is a highly visually based social network (Chen, 2018). The gender of the influencer was randomly either *female* or *male* and had a *high* or *low attractiveness* level. Because it might have seemed odd if an influencer endorsed a garment intended for a member of the opposite gender (e.g. a woman endorsing men's jeans), in the event that a participant viewed an influencer of the opposite gender, the post was staged as though the influencer was reporting his/her impression of the product for his/her girl/boyfriend. For manipulation checks, the *perceived attractiveness* of the influencer was assessed (scale adapted from Ohanian, 1990).

Fourth, the perception of the *likeability* (scale adapted from Whittler & DiMeo, 1991) and *credibility* (scale adapted from Ohanian, 1990) of the influencer and their *purchase intention* (scale adapted from Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt, & Wuestefeld, 2014) were assessed. All scales had eleven points and can be found in the appendix.

Fifth, additional control variables were surveyed. These variables included the subjects' *age*, *fashion involvement* and *perceived expertise* and *trustworthiness* of the influencer.

Manipulation checks

To verify the manipulation of **the attractiveness of the influencer**, manipulation checks were conducted. For this purpose, an ANOVA was performed. The ANOVA showed significant differences ($M_{\text{Unattractive Influencer}} = 4.198$, $M_{\text{Attractive Influencer}} = 8.046$, $p < 0.0001$); thus, the manipulation was successful.

Model evaluation

Two submodels of the female and male participants were employed to verify the hypotheses. The models can be retrieved in Figure 1. The following abbreviations are used in the remainder of this section:

(F)Submodel of Females

(M)Submodel of Males

IA+Influencer of high attractiveness

IA-Influencer of low attractiveness

RA+Receiver of high attractiveness

RA-Receiver of low attractiveness

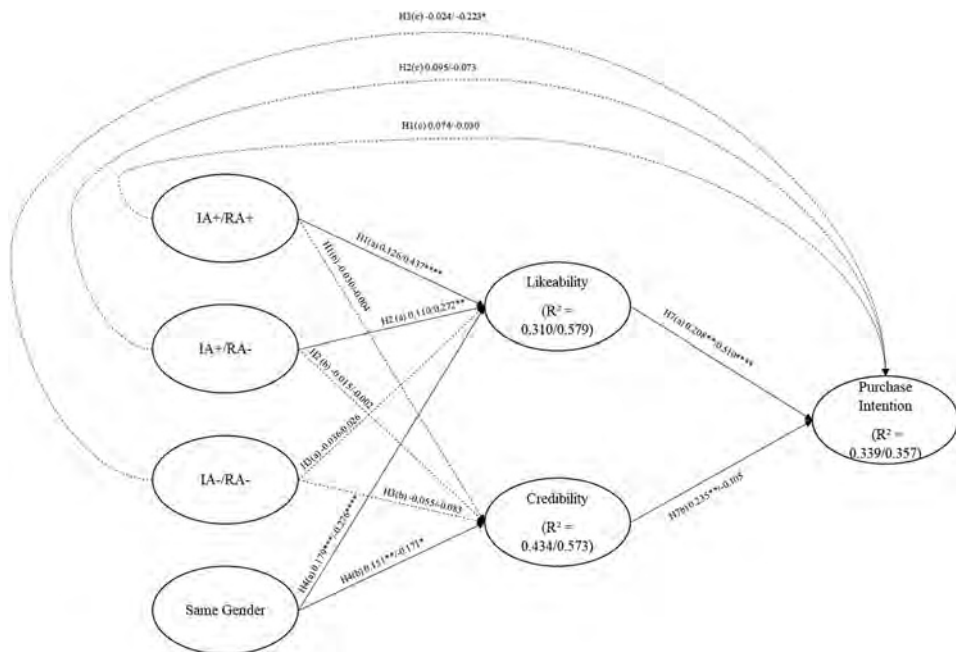


Figure 1. Models (F)/(M) (to avoid overburdening the figure, the moderating effects were omitted). IA +/RA+Influencer of high attractiveness viewed by a receiver of high attractiveness|IA+/RA-Influencer of high attractiveness viewed by a receiver of low attractiveness|IA-/RA-Influencer of low attractiveness viewed by a receiver of low attractiveness.

Moreover, as the hypotheses required the attractiveness of the receiver and influencer to be combined in multiple ways, the following constructs were created and abbreviated as follows:

IA+/RA+Influencer of high attractiveness viewed by a receiver of high attractiveness

IA+/RA-Influencer of high attractiveness viewed by a receiver of low attractiveness

IA-/RA-Influencer of low attractiveness viewed by a receiver of low attractiveness.

Before presenting the results, we discuss the evaluation of the quality of the model. A detailed overview is provided in [Tables 1 and 2](#).

To check the models for the issue of common method bias, the method of the ‘full collinearity test’ by Kock and Lynn (2012) as well as the Harman (1976) single factor test were used.

Through the ‘full collinearity test’, VIFs are generated for all latent variables in the model to consider the two types of collinearity, namely, *vertical* and *lateral collinearity*. Thus, full collinearity VIFs are obtained. The occurrence of a full collinearity VIF greater than 3.3 is an indication of pathological collinearity and suggests that the model may be contaminated by common method bias (Kock, 2015; Kock & Gaskins, 2014). In the present study, the full collinearity VIFs were 1.032–2.275 in (F) and 1.083–3.237 in (M). Hence, the model could be considered free of common method bias according to the ‘full collinearity test’.

According to Harman’s (1976) single factor method, the average variance extracted of a single factor encompassing all items employed in the model must be smaller than 50% (Eichhorn, 2014). The average variance extracted of the common factor was 28.9% in (F) and 30.5% in (M). Hence, no common method bias was present according to Harman’s (1976) single factor method,

To ensure item reliability, each factor loading must be greater than 0.500 for its respective measurement construct (Hulland, 1999). As the loadings were 0.774–0.975 in (F) and 0.752–0.968 in (M), item reliability was present.

Table 1. Model evaluation.

	Model (F)	Model (M)
Likeability		
R ²	0.310	0.579
Q ²	0.169	0.412
Average Variance Extracted	0.667	0.742
Composite Reliability	0.941	0.958
Credibility		
R ²	0.434	0.573
Q ²	0.371	0.477
Average Variance Extracted	0.880	0.892
Composite Reliability	0.967	0.971
Brand Purchase Intention		
R ²	0.339	0.357
Q ²	0.301	0.256
Average Variance Extracted	0.959	0.914
Composite Reliability	0.979	0.955

Table 2. Path coefficients and differences.

	(F) path coefficient	(M) path coefficient	path coefficients-diff (F)-(M)
H1a IA+/RA+ -> Likeability	0.126	0.437****	-0.310**
H1b IA+/RA+ -> Credibility	-0.030	-0.004	-0.026
H1c IA+/RA+ -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.074	-0.030	0.103
H2a IA+/RA- -> Likeability	0.110	0.272**	-0.162
H2b IA+/RA- -> Credibility	-0.015	-0.002	-0.014
H2c IA+/RA- -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.095	-0.073	0.168
H3a IA-/RA- -> Likeability	-0.036	0.026	-0.062
H3b IA-/RA- -> Credibility	-0.055	-0.083	0.028
H3c IA-/RA- -> Brand Purchase Intention	-0.024	-0.223*	0.199
H4a Same Gender -> Likeability	0.179***	-0.276****	0.455****
H4b Same Gender -> Credibility	0.151**	-0.171*	0.322****
H5 'Same Gender x IA+/RA+' -> Likeability	0.057	-0.219**	0.276
H5 'Same Gender x IA+/RA-' -> Likeability	0.052	-0.160	0.212*
H5 'Same Gender x IA-/RA-' -> Likeability	0.108	-0.051	0.159
H5 'Same Gender x IA+/RA+' -> Credibility	0.025	-0.061	0.086
H5 'Same Gender x IA+/RA-' -> Credibility	0.017	0.049	-0.033
H5 'Same Gender x IA-/RA-' -> Credibility	0.109	-0.046	0.155
H7a Likeability -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.208**	0.510****	-0.302*
H7b Credibility -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.235**	-0.105	0.340*

*p < 0.05

**p < 0.01

***p < 0.001

****p < 0.0001

A model is convergent if the average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs surpasses 0.500 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE was 0.667–0.959 in (F) and 0.704–0.918 in (M), confirming convergence.

Internal consistency exists if the composite reliability is greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). As the composite reliability was between 0.898–0.986 in (F) and 0.898–0.986 in (M), internal consistency was validated. Moreover, the level of discriminant validity was determined by means of the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the exclusion of cross-loadings and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Discriminant validity was assured as the Fornell-Larcker criterion was fulfilled, and there were no cross-loadings (Hair et al., 2014). The HTMT ratio was required to stay below 0.85. This assumption was fulfilled as the HTMT ratio was 0.001–0.662 in (F) and 0.060–0.799 in (M).

To evaluate the goodness of fit of a model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of each endogenous construct should exceed 0.19 (Marcoulides, 2009). R^2 was 0.310–0.434 in (F) and 0.357–0.579 in (M), thereby fulfilling the specification.

The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was evaluated by Stone-Geisser's Q^2 , which should be higher than 0.000 for all endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2014). Q^2 was 0.169–0.371 in (F) and 0.256–0.477 in (M); hence, the thresholds were met.

To avoid multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) must be below the threshold of five (Kline, 2016). The VIF values were 1.079–2.942 in (F) and 1.079–2.530 in (M); thus, there was no multicollinearity.

Table 3. Bootstrapping results.

Model (F)	Path coefficient	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
H1a IA+/RA+ -> Likeability	0.126	0.070	1.801	0.072
H1b IA+/RA+ -> Credibility	-0.030	0.060	0.504	0.614
H1c IA+/RA+ -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.074	0.070	1.047	0.295
H2a IA+/RA- -> Likeability	0.110	0.071	1.545	0.122
H2b IA+/RA- -> Credibility	-0.015	0.061	0.252	0.801
H2c IA+/RA- -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.095	0.063	1.508	0.132
H3a IA-/RA- -> Likeability	-0.036	0.071	0.501	0.616
H3b IA-/RA- -> Credibility	-0.055	0.058	0.947	0.344
H3c IA-/RA- -> Brand Purchase Intention	-0.024	0.067	0.362	0.718
H4a Same Gender -> Likeability	0.179	0.053	3.379	0.001
H4b Same Gender -> Credibility	0.151	0.048	3.136	0.002
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA-/RA-' -> Likeability	0.108	0.069	1.571	0.116
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA+/RA-' -> Credibility	0.017	0.059	0.286	0.775
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA+/RA-' -> Credibility	0.109	0.057	1.916	0.055
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA+/RA-' -> Likeability	0.052	0.066	0.783	0.434
H5 "Same Gender x IA+/RA+' -> Credibility	0.025	0.058	0.427	0.669
H5 "Same Gender x IA+/RA+' -> Likeability	0.057	0.067	0.845	0.398
H7a Likeability -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.208	0.075	2.761	0.006
H7b Credibility -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.235	0.079	2.980	0.003
Model (M)	Path coefficient	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
H7b Credibility -> Brand Purchase Intention	-0.105	0.158	0.660	0.509
H1c IA+/RA+ -> Brand Purchase Intention	-0.030	0.124	0.239	0.811
H1b IA+/RA+ -> Credibility	-0.004	0.089	0.049	0.961
H1a IA+/RA+ -> Likeability	0.437	0.090	4.873	0.000
H2c IA+/RA- -> Brand Purchase Intention	-0.073	0.105	0.692	0.489
H2b IA+/RA- -> Credibility	-0.002	0.076	0.023	0.981
H2a IA+/RA- -> Likeability	0.272	0.091	2.977	0.003
H3c IA-/RA- -> Brand Purchase Intention	-0.223	0.106	2.105	0.035
H3b IA-/RA- -> Credibility	-0.083	0.094	0.880	0.379
H3a IA-/RA- -> Likeability	0.026	0.093	0.277	0.782
H7a Likeability -> Brand Purchase Intention	0.510	0.127	4.017	0.000
H4a Same Gender -> Credibility	-0.171	0.068	2.520	0.012
H4b Same Gender -> Likeability	-0.276	0.072	3.835	0.000
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA+/RA-' -> Likeability	-0.160	0.087	1.839	0.066
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA+/RA-' -> Credibility	-0.046	0.088	0.527	0.598
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA+/RA-' -> Credibility	0.049	0.080	0.616	0.538
H5 "Same Gender x 'IA-/RA-' -> Likeability	-0.051	0.084	0.609	0.542
H5 "Same Gender x IA+/RA+' -> Likeability	-0.219	0.085	2.566	0.010
H5 "Same Gender x IA+/RA+' -> Credibility	-0.061	0.091	0.666	0.506

Results

Testing interrelationships

A core part of a structural measurement model is hypothesis testing. In this context, the bootstrapping results including significance levels are considered (Lohmöller, 1989; Sharma & Kim, 2013) (Tables 2 and 3).

H1 stated that IA+/RA+ would have a positive effect on the (a) likeability and (b) credibility of the influencer and the (c) purchase intention towards the endorsed brand. The path coefficients of construct IA+/RA+ on (a) influencer likeability, (b) influencer credibility and (c) brand purchase intention in (F)/(M) were (a) 0.126

($p < 0.1$; $T = 1.801$)/0.437 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 4.873$), (b) -0.030 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.504$)/ -0.004 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.049$) and (c) 0.074 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 1.047$)/ -0.030 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.239$), respectively. Hence, only H1 (a) could be supported.

H2 argued that IA+/RA- would have a positive effect on the (a) likeability and (b) credibility of the influencer and the (c) purchase intention towards the endorsed brand. The path coefficients of the construct IA+/RA- on (a) influencer likeability, (b) influencer credibility and (c) brand purchase intention in (F)/(M) were (a) -0.110 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 1.545$)/0.272 ($p > 0.01$; $T = 2.977$), (b) -0.015 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.252$)/ -0.002 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.239$) and (c) 0.095 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 1.508$)/ -0.073 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.692$), respectively. Hence, only H2(a) among males was supported.

H3 suggested that IA-/RA- would have a positive effect on the (a) likeability and (b) credibility of the influencer and the (c) purchase intention towards the endorsed brand. The path coefficients of the construct IA-/RA- on (a) influencer likeability, (b) influencer credibility and (c) brand purchase intention in (F)/(M) were (a) -0.036 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.501$)/0.026 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.692$), (b) -0.055 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.947$)/ -0.083 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.880$) and (c) -0.024 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.362$)/ -0.223 ($p > 0.05$; $T = 2.105$), respectively. Overall, H3 was not supported. Interestingly, among males, H3(c) seemed to work even in the opposite direction of that predicted.

H4 proposed that an influencer who is of the same gender as the receiver would be perceived as more credible. The path coefficients of the same gender construct on credibility in (F)/(M) were (b) 0.151 ($p < 0.01$; $T = 3.136$)/ -0.171 ($p < 0.05$; $T = 2.520$). Hence, H4 was supported only among females. Interestingly, among males, the relationship appeared to contradict the predicted relationship. Additionally, although not hypothesised, a very similar structure seemed to apply to likeability as follows: the effect of the same gender construct on Likeability in (F)/(M) was (a) 0.179 ($p < 0.001$; $T = 3.379$)/ -0.276 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 3.835$).

H5 predicted that, if the influencer and receiver are of the same gender, the effect of IA+/RA+ and IA+/RA- on (a) likeability and (b) credibility would be weaker. This hypothesis implied that the same gender construct should significantly *negatively* moderate the relationships between IA+/RA+ and IA+/RA- and (a) likeability, (b) credibility and (c) purchase intention. No moderation of any effect of IA-/RA- was expected. The moderating effects of the same gender construct on the effects of IA+/RA+ in (F)/(M) were (a) 0.057 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.845$)/ -0.219 ($p < 0.01$; $T = 2.566$) and (b) 0.025 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.427$)/ -0.061 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.667$). The moderating effects of the same gender construct on the effect of IA+/RA- in (F)/(M) were (a) 0.052 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.783$)/ -0.160 ($p < 0.1$; $T = 1.839$) and (b) 0.017 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.286$)/0.049 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.616$). Hence, H5 was supported only in (M) concerning the moderation of the effect of IA+/RA+ and IA+/RA- on (a) likeability.

H7 suggested that the (a) likeability and (b) credibility of the influencer would have a positive effect on brand purchase intention. The effects of the constructs (a) likeability and (b) credibility on purchase intention in (F)/(M) were (a) 0.208 ($p < 0.01$; $T = 2.761$)/

0.510 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 4.017$) and (b) 0.235 ($p < 0.01$; $T = 2.980$)/-0.105 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.660$), respectively. Hence, H7 (a) was supported in (F) and (M). H7(b) was supported only in (F).

In (F)/(M), control variable perceived expertise was found to have an effect of 0.171 ($p < 0.001$; $T = 3.286$)/0.160 ($p < 0.1$; $T = 1.887$) on the credibility of the influencer. The perceived trustworthiness of the influencer had an effect of 0.425 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 8.347$)/0.479 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 6.558$) on likeability, 0.557 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 12.824$)/0.677 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 10.877$) on trustworthiness and 0.360 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 6.349$)/0.377 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 4.642$) on purchase intention. The other control variables, i.e. age and involvement, were not found to have any effect.

Multigroup analysis of models (F) and (M): Answering H6

H6 suggested that the antiattractiveness bias would be more pronounced for females than it would be for males. The previous section concerning interrelationships suggests that the effects differed between models (F) and (M). However, this finding does not allow any conclusions regarding the statistical significance of these differences. To fill this gap and offer a more qualified discussion, a multigroup analysis was performed to statistically compare the path coefficient between (F) and (M). A basic prerequisite for a multigroup analysis is the existence of measurement invariance (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2017; Henseler et al., 2016), which was observed. In the following discussion, statistically significant differences are reported.

The moderating effects of the construct ‘same gender’ on the path coefficients of (a) IA+/RA+ and (b) IA+/RA- on likeability differed by (a) 0.276 ($p < 0.05$; $T = 2.216$) and (b) 0.212 ($p < 0.1$; $T = 1.706$) between (F)_{[(a) 0.057 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.845$); (b) 0.052 ($p > 0.1$; $T = 0.783$)] and (M)_[(a): -0.219 ($p < 0.01$; $T = 2.566$); (b): -0.160 ($p < 0.1$; $T = 1.839$)]. This finding implies that, for a female audience, the impact of high attractiveness is independent of the gender of the endorser, whereas, for a male audience, the impact decreases if the endorser is male. Hence, H6 was not supported. The antiattractiveness bias appears to occur only among males, i.e. the opposite of what was predicted.}

In the course of the multigroup analysis, we found further (unexpected) differences that conveyed interesting information, and we therefore report the following:

The difference in the path coefficients of the same-gender construct on credibility was (b) 0.322** ($p < 0.001$; $T = 3.232$) between (F)_{[0.151 ($p < 0.01$; $T = 3.136$)] and (M)_[-0.171 ($p < 0.05$; $T = 2.520$)]. The difference in the path coefficients of the same-gender construct on likeability was (a) 0.455 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 4.618$) between (F)_{[(a): 0.179 ($p < 0.001$; $T = 3.379$)] and (M)_[(a): -0.276 ($p < 0.0001$; $T = 3.835$)]. Hence, using an endorser of the same gender was much more advantageous for a female than a male audience. In fact, for males, an endorser of the same gender even had a negative effect. Therefore, it might be more advantageous to use a female endorser even for a male audience.}}

The path coefficient of IA+/RA+ on influencer likeability showed a significant difference of 0.310 ($p < 0.05$; $T = 2.422$) between (F)_[0.126 (p < 0.1; T = 1.801)] and (M)_[0.437 (p < 0.0001; T = 4.837)]. Thus, for highly attractive males, a highly attractive endorser had a significantly stronger effect on the likeability of the endorser.

The difference in the path coefficient of the construct IA-/RA- on brand purchase intention was 0.199 ($p < 0.1$; $T = 1.548$) between (F)_[-0.024 (p > 0.1; T = 0.362)] and (M)_[-0.223 (p < 0.05; T = 2.105)]. Hence, while an IA did not affect the brand purchase intention of females of low attractiveness, concerning males of low attractiveness, an unattractive influencer even had a negative impact on brand purchase intention.

The differences in the path coefficients originating from the constructs (a) likeability and (b) credibility on purchase intention were (a) 0.302 ($p < 0.05$; $T = 2.046$) and (b) 0.340 ($p < 0.05$; $T = 2.100$) between (F)_[(a): 0.208 (p < 0.01; T = 2.761); (b) 0.235 (p < 0.01; T = 2.980)] and (M)_[(a): 0.510 (p < 0.0001; T = 4.017); (b): -0.105 (p > 0.1; T = 0.660)]. This finding suggests that likeability affects the brand purchase intention of males to a much stronger degree than that of females. Moreover, credibility affects only the brand purchase intention of females.

Discussion

Can influencers of the opposite gender endorse a fashion product to a member of the opposite gender? What role do the influencer's and perceiver's attractiveness and gender play in this context? These questions are crucial, as appearance and gender are characteristics that all influencers unavoidably reveal through their profile on social media. Receivers are inevitably and mostly unconsciously affected by endorsers' attractiveness and gender regardless of their intention (Maner et al., 2007, 2009; Smith, 2004). In this study, we strived to answer these pivotal questions. Thus, we carried out an online survey with 374 relevant observations and analysed the effects of attractiveness levels and gender on the influencer and the brand.

The results imply that high endorser attractiveness is ideal, especially among male perceivers viewing female influencers and, to a lesser degree, female perceivers in general. Overall, hypotheses H1-H3 concerning attractiveness revealed that attractiveness mostly had a positive or neutral effect on likeability, credibility and brand purchase intention. For unattractive male perceivers, an unattractive endorser could even have a negative effect on purchase intention. Additionally, influencer attractiveness appears to not have an effect on brand purchase intention, at least not directly. However, attractiveness seems to affect the likeability of the influencer. As attractiveness affects likeability, it has an indirect impact on brand purchase intention. Regarding the dimensions of the Cialdini (2011) liking principle, the dimension of 'high attractiveness' seems to be triumphant over 'attractiveness similarity' in the context of the parameters of this study. This finding may be explained by the fact that an attractiveness-related product was examined. The attractiveness of an endorser has been found to be more relevant for this type of product than products with no connection to attractiveness (Kamins, 1990). Moreover, the relevance of attractiveness may be high because fashion products might (at least partially) be publicly consumed goods. As high attractiveness is a symbol representing social skills, popularity, or mental health (Feingold, 1992), consumers value highly attractive endorsers more for publicly consumed products than privately consumed products. In private

consumption contexts, consumers do not fear being evaluated by others and thus prefer products that they personally like (rather than products that signal specific characteristics). In such contexts, consumers might prefer endorsers who are similar to them (Bekk et al., 2017).

The second ‘champion’ seems to be females who triumph over males, as they are viewed as more likeable and credible by both females and, counterintuitively, male perceivers. A reason for the latter finding may be that males might perceive the assessment of what looks good on them as more accurate if expressed by a female. It can also be argued that fashion in general is a ‘female’ product and that females are perceived to make more competent judgements (Barry & Phillips, 2016).

The findings show that when evaluating an influencer of the same gender, the effect of the attractiveness of the endorser significantly decreases for male but not female perceivers. Hence, an antiattractiveness bias seems to occur only among males. A possible rationale for our finding may be that males have a stronger tendency towards competitive thinking (Aslam, Brown, Nikolaev, & Reading, 2019).

A final finding was that among both males and females, the likeability of the influencer has a positive impact on brand purchase intention. Moreover, the credibility of the influencer impacts brand purchase intention only among females. A possible rationale for this finding may be that females are more risk averse than males (Reniers et al., 2016). Therefore, females might attach high importance to the ability to confide in and rely on the influencer.

Management implications

According to Childers, Lemon, and Hoy (2019), brand managers are still struggling with the questions of what influencer marketing is, what its value is, and how it should be managed. This study aimed to shed light on this gap by analysing the contingencies of attractiveness and gender in the context of fashion influencer marketing. According to Zietek (2016), fashion influencers and fashion brand managers have identified authenticity, long-term relations, cocreation and the use of microinfluencers as success factors of a good influencer marketing campaign. Underneath these core components, the following subcomponents were found: brand fit, exclusivity, visual language, passion, trust, price, creative freedom, and frequent communication. Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2019) identified ad similarity, identification and trust. A further success factor is attractiveness (Hund, 2017; Trivedi, 2018). Overall, this collection of works clearly reflects the relevance of attractiveness and gender in the context of influencer marketing. However, none of these studies consider contingencies. Our study highlights the necessity of considering contingencies. Thus, influencers, especially practitioners, can refine their decisions as follows.

Overall, using an influencer of high attractiveness seems to be more advantageous than using a low-attractiveness influencer. Highly attractive influencers seem to deploy their advantages among highly attractive female and male receivers and male receivers of low attractiveness. A highly attractive influencer was never found to be disadvantageous. A low attractiveness influencer can have a negative effect on the purchase intention of low attractiveness males. Hence, practitioners are advised to focus on attractive influencers. They can evaluate an influencer’s attractiveness by pre-tests or

scientific algorithms (e.g. Bernini-Hodel, Agustsson, Timofte, Affolter, & Patcas, 2017). Influencers should signal their attractiveness to their followers, e.g. by dressing in an advantageous way or using their best professional photos (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Moreover, McGloin and Denes (2018) suggest applying make-up and sophisticated hairstyling to the individual (even for male influencers) and using flattering lighting and angles.

The findings revealed that both females and males consider female influencers more likeable. In light of this finding, practitioners are advised to consider relying more on female influencers, even for male fashion. The findings reveal that attractiveness becomes more important when the influencer is female. Hence, practitioners should value attractiveness even more in specific cases in which a female influencer is used to endorse male fashion.

Given these results, the positive effects of similarity or identification may not be realisable in all types of target groups at the level of attractiveness and gender (unattractive people, males). However, as similarity and identification are also considered success factors of an influencer campaign, practitioners may have to seek other possibilities to achieve success. Aiming for similarity at the level of personality could be advisable (Schouten et al., 2019).

Generally, the purchase intention of females and males is affected by the influencer's likeability; this effect is stronger among males. For females only, credibility is a second driver of purchase intention. Hence, practitioners should heavily focus on using a likeable endorser if they target males. For female customers, practitioners should ensure that the endorser appears equally likeable and credible.

Limitations and research implications

As with all research, our study faces some limitations. Our research focuses only on cisgender identities and presumes heterosexual attraction. In further research, looking more closely at how intersex, trans, nonbinary and other gender/sex diverse people figure into the models of attractiveness and gendered relationality with regard to influencers will fill a very noticeable gap in the marketing research. The roles played by queerness and same-sex attraction in the factors of attraction to influencers should also be examined.

Furthermore, in this study, we used Instagram as the only platform. Although only participants who were regular Instagram users were eligible for participation, trust or distrust in Instagram might influence the results. Future research might use multiple online social networks.

Moreover, further individual peculiarities could be considered. Feltman and Szymanski (2018) argued that women who hold feminist beliefs might have a critical perspective on body-related messages. Furthermore, self-esteem, body esteem and body shame may play a role in attractiveness issues (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Hence, the degree to which these characteristics of a receiver affect the relevance of influencer attractiveness could be analysed.

Attractiveness was found to be critical in the context of this research; however, this finding might not be valid if other dependent variables are regarded or in other contexts. In the context of celebrity endorsements, Baker and Churchill (1977) suggested that

advertisements with attractive endorsers elicit lower message recall and brand identification over time than ads with less attractive models. For products that, in contrast to fashion, cannot affect the attractiveness of their user, attractiveness may be of less importance (Kamins, 1990). Moreover, attractiveness may also have lower relevance for products that are merely consumed privately. Interestingly, in this context, similarity might gain relevance (Bekk et al., 2017). Hence, future research could probe the role of attractiveness in these other contexts.

Furthermore, the role of other appearance-related characteristics may be analysed. For influencers employing video, further overt characteristics, such as the attractiveness of the voice and motor skills, may have an effect. Moreover, the role of the ethnicity of the endorser and receiver could be examined (Kerin, 1979). Since the effects of target attractiveness depend on the sexual maturity of the recipient, different effects might be found among influencers targeting prepubescent customer groups (Agthe, Spörrle, Frey, Walper, & Maner, 2013).

In addition to attractiveness, females were also found to be superior endorsers. One assumption explaining this finding was that fashion might be a 'feminine' product; thus, females may be perceived as more knowledgeable (Barry & Phillips, 2016). In future research, presumed 'masculine' products could be analysed. Furthermore, it has been argued that females are judged to a stronger extent by their attractiveness, while among males, body ability (e.g. strength) is more important (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Juhlin & Soini, 2018). Hence, examining the body ability of the endorser might produce further interesting results.

The importance of other endorser characteristics (e.g., expertise) may be dependent on the receivers' own level (Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019). Hence, contingencies based on these characteristics might be developed.

Finally, the results show that similarity cannot be achieved in all cases at the levels of attractiveness and gender. Nevertheless, as similarity is an important requirement for the success of an influencer (Schouten et al., 2019), the effectiveness of other types of similarity, such as attitudes, demographics, geographic locations and hobbies, could be examined.

Conclusion

This investigation provided an overview of the contingencies of attractiveness and gender on likeability, credibility and brand purchase intention for practitioners and influencers. The results showed that high endorser attractiveness may mostly be more advantageous than low attractiveness. A surprising finding was that both females and males find a female fashion influencer more likable and credible. Hence, practitioners should attempt to use more female endorsers for male fashion. Men care more about the attractiveness of female endorsers than women do. An antiattractiveness bias occurs solely among males. Influencers' likeability has a positive effect on brand purchase intention. For female receivers, this finding also holds regarding credibility.

The results contribute to the clarification of contradictions among extant studies. The results show that attractiveness, influencer gender and their interaction effect should be considered depending on the receivers' gender.

The following three major issues should be addressed in future research: (1) whether certain beliefs or character traits (e.g., feminism, Feltman & Szymanski, 2018) of receivers might affect the relevance of attractiveness, (2) whether the advantageousness of attractiveness holds for all product types and (3) whether the advantageousness of female endorsers also applies globally.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and/or ethical restrictions.

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Appendix: Items

Attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990)

- The person is attractive.
- The person is charismatic.
- The physical condition of the person is admirable.
- The person is beautiful.

Credibility (Ohanian, 1990)

- The person is reliable.
- The person is honest.
- The person is dependable.
- The person is sincere.

Purchase Intention (Wiedmann et al., 2014)

I would be ready to buy products by the brand BOSS in the future.

I would have the intention to buy products by the brand BOSS in the future.

Likeability (Whittler & DiMeo, 1991)

The person is approachable.

(If I lived in a shared flat) I would want this person as a roommate.

The person is warm.

I would seek advice from this person.

The person is adorable.

The person is kind.

I would like to be friends with this person.

I would like to see this person as a colleague.

A4. The counterintuitive case of influencer marketing for hedonic and utilitarian services

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in Tourism Culture & Communication
under Review

The counterintuitive case of influencer marketing for hedonic and utilitarian products

Abstract

This work investigates how the relevance of social influencer's *product-specific expertise* and *utilitarian/hedonic argument style* depends on consumers' (hedonic or utilitarian) consumption goals.

The experiment consists of comparing a hotel selection for a vacation (hedonic condition) to a hotel chosen for a seminar trip (utilitarian condition). To verify the hypotheses, a structural equation model is developed.

Contradicting human intuition, (1) expertise is more important under hedonic conditions than under utilitarian conditions. Regarding (2) argument style, the results indicate the necessity for an adaptation to a particular consumption goal. The findings therefore clarify the ideal pairing of influencer characteristics and consumption goals in the context of influencer marketing.

Keywords: Holiday, Hedonic Products, Utilitarian Products, Influencer Marketing, Expertise

Introduction

The power of influencers and their fields of activity have been continuously growing in recent years (Lin et al., 2018; Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). Remarkably, extant research has scarcely considered the differences between consumption goals (hedonic versus utilitarian). Practitioners also struggle with this issue (Jahnke, 2018). However, the results from research areas outside influencer marketing (e.g., on advertising texts, Klein & Melnyk, 2016) have highlighted the need for differentiation; examples from practice demonstrate the relevance of such differentiation. The news portal Socialpromi (2021) regularly chronicles the greatest influencer failures. In 2019, it reported an image the influencer ‘cinderelly’ posted, showing her in a hedonic situation as she indulged during a holiday. However, she was not advertising a hedonic tourism product but job vacancies in financial consultancy, which was definitely a more utilitarian issue. Was her post truly a failure, or, counterintuitively, could the gesture have been a stroke of genius?

This work aims to illuminate these issues by determining how influencer marketing differs between hedonic and utilitarian consumption goal conditions in the hotel service context, regarding the following two influencer characteristics: (1) product-specific expertise and (2) utilitarian/hedonic argument style. These two variables were chosen because the theory and research outside influencer marketing suggest that their importance may differ between hedonic and utilitarian products (Chitturi et al., 2008; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Feick & Higie, 1992; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Gill, 2008; Grabner-Kräuter & Waiguny, 2015; Kim et al., 2012; Okada, 2005; Stafford et al., 2002). However, the extant theory and research do not consider influencers’ specific characteristics, which (as demonstrated in the hypothesis section) may thwart the assumed mechanisms of action. To clarify this issue, a study employing 269 data sets

was performed. The scenarios are consumers' selection of a hotel for (1) a holiday (hedonic consumption goal) or (2) a professional/university seminar (utilitarian consumption goal). Hotels were selected because they have been demonstrated to be consumed for either hedonic or utilitarian goals (Garcia-Falcon & Medina-Muñoz, 1999; Huang & Lin, 2011).

The analysis was carried out using structural equation modeling in SmartPLS. The statistical comparison of the models was performed using multigroup analysis. The results were partially surprising. In contrast to the extant research (Smith et al., 2005) and perhaps human intuition, (1) product-specific expertise appears to be more important under hedonic rather than under utilitarian conditions. With reference to (2) argument style, the results do not support the universal superiority of a hedonic argument style (Klein & Melnyk, 2016). This finding clarifies the ideal pairing of argument style and consumption goals in the influencer marketing context. Social media managers and influencers can greatly benefit from these results, especially since other research areas' theories and findings apparently cannot be transferred to influencer marketing. Rather, this area seems to follow its own principles. Similarly, some mechanisms of action appear to work counterintuitively. Hence, practitioners and influencers should not rely solely on theory or intuition.

Theory

Hedonic and utilitarian products

Products can be characterized as either hedonic or utilitarian (Okada, 2005). Hedonic products have more nontangible or subjective features and greater potential to evoke emotions and feelings among consumers. In contrast, utilitarian products have more tangible or objective

features and more closely correspond to consumers' rational and functional aspects (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). As consumers use hedonic and utilitarian products for different reasons, their consumption goals differ (Chernev, 2004). They use hedonic products to pursue pleasure-related goals, while utilitarian products fulfill functionality-related goals (Chitturi et al., 2008).

Influencers

Influencers are individuals who can create *valuable content*, have *high reputations in specific fields* and are followed by *a large number of users* in online social networks (De Veirman et al., 2017). This work addresses the issue of whether a product that influencers endorse is hedonic or utilitarian. This issue may gain relevance as influencers are employed in a wider range of fields, notably business-to-business marketing, where a good's utilitarian characteristics play a larger role in decision making (Von Lewinski, 2018).

Influencers' relevance in the hotel industry

The present study examines the hotel industry because traveling is an important activity field for influencers (Javits, 2019). Since tourism products are difficult to assess prior to their consumption (Pan et al., 2016), consumers strongly rely on word-of-mouth (WoM) (Fili & Križaj, 2017). The hospitality sector is among the sectors most influenced by electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM) (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014). Notably, travelers trust user-generated content more than traditional advertising. Nevertheless, influencer marketing research in the context of tourism products remains scarce (Javits, 2019).

Hotels were found to be well suited for the current experiment because tourism products can generally be consumed for hedonic as well as utilitarian needs (Zacharia & Spais, 2017).

Business travelers choose hotels mainly for utilitarian reasons, whereas leisure travelers usually choose hotels that offer mostly hedonic benefits (Huang & Lin, 2011; Kuo et al., 2015). In this way, hotels allow for eliminating idiosyncratic differences that might occur if two different products (a utilitarian product and a different hedonic product) were used in the experiment (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013). Moreover, the hotel-stay scenario is proven to be easily understood and envisioned by survey participants (Palazon & Delgado-Ballester, 2013).

Product-specific expertise

Product-specific expertise is conceptualized as the skills that enable a recommender to have influence within an area (Mayer et al., 1995; Sitkin & Roth, 1993). Such expertise is consensually defined in terms of high performance levels within a given domain (Bourne et al., 2014). Highlighting this issue is important because this work focuses on expertise related to the product and not general education or other forms of unrelated knowledge. An expert is defined as being capable of performing in a domain at a high level that only a few others can achieve. Individuals recognize expertise in a particular domain by considering what the expert knows and what he or she has accomplished or achieved (Bourne et al., 2014; Garrett et al., 2009). Opinion leaders are similarly characterized as experts who have superior product knowledge and experience (Flynn et al., 1996; Gilly et al., 1998). Therefore, possessing product-related expertise can be considered a relevant criterion for influencers.

Utilitarian/hedonic argument style and goal mismatch

Products can be characterized as either primarily hedonic or utilitarian (Okada, 2005). Because consumers use hedonic and utilitarian products for different purposes, their consumption goals

also differ (Chernev, 2004). Consumers pursue pleasure-related goals with hedonic products, whereas utilitarian products fulfill functionality-related goals (Chitturi et al., 2008). As part of its communication policy (e.g., via influencers), a company chooses whether to emphasize the product's hedonic or utilitarian benefits (MacInnis & Jaworski, 2018). The arguments can match (e.g., communicating *utilitarian* benefits for *utilitarian* products) or mismatch consumption goals (e.g., communicating *hedonic* benefits for *utilitarian* products) (Lavine & Snyder, 1996; Shavitt, 1990). A consumption goal match occurs when the communicated arguments about the product and the product itself are associated with the same goal (Klein & Melnyk, 2016). As hypothesis development shows, against first intuitions, communicating goal-matching arguments is not automatically the most successful choice (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Gill, 2008).

Which hotel-related success factors can influencers impact?

During this investigation, the impacts of the two aforementioned characteristics (product-specific expertise, utilitarian/hedonic argument style and goal mismatch) on hotel attitude, booking intention, and willingness to pay a price premium are examined. These constructs were chosen for reasons detailed below.

Hotels are part of the service industry. Unlike material goods, services are characterized by a high degree of intangibility, which makes assessing their quality prior to consumption more difficult (i.e., in contrast to a material physical good, an immaterial service cannot be seen or touched). Therefore, to assess product quality, consumers regularly rely on other sources, such as third-party information (Meffert et al., 2018). Consumers consider eWoM to be a reliable and imperative source of information (Li, 2013); as a result, it can shape consumers' expectations

and influence their **attitudes**, which eventually affect their purchasing decisions (Luo & Zhong, 2015).

Attitude refers to one's tendency to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner towards a target (e.g., brand or product). A positive **attitude towards a hotel** can have many favorable effects: it determines the customer's intention to visit the hotel and reduces the customer's skepticism towards negative information (Bravo et al., 2019). A positive customer attitude directly correlates to a product's positive reputation and future profits (Anderson et al., 1994; Homburg et al., 2005). Thus, any hotel marketing strategy's highest aim is to increase consumers' attitudes towards their offerings (O'Fallon, 2011).

Moreover, in most cases, an influencer endorsement represents an investment in the hotel. Hence, investigating the possibility of directly recovering the investment by either selling a higher quantity of stays (i.e., a higher **booking intention**) or charging a higher price (i.e., a stronger willingness to pay a **price premium**) is worthwhile (Wertenbroch & Skiera, 2002). Both constructs can be (negatively and positively) impacted by eWoM. The impact on booking intention is relevant because **booking intention** has been found to vitally predict actual booking behavior in the hospitality and tourism industry (Bai et al., 2008; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Investigating consumer willingness to pay a **price premium** for tourism accommodations in the presence of eWoM is also a matter of strong interest because it has remained undetermined despite its relevance to hospitality operators (Nieto-García et al., 2017).

Conceptualizing research goals

A comprehensive framework of endorser success factors stems from Erdogan (1999), who builds on early pioneering research. This framework rudimentarily features many characteristics that

are relevant to this work. Product-specific expertise, along with attractiveness and trustworthiness, is part of the source-credibility model by Hovland et al. (1982) and Ohanian (1990). The model states that product-specific expertise, physical attractiveness, and trustworthiness enhance a communicator's credibility. Erdogan (1999) also addresses the relevance of argument style and goal (mis)match, which emerges from the match-up hypothesis (e.g., Kamins, 1990). According to this hypothesis, an endorser should match the product. The match-up hypothesis is rooted in social adaptation theory (Kahle & Homer, 1985), which states that information's adaptive significance determines its impact. Arguably, Erdogan developed the framework for traditional offline celebrity advertising, and it does not consider modern influencers' specific characteristics. Therefore, this model should be considered with caution. Moreover, Erdogan's framework does not determine whether certain characteristics' relevance differs between hedonic and utilitarian products; thus, it is impossible to determine which characteristics are worthy analyzing in order to address this work's central issue. The conceptual work by Lin et al. (2018) contributes to filling these gaps. As consumers' judgment of hedonic products is subjective, influencers must foster consumers' personal attachment to a product. Therefore, personal attachment to the product must be communicated, e.g., by means of emotions (Bond et al., 2009; Im et al., 2015). In contrast, utilitarian values are judged by a conscious and evaluative process (Bond et al., 2009). Therefore, influencers promoting utilitarian values should embody a knowledge leadership function, which means that their product-specific expertise is important (Lin et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2005). This theory serves as a basis for the current empirical investigation (Figures 1-4). As Lin et al. (2018) do not provide empirical evidence to support their theory, we consider empirical results related to similar issues in other types of endorsements (e.g., customer reviews and advertising texts) in order to develop our

hypothesis.

Impacts of product-specific expertise

Expertise is an important endorser requirement according to Erdogan's (1999) framework of endorser success factors. In online communities, the expertise of individual members is a relevant characteristic (Rezaei & Ismail, 2014) [Klicken oder tippen Sie hier, um Text einzugeben..](#) Martensen et al. (2018) found that product-specific expertise enhanced fashion influencers' persuasiveness. Similarly, Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that influencers' expertise positively affects brand awareness. The relevance of expertise is also supported by theory: Numerous scholars have associated an endorser's level of product-specific expertise with his or her perceived trustworthiness (Feick & Higie, 1992; Gilly et al., 1998; McCracken, 1989; McGinnies & Ward, 1980). Nevertheless, some scholars have refuted the premise that expertise is a crucial requirement for influencers (e.g., Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019; Saima & Khan, 2020; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). Expertise is a persuasion cue that triggers individuals to use cognitive heuristics such as 'statements by experts can be trusted' (Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991). Moreover, an endorser's expertise helps communicate a sustainable bond with the product (Mowen, 1980).

According to Lin et al.'s (2018) theory, expertise may be less important under hedonic conditions, which can be understood as follows: under utilitarian conditions, cognitive beliefs about functional attributes guide consumers' decisions (Feick & Higie, 1992). In such situations, consumers prefer endorsers who are experts on a product because they believe that such endorsers are able to evaluate functional attributes (Feick & Higie, 1992; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Stafford et al., 2002). In the context of online reviews for online shopping goods, Smith et

al. (2005) found that product-specific expertise has a weaker impact on the recommender's perceived influence if consumers pursue a more hedonic (or less utilitarian) consumption goal. However, this line of reasoning has not been found to be universally true: Peter and Ponzi (2018) demonstrated that an endorsing source's expertise was not more significant for a utilitarian product than for a hedonic one. To explain this surprising result, they speculated that expertise's importance might instead depend on the receiver's individual preferences.

The considerations above highlight the necessity for verifying expertise's relevance. The following hypotheses (following theoretical considerations) are thus proposed:

H1: Product-specific expertise positively affects trust in an influencer.

H2: If consumers pursue a more hedonic (less utilitarian) consumption goal, product-specific expertise's effect on trust in an influencer is less pronounced.

Impacts of a utilitarian/hedonic argument style

The endorser success factors framework in Erdogan (1999) states that information's adaptive significance determines its impact. Thus, a fit between product type and argument style is assumed more persuasive (Haddock & Maio, 2007). Product evaluation mainly depends on consumers' beliefs about a product's suitability for fulfilling their consumption goals, and this evaluation relates to the match between the product and consumers' consumption goals (Sirgy, 1982). Hence, a message that is compatible with a consumer's goal should be more persuasive than an incompatible message (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee & Labroo, 2004). However, this intuitive line of reasoning has also raised objections: Lim and Ang (2008) postulated that communicating mismatching arguments (e.g., *utilitarian* benefits for a *hedonic* product) would be more advantageous in brand promotion. The mismatch would be perceived as novel and

stimulate elaboration (Heckler & Childers, 1992; Mandler, 1981). Resolving this mismatch produces favorable responses because consumers are delighted when they are able to tackle the incongruity (Lim & Ang, 2008). However, Lim and Ang (2008) were able to support their hypothesis only for a mismatch in terms of utilitarian but not for hedonic products. Other studies also suggest that hedonic arguments can enhance consumers' attitudes towards utilitarian products more than utilitarian arguments can (Klein & Melnyk, 2016; Lim & Ang, 2008). Notably, Klein and Melnyk (2016) tested advertising texts for shower gels and candles and found that for utilitarian products, goal-mismatching arguments increased purchase likelihood more than goal-matching arguments.

An explanation for why hedonic arguments may also be more advantageous than utilitarian arguments for utilitarian products is as follows: because consuming utilitarian products is easier to justify than consuming hedonic goods (Chitturi et al., 2008; Gill, 2008; Okada, 2005), consumers may consider factors other than utilitarian arguments when they consider purchasing such goods (Gill, 2008). Product goal-mismatching (hedonic) arguments may attract more attention because they make the product seem more pleasurable or exciting (Gill, 2008). They may elicit positive affect, thus enhancing persuasion (Klein & Melnyk, 2016). Notably, it requires less effort to switch from a utilitarian to a hedonic processing mode than vice versa (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Gill, 2008). These specialties might explain why goal mismatch may be advantageous only in utilitarian consumption goal situation.

However, in line with the intuitive suggestions of Haddock and Maio (2007), other scholars have demonstrated that, for utilitarian products, emphasizing utilitarian qualities is more effective than emphasizing hedonic qualities (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Shavitt, 1990, 1992; Shavitt & Lowrey, 1992). These contradictory results raise the question of whether one effect dominates

or if the effects cancel each other out. Although the extant results conflict, we believe that hedonic arguments will be most successful because social network use mostly arises from a hedonic motivation (Ernst et al., 2013). Based on theoretical support, the following (partially counterintuitive) hypotheses are developed:

H3: If consumers pursue a hedonic consumption goal, a more utilitarian (less hedonic) argument style will negatively affect their (a) attitude, (b) booking intention and (c) willingness to pay a price premium.

H4: If consumers pursue a utilitarian consumption goal, a more utilitarian (less hedonic) argument style will negatively affect their (a) attitude, (b) booking intention and (c) willingness to pay a price premium.

Interconnections between influencer trust and product-related variables

The introduced concepts of influencer trust and product attitude may also affect the downstream crucial constructs of booking intention and willingness to pay a price premium. Hence, these additional relationships also merit investigation.

Attribution theory states that any source that is perceived as biased will be dismissed (Kelley, 1973). The balance model states that trustworthiness sustains the link between the endorser and the message (Mowen, 1980).

Overall, trust in online information positively affects consumers' attitudes towards described products (Chu & Kamal, 2008). Huang (2014) found that trust in a restaurant blogger positively affects consumers' attitudes. Trust in a blogger also positively affects purchase intention in the context of online shopping (Hsu et al., 2013). Similar findings were produced by Haron et al. (2016) in relation to bloggers in the contexts of fashion, skincare, gadgets and

foodstuffs. Martensen et al. (2018) found that influencers' trustworthiness enhanced their persuasiveness. In this spirit, it can be suggested that a positive post will have a greater positive effect if the influencer is perceived as trustworthy. However, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) could not demonstrate that bloggers' trustworthiness impacted 'perceived influence' or 'influence to purchase,' although trustworthiness was marginally significant under conditions of higher issue involvement or when consumers pursued a goal that depended strongly on trust. In light of these contradictory results, the relevance of trust must be verified.

H5: Influencer trust positively affects attitudes towards a hotel.

Attitude explains the predictive utility through which individuals formulate the intention to engage in a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). When consumers have developed a positive attitude towards a product, their purchase intention increases, and they are prepared to pay a price premium (e.g., Farris et al., 2010; Martenson & Dennis, 2007; Wiedmann et al., 2011). In the context of influencers endorsing travel destinations, Xu and Pratt (2018) demonstrated that the attitude an influencer formed towards a destination positively affected consumers' intention to visit. Sijoria et al. (2019) found that positive and reliable eWoM about hotels can form a positive impression among consumers, which results in their willingness to pay a price premium. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H6: Attitude towards a hotel positively influences (a) booking intention and (b) willingness to pay a price premium.

Scenarios and stimulus material

The current study features two scenarios (*hedonic* versus *utilitarian* consumption goals) in which the subjects were faced with fictitious influencers who possessed either *low* or *high product-*

specific expertise and employed either a *hedonic* or *utilitarian argument style* (to create a goal (mis)match in the scenarios). Corresponding influencer profiles and posts were designed accordingly (Table 1).

In the hedonic consumption goal scenario, the subjects sought a holiday resort. In the utilitarian consumption goal scenario, the subjects sought a hotel for a university/professional seminar. Product-specific expertise was manipulated by means of an entry in the influencer's profile, demonstrating a high/low amount of product-specific expertise with hotels. Employing a hedonic/utilitarian argument style was manipulated by hotel reports that mainly praised the hotel's utilitarian or hedonic benefits.

To avoid interference from other nonconsidered variables, particularly the perceived *personality* of the influencers (Von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021), no further information on the influencers was communicated.

Pretest

A pretest study (n=74) was carried out to test the aforementioned scenarios and stimulus material. The pretest was conducted in Germany, and students shared the study on SurveyCircle, Thesius and PollPool. The subjects evaluated the two scenarios (choosing a holiday resort/choosing a hotel for a university or professional seminar) on a bipolar scale, where the lowest degree was the perception of an extremely hedonic consumption goal and the highest degree was the perception of an extremely utilitarian consumption goal.

The stimulus material was evaluated with regard to perceived product-specific expertise and argument style. Product-specific expertise was measured using a Likert scale adapted from Ohanian (1990). The hedonic/utilitarian argument style was measured on a bipolar scale, where

the lowest degree was an extremely hedonic argument style and the highest degree was an extremely utilitarian argument style. All of these scales had seven points. Perceptions were compared using five ANOVAs.

The results confirmed successful scenario manipulation ($M_{\text{Hedonic Scenario}} = 2.800$, $M_{\text{Utilitarian Scenario}} = 5.570$, $p < 0.0001$) and stimulus material in terms of *product-specific expertise* ($M_{\text{Low Product-specific expertise}} = 1.274$, $M_{\text{High Product-specific expertise}} = 6.000$, $p < 0.0001$) and *hedonic/utilitarian argument style* ($M_{\text{Hedonic Style}} = 1.710$, $M_{\text{Utilitarian Style}} = 6.140$, $p < 0.0001$).

Integrated design and measures

Data collection was performed via an online experiment from May to August 2021 in Germany. The questionnaires was shared on the SurveyCircle, PollPool, and Thesius research platforms. For the purpose of data cleaning, the algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers (Leiner, 2013), was run. In total, 269 data sets were employed ($M_{\text{age}} = 25$ years, 69.8 % female) (demographic data is displayed in Table 2).

The study adopted a 2 (hedonic versus utilitarian scenario) x 2 (low versus high product-specific expertise) x 2 (hedonic versus utilitarian argument style) experimental design. The structure of the questionnaires was as follows:

In the first step, the subjects' demographic data were collected. Age and gender were employed as control variables.

In the second step, the subjects were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental groups. The subjects were allocated to either the hedonic or utilitarian scenario. They were shown one of the hotel reports that employed either a hedonic or a utilitarian argument style.

Then, the subjects were presented with profile information identifying the influencer as either an expert or a nonexpert.

In manipulation checks, the perceived argument style of the reports and the perceived product-specific expertise were queried.

In the third step, the subjects indicated their *trust in the influencer* (using a three-item scale adapted from De Wulf et al. (2001)), *attitude towards the hotel* in light of the scenario (using a three-item scale adapted from Till and Busler (2000)), *booking intention* (containing three items) and willingness to pay a *price premium* (containing two items) (the latter two scales were adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2011)).

In the fourth step, additional control variables were surveyed; the primary variable was the perceived honesty of the influencer. This variable describes the subjects' estimation of whether influencers expressed their honest opinions or were biased by the influence of third parties and/or material rewards. Further control variables were the subjects' *susceptibility to interpersonal influence*, *perceived task importance*, *involvement with hotels*, *own product-specific expertise with hotels* and *own hotel-usage frequency*. All of these scales had nine points.

Results

Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks were carried out to verify whether manipulating the stimulus material featuring low/high product-specific expertise and either a hedonic or utilitarian argument style was perceived as intended. For this purpose, two ANOVAs were performed. The ANOVAs of *product-specific expertise* ($M_{\text{Low product-specific expertise}} = 2.915$, $M_{\text{High product-specific expertise}} = 7.600$, $p <$

0.0001) and *argument style* ($M_{\text{Hedonic Style}} = 1.670$, $M_{\text{Utilitarian Style}} = 8.140$, $p < 0.0001$) ascertained significant differences, hence, the manipulation was successful.

Model evaluation

To test the hypotheses, the methodological considerations require two structural equation models, which are denominated as follows:

- a: hedonic consumption goal scenario
- b: utilitarian consumption goal scenario

The models were first checked for common method bias using Harman's (1976) single-factor method. The common factor explained 35.240 % of the variance, which was less than 50 %; thus, no common method bias was present (Eichhorn, 2014).

The models were statistically compared using multigroup analysis. Before considering the results, the measurement and structural models were evaluated. Structural equation models were developed and analyzed using SmartPLS, a leading application for applying structural equation modeling (Rippé et al., 2019). SmartPLS has the exclusive feature of being able to support multigroup analysis, which tests groups to determine whether significant differences exist in group-specific parameter estimates (Hair, 2014; Henseler & Chin, 2010). This type of analysis is considered to provide a huge advantage over standard approaches that examine a single structural relationship at a time by simply testing moderations (Hair et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2018). In this study's context, multigroup analysis allowed us to split the models into two scenarios, one with hedonic consumption goals and the other with utilitarian consumption goals.

Measurement model evaluation

To ensure item reliability, every factor loading must be greater than 0.500 on its respective measurement construct (Hulland, 1999). The factor loadings were 0.662 – 0.992 ($P < 0.05$) in a and 0.755 – 0.976 ($P < 0.0001$) in b.

The average variance extracted (first column of Table 3) measures the amount of variance captured by a construct based on its indicators relative to the amount of variance explained by measurement error. A model is convergent when the average variance extracted surpasses 0.500 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The average variance extracted was 0.635 - 0.979 in a and 0.652 - 0.945 in b across the set of constructs.

Composite reliability (second column of Table 3) assesses the correlation between indicators and constructs and reflects whether a factor is suitable for explaining its components. The composite reliability value should be greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Netemeyer et al., 2003). The composite reliability was 0.872 – 0.989 in a and 0.651 – 0.945 in b across the set of constructs.

To assess discriminant validity, we used the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion. The HTMT criterion assesses the HTMT ratio of the correlations, which is the average of the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of the indicators across constructs measuring different phenomena), relative to the average of the monotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of indicators within the same construct). This result should remain below the threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), which was the case in our model.

Structural model evaluation

To evaluate a model's goodness of fit, the coefficient of determination (R^2) (third column of

Table 3) of every endogenous construct should exceed the value of 0.19 (Marcoulides, 2009). R^2 was 0.442 – 0.729 in a and 0.467 – 0.682 in b across the set of endogenous constructs.

The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was evaluated using Stone-Geisser's Q^2 (fourth column of Table 3). This construct should be higher than 0.000 for all endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2011, 2014). Q^2 was 0.354 – 0.649 in a and 0.387 – 0.544 in b across the set of endogenous constructs.

To prevent inflated standard errors of a nonmoderated dependent variable's regression coefficients, multicollinearity must be avoided (Disatnik & Sivan, 2016; Groebner et al., 2018; Kline, 2016). The risk of multicollinearity was demonstrated to be low, as the VIF value was below the threshold of five (Kline, 2016).

Hypothesis testing

The hypotheses were tested based on the path coefficients and their significance levels (Table 4). The individual path coefficients of the PLS structural model can be interpreted as the standardized beta coefficients of ordinary least squares regressions (Hair et al., 2014). Paths that are nonsignificant or show signs contrary to the hypothesized direction do not support a prior hypothesis, whereas significant paths showing the hypothesized direction empirically support the proposed causal relationship (Hair et al., 2014). For more rigor, in addition to these criteria and to support a hypothesis, a path coefficient should also be influential; that is, its value should exceed 0.200 if a positive relationship is assumed or be less than -0.200 in the case of a negative relationship (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). (In practice, path coefficients with an absolute value less than 0.200 will, in many cases, be insignificant anyway.) In summary, a hypothesis is considered supported if the path coefficients' value (1) shows a sign that aligns with the hypothesized

direction, (2) is significant, and (3) surpasses 0.200 in the case of an assumed positive relationship or if it declines to less than -0.200 in the case of a presumed negative relationship.

The model's path coefficients and significance levels are presented in Figure 1 and Table 4.

As the hypotheses require, the differences between two structural equation models were analyzed by multigroup analysis as suggested by Henseler et al. (2009) and Keil et al. (2000). Multigroup analysis serves the purpose of statistically comparing the two models' path coefficients. In this way, we can state whether the observed difference between two path coefficients is significant. In the context of our study, a multigroup analysis appeared to be more appropriate than a mere variance analysis, as variance analysis does not allow the path coefficients between two structural equation models to be directly compared.

H1 stated that product-specific expertise positively affects trust in an influencer. As the path coefficient of *product-specific expertise* on *trust in the influencer* was 0.684 ($p < 0.0001$)/0.470 ($p < 0.0001$) in a/b, H1 was supported.

H2 stated that if consumers pursue a hedonic consumption goal, the effect of product-specific expertise on their trust in an endorser will be less pronounced. Comparing the path coefficients showed that in contrast to H2, the path coefficient from *product-specific expertise* to *trust in the influencer* was higher under the hedonic rather than under the utilitarian consumption goal condition. The difference between the two path coefficients was significant at $P < 0.05$. Hence, H2 was not supported.

H3 stated that if consumers strive for a hedonic consumption goal, a more utilitarian argument style will negatively affect their (a) attitude towards the hotel, (b) booking intention and (c) willingness to pay a price premium. The path coefficient of *utilitarian argument style* on (a) *attitude towards the hotel* was -0.546 ($p < 0.0001$), (b) *booking intention* was -0.300 ($p <$

0.0001) and (c) *willingness to pay a price premium* was -0.269 ($p < 0.01$) in a, supporting H3 (a) through (c).

H4 proposed that if consumers have a utilitarian consumption goal, a more utilitarian argument style will negatively affect their (a) attitude towards the hotel, (b) booking intention and (c) willingness to pay a price premium. In b, the path coefficient from utilitarian argument style to (a) *attitude towards the hotel* failed to meet the threshold of 0.200. Argument style had no influence on attitude, and H4 (a) was not supported. The path coefficient on (b) *booking intention* was 0.552 ($p < 0.0001$) and on (c) *willingness to pay a price premium* ($p < 0.0001$) was 0.302. Hence, a utilitarian argument style positively impacted these two constructs, and H4 (b) and (c) were not supported.

H5 stated that *trust in the influencer* positively influences *attitude towards the hotel*. The path coefficients from *influencer trust* to *attitude towards the hotel* were 0.363 ($p < 0.0001$)/0.572 ($p < 0.0001$) in a/b. Consequently, H5 was supported.

H6 stated that attitude towards the hotel positively impacts (a) *booking intention* and (b) *willingness to pay a price premium*. The path coefficients from *attitude towards the hotel* on (a) *booking intention* ($\text{path}_a = 0.620$; $p_a < 0.0001$; $\text{path}_b = 0.445$; $p_b < 0.0001$) and (b) *willingness to pay a price premium* ($\text{path}_a = 0.400$; $p_a < 0.001$; $\text{path}_b = 0.373$; $p_b < 0.0001$) were influential and significant. Hence, H6 (a) and (b) were supported.

The path coefficient of the control variable perceived honesty of the influencer on influencer trust was 0.212 ($p < 0.01$)/0.400 ($p < 0.0001$ in a/b).

The *subjects' own product-specific expertise with hotels* impact on the booking intention was 0.203 ($p < 0.01$) in a. No other control variable became significant in any of the models.

The results are shown in Figures 1-4. These figures illustrate the relationships between the constructs based on the path coefficients and their significance levels.

Discussion

This work aimed to investigate the relevance of product-specific expertise and argument style under hedonic and utilitarian consumption goal conditions. The results suggest that product-specific expertise has a higher impact on influencer trust under hedonic than utilitarian conditions. This result marks a contrast to the extant findings in other research fields (e.g., on customer reviews (Smith et al., 2005)). Moreover, a utilitarian argument style is more effective under utilitarian consumption goal conditions, while a hedonic argument style is more suitable under hedonic conditions. These results might sound logical; however, they contradict those found in the research on advertising texts, suggesting that goal-mismatching arguments are more suitable under utilitarian conditions. Trust in the influencer also depends on the influencer's perceived honesty. Thus, it is possible that consumers initially expect a message that is compatible with their goals should be more persuasive than an incompatible message (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee & Labroo, 2004), i.e., a hedonic message that matches a hedonic scenario and a utilitarian message that suits a utilitarian scenario. In contrast, the presumed positive effects including a less effortful processing of hedonic arguments (even in utilitarian scenarios) (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Gill, 2008) or the joy and pleasure that stem from hedonic communications (even for utilitarian products) (Gill, 2008; Lim & Ang, 2008) might be very small.

Implications for further research and limitations

As with all research, our study faces some limitations. This study was conducted in Germany,

that is, in a Western cultural setting. Zhu et al. (2019) suggested that the relevance of identification might vary among eastern and western societies. Therefore, in future research, this study's results could be reproduced in an eastern cultural context to allow for comparisons.

Furthermore, a hotel stay qualifies as a service. Services are less tangible than physical goods because they cannot be physically perceived. In this way, assessing quality characteristics prior to consumption becomes more difficult (Meffert et al., 2018). Therefore, the endorser characteristics that reflect the endorser's qualifications and diagnosticity, such as expertise and perhaps similarity, might carry more weight in the context of services than physical goods. In future research, a comparative study on physical goods could be conducted.

In this study, we mainly focused on variables related to brand and trust in the influencer. In future research, further variables could be considered, especially for engagement such as likes, shares, and comments (McGloin & Denes, 2018).

A final limitation might be that audience-related characteristics were not considered. An individual's previous experiences might shape the individual variables' importance. For example, an individual who was disappointed in the past by an endorser's low expertise might now attach higher importance to any sign of high endorser expertise (Pentina et al., 2018). Therefore, in future research, prior experience could be included in the study.

Implications for management and conclusions

Social media managers should note that they must pay more attention to influencers' product-specific expertise under hedonic conditions than under utilitarian conditions. Influencers can signal expertise by means of product-related education and experience. Similarly, influencers (or related agencies) should focus on goal-matching arguments. Concretely, influencers should

highlight hedonic benefits if consumers pursue a hedonic consumption goal and utilitarian benefits if consumers pursue a utilitarian consumption goal. Additionally, it is critical that influencers are always perceived as communicating their honest opinion.

In future research, an empirical explanation for the occurrence of the aforementioned counterintuitive results could be developed. It would also be advisable to expand the research to focus on other industries in which influencers play a major role, such as fashion or beauty. Finally, as certain products also have both high utilitarian and hedonic value (Lin et al., 2018), the success factors in this condition could be investigated.

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Figure legends

Figure 1. The arrows are labeled with the path coefficients and their significance levels.

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

**** $p < 0.0001$

Tables

Table 1. Stimulus material.

Stimulus Material
<hr/> Product-specific expertise <hr/> Low Product-specific expertise <p><i>After completing my office administration clerk training, I am currently earning my master's in administrative science. I have recently discovered my love for traveling, and in the past few months, I have visited three hotels. You can find my reviews on Instagram. While I still do not have a clear idea of what makes a good hotel, I learn something new every day. As I discover what makes a good hotel, I hope to gain followers such as yourself.</i></p> <hr/> High Product-specific expertise <p><i>If I had to describe my life in three words, I would say, I love traveling! Harnessing this passion, I first trained as a hotel clerk and now study hotel management in a master's program. Over many years, I have stayed in more than 300 hotels. You can find my reviews on Instagram. I dream of opening my own hotel someday; until I do, I hope you will continue to follow me.</i></p> <hr/>
Argument Styles <hr/> Hedonic Argument Style <p><i>True Joie de Vivre – This hotel is the perfect place for a pleasurable vacation. In the beautiful spa area with several swimming pools, saunas, and a massage area, I managed to leave behind the stress of everyday life. I also truly enjoyed the hotel restaurants that offer award-winning cuisine. Everything was delicious. I particularly liked the live cooking station. I certainly plan to spend many more wonderful vacations at this hotel.</i></p> <hr/> Utilitarian Argument Style <p><i>Perfect Organization – During my last seminar, I experienced this hotel's structured and quiet atmosphere. All of the conditions for efficient work are fulfilled, such as functional desks, printers, and copiers in the rooms. I particularly liked the secretarial service, which relieved me of some tedious tasks and was of great assistance. The conference rooms greatly simplify teamwork. Overall, I can fully recommend this well-thought-out business hotel. The conditions for project development are ideal—almost better than in a real office.</i></p> <hr/>

Table 2. Participant demographic data.

		Pretest	Study	
Age	18-25	68.9 %	69.8 %	
	26-35	23.3 %	25.4 %	
	Over 35	7.8 %	4.8 %	
Occupation	Pupil	1.1 %	0.0 %	
	Apprentice	1.1 %	0.3 %	
	Full-time Student	78.9 %	83.3 %	
	Dual Student	5.6 %	3.4 %	
	Employee	2.2 %	11.0 %	
	Self-employed	0.0 %	0.8 %	
	Unemployed	1.1 %	0.3 %	
	Retiree	1.1 %	0.8 %	
	Income	No Personal Income	17.8 %	14.4 %
		Less Than 500 €	23.3 %	30.3 %
500-999 €		33.3 %	30.8 %	
1000-1499 €		10.0 %	14.1 %	
1500-2000 €		5.6 %	3.4 %	
More Than 2000 €		10.0 %	7.6 %	

Table 3. Model evaluation.

	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability	R²	Q²
a				
Attitude towards the Hotel	0.886	0.959	0.505	0.446
Booking Intention	0.924	0.973	0.730	0.674
Product-Specific Expertise	0.920	0.983		
Influencer Trust	0.938	0.978	0.569	0.525
Perceived Honesty	0.676	0.860		
Price Premium	0.979	0.989	0.442	0.428
Subjects' Involvement	0.635	0.872		
Subjects' Own Product-Specific Expertise	0.874	0.954		
Utilitarian Argument Style	1.000	1.000		
b				
Attitude towards the Hotel	0.809	0.927	0.475	0.389
Booking Intention	0.925	0.974	0.682	0.626
Product-Specific Expertise	0.912	0.981		
Influencer Trust	0.922	0.973	0.493	0.450
Perceived Honesty	0.715	0.882		
Price Premium	0.945	0.971	0.467	0.442
Subjects' Involvement	0.652	0.882		
Subjects' Own Product-Specific Expertise	0.832	0.937		
Utilitarian Argument Style	1.000	1.000		

Table 4. Path coefficients.

	a		b		SD
	Path		Path		
Attitude Hotel -> Booking Int.	0.620	****	0.064	0.445	****
Attitude Hotel -> Price Premium	0.400	***	0.106	0.373	****
Product-Specific Expertise -> Influencer Trust	0.684	****	0.052	0.470	****
Influencer Trust -> Attitude Hotel	0.363	****	0.063	0.572	****
Perceived Honesty -> Attitude Hotel	0.057		0.072	0.103	
Perceived Honesty -> Booking Int.	0.064		0.052	-0.047	
Perceived Honesty -> Influencer Trust	0.212	**	0.071	0.400	****
Perceived Honesty -> Price Premium	0.131		0.080	0.218	**
Subjects' Involvement -> Attitude Hotel	0.038		0.114	0.166	
Subjects' Involvement -> Booking Int.	-0.056		0.071	0.025	
Subjects' Involvement -> Trust	0.038		0.095	-0.051	
Subjects' Involvement -> Price Premium	-0.011		0.096	0.054	
Subjects' Product-Specific Expertise -> Attitude Hotel	0.125		0.081	-0.162	
Subjects' Product-Specific Expertise -> Booking Int.	0.203	**	0.063	0.081	
Subjects' Product-Specific Expertise -> Influencer Trust	0.051		0.087	0.140	
Subjects' Product-Specific Expertise -> Price Premium	0.138		0.109	-0.109	
Uti. Argument Style -> Attitude Hotel	-0.546	****	0.059	0.189	
Uti. Argument Style -> Booking Int.	-0.300	****	0.072	0.552	****
Uti. Argument Style -> Price Premium	-0.269	**	0.104	0.302	****

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

*** p < 0.001

**** $p < 0.0001$

Figures

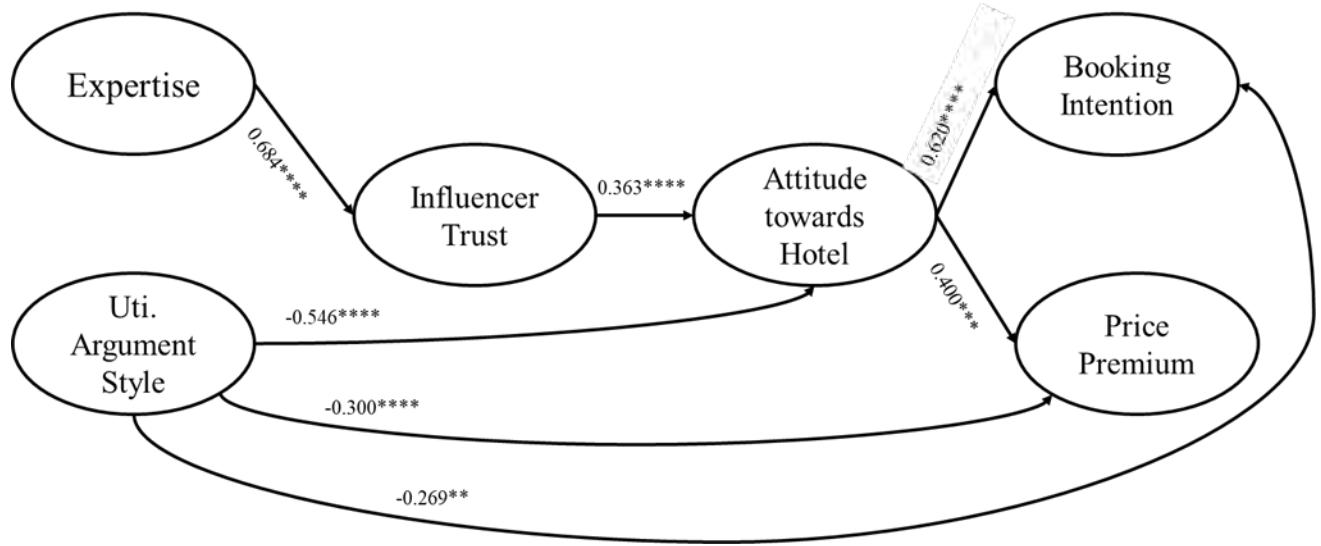


Figure 1a. Model a.

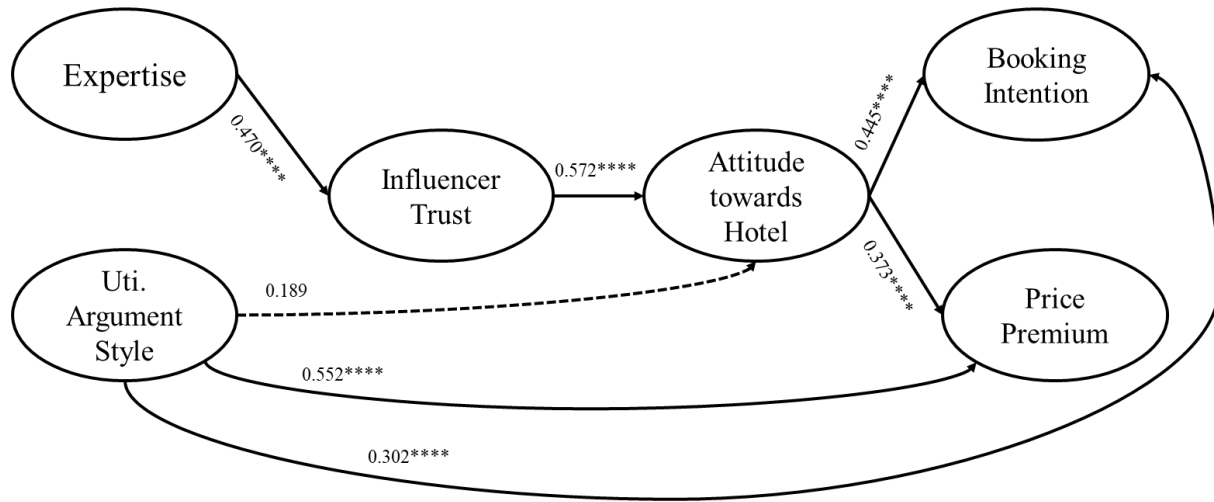


Figure 1b. Model b.

Figure 1. The arrows are labeled with path coefficients and their significance levels.

- * p < 0.05
- ** p < 0.01
- *** p < 0.001
- **** p < 0.0001

A5. The relevance of demographic similarity and factuality in social influencer communication – A comparison between hedonic and utilitarian conditions.

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The relevance of demographic similarity and factuality in social influencer communication culture – A comparison between hedonic and utilitarian conditions

Abstract: This work identifies differences in the success factors of influencers given consumers' consumption goals (hedonic vs. utilitarian). Although practitioners complain about a lack of knowledge on this issue, research on the topic remains scarce. Hypotheses on the differing relevance of the demographic similarity of influencers and consumers and of the factuality of influencers' communication are verified through an empirical investigation. The scenario is consumers' selection of a hotel for (1) a holiday (hedonic consumption goal) or (2) a professional/university seminar (utilitarian consumption goal). The results are analyzed by structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis. We generate some surprising results. Counterintuitively, demographic similarity is more important under utilitarian than hedonic conditions. Factuality seems equally important in both conditions. Explanations and implications of these findings are provided.

Keywords: Social Influencer Marketing, Hedonic Products, Utilitarian Products, Demographic Similarity, Factuality, Tourism Marketing

1 Introduction

The power of influencers and their fields of activity have been growing continuously (Lin et al., 2018). Until now, little empirical research has investigated the possible connections between a consumer's (hedonic or utilitarian) consumption goal and the ideal characteristics of an influencer; both practitioners and scholars have complained about a lack of knowledge on this issue (e.g., Jahnke, 2021; Lee and Eastin, 2020). Results from research areas outside the realm of influencer marketing have highlighted the necessity for differentiating these categories (e.g., Klein and Melnyk, 2016). The current work investigates two characteristics of influencers, for which differentiation may be necessary according to Lin et al.'s (2018) concept of concurrent value exchange processes, namely, their demographic similarity to perceivers and the factuality of their communication style. For this purpose, the impacts of these characteristics on hedonic and utilitarian consumption goals are analyzed. The underlying scenario is consumers' selection of a hotel for (1) a holiday (hedonic consumption goal) or (2) a professional/university seminar (utilitarian consumption goal). Based on an online questionnaire, the analysis is conducted by structural equation modeling in SmartPLS by SmartPLS GmbH. Subsequently, both scenarios are statistically compared by means of a **multigroup analysis**. In the context of our study, a multigroup analysis appears more appropriate than a variance analysis, as the multigroup analysis allows for the direct comparison of path coefficients between two structural equation models.

The results are somewhat surprising: contrary to the extant research (e.g., Grabner-Kräuter and Waiguny, 2015; Smith et al., 2005) and, perhaps, human intuition,

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demographic similarity between influencers and consumers appears more important under utilitarian conditions than under hedonic conditions. Moreover, there is no significant difference in the importance of **factuality** between hedonic and utilitarian conditions. Overall, the results show that the findings from other research areas cannot be directly transferred to influencer marketing. This research area seems to follow its own principles.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Influencers

Influencers are individuals who can create valuable content, have a good reputation in specific fields and are followed by a large number of users on online social networks (De Veirman et al., 2017). In their conceptual work, Lin et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of distinguishing between hedonic and utilitarian products in influencer marketing. This issue may gain relevance, as influencers are being employed in a wider range of fields, notably even in business-to-business marketing (von Lewinski, 2018), where goods' utilitarian characteristics play a larger role in decision making.

In this work, the hotel industry was selected for study because traveling is an important activity field of influencers. As tourism products are difficult to assess prior to their consumption (Pan et al., 2007), consumers strongly rely on word-of-mouth recommendations before traveling (Fili and Križaj, 2017; Javits, 2019). Notably, travelers trust user-generated content more than traditional advertising.

2.2 Hedonic and utilitarian products in the context of influencer marketing

Products can be characterized as hedonic or utilitarian (Okada, 2005). Hedonic products have more nontangible or subjective features and greater potential to evoke the emotions and feelings of consumers, whereas utilitarian products have more tangible or objective features and better correspond to rational and functional aspects (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). As consumers use hedonic and utilitarian products for different reasons, their consumption goals also differ (Chernev, 2006). They pursue pleasure-related goals with hedonic products, while they pursue functionality-related goals with utilitarian products (Chitturi et al., 2008). In the upcoming hypothesis development discussion, the implications of this differentiation will be connected to the concepts of 'demographic similarity' and 'factuality'.

In the extant research on influencer marketing, the outcome of potential differences between hedonic and utilitarian products has remained largely underexplored in regard to empirical research. On the conceptual side, the work of Lin et al. (2018) is noteworthy. A key element of their work is the concept of concurrent value exchange processes, which states that due to the abovementioned characteristics of hedonic and utilitarian products, an influencer can best create value for a customer by (1) increasing personal attachment if the product is hedonic and (2) providing functional information about the product if it is utilitarian. The selection of influencers and their communication style should remain aligned with these statements. However, Lin et al. (2018) did not provide any empirical evidence for their conceptual suggestions. In this paper, we will discuss their concept of a

concurrent value exchange process to develop our hypotheses and, in this way, attempt to transfer this concept into empiricism.

Regarding the extant empirical work on influencer marketing of hedonic and utilitarian products, Lee and Eastin (2020) conducted relevant pioneering research. They introduced the concept of sincerity, including its subdimensions, such as being down to earth, family oriented, honest, sincere, real, and friendly (Aaker, 1997). Based on this, they argued that the sincerity of an influencer is more relevant for a utilitarian product than for a hedonic/symbolic product.

However, the dimensions of (demographic) similarity and factuality that we intend to explore based on Lin et al.'s (2018) concept of concurrent value exchange processes have not, until now, been considered in the context of influencers for hedonic and utilitarian products.

3 Conceptualization of research goals

3.1 Demographic similarity

Similarity is the perceived resemblance between two individuals (Martensen et al., 2018). Demographic similarity refers to the degree to which individuals share similarities in certain attributes, such as age, gender, education and social status (Brown and Reingen, 1987). Demographic similarity can facilitate the development of rapport, which is defined as a close, harmonious relationship based on mutual trust (Smith et al., 2005; Weitz et al., 2007). The attraction between similar individuals is referred to as homophily, the theory of which proposes that communication volume is higher when the source and recipient are similar. Homophily helps make the flow of information easier, as perceived communication barriers are lower. Individuals also feel more comfortable choosing a homophilous source due to presumed common needs (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954). Based on this, the similarity-attraction effect states that individuals tend to like similar sources more than dissimilar ones (Byrne, 1971). In the online context and, in particular, in influencer marketing, consumers encounter persons whom they have never physically met. In this circumstance, consumers employ easily accessible information, such as demographic characteristics, to form bonds with others. Therefore, demographic similarity may play an important role in online source selection. In particular, identification, on a personal level, compensates for the ambiguity that characterizes an online experience (McKnight et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2005).

In practice, demographic similarity has been demonstrated to have multiple influences in online environments. Smith et al. (2005) argued that consumers use rapport as a cue for their overall perception of an online product reviewer and the offered product advice. Electronic word of mouth in online forums, which stems from demographically similar sources, is more influential in consumers' decisions than information from dissimilar sources (Steffes and Burgee, 2009). Demographic similarity was also demonstrated to be crucial in determining credibility perceptions and attitudes toward user-generated content on TripAdvisor (Ayeh et al., 2013).

The extant research on social influencers has considered various aspects of similarity. Studies have generally affirmed that the actual self-congruence between a user and an

influencer can positively affect both the influencer and the brand (e.g., Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Costa et al., 2021; Duh and Thabethe, 2021; Mettenheim and Wiedmann, 2021; Shan et al., 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). For example, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) demonstrated that beauty bloggers who are perceived as homophilous are more influential. Regarding fashion brands, Martensen et al. (2018) found partial support for their hypothesis that influencers perceived as similar were more trustworthy. However, their concept of similarity included congruence between perceiver and influencer on the levels of physical appearance, fashion style and lifestyle. Furthermore, none of the extant studies considered potential differences between hedonic and utilitarian products.

In light of this apparent research gap, we speculate as to whether consumer preferences are likely to be more heterogeneous for hedonic purchases than for utilitarian ones (Feick and Higie, 1992). Therefore, consumers tend to consider whether an opinion source shares their own preferences as a means of judging the diagnosticity of the recommendation (Gershoff et al., 2001, 2003). One way of evaluating shared preferences is by relying on the feeling of rapport shared with a recommender (Smith et al., 2005). Feick and Higie (1992) found that under hedonic conditions only, consumers were more influenced by peers who were highly similar to them. However, other results have contradicted these theoretical considerations. In the context of online product recommendations, Smith et al. (2005) found that demographic similarity had the same effect on the perceived influence of the recommender under hedonic and utilitarian conditions. In the context of product reviews, Pentina et al. (2018) found that for hedonic products, similarity had no effect at all on the perceived helpfulness, trustworthiness, or credibility of a product review. Nevertheless, they speculated that similarity may affect other variables, such as purchase intention. Based on these theoretical considerations, the following hypotheses are developed:

H1: Demographic similarity has a positive impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude under hedonic and utilitarian consumption goal conditions.

H2: Demographic similarity has a stronger impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude under hedonic consumption goal conditions than under utilitarian consumption goal conditions.

3.2 Factuality

A factual message is a message that is logical and based on specific facts (Filiari, 2015). Conversely, an emotional message is marked by narrative and emotional expressions. In prior research on hotel business marketing, perceived factuality has been analyzed in the context of customer reviews and conceptualized as accruing from the elements of thematical structuration, preciseness, fact descriptiveness, conciseness, standardization, and specificity (Papathanassis and Knolle, 2011). Consumers perceive factual messages as diagnostic information, which increases the perceived trustworthiness of these messages. They are viewed as differing from less credible messages from commercial sources, which are often less fact-based and contain promotional language (Filiari, 2016).

In the context of product reviews for holiday decision making, Papathanassis and Knolle (2011) demonstrated that consumers preferred more factual reviews and were more likely to utilize them for decision making. Likewise, Lee and Koo (2012) found that online reviews with perceived objective information were more likely to be utilized. However, a study on experience goods produced contradictory results. Personalized and

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sentimental comments providing merely brief objective information were found to have a stronger impact on product sales (Ghose et al., 2009). As hotels have the characteristics of experience goods (whose quality is difficult to assess prior to consumption), these results may likewise have to be considered in the context of this study. Overall, the state of the research on factuality appears ambiguous and calls for verification; thus, we hypothesize the following:

H3: Factuality has a positive impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude for hotels under utilitarian and hedonic consumption goal conditions.

While hedonic products have more nontangible or subjective features and greater potential to evoke the emotions and feelings of consumers, utilitarian products include more tangible or objective features and better correspond to the rational and functional aspects of consumption (Grabner-Kräuter and Waiguny, 2015). As subjective feelings and emotions are aspects of the consumption experience of hedonic products, consumers may be more willing to attribute emotions to a product and consider these emotions in their purchase decision process (Kim et al., 2012). Conversely, for more utilitarian products, consumers may rely on factual and functional arguments, as these are regarded as most important in purchase decisions (Grabner-Kräuter and Waiguny, 2015). In the context of product reviews, (Grabner-Kräuter and Waiguny, 2015) found partial/marginal support for their hypothesis that the effect of factuality was stronger on trust in the reviews of and attitudes toward more utilitarian products. However, they could not demonstrate that factuality had a stronger impact on the evaluation of the reviewer if the product was more hedonic. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Factuality has a stronger positive impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude under utilitarian consumption goal conditions than under hedonic consumption goal conditions.

Certain scholars hold nuanced or disapproving positions about the relevance of demographic similarity. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) found that electronic referrals from demographically dissimilar sources had more of an influence than did referrals from similar sources. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) and Racherla et al. (2012) suggested that these ambiguous findings result from contextual contingencies. Online product reviews that focus on simply describing the facts and do not refer to the feelings of the reviewer may be influential in consumers' decisions when the information source is perceived as demographically dissimilar (Grabner-Kräuter and Waiguny, 2015). Conversely, consumers may be more willing to utilize a review that comprises emotional expressions in their purchase decision when the message comes from a source that is similar to them. In this case, they are more used to handling emotional encounters in relationships where similarity exists (McPherson et al., 2001). Grabner-Kräuter and Waiguny (2015) found partial support for their hypothesis that in the case of demographic dissimilarity, customer reviews written in a more factual style are better evaluated. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

H5: Demographic similarity negatively moderates the impact of factuality on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude.

3.3 *Impacts on consumer behavior*

The introduced concepts of influencer trust and product attitude may also affect the downstream constructs of booking intention and willingness to pay a price premium. Hence, these additional relationships must also be investigated.

The grouping schema of De Soto and Kuethe (1959) states that feelings such as friendship or trust are assumed to occur and spread within groups of individuals. These findings suggest that if a consumer trusts an influencer and the influencer expresses approval of a product, then the consumer will also like the product. Therefore, trustworthiness sustains the link between the endorser and the message Mowen (1980).

In practice, trust in a blogger has been found to positively influence purchase intention in the context of online shopping (Hsu et al., 2013). Similar findings were produced by Haron et al. (2016) in relation to bloggers characterized as opinion leaders in the context of fashion, skincare, gadgets and foodstuffs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H6: Influencer trust positively influences product attitude.

The question of whether influencers can impact booking intention has not yet been answered. The findings of Xu and Pratt (2018), who demonstrated that an influencer's attitude toward a holiday destination has a positive influence on consumers' intention to visit, have come the closest to answering this question.

Interestingly, the findings on how influencers can impact a very similar construct—purchase intention—also remain ambiguous. While McCormick (2016) affirmed this, Hermandá et al. (2019) negated this possibility. To harmonize these positions, it has been proposed that influencers generally do not directly influence purchase intention but that there may be an indirect effect through perceptual or behavioral variables (Jamil and ul Hassan, 2014; Johansen and Guldvik, 2017), which can mean, in the present context, that booking intention is impacted by product attitude.

Likewise, it is not yet clear whether an influencer can generate a price premium. Nevertheless, theoretical considerations suggest such an effect: a positive product attitude has an influence on consumer preferences. If consumers perceive added value (endowed by the attitude), then brand equity rises, and consumers' willingness to pay is higher than it would be for a product perceived as having less added value. Therefore, products viewed with a positive attitude can also generate a price premium (Vázquez et al., 2002; Wiedmann et al., 2014). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Product attitude positively influences (a) booking intention and (b) price premium.

4 **Research methodology**

4.1 *Scenarios and stimulus material*

The current study used two scenarios (hedonic vs. utilitarian consumption goals), in which subjects were faced with fictive influencers who were either demographically similar or dissimilar and communicated in either a factual or an emotional way. Therefore, corresponding influencer profiles and posts were designed. The hedonic consumption goal scenario involved a situation in which subjects were looking for a

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holiday resort. The utilitarian consumption goal scenario involved a situation in which subjects were looking for a hotel for a university/professional seminar. Demographic similarity was intended to be manipulated by means of influencer profile information on gender, age, occupation and certain hints as to income level. In the case of demographic similarity, these four characteristics were similar to those of the subject. If demographic dissimilarity was intended to be demonstrated, then these four influencer characteristics were highly different from those of the subject. Importantly, thereby, it was ensured that very odd or unlikely combinations, such as an 18-year-old retiree, would be excluded. Factuality was manipulated by an influencer's post. In the case of a high degree of factuality, the influencer communicated in a formal, well-structured way, substantiating the arguments with facts and figures. In the case of a low degree of factuality, the post was emotional and unstructured and contained numerous emojis. The stimulus material is displayed in Table 1.

4.2 Pretest

A pretest study (n=74) was carried out to verify the aforementioned scenarios and materials. The subjects evaluated the two scenarios (choosing a holiday resort/hotel or a hotel for a university or professional seminar) on a bipolar scale, where the lowest degree was the perception of an extremely hedonic consumption goal and the highest degree was the perception of an extremely utilitarian consumption goal. The stimulus material was evaluated with regard to perceived demographic similarity and factuality. Demographic similarity was measured on a Likert scale adapted from McCroskey et al. (1975), where the lowest degree was extreme demographic dissimilarity and the highest degree was extreme demographic similarity. Factuality was measured on a Likert scale adapted from Grabner-Kräuter and Waiguny (2015), where the lowest degree was an extremely emotional communication style and the highest degree was an extremely factual communication style. All the scales had seven points. Perceptions were compared by means of three analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The results confirmed the scenario manipulation ($M_{\text{Hedonic Scenario}} = 2.800$, $M_{\text{Utilitarian Scenario}} = 5.570$, $p < 0.0001$) and the stimulus material in terms of demographic similarity ($M_{\text{Demographic Dissimilarity}} = 1.682$, $M_{\text{Demographic Similarity}} = 6.304$, $p < 0.0001$) and factuality ($M_{\text{Emotional Post}} = 2.125$, $M_{\text{Factual Post}} = 5.111$, $p < 0.0001$).

4.3 Integrated design and measures

For hypothesis development, two structural equation models, one on the hedonic consumption goal scenario (Submodel 1) and one on the utilitarian consumption goal scenario (Submodel 2), were considered. Data were collected via an online questionnaire shared on the SurveyCircle, PollPool and Thesius research platforms from June through September 2020. To clean the data, the algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers (Leiner, 2013), was run. Moreover, the data of subjects with incorrect scenario perceptions (e.g., perceiving the hedonic scenario as utilitarian) were omitted. Eventually, 179 datasets on Submodel 1 ($M_{\text{age}} = 25$ years, 71.5 % female) and 200 datasets on Submodel 2 ($M_{\text{age}} = 25$ years, 68 % female) were employed. The demographic data are displayed in Table 2.

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The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: after having been assigned to one of the two scenarios, the subjects' demographic data were collected. Second, the subjects were randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups. They were shown one of the hotel posts written in either a factual or an emotional style. Third, they were presented with profile information identifying the influencer as either demographically similar or dissimilar. For manipulation checks, the perceptions of demographic similarity and factuality were measured on the same scales as those employed in the pretest. Fourth, the subjects gave their opinion on *trust in the influencer* (scale adapted from De Wulf et al., 2001), *attitude toward the hotel* in light of the scenario (scale adapted from Till and Busler, 2000), *booking intention* and *willingness to pay a price premium* (scale adapted from Wiedmann et al., 2014). All the scales had nine points. Fifth, additional control variables were employed. Primarily, these included the perceived honesty of the influencers, which describes subjects' evaluation of whether the influencers expressed their honest opinion or were biased by the influence of third parties and material rewards. Further control variables were subjects' *involvement with hotels* and their *own expertise in hotels*.

4.4 Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks were conducted to verify whether the manipulation of the stimulus material in terms of **demographic similarity** and **factuality** had been perceived as intended. For this purpose, two ANOVAs were performed: one on demographic similarity ($M_{\text{Demographic Dissimilarity}} = 1.861$, $M_{\text{Demographic Similarity}} = 7.082$, $p < 0.0001$) and one on factuality ($M_{\text{Emotional Post}} = 2.540$, $M_{\text{Factual Post}} = 6.068$, $p < 0.0001$). Both ascertained significant differences, and hence, the manipulation was successful.

5 Data analysis & findings

5.1 Model evaluation

The model was first checked for common method bias by means of Harman's (1976) single-factor method. The common factor (45.640 %) of the variance was below 50 %; thus, no common method bias was present (Eichhorn, 2014).

5.1.1 Measurement model evaluation

To ensure item reliability, every factor loading must be greater than 0.500 on its respective measurement construct (Hulland, 1999). Through a bootstrapping procedure, it was determined that the factor loadings were in the range of 0.740-0.983 ($P < 0.0001$) in Submodel 1 and 0.620-0.984 ($P < 0.0001$) in Submodel 2 across the set of items.

Average variance extracted measures the amount of variance that a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount of variance explained by measurement error. A model can be considered convergent when the average variance extracted surpasses 0.500 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The average variance extracted was 0.675-0.967 in Submodel 1 (Table 3) and 0.649-0.968 in Submodel 2 (Table 3) across the set of constructs.

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Composite reliability assesses the correlation between indicators and constructs and thus reflects whether a factor is suitable for explaining its components; it is a measure of internal consistency in scale items, which should be greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Netemeyer et al., 2003). Composite reliability was 0.892-0.984 in Submodel 1 (Table 3) and 0.866-0.984 in Submodel 2 (Table 3) across the set of constructs.

Discriminant validity indicates the extent to which a construct differs from other constructs. The level of discriminant validity can be determined by the fulfillment of the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion, which assesses the HTMT ratio of the correlations, which is the average of the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of the indicators across constructs measuring different phenomena), relative to the average of the monotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of the indicators within the same construct). As this value remained below the threshold of 0.85 in both submodels, the HTMT criterion was fulfilled (Henseler et al., 2015).

5.1.3 Structural model evaluation

The structural models of Submodels 1 and 2 are shown in Figures 1 and 2. To evaluate the goodness of fit of a model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of every endogenous construct should exceed the value of 0.19 (Marcoulides, 2009). R^2 was 0.274-0.606 in Submodel 1 (Table 3) and 0.225-0.552 in Submodel 2 (Table 3) across the set of endogenous constructs, thus fulfilling the abovementioned requirement.

The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was evaluated by Stone-Geisser's Q^2 . For all endogenous constructs, this value should be higher than 0.000 (Hair et al., 2014a, 2014b). A blindfolding procedure showed that Q^2 was 0.242-0.549 in Submodel 1 and 0.198-0.518 in Submodel 2 (Table 3) across the set of endogenous constructs. Thus, the predictive relevance of the model was confirmed.

To prevent inflated standard errors of a dependent variable's regression coefficients, for all of its predictors that are not involved in moderation, multicollinearity must be prevented (Disatnik and Sivan, 2016; Groebner et al., 2018; Kline, 2016). The risk of multicollinearity was proven to be low, as the variance inflation factor (VIF) value was below the threshold of five in both submodels (Kline, 2016).

5.2 Results

The hypotheses were tested based on the path coefficients and their significance levels (Table 4 and Figures 1 and 2). The individual path coefficients of the partial least squares (PLS) structural model can be interpreted as the standardized beta coefficients of ordinary least squares regressions (Hair et al., 2014a, 2014b). Paths that are nonsignificant or show signs contrary to the hypothesized direction do not support a prior hypothesis, whereas significant paths showing the hypothesized direction empirically support the proposed causal relationship (Hair et al., 2014a, 2014b). For more rigor, in addition to these criteria and to support a hypothesis, a path coefficient should also be influential; that is, its value should exceed 0.200 if a positive relationship is assumed or should be less than -0.200 in the case of a negative relationship (Kock and Hadaya, 2018).

The differences between the two structural equation models were analyzed by multigroup analysis, as suggested by Henseler et al. (2009) and Keil et al. (2000). Multigroup analysis serves the purpose of statistically comparing the path coefficients of

two models and reveals whether the observed difference between two path coefficients is significant. In the context of our study, a multigroup analysis appeared more appropriate than a mere variance analysis, as the multigroup analysis allows for the direct comparison of path coefficients between two structural equation models. A basic prerequisite for a multigroup analysis is the existence of measurement invariance (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2016), which was observed in this study.

H1 stated that demographic similarity has a positive impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude under hedonic and utilitarian consumption goal conditions. The path coefficients of demographic similarity and influencer trust were 0.211 ($p < 0.1$) in Submodel 1 and 0.514 ($p < 0.001$) in Submodel 2 but nonsignificant for product attitude (in both submodels). Hence, H1 (a) was partially supported, while H1 (b) was not supported.

H2 argued that demographic similarity has a stronger impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude under hedonic consumption goal conditions than under utilitarian consumption goal conditions. Against expectations, the path coefficient of 'demographic similarity' on 'influencer trust' was significantly higher ($p < 0.1$) in Submodel 2 than in Submodel 1. No significant differences between the (noninfluential and nonsignificant) path coefficients of 'demographic similarity' on 'product attitude' were determined. Hence, H2 (a) and (b) were not supported.

H3 stated that factuality has a positive impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude under utilitarian and hedonic consumption goal conditions. The path coefficients from factuality and influencer trust were 0.479 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 1 and 0.630 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 2 but noninfluential and nonsignificant for product attitude (in both submodels). Hence, only H3 (a) was supported.

H4 argued that factuality has a stronger positive impact on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude under utilitarian consumption goal conditions than under hedonic consumption goal conditions. The difference between the respective path coefficients was not significant ($p > 0.1$). Hence, H4 was not supported.

H5 stated that demographic similarity negatively moderates the impact of factuality on (a) influencer trust and (b) product attitude. In Submodel 1, the interaction effects of 'demographic similarity' x 'factuality' were nonsignificant on both (a) 'influencer trust' and (b) 'product attitude'. In Submodel 2, a marginally significant effect of -0.311 ($p < 0.1$) was demonstrated on (a) 'influencer trust' but not on (b) product attitude. Thus, only H5 (a) could be partially supported.

H6 stated that 'influencer trust' positively impacts 'product attitude'. The path coefficients of 'influencer trust' and 'product attitude' were 0.403 ($p < 0.001$) in Submodel 1 and 0.382 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 2. Consequently, H6 was supported.

H7 stated that product attitude has a positive impact on (a) booking intention and (b) price premiums. The path coefficients of 'product attitude' and (a) 'booking intention' were 0.754 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 1 and 0.753 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 2; for (b) 'price premium', they were 0.532 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 1 and 0.319 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 2. Hence, H7 (a) and (b) were supported.

The path coefficient of the control variable 'perceived honesty of the influencer' on 'influencer trust' was 0.278 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 1 and 0.229 ($p < 0.0001$) in Submodel 2. The following control variables became significant only in Submodel 2: the path coefficient of 'subjects' involvement' and 'price premium' was 0.218 ($p < 0.1$). Moreover, the path coefficient of 'subjects' own expertise in hotels' and 'product attitude' was 0.202 ($p < 0.1$).

6 Conclusion & recommendations

6.1 Discussion

The goal of this work was to investigate the relevance of demographic similarity between influencers and consumers and the factuality of the communication style in hedonic and utilitarian consumption goal conditions. The results suggest that demographic similarity has a positive impact on influencer trust under both hedonic and utilitarian consumption goal conditions. However, contrary to the suggestions of the extant research (e.g., Feick and Higie, 1992), demographic similarity has a greater impact on influencer trust under utilitarian consumption goal conditions than under hedonic consumption goal conditions. Moreover, the factuality of the communication style has an influence on 'influencer trust' under both consumption goal conditions. The difference in the influence is not significant. Influencer trust is also dependent on his or her perceived honesty. Neither demographic similarity nor factuality seems to impact product attitude, which seems to depend on influencer trust. Under utilitarian consumption goal conditions, the impact of factuality on influencer trust decreases in the event of greater demographic similarity.

Some of the results are counterintuitive. It is surprising that demographic similarity appears more relevant under utilitarian consumption goal conditions than under hedonic consumption goal conditions. Feick and Higie (1992) and Smith et al. (2005) suggested that under hedonic consumption goal conditions, consumer preferences are more heterogeneous; therefore, demographic similarity is more significant. For example, an endorser having the same income as an exemplary consumer may opt for a hotel in a price range that is acceptable to the consumer. However, it can also be speculated that under utilitarian consumption goal conditions, consumer preferences may differ, and demographic facts may be used to facilitate the decision. For example, when choosing a hotel for a professional or educational seminar, consumers may rely more strongly on influencers with occupations similar to their own.

Another surprising finding is that factuality did not have a significantly stronger impact under utilitarian conditions than under hedonic conditions (the assumed difference was extant but lacked significance). A look at the interplay of the underlying effects may help clarify this finding. (1) One body of literature has argued that a higher degree of factuality is advantageous under both utilitarian and hedonic consumption goal conditions (e.g., Papathanassis and Knolle, 2011). (2) Other scholars have argued that subjective feelings and emotions are more advantageous under hedonic consumption goal conditions (e.g., Kamins and Gupta, 1994). In light of these results, it may be speculated that effect (2) is small compared to effect (1) in the context of social media influencer marketing.

6.2 Implications

Social media managers should be aware that demographic similarity is an important criterion for selecting influencers, which applies even more if consumers pursue utilitarian consumption goals. To convey demographic similarity, influencers should have similarities in attributes, such as age, gender, education and social status, with their targeted consumers (Brown and Reingen, 1987). If the target group is heterogeneous in terms of these attributes, this may suggest that demographically heterogeneous

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influencers should be used. Influencers should opt for a more factual communication style regardless of whether the endorsed product is hedonic or utilitarian. To communicate in a factual way, influencers should pay attention to thematical structure, preciseness, fact descriptiveness, conciseness, standardization and specificity (Papathanassis and Knolle, 2011). As an exception to this rule, under utilitarian consumption goal conditions, influencers can waver in terms of factuality if they have high demographic similarity to their target group.

Future research can develop an empirical explanation for the occurrence of the aforementioned counterintuitive results. Furthermore, the literature suggests the existence of additional requirements for which differentiation between hedonic and utilitarian consumption goal conditions may be necessary. Examples of this are endorsers' expertise (e.g., Smith et al., 2005) and the matching of the argument style with the consumption goal (e.g., Klein and Melnyk, 2016). Finally, it is advisable to expand the extant research to other industries in which influencers play a major role, such as fashion or beauty.

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Tables

Table 1. Stimulus material.

Demographic Similarity

Gender:

Participant selected: female/male/other

Age

Participant age

Occupation

Participant selected from the following options:

Part-time student

Apprentice

Full-time student

Dual student

Employee

Civil servant

Self-employed

Unemployed

Retired

Income

Participant selected from the following options:

No income of my own

Less than €250

€250 to less than €500

€500 to less than €1,000

€1,000 to less than €1,500

€1,500 to less than €2,000

€2,000 to less than €2,500

€2,500 to less than €3,000

€3,000 to less than €3,500

€3,500 to less than €4,000

€4,000 or more

Perceived factuality

High perceived factuality

(1) On a school grade scale, I would rate the hotel as A (very good). The hotel put me in a happy mood.

(2) The staff was friendly and helpful. However, a waitress was a bit disorganized. She kept us waiting for 35 minutes.

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(3) The rooms were very large (30 m²). The furniture consisted of designer pieces but was simultaneously very functional. The cleaning was very thorough. All small items of garbage were cleared away.

(4) The food was very fresh and tasty without exception. However, one criticism is that there were only two types of bread rolls to choose from at the breakfast buffet.

(5) The wireless network coverage was very good. Throughout the hotel, we had the best coverage everywhere (five bars).

Low perceived factuality

What an incredibly cool hotel 🤩😊! I felt really good here. The staff was super friendly 😍, and the food was delicious 😊😊🍴. In the room, everything from its size to its cleanliness was tiptop. One of the waitresses was a bit dorky 😊, and you had to wait really long until you got something, but the furniture in the room was really stylish and extremely practical 😍. The bed was super comfy too 😊😊. I really think it sucks that there was not much of a variety of bread rolls at breakfast, but it was still good. Oh yeah, the Wi-Fi was awesome 😊😊😊.

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Table 2. Demographic data of participants.

		Pretest	Study
Age (years)	18-25	68.9 %	63.4 %
	26-35	23.3 %	33.5 %
	Over 35	7.8 %	3.1 %
Occupation	Part-time student	1.1 %	1.0 %
	Apprentice	1.1 %	0.4 %
	Full-time student	78.9 %	77.3 %
	Dual student	5.6 %	3.7 %
	Employee	2.2 %	14.7 %
	Self-employed	0.0 %	1.2 %
	Unemployed	1.1 %	0.8 %
	Retiree	1.1 %	0.4 %
	Income	No income of my own	17.8 %
	Less than €500	23.3 %	21.5 %
	€500-999	33.3 %	28.7 %
	€1,000-1,499	10.0 %	16.1 %
	€1,500-2,000	5.6 %	5.2 %
	More than €2000	10.0 %	11.8 %

Table 3. Model evaluation.

	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability	R ²	Q ²
Submodel 1				
Attitude toward the hotel	0.897	0.963	0.274	0.446
Booking intention	0.909	0.968	0.606	0.674
Demographic similarity	0.943	0.971		
Perceived factuality	0.675	0.892		
Perceived factuality * Demographic similarity	0.826	0.974		
Influencer trust	0.918	0.971	0.448	0.525
Perceived honesty	0.735	0.892		
Price premium	0.967	0.983	0.340	0.428
Subjects' involvement	0.694	0.900		
Subjects' own product-specific expertise	0.842	0.941		
Submodel 2				
Attitude toward the hotel	0.870	0.953	0.415	0.356
Booking intention	0.947	0.982	0.552	0.521
Demographic similarity	0.962	0.981		
Perceived factuality	0.649	0.881		
Perceived factuality * Demographic similarity	0.797	0.969		
Influencer trust	0.931	0.976	0.504	0.447
Perceived honesty	0.690	0.866		
Price premium	0.968	0.984	0.225	0.214
Subjects' involvement	0.682	0.896		
Subjects' own product-specific expertise	0.831	0.936		

The relevance of demographic similarity and factuality in social influencer communication culture – A comparison between hedonic and utilitarian conditions

Table 4. Path coefficients.

	Submodel 1		Submodel 2	
	Path	SD	Path	SD
Attitude toward hotel -> Booking intention	0.754 ****	0.041	0.753 *** *	0.055
Attitude toward hotel -> Price premium	0.532 ****	0.056	0.319 *** *	0.060
Demographic similarity -> Attitude toward hotel	0.009	0.185	0.204	0.160
Demographic similarity -> Influencer trust	0.211	0.129	0.514 ***	0.142
Perceived factuality -> Attitude toward hotel	-0.058	0.135	0.161	0.126
Perceived factuality -> Influencer trust	0.479 ****	0.097	0.630 *** *	0.075
Perceived factuality * Demographic similarity -> Influencer trust	-0.039	0.139	-0.312	0.167
Perceived factuality * Demographic similarity -> Attitude toward hotel	0.107	0.203	-0.099	0.165
Influencer trust -> Attitude toward hotel	0.403 ***	0.109	0.382 *** *	0.081
Perceived honesty -> Attitude toward hotel	0.077	0.073	0.159	0.065
Perceived honesty -> Booking intention	0.119	0.055	-0.078	0.055
Perceived honesty -> Influencer trust	0.278 ****	0.064	0.229 *** *	0.056
Perceived honesty -> Price premium	0.076	0.065	0.001	0.064
Involvement -> Attitude toward hotel	0.056	0.109	-0.170	0.088
Involvement -> Booking intention	-0.023	0.068	0.026	0.070
Involvement -> Influencer trust	0.060	0.089	0.105	0.07

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				1
Involvement -> Price premium	-0.011	0.088	0.218	0.089
Subjects' expertise -> Attitude toward hotel	0.030	0.084	0.202	0.078
Subjects' expertise -> Booking intention	0.038	0.068	0.025	0.072
Subjects' expertise -> Influencer trust	-0.099	0.080	-0.064	0.075
Subjects' expertise -> Price premium	0.063	0.098	-0.103	0.084

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

*** p < 0.001

**** p < 0.0001

Figure captions

Figure 1. Submodel 1. The arrows are labeled with the path coefficients and their significance levels.

- * $p < 0.05$
- ** $p < 0.01$
- *** $p < 0.001$
- **** $p < 0.0001$

Figure 2. Submodel 2. The arrows are labeled with the path coefficients and their significance levels.

- * $p < 0.05$
- ** $p < 0.01$
- *** $p < 0.001$
- **** $p < 0.0001$

Figures

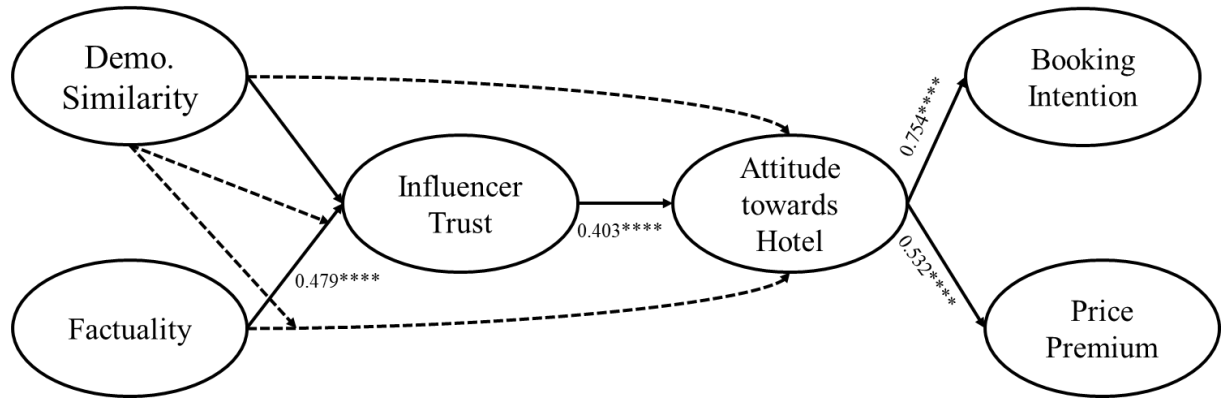


Figure 1

The relevance of demographic similarity and factuality in social influencer communication culture – A comparison between hedonic and utilitarian conditions

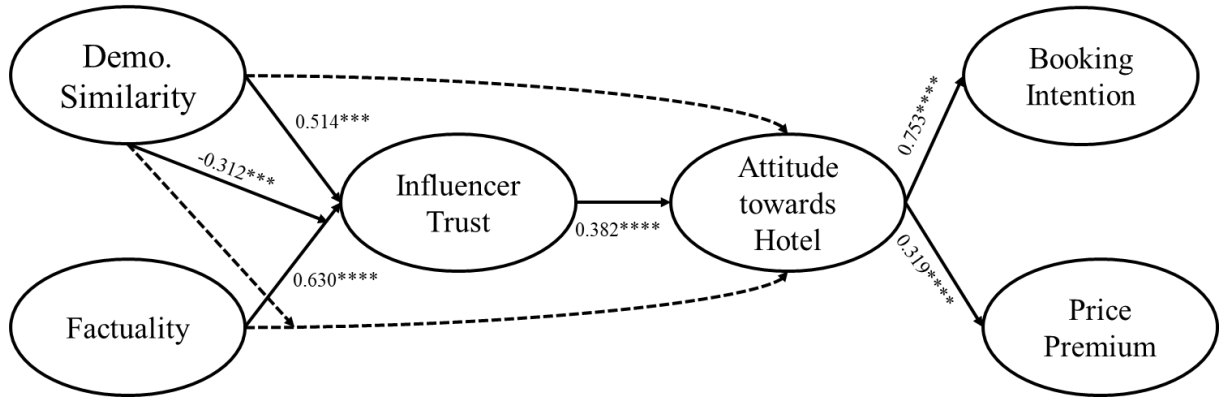


Figure 2

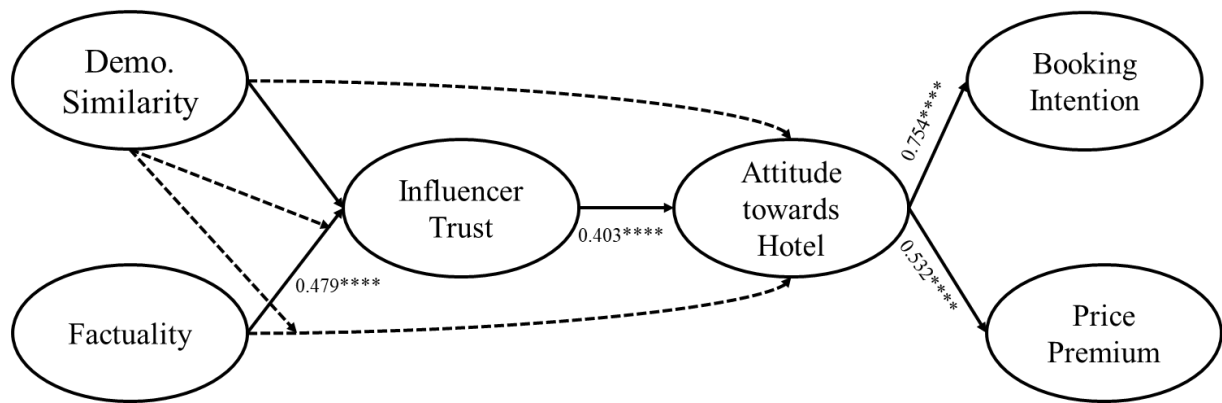


Figure 1. Submodel 1. The arrows are labeled with the path coefficients and their significance levels.

- * $p < 0.05$
- ** $p < 0.01$
- *** $p < 0.001$
- **** $p < 0.0001$

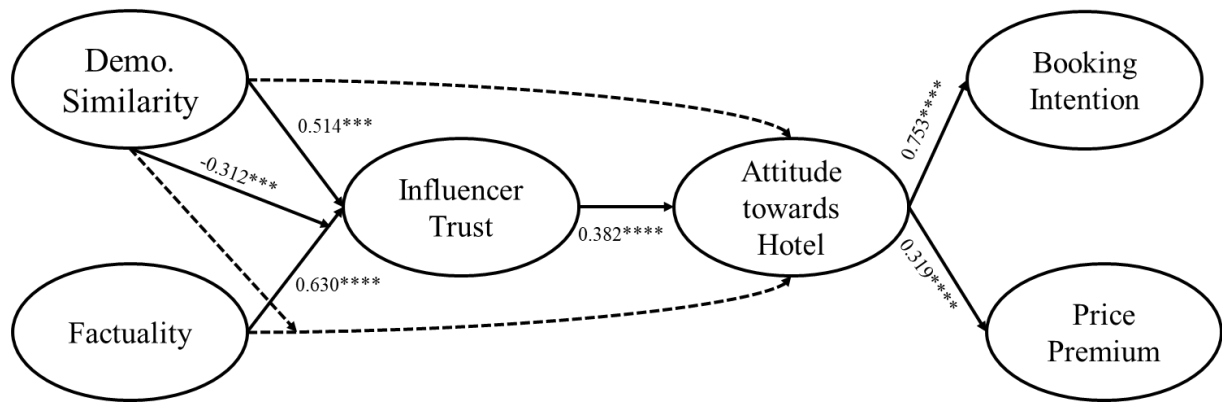


Figure 2. Submodel 2. The arrows are labeled with the path coefficients and their significance levels.

- * $p < 0.05$
- ** $p < 0.01$
- *** $p < 0.001$
- **** $p < 0.0001$

A6. Aristotele meets social influencers – implications of ancient philosophy for modern marketing communications.

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Klaus-Peter Wiedmann

in Atlantic Journal of Communication

under Review

Aristotle meets social influencers – Implications of ancient philosophy for modern marketing communications

This work identifies the differences in the relevance of social influencers' physical attractiveness and expertise depending on whether an endorsed product is related to attractiveness. It provides a new perspective regarding the source-credibility model and explores unprecedented relationships. To date, many studies investigating influencers have focused on attractiveness-related products, but influencers are also employed for attractiveness-unrelated products. Practitioners therefore need to know which requirements are relevant to attractiveness-unrelated products. However, no existing study has compared influencers of attractiveness-related or attractiveness-unrelated products. Our investigation is based on an empirical experiment including 576 participants, analyzed with structural equation modeling. The subsamples are compared by multigroup analysis, resulting in counterintuitive results. Both influencers and practitioners can greatly benefit from our findings. Our findings indicate that attractiveness is a relevant requirement for both types of products, although attractiveness has a stronger impact on brand-related variables of attractiveness-related products. Male attractiveness is also more relevant than female attractiveness regarding attractiveness-related products. Concerning expertise, we find no differences between the two types of products.

Introduction

At present, influencer marketing is employed in constantly growing domains (Jahnke, 2018; Lin et al., 2018). A remarkably large amount of research has focused on the employment of influencers to market attractiveness-related products, such as fashion (e.g., Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020) and beauty products (e.g., Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019).

In this context, practitioners who are willing to use influencer marketing for attractiveness-unrelated products, such as household appliances, struggle with whether they should select influencers according to the same requirements (Jahnke, 2018).

Accordingly, the basic requirements of the source-credibility model, i.e., (1) attractiveness, (2) expertise and (3) trustworthiness, have been analyzed regarding influencer marketing for attractiveness-related products (e.g., Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). However, the central question of whether attractiveness is relevant for attractiveness-unrelated products remains unanswered. The need for expertise could be more relevant to attractiveness-unrelated products (Hsu, 2013), but what seems plausible in theory may not be applicable in practice. The expertise of an influencer may be difficult to assess—at least, it is more difficult to evaluate than attractiveness. While the profile picture of an influencer clearly demonstrates his or her attractiveness, there is no comparable proof of their evidence. That is, becoming an influencer does not require any proof of capability, and a user who is truly interested in product knowledge could obtain such information indirectly via other sources (Čop & Culiberg, 2020). A profile picture is also important, since the assessment of attractiveness relies on easily accessible and superficial cues (Calvo et al., 2018). Such reliance can serve as a mental shortcut to assess expertise or trustworthiness, even when an endorsed product is not related to attractiveness. Indeed, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle stated that personal beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of reference (Busetta et al., 2013). Similarly positive effects of attractiveness have also been demonstrated in diverse practical contexts. For example, attractive students are perceived to be more intelligent by their teachers, although rationally, there is no obvious reason to believe that attractiveness affects intelligence (Krawczyk, 2018). Attractive defendants also have higher chances of being deemed innocent and acquitted (Kulka & Kessler, 1978). Such shortcuts could apply even more strongly to influencer marketing, as social media users have been found to be especially superficial and reluctant regarding intent information processing (Eulerich et al., 2018).

Comparative studies that analyze influencers of attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products are lacking, although some results concerning this issue have been produced regarding traditional offline celebrity endorsers. However, adapting these results to influencers is difficult: First, they have generated fundamentally conflicting results (e.g., Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000). Second, these studies have clearly omitted the specific circumstances of modern online endorsements, where several new variables play a role and might act as game changers. For example, online pictures can be easily manipulated to increase the attractiveness of a depicted individual, which can produce distrust concerning highly attractive profile pictures (McGloin & Denes, 2018). Users might also begrudge highly attractive influencers (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011). On the other hand, users have become more impressionable by superficial criteria (Eulerich et al., 2018).

Accordingly, given these research gaps and conflicts, this study analyzes the impacts of physical attractiveness on influencer-related constructs (expertise and trustworthiness) and brand-related constructs (brand attitude, positive word of mouth (WoM), and price premium) regarding attractiveness-related (jeans) and attractiveness-unrelated (vacuum cleaner) products. This research follows the source-credibility model (Hovland et al., 1982; Ohanian, 1990) and social adaptation theory (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Hypothesis testing was conducted using structural equation modeling, and data collection was performed with an online questionnaire from October to November 2021. In total, 576 data sets were employed, and the study adopted a 2 (attractiveness-related vs. attractiveness-unrelated products) x 2 (low-attractiveness vs. high-attractiveness endorsers) research design. The path coefficients and their significance levels were investigated to address the hypotheses. Finally, the differences in the path

coefficients of the subsamples of jeans and a vacuum cleaner were compared using multigroup analysis. All investigations were carried out in SmartPLS.

Literature review

Influencers and their use of attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products

Influencers are individuals who create valuable content, have a high reputation in specific fields and are followed by numerous users on online social networks (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers first became relevant to attractiveness-related product fashion (Wiedmann et al., 2010), but their employment has been used to market a variety of products, including attractiveness-unrelated products, such as, notably, household appliances (e.g., vacuum cleaners) (Jahnke, 2018; Lin et al., 2018). An attractiveness-related product can impact users' physical attractiveness, while attractiveness-unrelated products cannot (Praxmarer, 2011). An example of an influencer endorsement of an attractiveness-unrelated product is Balmuda Inc., which used influencers to promote its "GreenFan" ventilator (Jahnke, 2018). However, practitioners who employ influencers to endorse attractiveness-unrelated products often deride the lack of knowhow in influencer campaigns and question whether they can adapt the well-elaborated requirements that have been developed for fashion influencers (Jahnke, 2018).

Relevance and research issues

The **source-credibility model**, developed by Hovland et al. (1982) and further substantiated by Ohanian (1990), constitutes the overarching theoretical concept of this paper. This model states that to be credible, a source should fulfill the following three requirements: **(1) attractiveness, (2) expertise and (3) trustworthiness. (1)**

Attractiveness describes the physical attractiveness of an individual, i.e., is the source good-looking or unattractive? According to Patzer (1983), attractiveness is defined as “the degree to which a stimulus person’s facial features are pleasing to observe”. **(2) Expertise** describes the source’s level of knowledge, i.e., is the source well-versed regarding the specific issue? (Ohanian, 1990). An expert can perform in a domain at a level that few can reach (perhaps only a small percentage of the general population) (Bourne et al., 2014). Finally, **(3) trustworthiness** addresses whether an individual is believable, i.e., does the source express his or her honest opinion or is he or she influenced by third parties? (Ohanian, 1990).

These three requirements have been the research objectives of extant work concerning influencers. Most studies focusing on attractiveness-related products report that attractiveness is indeed a relevant requirement (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sakib et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2019; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020), while few studies have generated somewhat invalidating results (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Notably, Torres et al. (2019) analyzed an attractiveness-unrelated product, namely, videogames, and concluded that attractiveness was relevant. The two other requirements, expertise and trustworthiness, have also been the subjects of several studies concerning influencers for attractiveness-related products and have generated mixed results (Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019; Jin & Muqaddam, 2019; Sakib et al., 2020; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). Overall, the extant work has clearly and primarily focused on attractiveness-related products (with a few exceptions). Thus, concerning the employment of influencers for attractiveness-unrelated products, a comparative study is still lacking.

However, some light can be shed on this issue by using social adaptation theory (Kahle & Homer, 1985), which suggests that the adaptive significance of information

determines its impact. Information therefore has adaptive significance for guiding a consumer's brand evaluation and choice. Kamins (1990) refined social adaptation theory into the match-up hypothesis regarding celebrity endorsers. This hypothesis implies that the message conveyed by an image of an endorser and an image of a product should converge to create advantageous product- or ad-related effects. An attractive endorser may thus serve as an effective source of information for a product that is attractiveness related. For attractiveness-unrelated products, the match between an endorser's physical attractiveness and the attractiveness of a product is not salient; the success of an endorsement is motivated by other factors, such as expertise (Hsu, 2013). Hence, an endorser's physical attractiveness must be congruent with how an advertised product is related to attractiveness.

The findings of social adaptation theory have not been applied to influencers. However, for traditional offline celebrities, Kamins (1990) has found that endorser attractiveness has stronger effects on advertisement attitude and purchase intention for attractiveness-related products than for attractiveness-unrelated products. In contrast, Till and Busler (2000) heavily disagreed with these suggestions and demonstrated that the attractiveness of a celebrity had a similar effect on brand attitude/purchase intention for both attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products. Thus, the research involving traditional offline celebrities has also provided mixed result.

Furthermore, the extant studies' applicability to influencers may be limited because they have clearly targeted traditional offline celebrity endorsers; the specific characteristics of influencers have not been considered. For example, users connect to social media websites to fulfill their mood management needs (Shao, 2009). Social media content thus needs to be easily processible, which could increase the importance of attractiveness and reduce that of expertise, regardless of whether an endorsed product

is related to attractiveness (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Moreover, according to Haferkamp and Krämer (2011), people who view profile photographs of physically attractive users, because they feel dissatisfied with their own appearance, are likely to subsequently experience a more negative emotional state than people who view profile photographs of unattractive users. Importantly, such an effect could be very strong for influencers, as they are often considered someone “like you and me” and not an aloof celebrity (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021). Whether a user who is consequently dissatisfied with his or her appearance reacts positively (continues to follow the influencer and mimics him or her to become more similar) or negatively (terminates the relationship or at least consumes the influencer’s content less frequently), however, remains unclear.

A finding that undermines the benefits of attractiveness was reported by McGloin and Denes (2018), who suggested that in online dating, individuals with a highly attractive profile picture are perceived to be less trustworthy because viewers relate such high attractiveness with the presumption that the picture was artificially processed (Lo et al., 2013).

Brand-related constructs

In the empirical investigation, three brand-related constructs that are crucial for brands serve as independent variables.

Positive *brand attitude* contributes to the creation of brand equity (Aaker, 1991) and affects buyers’ evaluations of brands regarding their perceived ability to address a currently relevant motivation. A positive brand attitude is thus a necessary communication effect if a brand wants purchases to occur (Percy & Rossiter, 1992). For fashion brands, attitude is particularly relevant because rapidly changing design trends increase the risk of brand switching (Büttner et al., 2008). Moreover, a favorable

attitude impacts consumers' evaluation of whether their relationship with a brand is rewarding and can sustain positive associations (Burmam et al., 2008; Esch et al., 2006).

Positive WOM is deemed believable and has a greater impact on customers' purchasing decisions than other communication channels (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2006). A brand that enjoys positive WOM is therefore more likely to gain a competitive advantage and more loyal customers (Smith & Zook, 2011).

A *price premium* involves setting the price of a product higher than similar products (Dean, 1969). Price premiums are used to maximize profit in areas where customers are willing to pay more and entail a creation of brand equity or value that a consumer is willing to pay extra for (Anselmsson et al., 2016). In most cases, an influencer endorsement represents an investment in the endorsed product. Investigating the possibility of directly recovering such an investment by charging a higher price (i.e., a stronger willingness to pay a price premium) is thus worthwhile (Wertenbroch & Skiera, 2002).

Hypothesis development

Attractiveness

The question of whether attractiveness is relevant for attractiveness-related products or attractiveness-unrelated products conflicts social adaptation theory (Kahle & Argyle, 2013) with the attractiveness stereotype effect (Eagly et al., 1991).

According to Kahle and Argyle's (2013) social adaptation theory, the adaptive significance of information determines its impact. Hence, information may have adaptive significance for guiding a consumer's brand evaluation. Social adaptation theory serves as the basis for the endorser attractiveness–product category match-up

effect (e.g., Kamins, 1990); an endorsement is more effective when the endorser and product fit (Malodia et al., 2017). For attractiveness-related products, the endorser's attractiveness therefore creates this match. Accordingly, an attractive endorser serves as an effective source of information for a product that is related to attractiveness. An endorser's appearance may inherently suggest to viewers that the use of a product will enhance their physical attractiveness (Kamins, 1990). These theoretical concepts are supported by empirical findings. Attractive influencers who are associated with luxury fashion brands enhance a product's appeal by building an association with their attractiveness (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019). Torres et al. (2019) also demonstrated that the attractiveness of influencers, for fashion products and video games, positively impacted attitudes toward their endorsements, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencers' attractiveness positively affects brand awareness. Attractiveness also increases followers' trust in branded content. Moreover, Sakib et al. (2020) demonstrated that weight loss influencers' attractiveness had a positive impact on parasocial interactions. Finally, regarding beauty-related influencer videos, Behm-Morawitz (2017) showed that an influencer's attractiveness motivated viewers to create videos.

In studies involving offline celebrities, endorser attractiveness has been found to have stronger effects on attitudes toward advertisements for attractiveness-related products (Bower & Landreth, 2001; Kamins, 1990; Levi et al., 2017). Indeed, Caballero and Solomon (1984) suggested that for an attractiveness-unrelated product, a *less attractive* model was more effective for generating purchase intention than an attractive model. Furthermore, a highly attractive endorser of an attractiveness-unrelated product could cause a vampire effect, where a receiver's attention is entirely given to the endorser. Such an endorsement is therefore of no use to the endorsed product or brand.

Since the high attractiveness of an endorser attracts attention but is not related to a brand or product, attention is actually detracted (Erfgen et al., 2015). However, other scholars (e.g., Praxmarer, 2011) and Till and Busler (2000) have refuted the differing effects of attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products.

These contradictory effects may be explained by the attractiveness stereotype effect, which entails a more universal relevance of attractiveness. Eagly et al. (1991) introduced the attractiveness stereotype effect using implicit personality theory, suggesting that people have the impression that attractive persons have personality characteristics that are superior to those of unattractive people. While perceived expertise and trustworthiness are different concepts, the explanations of how physical attractiveness might influence the two constructs are similar: Individuals might associate social categories with personal attributes. Therefore, people form stereotypes that categorize others via easily accessible information, such as facial cues (Hosoda et al., 2003; Sutherland et al., 2015; Todorov et al., 2015). Individuals may also observe that attractive people have more success (Cook, 1981). When individuals attempt to explain their observations (Kelley, 1973), they may conclude that attractive people must have other positive attributes, such as expertise or trustworthiness (Eagly et al., 1991). Practical examples highlight how attractiveness might be a universal asset, e.g., attractive defendants are more likely to be trusted and considered innocent (Shechory-Bitton & Zvi, 2015). Experiments that have examined trust-related games have indicated that most players are willing to trust attractive people more than less attractive people (Zhao et al., 2015). Attractive students are considered more intelligent by their teachers (Krawczyk, 2018), and attractive politicians are perceived to be more competent (Mattes & Milazzo, 2014). Moreover, an attractive communicator who advocates a specific opinion (e.g., an attitude toward speed limits on highways) induces

comparatively larger changes in opinion than an unattractive communicator (Chaiken, 1979; Eulerich et al., 2018; Horai et al., 1974; Rule & Tskhay, 2014; Snyder & Rothbart, 1971). Attractive celebrity endorsers positively affect brand attitudes concerning pens and colognes (Till & Busler, 1998, 2000), and attractive AirBnB hosts can charge a price premium to their guests (Jaeger et al., 2019). Finally and crucially, one of the few influencer studies that has evaluated attractiveness for an attractiveness-unrelated product, namely, videogames, has demonstrated that attractiveness has a positive impact on attitudes toward endorsement, brand attitude, and purchase intention (Torres et al., 2019).

Accordingly, based on these findings, we speculate that attractiveness might be relevant to influencer endorsements of both attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products. However, for attractiveness-related products, the effect might be stronger as users are (similar to attractiveness-unrelated products) subject to the attractiveness-stereotype effect and (exclusively for attractiveness-related products) additionally affected by social adaptation theory.

H1: The effect of influencer attractiveness on (a) expertise and (b) trustworthiness is significantly stronger for attractiveness-related products than for attractiveness-unrelated products.

H2: The effect of influencer attractiveness on (a) brand attitude, (b) positive WoM and (c) price premium is significantly stronger for attractiveness-related products than for attractiveness-unrelated products.

Expertise

A source that demonstrates expertise is more persuasive than a source that does not (Andersen & Clevenger, 1963). According to the balance model, an endorser's expertise is helpful for communicating a bond with a product (Mowen, 1980). Moreover, the

heuristic-systematic model posits that expertise is a persuasion cue that triggers individuals to use cognitive heuristics, such as “statements by experts can be trusted” (Chaiken, 1979, 1980; Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991).

The positive effects of expertise might be increased for attractiveness-unrelated products; the physical attractiveness/product attractiveness match-up is not present, and thus internal attributions to an endorsement are motivated by other factors, such as expertise (Kamins, 1990; Smith & Hunt, 1978). Similarly, Hsu (2013) suggests more strongly stressing an endorser’s expertise for attractiveness-unrelated products, as this approach might generate an especially strong effect for such a product.

Empirical investigations have produced mixed results regarding this issue. Martensen et al. (2018) found that expertise enhanced the persuasiveness of fashion influencers, while Lou and Yuan (2019) showed that influencer expertise positively affects brand awareness. Sakib et al. (2020) demonstrated that weight loss influencers’ expertise has a positive impact on parasocial interactions. In contrast, according to Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019), beauty bloggers’ expertise has no impact on their “perceived influence” or the “influence to purchase”. Similarly, Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2020) could not establish any effect of fashion influencers’ expertise on brand satisfaction, image, or brand trust.

Overall, consistent with the theoretical considerations, we expect the effect of expertise to be stronger for attractiveness-related products than for attractiveness-unrelated products.

H3: Influencer expertise has a positive effect on (a) brand attitude, (b) positive WoM and (c) price premium. The effect is significantly stronger for attractiveness-unrelated products than for attractiveness-related products.

Trustworthiness

Attribution theory states that any source perceived to be biased will be dismissed (Kelley, 1973). This theory draws upon the grouping schema of De Soto and Kueth (1959), who proposed that feelings, such as liking or trusting, occur and spread within groups of individuals. These findings suggest that if a consumer trusts an influencer and the influencer likes a brand, the consumer will also like the brand. Moreover, the balance model states that trustworthiness sustains the link between an endorser and a message (Mowen, 1980). Concerning electronic word of mouth (eWoM), trustworthiness has been demonstrated to be the most important requirement of the source-credibility model (Reichelt et al., 2014).

Empirical research, however, has produced mixed results regarding the relevance of trustworthiness. Trust in a blogger positively affects purchase intention in online shopping (Hsu et al., 2013). Similar findings were reported by Haron et al. (2016) concerning bloggers who write about fashion, skincare, gadgets and foodstuffs. Martensen et al. (2018) found that influencer trustworthiness enhanced their persuasiveness, while Lou and Yuan (2019) showed that influencer trustworthiness positively affects brand awareness. Sakib et al. (2020) also demonstrated that weight loss influencers' trustworthiness had a positive impact on parasocial interactions. Furthermore, Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2020) indicated an effect of fashion influencers' trustworthiness on brand satisfaction, image, and trust. In contrast, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) argued that the trustworthiness of bloggers had *no* impact on their "perceived influence" or the "influence to purchase". Wu and Lee (2012) also refuted the effect of blogger trustworthiness on purchase intention concerning beauty and medical products.

Overall, the empirical results are mixed and thus do not facilitate identifying a distinct difference between attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products concerning trustworthiness. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Influencer trustworthiness has a positive effect on (a) brand attitude, (b) positive WoM and (c) price premium. There are no significant differences between attractiveness- and attractiveness-unrelated products.

Effects of brand attitude on positive WoM and price premium

Reasonably, our dependent variable of brand attitude could also affect positive WoM and price premium; therefore, this relationship must be considered. Dichter (1966) proposed a theory stating that (positive) WoM has the following three antecedents: (1) the desire of a user to discuss a purchase and the gratification it provides; (2) the desire to gain attention, recognition, or status by informing others about a purchase; and (3) the desire to help other consumers by sharing knowledge or an experience. Each form is channeled by a positive brand attitude. By generating positive WoM, individuals thus fulfill an emotional need that is generated by a positive brand attitude (Westbrook, 1987). Moreover, discussing a brand that an individual likes plays an important role in reflecting that person's identity (Batra et al., 2012).

A positive brand attitude influences consumer preferences: If consumers perceive added value (endowed by the attitude), brand equity rises, and the consumers' willingness to pay is higher than it would be for a brand that generates a more negative attitude. Brands that produce a positive attitude can therefore also generate a price premium (Vázquez et al., 2002; Wiedmann et al., 2014). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Brand attitude has a positive effect on (a) positive WoM and (c) price premium.

Research methodology

Stimulus material and pretest

The investigations consisted of two scenarios (attractiveness-related product, jeans, versus attractiveness-unrelated product, vacuum cleaner) where the subjects were presented with fictitious influencers who were either attractive or unattractive. A pretest study (n=84) was conducted to verify the study scenarios and materials. The subjects evaluated the relationship to the attractiveness of the products (jeans/vacuum cleaner) on a bipolar scale, where the lowest degree was the perception of a very low relationship to physical attractiveness and the highest degree was the perception of a very strong relationship. To select influencers of low and high attractiveness, the subjects evaluated the physical attractiveness of 20 individuals (whose images were drawn from free image databases) on a four-item Likert scale adapted from Ohanian (1990) (see Appendix 1). The participants were presented with statements on the attractiveness scale. On an eleven-point Likert scale, the participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the statements. The lowest level of the scale was labeled “I do not agree at all”, and the highest level was “I fully agree”. The perceptions were compared by ANOVAs, and the results confirmed that the jeans were perceived to have a significantly stronger impact on physical attractiveness than the vacuum cleaner ($M_{\text{Jeans}} = 8.600$, $M_{\text{Vacuum Cleaner}} = 2.520$, $p < 0.000$). This investigation sought to manipulate the participants with attractive and unattractive influencers of the same and opposite genders. This combination method was deemed relevant because fashion endorsements by influencers of opposite genders occur in practice. For example, the female influencer Sonya Glyn Nicholson has endorsed menswear from a female perspective. In one of her videos, she recommends different shoe brands to men based on their personality and characteristics.

The results of the pretest were used to form four pairs of influencers (**female participants**: $M_{\text{Unattractive female}} = 4.308$, $M_{\text{Attractive female}} = 9.408$, $p < 0.000$; $M_{\text{Unattractive male}} = 3.918$, $M_{\text{Attractive male}} = 8.151$, $p < 0.000$; **male participants**: $M_{\text{Unattractive female}} = 4.152$, $M_{\text{Attractive female}} = 10.139$, $p < 0.000$; $M_{\text{Unattractive male}} = 3.918$, $M_{\text{Attractive male}} = 8.583$, $p < 0.000$). The stimulus material is presented in Appendix 2.

On social networks, influencers usually do not provide explicit tangible evidence of their expertise, and users typically accept the expertise of influencers based on other information or their intuition (Čop & Culiberg, 2020). Therefore, to maintain a natural scenario, we concluded that the best approach was not to explicitly manipulate expertise to allow the participants to form judgments based on the appearance of the influencer or their intuition.

Participants

Data collection was performed from October to November 2021 using an online experiment. The participants accessed the online questionnaire via the online platforms SurveyCircle, PollPool and Thesius. For data cleaning, the algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers (Leiner, 2013), was used. Moreover, the data of the participants who stated that they were not heterosexual were removed, as these data might have skewed the results. Ultimately, 572 (63.4% female) data sets were employed ($M_{\text{age}} = 26.75$ years, Age_{18-25} : 54.6%, Age_{25-35} : 38.9%, $\text{Age}_{\text{Over } 35}$: 6.5%, $\text{Income}_{\text{no own income}}$: 13.7%, $\text{Income}_{\text{less than } 1000\text{€}}$: 62.1%, $\text{Income}_{1000\text{€} - 2000\text{€}}$: 32.1%, $\text{Income}_{\text{more than } 2000\text{€}}$: 5.8%).

Questionnaire

To test our hypotheses, an online questionnaire was developed. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: First, the subjects' demographic data, including their gender, were collected. Second, the subjects were randomly assigned to one of two

experimental groups. Based on the results of the pretest, the participants were shown either an **attractive** or **unattractive influencer** endorsing either a pair of jeans (**subsample J**) or a vacuum cleaner (**subsample VC**) in an Instagram post. Each post displayed the profile picture of the influencer and pictures of the product. Because it might have seemed odd if the influencer endorsed a garment intended for a member of the opposite gender (e.g., a female endorsing men's jeans), if a participant viewed an influencer of the opposite gender, the influencer reported his or her impression of the product for his or her girlfriend or boyfriend. Subsequently (steps three and four), the participants were presented with the statements of the measurement scales. On these eleven-point Likert scales, the participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the statements. The lowest level of the scales was labeled "I do not agree at all", and the highest level was "I fully agree". The scale items are shown in the appendix.

Specifically, steps three and four were as follows: In the third step, for manipulation checks, the *relationship between the attractiveness of the product and the perceived attractiveness* (four-item scale adapted from Ohanian (1990), Cronbach's α : 0.940) of the influencer's profile picture was queried. In the fourth step, the subjects provided their perception of the *expertise* (four-item scale adapted from Ohanian (1990), Cronbach's α : 0.932) and *trustworthiness* (four-item scale adapted from Ohanian (1990), Cronbach's α : 0.968) of the influencer, their *brand attitude* (three-item scale adapted from Till and Busler (2000), Cronbach's α : 0.968), their intention to generate *positive WoM*, and their *willingness to pay a price premium* (one-item scales adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2014)). All scales had eleven points.

In the fifth step, additional control variables were surveyed; primarily, the perceived honesty of the influencer. This variable describes the subjects' estimation of whether the influencers expressed their honest opinions or were biased by the influence

of third parties and material rewards. Further control variables were the subjects' *age*, *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* and *product involvement*.

Manipulation checks

To verify the manipulation of **the relationship between the attractiveness of the product and the attractiveness of the influencer**, manipulation checks were conducted. Accordingly, two ANOVAs were performed: The ANOVAs of the relationships between attractiveness and product ($M_{\text{Jeans}} = 8.360$, $M_{\text{Vacuum Cleaner}} = 2.430$, $p < 0.000$) and attractiveness ($M_{\text{Unattractive Influencer}} = 4.010$, $M_{\text{Attractive Influencer}} = 9.957$, $p < 0.0001$) showed significant differences. Thus, the manipulation was successful.

Common method bias

Regarding PLS-SEM, common method bias refers to potential biases in the data that are caused by the measurement method. Therefore, it can be demonstrated that the data are not contaminated by common method bias.

The models were checked for common method bias using Harman's (1976) single factor method. The common factor explained 33.333 of the variance, which is smaller than 50%. Thus, no common method bias was present (Eichhorn, 2014).

Measurement model evaluation

In the following section, the measurement model is discussed (Table 1).

[Table 1 near here]

To ensure item reliability, each factor loading must be greater than 0.500 on its respective measurement construct (Hulland, 1999). The factor loadings were 0.891–0.969 across the set of items. The average variance extracted measures the amount of

variance that a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount of variance explained by measurement error.

A model features convergent validity when the average variance extracted surpasses 0.500 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The average variance extracted was 0.814–0.936. In addition, composite reliability assesses the correlation between the indicators and constructs and reflects whether a factor can suitably explain its components. Composite reliability is a measure of internal consistency in scale items and should be greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Netemeyer et al., 2003). The composite reliability was 0.910–0.976 across the set of constructs.

Discriminant validity indicates whether a construct differs from other constructs. The level of discriminant validity can be determined by the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT criterion) (Henseler et al., 2015). The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations measures the similarity between latent variables (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Voorhees et al., 2016). The HTMT criterion was therefore fulfilled because the HTMT ratio remained less than 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Overall, discriminant validity can be considered present.

Structural model evaluation

To evaluate the goodness of fit of a model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of each endogenous construct should exceed the value of 0.19 (Marcoulides, 2009). R^2 was 0.252–0.502 across the entire set of endogenous constructs, except for expertise, which was 0.147. However, this was not fatal because the partial R^2 was 0.586 in Model J and 0.015 in Model VC. This finding can thus be interpreted as a first indication that (as expected) for the attractiveness-related product, expertise might be largely explained by the attractiveness of the influencer, but this is obviously not the case for the attractiveness-unrelated product.

The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was evaluated by Stone-Geisser's Q^2 , which should be higher than 0.000 for all endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2014). A blindfolding procedure showed that Q^2 was 0.135–0.481 across the set of endogenous constructs. Thus, the predictive relevance was confirmed.

To prevent inflated standard errors of a dependent variable's regression coefficients, for all its predictors, multicollinearity must be avoided (Groebner et al., 2018; Kline, 2016). Accordingly, the risk of multicollinearity was low because the VIF value of all constructs was below the threshold of five (Kline, 2016).

Results

A core part of a structural measurement model is the hypothesis test, where the path coefficients, total effects (unless they are equivalent to the path coefficients) and their significance levels are considered (Figure 1 and Table 2). A path coefficient or total effect is influential if its absolute value exceeds 0.200 and is significant and thus, a hypothesis can be deemed supported (Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

[Figure 1 near here]

[Table 2 near here]

The differences between the subsamples and their significances were analyzed and statistically compared by multigroup analysis (Table 2). Multigroup analyses of both the path coefficients and total effects were conducted. Therefore, it was possible to determine whether two path coefficients or two total effects significantly differed between the subsamples. For our research, a multigroup analysis is a superior approach to a variance analysis because a multigroup analysis allows the direct statistical comparison of the path coefficients between two structural equation models (Hair et al., 2018; Henseler et al., 2016).

Accordingly, we found full support (based on the path coefficients and total effects) for H1 (a) and (b), H4 (a), and H5 (a) and (b).

We also found partial support (based on the total effects) for H2 (a), H3 (b) (only in subsample J), H3 (c) and H4 (b).

As previously mentioned, the genders of the influencer and subject were used as control variables. Therefore, the two subsamples J and VC were both divided into four submodels as follows and then compared using further multigroup analysis:

Female Influencer/Female Subject

Female Influencer/Male Subject

Male Influencer/Female Subject

Male Influencer/Male Subject

Measurement invariance was observed. The multigroup analysis revealed relatively few significant differences. For attractiveness-related products and female subjects, the effect of attractiveness on trustworthiness was stronger by 0.295 if the influencer was male than if the influencer was female ($p < 0.05$). For attractiveness-related products and male subjects, the effect of attractiveness on trustworthiness was stronger by 0.478 if the influencer was male than if the influencer was female ($p < 0.05$). No further gender-related differences were observed.

The following further control variables became relevant: The perceived honesty of the influencer had an effect on “trustworthiness” of 0.399 ($p < 0.0001$)/0.400 ($p < 0.0001$) in subsample J/subsample VC. In subsample VC, the path coefficient of susceptibility to interpersonal influence was 0.215 ($p < 0.0001$) on brand attitude.

Discussion and theoretical implications

Profile pictures are a crucial element of influencer profiles; profile pictures are always visible and are among the first elements that capture a perceiver’s gaze. Profile pictures

clearly illustrate important information regarding the physical attractiveness of an influencer. Thus, in this study, we evaluated how the relevance of attractiveness varies between attractiveness-related products and attractiveness-unrelated products. We used PLS SEM to analyze the effects of attractiveness on influencers and brand-related constructs.

The findings suggest that for both attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products, influencer attractiveness positively impacts trustworthiness and price premiums. In addition, for attractiveness-related products, attractiveness positively impacts perceivers' observed expertise of influencers, brand attitude and intention to generate positive WoM. Indeed, the difference in the total effects of attractiveness on expertise and brand attitude (between both product types) is significant.

In most cases, only the total effect of attractiveness is influential and significant. That is, the direct effect of attractiveness is influential and significant only on trustworthiness and, in the case of an attractiveness-related product, on expertise.

Concerning expertise and trustworthiness, no significant differences were found. The former finding is surprising, as theory suggests that expertise should have a stronger effect on attractiveness-unrelated products. It can therefore be speculated that the general effects of expertise, according to the balance model proposed by Mowen (1980), dominate the suggestions of Kamin's (1990) match-up hypothesis.

Finally, notably, an influencer's attractiveness had no significant *negative* effect on any construct. Although the findings reported by McGloin and Denes (2018) suggest that using a more attractive picture reduces the trustworthiness of a potential dating partner, this conclusion does not seem to transfer to influencers. Rather, the findings of the "what is beautiful is good" theory seem to apply to social influencers.

Implications for management

The goal of this work was to compare the impacts of influencers' attractiveness regarding attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products on their perceived expertise and trustworthiness, and on brand attitude, positive WoM and price premium. The effects of expertise and trustworthiness on brand attitude, positive WoM and price premium were also considered. Thus, we attempted to close a research gap concerning whether the requirements developed for influencers who endorse attractiveness-related products transfer to influencers who endorse attractiveness-unrelated products. The results showed that the impacts on expertise were indeed stronger for attractiveness-related products than for attractiveness-unrelated products. Regarding attractiveness-related products, influencers should be advised to attempt to appear more attractive if they desire to be perceived to have greater expertise. Concerning attractiveness-unrelated products, further research is necessary to investigate the drivers of perceived expertise. Furthermore, for attractiveness-related products, attractiveness has a positive impact on trustworthiness, brand attitude, positive WoM and price premium. For attractiveness-unrelated products, only trustworthiness and price premiums are positively impacted by attractiveness. Practitioners should therefore note that for attractiveness-unrelated products, only attractiveness needs to be considered if the goal is to increase a price premium or the trustworthiness of an influencer. For attractiveness-related products, it is necessary to consider attractiveness if the goal is to generate a better brand attitude, positive WoM or price premium. Notably, for attractiveness-related products, attractiveness has an especially strong effect on expertise and brand attitude. Practitioners should thus deem attractiveness a crucial requirement if they want to positively impact these two constructs. Overall, practitioners should be aware that depending on the nature of a product (attractiveness-related versus attractiveness-

unrelated), different brand-/product-related constructs can be affected by an influencer's attractiveness to a different degree. Moreover, when practitioners choose a male endorser for an attractiveness-related product, they should attach even greater importance to high attractiveness.

Accordingly, the results reveal that at least for attractiveness-related products, attractiveness is a superpower. Attractiveness not only affects brand-related constructs but also impacts the two other requirements of the source-credibility model, namely, trustworthiness and expertise.

Influencers should thus refine their objectives based on the results of this study. Two extant studies involving influencers (stemming from a broad range of industries) significantly confirm this necessity. First, Virkkunen and Norhio (2019) have found that influencers estimate that the most important requirements for their success were being accessible, authentic, honest, and social. Second, Abert et al. (2019) identified trust, continuity, variation, competence development and networks as crucial requirements for influencer success. Therefore, neither influencers who endorse attractiveness-related products nor influencers who endorse attractiveness-unrelated products consider physical attractiveness a relevant requirement for success. Given the results of this study, however, practitioners should pay more attention to this requirement; it is an antecedent requirement of trustworthiness and, for attractiveness-related products, expertise.

Practitioners can also learn from this study.

According to Childers et al. (2019), practitioners struggle to define influencer marketing, its value, and how it should be managed. Childers et al. (2019) have provided an overview of the indices and models that practitioners employ to select influencers. However, although attractiveness is a fairly relevant requirement, relatively

few indices or models consider it. Ki and Kim (2019) have demonstrated that practitioners set suboptimal priorities; for example, an influencer who has high expertise in his specific field and has amassed a very high number of followers (50 million) might nevertheless fail to deploy the best marketing effects because his content is not visually appealing. Hence, these authors suggest that practitioners should select a different influencer with visually appealing content, even if that influencer has fewer followers.

Furthermore, the common indices do not consider the contingent differences in the relevance of attractiveness for attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products or the effects of attractiveness on trustworthiness and expertise. In contrast, the results of this work suggest that attractiveness should be considered in a stronger and more differentiated way. According to Jahnke (2018), fashion brands initially focused on the conversion rates of their influencers. However, it eventually became apparent that there were many other relevant requirements. Notably, influencers are typically perceived to be “the face of the brand”. Given the results of this study, such a face should be attractive. However, for household appliances, endorsement is more complex. Because influencer endorsement of such products has become less common, practitioners are less experienced and are unsure whether they can use the same influencers as fashion brands or whether they should utilize the same requirements (Jahnke, 2018). While this study indicates that attractiveness is slightly relevant for attractiveness-unrelated products, overall, attractiveness can impact fewer influencer- and brand-related constructs.

In sum, practitioners could benefit from evaluating the attractiveness of the influencers of their brands by using pretests or scientific algorithms (Bernini-Hodel et al., 2017). Moreover, practitioners should instruct their influencers to dress appropriately and use professional photos that show them at their best (Lou & Yuan,

2019). Further factors that could lead to higher perceived attractiveness are facial expressions and picture quality (Ert & Fleischer, 2020). Indeed, McGloin and Denes (2018) suggest applying make-up (even for males), using sophisticated hairstyling and integrating flattering lighting and angles.

Implications for research and limitations

In future research, the reasons for the different impacts of expertise and trustworthiness should be addressed. A further suggestion is to for research to evaluate identification through match-up in terms of attractiveness (e.g., Bower & Landreth, 2001).

Accordingly, the hypothesis that consumers more strongly identify with influencers whose attractiveness level is comparable to their own level could be tested. As the perception of attractiveness might also be culture-sensitive, in future research, the impacts of perceivers' cultural backgrounds could be analyzed (Ert & Fleischer, 2020). Moreover, self-esteem, body shame and especially body esteem may also influence attractiveness issues (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Musetti et al., 2021). Further characteristics in addition to facial attractiveness, , especially body size, may also play an important role (Sohn & Youn, 2013). In addition, the relevance of attractiveness may depend on the personal values of the perceiver. For example, Feltman and Szymanski (2018) argued that women who strongly identify with feminist beliefs might have a critical perspective of body-related messages and, consequently, be less likely to internalize related ideals and standards. Whether the feminist beliefs of a receiver affect the relevance of influencer attractiveness could therefore be analyzed. Age is another demographic variable that might be significant in this context. Specifically, children might react differently than adults (Vermeir & Van de Sompel, 2014).

Furthermore, the relevance of attractiveness could vary with the involvement level of a product. Concerning avatars, under moderate-involvement conditions, attractiveness is more persuasive than expertise (Holzwarth et al., 2006). Additionally, regarding celebrities, the existence of six different beauty types has been identified; beauty type should thus match the image of an endorsed product or brand (Solomon et al., 1992). This theory could similarly be tested among influencers. The gender-related impacts of attractiveness on female- and male-dominated areas could also be tested. For instance, Burns and Farina (1992) have reported that individuals consider attractive women less competent in male-dominated areas, such as motorbike maintenance.

Finally, the interplay of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness could be analyzed to address the question of whether deficits in one requirement can be compensated by other requirements. Research investigating celebrity endorsement has suggested that high expertise could compensate for deficits in trustworthiness (Premeaux, 2005, 2009). Moreover, the impacts of attractiveness manipulation on further constructs related to engagement, such as likes or comments, could be considered.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study have helped clarify the contradictions of existing studies. Attractiveness is a demonstrably relevant requirement for both attractiveness-related products and attractiveness-unrelated products. However, for attractiveness-related products, attractiveness has a partially stronger impact and can impact more constructs. Hence, the endorser attractiveness–product category match-up effect was partially confirmed, but not to its fullest extent; attractiveness has some relevance for attractiveness-unrelated products, but the impact on attractiveness-unrelated products was not significantly negative as Caballero and Solomon (1984) have suggested. For

attractiveness-related products, male attractiveness is significantly more relevant than female attractiveness. Concerning expertise and trustworthiness, no significant differences between attractiveness-related and attractiveness-unrelated products were identified.

Influencers and practitioners can benefit from these findings. As noted, neither group seems fully cognizant of the contingent relevance of attractiveness. Specifically, concerning attractiveness-unrelated products, there is still great uncertainty regarding the relevance and adaptability of the requirements of influencers. Hence, this study has provided a salient clarification.

Finally, this study introduces two large areas for future research concerning the contingent relevancy of attractiveness, i.e., the impacts of perceiver-related characteristics (e.g., perceivers' attractiveness) and the repercussions of product-related characteristics (e.g., high- versus low-involvement products).

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and/or ethical restrictions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Items.

Attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990)

The person is attractive.

The person is charismatic.

The physical condition of the person is admirable.

The person is beautiful.

Trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990)

The person is reliable.

The person is honest.

The person is dependable.

The person is sincere.

Expertise (Ohanian, 1990)

The person is qualified in the area of fashion and style/vacuum cleaners.

The person has a solid understanding of fashion and style/vacuum cleaners.

Brand Attitude (Till & Busler, 2000)

I would like this brand.

I would have positive emotions about this brand.

I would be happy with this brand.










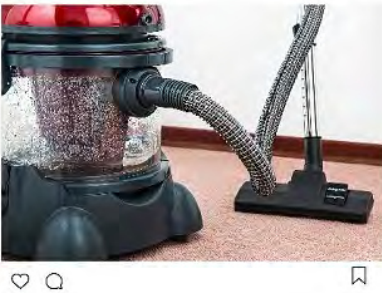
Positive WOM (Wiedmann et al., 2014)

I would recommend the brand to my friends.

Price Premium (Wiedmann et al., 2014)

I would be willing to pay more for a product of this brand than for other brands.

Appendix 2. Stimulus material.

					
High- Attractive Female	Low- Attractive Female #1	Low- Attractive Female #2	High- Attractive Male # 1	High- Attractive Male # 2	Low- Attractive Male
					
Jeans Collection Post Dedicated to Females	Jeans Collection Post Dedicated to Males		Vacuum Cleaner Post		

Jeans collection post text dedicated to subjects of the same gender:

I really like the new jeans collection from the brand Mondussive. Have tested it extensively. Conclusion: great jeans with (small) weaknesses. What do you think?

Jeans collection post text dedicated to subjects of the opposite gender:

Today, I have got something for the girls/boys: I really like the new jeans collection from the Mondussive brand my on my boyfriend. We have tested them extensively. Conclusion: great jeans with (small) weaknesses. What do you think?

Vacuum cleaner post text:

Tried out the new Convile V8 vacuum cleaner in my apartment today. Was really pleasantly surprised by the result. My conclusion: this is an (almost) perfect vacuum cleaner. What do you think?

Tables

Table 1. Evaluation of the measurement model and structural model.

	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability	R²	Q²
Age	1	1		
Attractiveness	0.793	0.939		
Brand Attitude	0.926	0.974	0.357	0.302
Expertise	0.928	0.963	0.012	0.135
Honesty	0.916	0.956		
Involvement	1	1		
Positive WOM	1	1	0.715	0.481
Price Premium	1	1	0.443	0.367
Trustworthiness	0.925	0.98	0.441	0.227

Table 2. Path coefficients, total effects, values and differences (multigroup analysis).

	Path Coefficient Jeans		Path Coefficient Vacuum Cleaner		Total Effect Jeans		Total Effect Vacuum Cleaner		Difference Path Coefficients Jeans - Vacuum Cleaner		Difference Total Effects Jeans - Vacuum Cleaner	
Attractiveness -> Brand Attitude	0.164		0.179	***	0.446	****	0.198	***	-0.014		0.248	***
Attractiveness -> Expertise	0.765	****	-0.122		0.765	****	-0.122		-0.888	****	0.888	****
Attractiveness -> Positive WOM	-0.078		0.046		0.321	****	0.197	****	-0.124		0.124	
Attractiveness -> Price Premium	-0.158		0.103		0.238	****	0.219	****	-0.261	**	0.019	
Attractiveness -> Trustworthiness	0.275	****	0.238	****	0.275	****	0.238	****	0.037		0.037	
Brand Attitude -> Positive WOM	0.667	****	0.661	****	0.667	****	0.661	****	0.007		0.007	
Brand Attitude -> Price Premium	0.577	****	0.558	****	0.577	****	0.558	****	0.020		0.020	
Expertise -> Brand Attitude	0.291	***	0.316	****	0.291	***	0.316	****	-0.025		-0.025	
Expertise -> Positive WOM	0.11		-0.056		0.304	****	0.153		0.166		0.152	
Expertise -> Price Premium	0.163	****	0.056		0.331	****	0.233	****	0.106		0.098	
Trustworthiness -> Brand Attitude	0.215	****	0.245	****	0.215	****	0.245	****	-0.03		-0.03	
Trustworthiness -> Positive WOM	0.063		0.055		0.206	****	0.217	***	0.008		-0.011	
Trustworthiness -> Price Premium	0.052		0.056		0.176	**	0.192	***	-0.004		-0.017	

**** p < 0.0001

*** p < 0.001

** p < 0.01

Figure captions

Figure 1. Models.

The upper model refers to subsample J. The lower model refers to subsample VC.

On each arrow, the first figure is the path coefficient, and the second figures is the total effect (if different from the path coefficient).

Solid bold lines indicate an influential significant path coefficient.

Thin lines indicate influential significant total effects.

Dashed lines indicate interconnections for which neither an influential significant path coefficient nor a total effect could be demonstrated.

Figures

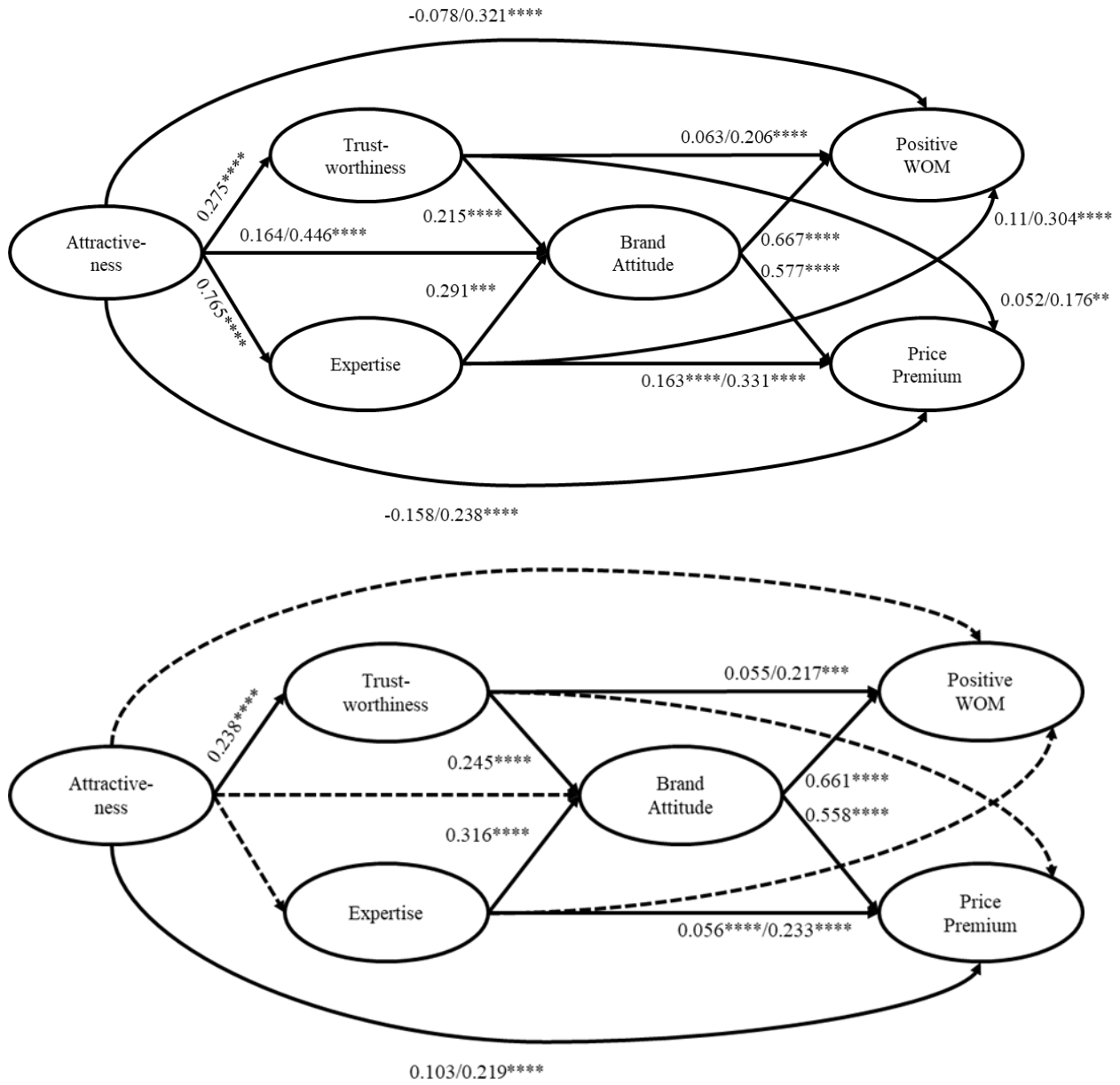


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**A7. Social Influencers and Healthy Nutrition – The Challenge of Overshadowing Effects
and Uninvolved Consumers.**

Walter von Mettenheim

Klaus-Peter Wiedmann

in Journal of Food Products Marketing



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Social Influencers and Healthy Nutrition – The Challenge of Overshadowing Effects and Uninvolved Consumers

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the researchers investigate the issue of social influencers as endorsers of healthy nutrition. This issue is highly underexplored and involves two aspects that might pose a special challenge: (1) overshadowing and (2) consumers' lack of involvement in healthy nutrition. Based on an experiment that included 289 valid observations, the researchers tested two influencer archetypes, namely, an attractive influencer and a sporty influencer. The data were analyzed with structural equation modeling in SmartPLS. For the attractive influencer, the researchers found a small overshadowing effect. The sporty influencer did not elicit any overshadowing. Furthermore, the sporty influencer appeared to have more favorable effects on highly involved consumers. The opposite was true for low-involved consumers: the attractive influencer had a stronger impact. Based on these surprising results, the researchers propose implications for theory and practice.

KEYWORDS

Influencer marketing;
healthy nutrition;
attractiveness; sportiness;
overshadowing

Introduction

Unhealthy eating patterns in most Western countries pose a serious threat to economic welfare and have severe consequences for the health of the individual consumer. As a major consequence, unhealthy eating patterns are likely to cause obesity, which has nearly tripled since 1975 on the worldwide level. Thirty-nine per cent of adults aged 18 years and older are overweight. Overweight can entail numerous health consequences such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders and some cancers (World Health Organization, 2021). The economic consequences of unhealthy eating are clearly noticeable: For example, in the US, chronic diseases driven by the risk factor of obesity and overweight account for \$1.72 total costs – equivalent to 9.3% of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP; Waters & Graf, 2018).

Against this backdrop, it is striking that the impact of marketing communication on healthy eating is largely underexplored (Folkvord & De Bruijne, 2020; Folkvord et al., 2020). In addition, most extant studies have focused only on children or teenagers (Tegan et al., 2015), who represent a target group that might not show representative reaction patterns (Maria et al., 2013).

The field of social influencer marketing for healthy nutrition is especially underexplored (e.g., Folkvord & De Bruijne, 2020; Folkvord et al., 2020). As supportive environments and communities are fundamental in shaping people's food choices (World Health Organization, 2021), influencers can be assumed to be well-suited vehicles for endorsing healthy nutrition (Tegan et al., 2015; Von Bothmer & Fridlund, 2005). Moreover, influencer marketing for healthy nutrition already happens frequently. Against this backdrop, the glaring lack of knowledge regarding influencers in research on healthy nutrition endorsements leaves much potential.

When paired with influencers, issues of healthy nutrition can be considered vulnerable to two specificities: (1) overshadowing and (2) low-involved consumers. The majority of research on influencers has been conducted out on influencers who endorse topics perceived as “cool,” such as beauty, fitness, fashion, gadgets and travel (Lin et al., 2018; Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018). However, healthy nutrition is an issue that is perceived as uncool, geeky, nerdy and boring (Chan & Tsang, 2011; Croll et al., 2001; Mahadzir et al., 2020; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2000; Stead et al., 2011). Under this circumstance, the “cool” influencer might (1) *overshadow* the “uncool” issue of healthy nutrition (Erfgen et al., 2015). In other words, the influencer may earn a considerable amount of positive engagement (likes, shares, new followers), but viewers will not feel inclined to enhance their dietary behavior. Indeed, practitioners from a broad range of industries producing “low-interest products,” such as household appliances, fear this effect and have called for more research on influencer marketing for this issue (Jahnke et al., 2018). A second specificity of healthy nutrition may further complicate the issue – (2) *involvement*. In consumer marketing, consumers who are not interested in a specific product may be seen as not being part of the target group and not worth communicating with. Communicating with them would be perceived as a scatter loss and a waste of communication resources (Nufer, 2013). In contrast, with regard to marketing for healthy nutrition, those with low involvement may be those whom a healthy nutrition campaign should primarily target. After all, those who are not interested in healthy nutrition are those who most need to improve their diet (McDermott et al., 2005). Hence, there is the necessity for research that considers how to target consumers with a low level of involvement in healthy nutrition.

In this work, the researchers investigate these issues by developing a research framework based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), findings on overshadowing (Erfgen et al., 2015) and the elaboration likelihood model (Cacioppo et al., 1985). The researchers verify their hypotheses by means of an experiment that included 289 participants. Two common influencer archetypes are used, namely, an attractive influencer and a sporty influencer (Schouten et al., 2019; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). The researchers measure the impacts on attitudes toward endorsement posts, engagement and dietary improvement intentions. The results are analyzed by means of structural equation modeling in SmartPLS, and some surprising results are obtained. While no (strong) overshadowing seems to occur, the sporty influencer appears to be more appealing to high-involvement consumers. In contrast, for low-involvement consumers, the attractive influencer is more favorable. Nevertheless, both types of influencers can be used to improve the diet behavior of both consumer types.

Theory

Social influencers are individuals who create valuable content, have strong reputations in specific fields (Cha et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017) and are followed by a large number of users on online social networks (De Veirman et al., 2017). At present, they are employed to endorse products across a wide range of industries (for an overview, see, e.g., Jahnke et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, they could also be suitable endorsers for a public or social issue, namely, healthy eating. First, as a matter of principle online opinion leaders have in general been found to be useful for endorsing food issues (Sahelices-Pinto & Rodríguez-Santos, 2014), although research going more into details is scarce. Second, influencers are often viewed as long-distance friend (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2019) and friends can have a huge impact on an individual’s food choice (Chauke & Duh, 2019). Third, according to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), people might learn a behavior via symbolic learning, i.e., through media presentations. Observing a model could impact the behavior of the observer, and observational learning can also happen on social media (Sokolova & Perez, 2021). Additionally, the behavior of an observed figure can serve as a social prompt for the already recognized positive behavior that is not performed due to insufficient inducements. Therefore, the media figure can activate, channel and support this behavior by showing the positive results that could be achieved (Bandura, 1995). Advertising uses this phenomenon to associate products with desirable outcomes (beauty, success, etc.; Sokolova & Perez, 2021).

In the context of this research, the researchers explore how influencer marketing can be used to target social media users with both low and high involvement to engage in healthy nutrition. Therefore, the researchers use two archetypes a highly attractive influencer (“beauty influencer”) and a highly physically fit and sporty influencer (“fitness influencer”). These archetypes are two types of influencers and are among the most present on social networks (Schouten et al., 2019). They are well suited for an influencer campaign on healthy nutrition, as healthy nutrition is related to both physical attractiveness (Brierley et al., 2016) and fitness (Cuenca-García et al., 2013). In this way, the researchers fill an important gap in research on influencer marketing for healthy nutrition. The bulk of extant research on endorsements of healthy nutrition has focused on communication targeting children (e.g., Binder et al., 2020; Naderer et al., 2020; Stitt & Kunkel, 2008). Moreover, research has focused on other endorser types of endorsers, such as traditional celebrities (e.g., Dubuy et al., 2014), fictional characters (e.g., Kraak & Story, 2015) and nutrition experts (e.g., García-Conde et al., 2020). This glaring lack of knowledge regarding influencer endorsers is highly unfortunate, as influencers emanate special strength such that consumers identify with them in a stronger way and trust their advice more (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2019). Moreover, the findings on children may not be generalizable because children may show different reactions to, e.g., the physical attractiveness of a stimulus than postpubescent participants (Maria et al., 2013).

Important pioneering work on influencer endorsements of healthy nutrition involving adult participants was carried out by Folkvord et al. (2020). They essentially demonstrated that, in principle, influencers can be effective endorsers of healthy nutrition and highlighted the importance of a parasocial relationship between influencers and consumers. The researchers build on this pioneering work by examining different influencer types and two specificities that might make influencer endorsements for healthy nutrition especially challenging: (1) overshadowing and (2) consumers with a low level of involvement in healthy nutrition.

Overshadowing

While the high attractiveness and fitness of an endorser may attract high attention (Costanzo & Goodnight, 2005; Danişman & Aksoy, 2021), the topic of healthy eating is often perceived as uncool, geeky, untrendy and boring (Croll et al., 2001; Mahadzir et al., 2020; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2000; Stead et al., 2011). Intuitively, combining a highly attention-grabbing stimulus to upgrade potentially boring information may seem advantageous. However, this pairing may actually be problematic, as it could result in a vampire effect (also referred to as overshadowing). This term describes a situation in which a stimulus draws all of the attention away from the issue being advertised. A viewer mainly or only notices and remembers the stimulus. Similar to a vampire who sucks the blood of its prey, the stimulus (in our case, the influencer) sucks attention away from the matter being advertised (healthy nutrition; Erfgen et al., 2015). The stimulus distracts the viewer from processing central elements of the issue that is actually being advertised (Eisend, 2011). In traditional celebrity advertising, it has been suggested that the occurrence of a vampire effect is manifested by a negative effect on advertising goals such as the creation of purchase intentions (Danişman & Aksoy, 2021; Hwang & Lee, 2017).

Although overshadowing is usually discussed in the context of traditional celebrity advertising, recent studies have suggested that it can also happen in social influencer marketing (e.g., Liping et al., 2021). In the context of our study, overshadowing would mean that, in juxtaposition to the influencer, the call for healthy nutrition fades away. The influencer benefits the most (or even solely) from the campaign. In other words, the influencer may experience a considerable amount of engagement (e.g., likes, shares and new followers; Chua & Chang, 2016; Noland, 2020), but users may not feel inclined to improve their dietary behavior.

Involvement

Prior research identifies health involvement as a pivotal construct in attempts at understanding health behaviors (Saba & Vassallo, 2012). Health involvement refers to feelings of personal relevance that can motivate consumers to search for, acquire and process stimulus-relevant information (Beatty et al., 1988). Accordingly, the researchers conceptualize food-related health involvement as the degree of personal importance and relevance that a consumer attaches to healthy food intake (Moorman & Matulich, 1993; Thomsen & Hansen, 2015). In consumer marketing, consumers who are not interested in a specific product may be seen as not being part of the target group and not worth communicating with (Nufer, 2013). In contrast, regarding social marketing, those with low involvement may be those whom a healthy nutrition campaign should primarily target. After all, those who are not interested in healthy nutrition are obviously those who most need to improve their diet (McDermott et al., 2005).

Hypothesis development

Effects on attitudes toward endorsement posts

The first component of a successful endorsement is the attitudes toward endorsement posts. They are essentially driven by the fit between the influencer and the issue being endorsed (Von Mettenheim & Peter Wiedmann, 2021).

The match-up hypothesis states that any endorsement is more effective when the images or messages that the endorsers carry are congruent with the matter being endorsed (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Lynch & Schuler, 1994; Misra & Beatty, 1990; Till & Busler, 1998, 2000; Till et al., 2008). Early studies examined the match-up effects in the area of traditional celebrities' physical attractiveness and suggested that attractive celebrity endorsers are more effective than unattractive spokespersons only when the product being endorsed is related to attractiveness (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Kamins and Gupta (1994) and Misra and Beatty (1990) found that celebrity/product congruence had significant effects on advertisement and brand evaluations. Similarly, in influencer endorsements, a good fit is crucial; if it is lacking, users may doubt that the influencer is truly convinced of the endorsement and assume that the endorsement was carried out simply to make money (Evans et al., 2017; Koernig & Boyd, 2009). Von Mettenheim and Peter Wiedmann (2021) empirically supported this presumption by demonstrating that a good fit between the personality of an influencer and an endorsed brand was a key driver of attitudes toward endorsement posts.

Physical attractiveness and physical fitness are evidentially closely interlinked with healthy nutrition (Ashton et al., 2015). Consumers are aware that healthy nutrition largely contributes to overall physical attractiveness. Therefore, studies have suggested using this claim more extensively in communication on healthy diets (Alex et al., 2017). Likewise, as there is a link between healthy eating and performance in physical activities, studies have also proposed considering this relationship in health-related promotions (Tavares, 2014).

Effects on engagement and dietary improvement intentions – does overshadowing occur?

Most likely, a positive attitude toward endorsement posts contributes to reaching the ultimate goals, namely, positive engagement and an improvement in dietary behavior. Positive emotions toward a post are an antecedent of positive engagement (Smoliarova et al., 2018). Moreover, advertising research suggests that cognitions regarding the advertiser or the issue being advertised form or change during exposure. Consequently, ads that are more liked lead to more positive evaluations of the issue being advertised (Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1992). Some studies on social marketing issues have likewise confirmed a relationship between the attitude toward an ad and behavioral intentions to comply with the message being endorsed for a wide range of issues (e.g., Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020), while others have not (Gary et al., 2014). Could the explanation for this ambiguity be that the ad overshadowed the issue being advertised?

To ultimately convince their followers, influencers need to have some kind of power over them. One way to exert power is to exercise “referent power.” This kind of power accrues from admiration for an individual. Due to admiration, others want to be associated and comply with the individual emanating high referent power (French & Raven, 1965). Both individuals characterized by high physical attractiveness and individuals characterized by high physical fitness have been demonstrated to emanate strong referent power (Baghurst & James Diehl, 2016; Conway, 1984). Consequently, both the physical attractiveness and physical fitness of an influencer have the potential to generate high user engagement (Loureiro & Moraes Sarmiento, 2018; Sokolova & Perez, 2021). Concerning the behavioral variable, research on traditional advertising and influencer marketing likewise suggests that an endorser who is characterized by high physical attractiveness or high physical fitness might impact the intention to adopt a healthier diet (Dixon et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 2020).

However, the following question arises: Will positive effects be exerted on both the intention to improve one’s diet and engagement, or will the influencer overshadow the issue? Prior research essentially identifies two antecedents of overshadowing. First, it can occur when endorser-issue congruence is too weak and no strong cognitive link between the celebrity and the issue being endorsed is perceived (Erfgen et al., 2015). As mentioned, a link between the influencer and the issue is extant; thus, the researchers do not expect this effect to happen. Second, overshadowing can occur when the issue being endorsed is seen as boring (compared with the endorser; Ilicic & Webster, 2014). As attractive and sporty people are perceived as “cool” (Reddy-Best, 2020; Regenstein & Lefkowitz, 1998) and healthy eating is oftentimes considered “boring” (Chan & Tsang, 2011), the researchers do not rule out that this effect could happen in the present context. Ultimately, the outcome will depend on which of these effects dominates.

Overall, the researchers find more arguments supporting a positive effect on both dependent variables (engagement and dietary improvement intentions). Therefore, the researchers propose the following hypotheses:

H1: The referent power of the influencer ((a) attractiveness and (b) sportiness) has a significant positive effect on post attitude

H2: The referent power of the influencer ((a) attractiveness and (b) sportiness) has a significant positive effect on engagement

H3: The referent power of the influencer ((a) attractiveness and (b) sportiness) has a significant positive effect on diet improvement intentions

H4: Overshadowing moderates the relationship between the referent power of the influencer (attractiveness vs. fitness) on posts and engagement

H5: Overshadowing moderates the relationship between the referent power of the influencer (attractiveness vs. fitness) on diet improvement intentions.

Does involvement play a moderating role?

Previous studies highlighted the potential moderating effect that issue involvement may have on the effectiveness of an ad in the field of social advertising (Lewis, 2008). The elaboration likelihood model proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) links the concept of involvement to the amount of cognitive processing. The elaboration likelihood model indicates that the amount of cognitive processing performed for a change in attitude depends on involvement. Attitude changes can occur through two routes: a peripheral route that minimizes cognitive processing and a central route that requires intense processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Low involvement is extant when personal interest in an

issue is low (Antil, 1984). Consequently, consumers are unmotivated to exert extensive processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). The importance of persuasive arguments is small, while superficial characteristics are important (Martin et al., 2006; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Petty et al., 1981). An attitude change travels through the peripheral route along with simple cues associated with the issue (Roozen & Claeys, 2010). In contrast, in high-involvement conditions, consumers search more intensively for information (Coulter et al., 2003). They show high interest in the issue and exert the necessary cognitive effort to process issue-relevant arguments (Petty et al., 1983). Elaboration becomes more likely, and in this case, the attitude change travels through the central route (Roozen & Claeys, 2010).

Against this backdrop, the two stimuli, i.e., physical attractiveness and sportiness, must be classified as either a peripheral cue (processed under low-involvement conditions) or a central cue (processed under high-involvement conditions).

First, there are the very general findings of Petty and Cacioppo (1986): They state that any source feature may serve as a persuasive argument if it provides information that is central to the merits of the attitude object (e.g., a physically attractive source may provide persuasive visual testimony as to the effectiveness of a beauty product; Cacioppo & Petty, 1981; Kahle & Homer, 1985). Consequently, they explicitly state that attractiveness can be both central information or a peripheral cue, depending on the context (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Transferred to our research, this idea would mean that since attractiveness and sportiness are both positively related to healthy nutrition, both may function as a central cue and consequently be processed more intensively under high involvement. However, the findings of (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 1986) must be taken with caution: Eagly and Chaiken (1993) critically reviewed their line of argumentation and found it to be self-contradictory. Nevertheless, another study of Liang and Lin (2018) essentially confirms (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 1986).

Concerning research that explicitly combines involvement with sportiness, there is scarce research. Chao Sen (2013) states that an interaction effect of sportiness and consumer involvement on advertising does not exist.

In light of this very contradictory situation, the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

H6: The degree of involvement moderates the relationship between the referent power of the influencer and (a) post attitude (b) engagement and (c) diet improvement intentions.

Methodology

Scenarios and Stimulus Material

This study included three stimuli. Stimulus (1) consisted of an attractive influencer. Stimulus (2) featured a sporty influencer. For Stimulus (3), a control group influencer was presented. The stimulus material is displayed in [Figure 1](#).

Pretest

A pretest study ($n = 74$) was conducted to test the aforementioned stimulus material. The pretest was conducted in Germany, by means of an ANOVA followed by a Scheffé Post-Hoc Test. The pretest confirmed that the physically attractive Stimulus (1) was perceived as significantly more attractive than the sporty Stimulus (2) ($p \leq .001$) and the control group Stimulus (3) ($\text{Mean}_{\text{Attractiveness}} = 7.306$) ($p \leq .001$). Likewise, the sporty Stimulus (2) was perceived as significantly sportier than the attractive Stimulus (1) ($p \leq .001$) and the control group Stimulus (3) ($p \leq .001$). Hence, the stimuli were suitable for use in the subsequent investigation.

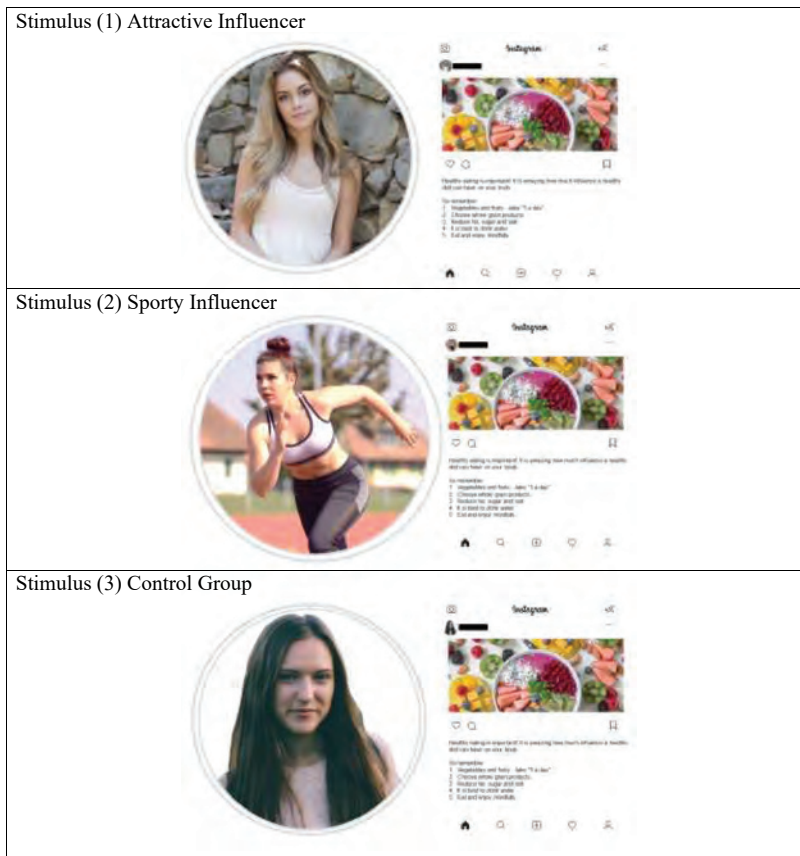


Figure 1. Stimulus material.

Structure of the Questionnaire and Measures

After welcoming introductory words, in the first step of the questionnaire, the participants' involvement in healthy nutrition (six-item scale adapted from Laurent & Noël Kapferer, 1985) and current status were queried. Subsequently, a random generator assigned the participants to one out of three experimental groups. For Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3, the attractive influencer, sporty influencer and control group influencer, respectively, were used as stimuli. In step two, the participants viewed the stimulus material that corresponded to their group. The attractiveness (three-item scale adapted from Ohanian, 1990) and sportiness (six-item scale adapted from Marsh & Sutherland Redmayne, 1994) of the depicted influencer were measured. In the third step, attitudes toward endorsement posts (bipolar four-item scale adapted from Aaker, 2000), engagement and dietary improvement intentions (seven-item scale adapted from Cruwys et al., 2013) were measured. Finally, in the fourth step, the demographic variables age, gender and income were queried; they were subsequently employed as control variables. All items are displayed in Table 1.

Participants

Data collection was performed in Germany via an online questionnaire in 2021. The questionnaires were distributed to students at German universities. Additionally, the survey was shared on the SurveyCircle, PollPool, and Thesius research platforms. For the purpose of data cleaning, the

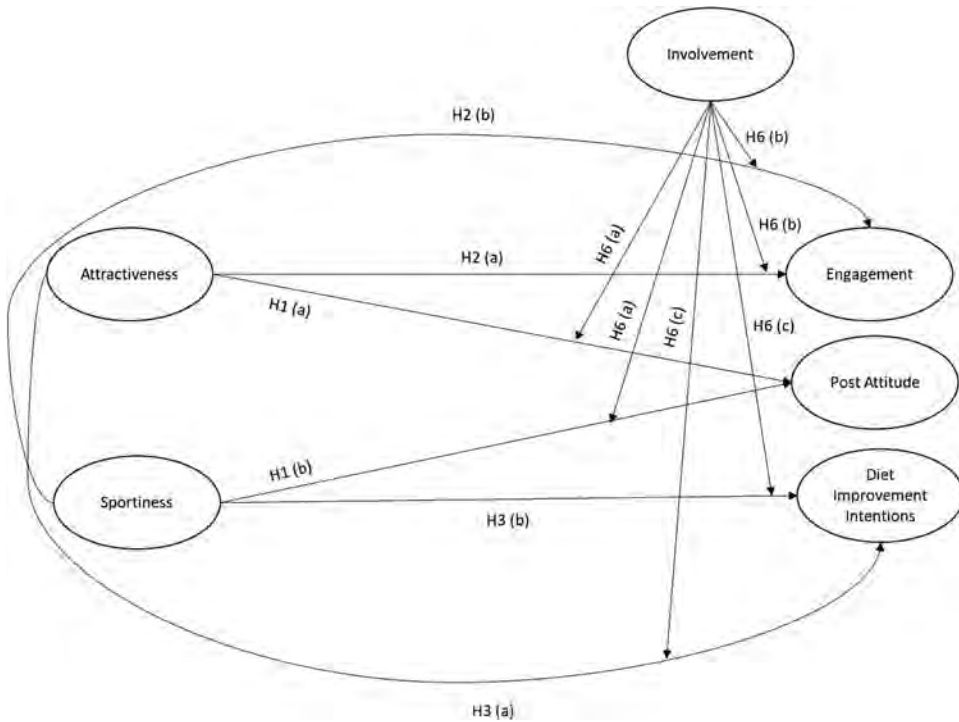


Figure 2. Frame of reference.

Time_RSI algorithm, which detects invalid answers (Leiner, 2019), was run. In total, 289 data sets were employed ($M_{\text{age}} = 25$ years, 64.4% female). The demographic data is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Manipulation checks

To test whether the manipulations had worked as intended, they were verified by means of ANOVA. The manipulation checks revealed that the attractive stimulus was perceived as significantly more attractive than the sporty stimulus ($p \leq .001$) and the control group stimulus ($p \leq .001$). Likewise, the sporty stimulus was perceived as significantly sportier (than the attractive stimulus ($p \leq .0001$) and the control group stimulus ($p \leq .0001$). Hence, the stimuli were suitable for use in the subsequent investigation.

Evaluation

Most of the hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H6) were answered by means of a structural equation model. An additional ANOVA followed by a Scheffé Post-Hoc Test was carried out for H4 and H5.

The structural equation model was first checked for common method bias by means of Harman's (1976) single-factor test. In line with the specification of the test, the common factor (39.500%) of the variance was smaller than 50%; thus, no common method bias was present (Eichhorn, 2014).

Table 1. Items.

	The person is attractive. The person is good-looking. The person is not attractive. (reverse coded)
Attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990)	
Sportiness (Marsh & Sutherland Redmayne, 1994)	The person has the required level of fitness to run longer distances without a break. The person enjoys doing sports. The sporty performance of this person is very good. There is a lot of power in this person's body. The person can only move insecurely. (reverse coded) The person is physically strong.
Involvement (Laurent & Noël Kapferer, 1985)	I attach great importance to a healthy diet. I am very interested in healthy eating. Healthy nutrition leaves me completely indifferent. (reverse coded) It would give me pleasure to eat more healthily. Eating a healthier diet would be a pleasure for me. It is certainly annoying to consume foods that are not healthy.
Attitudes toward Endorsement Posts (Aaker, 2000)	Bad/good Displeasing/pleasing Unfavorable/favorable Negative/positive
Engagement	I am ready to "like" this post. I could imagine following this Instagrammer. I would share this post.
Dietary Improvement Intentions (Cruwys et al., 2013)	I will be ready to eat healthier in the future I would like to eat more healthily in the future. I will eat more vegetables and fruits in the future. I will try to eat less sugar, salt and fat. I would prefer whole grain products to other grain products. I will drink more water instead of other beverages. My nutritional awareness will increase.

Table 2. Age distribution.

Age	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
18–29	0.894	89.500
30–39	0.074	96.800
40–49	0.028	99.600
50 or older	0.004	100.000
Total	100	

Table 3. Income distribution.

	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
No own income	18.339	18.339
Less than 1000 €	44.637	62.976
1000 € to 2000 €	19.723	82.699
2000 € to 3000 €	6.92	89.619
3000 € to 4000 €	2.077	91.696
More than 4000 €	1.038	92.734
I don't want to answer	7.266	100.000
Total	100	

Measurement model evaluation

To ensure item reliability, every factor loading on its respective measurement construct must be greater than 0.500 (Hulland, 1999). A bootstrapping procedure was employed, and it was determined that the factor loadings were in the range of 0.774–0.957 ($p \leq .001$) across the set of items.

The average variance extracted measures the amount of variance that a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount of variance explained by measurement error. The average variance extracted was 0.739–0.857 across the set of constructs. As the average variance extracted was above 0.500 there is support of the convergent validity of the measurement scales (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Composite reliability assesses the correlation between indicators and constructs; thus, it reflects whether a factor is suitable for explaining its components. It is a measure of internal consistency in scale items, and it should be greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi & Youjae, 1988; Netemeyer et al., 2003). The value of composite reliability was in the range of 0.849–0.960 across the set of constructs. Thus, all scales could be considered to be internally consistent.

Discriminant validity indicates the extent to which a construct is different from other constructs. The level of discriminant validity can be determined by the fulfillment of the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion, which assesses the HTMT ratio of the correlations, that is, the average of the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of the indicators across constructs measuring different phenomena) relative to the average of the monotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of the indicators within the same construct; Henseler et al., 2015). As this value remained in the range of 0.030–0.650, the HTMT criterion was fulfilled (Table 4).

Table 4. HTMT ratios.

	HTMT Ratio
Current Status -> Attractiveness	0.054
Diet Improvement Intentions -> Attractiveness	0.291
Diet Improvement Intentions -> Current Status	0.106
Engagement -> Attractiveness	0.453
Engagement -> Current Status	0.100
Engagement -> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.608
Involvement-> Attractiveness	0.156
Involvement-> Current Status	0.509
Involvement-> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.216
Involvement-> Engagement	0.142
Post Attitude-> Attractiveness	0.366
Post Attitude-> Current Status	0.032
Post Attitude-> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.622
Post Attitude-> Engagement	0.650
Post Attitude-> Involvement	0.210
Sportiness-> Attractiveness	0.371
Sportiness-> Current Status	0.055
Sportiness-> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.444
Sportiness-> Engagement	0.466
Sportiness-> Post Attitude	0.566

Table 5. Model evaluation.

	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	R ²	Q ²
Attractiveness	0.943	0.847		
Diet Improvement Intentions	0.954	0.747	0.255	0.155
Engagement	0.902	0.756	0.288	0.188
Involvement	0.849	0.739		
Post Attitude	0.960	0.857	0.357	0.291
Sportiness	0.955	0.809		

Structural model evaluation

To evaluate the goodness of fit of a model, the coefficient of determination (R²) of every endogenous construct should exceed the value of 0.19 (Marcoulides, 2009). The R² value was in the range of 0.219–0.357 across the set of endogenous constructs, thus fulfilling the abovementioned requirement (Table 5).

The predictive power of the endogenous constructs was evaluated by Stone-Geisser's Q². For all endogenous constructs, this value should be higher than 0.000 (Joe F. Hair et al., 2014). A blindfolding procedure showed that the Q² value was in the range of 0.155–0.291 across the set of endogenous constructs (Table 5). Thus, the predictive relevance of the model was confirmed.

To prevent the inflated standard errors of a dependent variable's regression coefficients, for all of its predictors that are not involved in moderation, multicollinearity must be prevented (Groebner et al., 2018; Kline, 2016). The risk of multicollinearity is low if the variance inflation factor (VIF) value is below the threshold of five (Kline, 2016). In our model, the VIF values were in the range of 1.027–1.401. Thus, the risk of multicollinearity was low.

Results

The hypotheses were tested based on the total effects and their significance levels (Joe F. Hair et al., 2014). To support a hypothesis, a total effect should be influential and significant. A total effect is influential if its absolute value exceeds 0.1 (Lohmöller, 1989). The effect strength can be further subdivided into low if its value remains below 0.2, moderate if the value is between 0.2 and 0.3 and fairly strong if its value is greater than 0.3 (Chin, 1998). Moderation was calculated with standardized product term generation using a two-stage calculation (i.e., for the product term calculation, the components were all standardized; Chin et al., 2003; Henseler & Chin, 2010; Henseler et al., 2012; Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017; Rigdon et al., 2008).

The results supported hypotheses 1–3 (Table 6 and Figures 2 and 3). Thereby, it is noteworthy that while the effect of sportiness on engagement, post attitude and diet improvement intentions is fairly strong, the impact of attractiveness is only low to moderate.

The moderator effect of overshadowing was tested by creating groups according to the referent power used (attractiveness vs. sportiness) and provided only partial support for H4 and no support for H5: A significant difference was only revealed regarding post attitude, i. e. the post attitude was significantly higher ($p < .05$) for the sporty influencer than the attractive one.

The structural equation model revealed particularly interesting contingencies regarding the moderating role of involvement on the effects of attractiveness and sportiness which partially supported H6. If a consumer is highly involved into healthy nutrition the effect of sportiness on post attitude and engagement is boosted. On the other hand, for low involved consumers the effect of effect of attractiveness on post attitude rises. In this way, the effect of attractiveness increases from low to fairly strong.

The control group was analyzed by using the response (attitudes, engagement, involvement) toward the attractive and sporty influencer vs. the regular person used as control group stimulus. An ANOVA followed by a Scheffé Post Hoc Test revealed significant differences ($p < .05$) only between the sporty influencer and the control group, i. e. the effect of the sporty influencer was significantly stronger than the control group. This might reflect the superior effectiveness of the sporty influencer than the structural equation already revealed.

Table 6. Structural model evaluation.

	Original Sample (O)		Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Attractiveness-> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.140	*	0.140	0.071	1.975	0.048
Attractiveness-> Engagement	0.288	****	0.291	0.059	4.871	0.000
Attractiveness-> Post Attitude	0.155	*	0.153	0.069	2.259	0.024
Current Status -> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.081		0.065	0.096	0.843	0.399
Current Status -> Engagement	0.079		0.040	0.106	0.743	0.458
Involvement * Attractiveness -> Diet Improvement Intentions	-0.043		-0.032	0.090	0.474	0.635
Involvement * Attractiveness -> Engagement	-0.075		-0.062	0.063	1.192	0.233
Involvement * Attractiveness -> Post Attitude	-0.184	*	-0.157	0.080	2.288	0.022
Involvement * Sportiness -> Engagement	0.116		0.112	0.063	1.848	0.065
Involvement * Sportiness -> Post Attitude	0.102		0.087	0.059	1.731	0.083
Involvement * Sportiness-> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.023		0.014	0.076	0.299	0.765
Involvement-> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.104		0.094	0.085	1.226	0.220
Involvement-> Engagement	0.019		0.026	0.066	0.292	0.770
Involvement-> Post Attitude	0.103		0.099	0.063	1.635	0.102
Sportiness-> Diet Improvement Intentions	0.356	****	0.358	0.070	5.115	0.000
Sportiness-> Engagement	0.347	****	0.347	0.061	5.728	0.000
Sportiness-> Post Attitude	0.457	****	0.461	0.052	8.720	0.000

* $p < 0.05$.** $p < 0.01$.*** $p < 0.001$.**** $p < 0.0001$.

The control variables (age, gender, income) were not found to have any impact. Likewise, it must be stressed that the control variable “current status of diet” had no impact.

Discussion

The results demonstrated that both attractiveness and sportiness have an impact on post attitudes, engagement and diet improvement intentions. Thereby it is noteworthy that while the effect of sportiness is consistently fairly strong, the effect of attractiveness is merely weak to moderate. Hence, sportiness is the more effective stimulus, which in turn have a positive effect on engagement and dietary improvement intention.

An overshadowing effect might occur with regard to sportiness. However, other causes of the observed effect cannot be excluded. It could also be a result of a perceived higher congruence between healthy diet and the sporty influencer.

When taking into account the moderating effects of involvement, an important differentiation regarding can be found. For consumers with low involvement in healthy eating, the impact of attractiveness on post attitude rises from weak to fairly strong. On the other hand, for highly involved consumers the impact of sportiness on post attitude and engagement becomes even stronger. The cause for these differences might be that attractiveness could be viewed as a superficial cue, which is processed more intensively under low involvement conditions (Martin et al., 2006; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Petty et al., 1981). Importantly, however, for diet improvement intentions, no such moderating effect can be found. Both attractiveness and sportiness are of similar relevance for low and high-involved consumers.

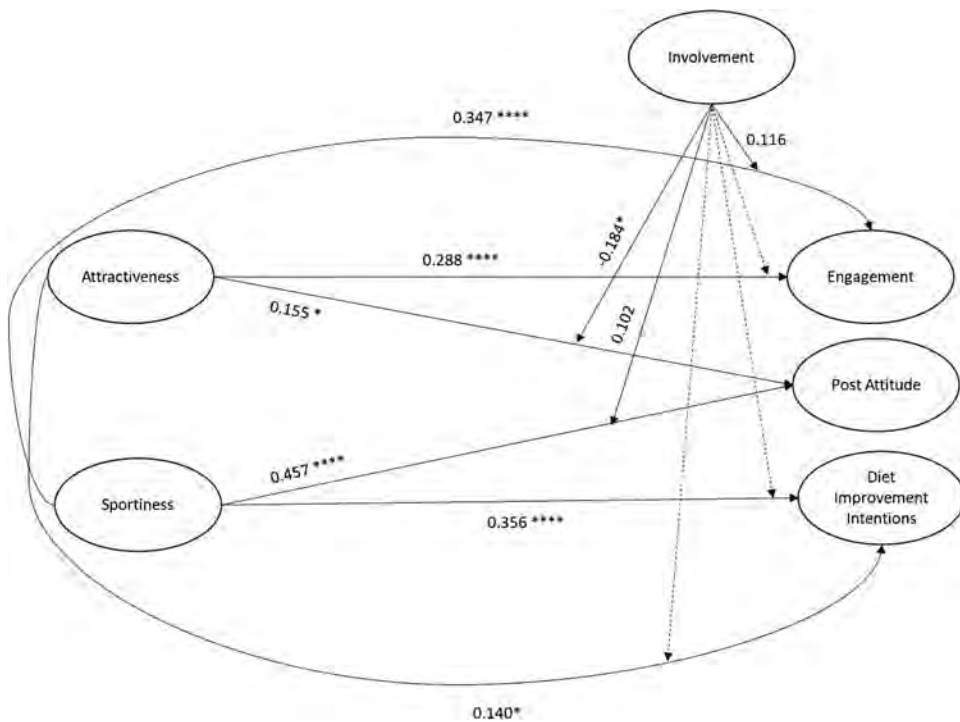


Figure 3. Results. *significant at $p \leq .05$. **significant at $p \leq .01$. ***significant at $p \leq .001$. ****significant at $p \leq .0001$.

Implications

Implications for theory and further research

The results show that pairing the presumably “uncool” topic of healthy nutrition (Chan & Tsang, 2011) with a “cool” attractive or sporty influencer (Reddy-Best, 2020; Regenstein & Lefkowitz, 1998) is an effective way to improve consumers’ diet. The influencer mostly did not overshadow the call for healthy nutrition. Only the with regard to the variable “post attitude” the sporty influencer might have overshadowed the cause. These findings can be explained by a closer look at the antecedents of overshadowing. Overshadowing occurs when (1) the stimulus is more interesting than the issue being endorsed and (2) there is no clear connection between the stimulus and the issue being endorsed (Erfgen et al., 2015). In light of our results, it can be assumed that although healthy nutrition tends to be perceived as boring (antecedent 1), the issue did not fade away, as a logical connection between the endorsers and the issue was at hand (antecedent 2) (healthy nutrition can evidently improve both physical attractiveness and performance; Ashton et al., 2015; Tavares, 2014). The potential overshadowing effect of the sporty influencer could be rooted in the perception of a higher congruence between healthy diet and the sporty influencer. Future research could verify these suggestions. Moreover, the overshadowing potential of other types of influencers could be examined in this context. Finally, it would be interesting to explore whether the results can be transferred to influencer endorsements of other low-interest products (e.g., household appliances) regarding which practitioners likewise fear overshadowing.

Our investigation revealed some surprising results regarding suitable influencers for consumers with high or low involvement in healthy nutrition. The finding that attractive influencers work better for low-involvement consumers and that high influencers are more successful under low-involvement conditions suggests that the sportiness of an influencer is a piece of information that travels through the central route, while attractiveness is processed via the peripheral route. As there is a great deal of

theoretical contradiction on this issue (see our hypothesis development), further research should try to verify this proposition by further investigating which cognitive heuristic consumers use (e.g., by means of the questioning technique of Sundar et al., 2016). A possible explanation may also be that individuals with high involvement in healthy nutrition are perhaps also more interested in performing physical activities (Dortch et al., 2014).

As the success of the examined influencers lies in their referent power, i.e., the desire of the participants to mimic them out of admiration, the results could be further refined by examining the role played by individual differences in the desire to affiliate with others, which is related to traits such as self-esteem, empathy or sociotropy (the need to please others and maintain social harmony; Hermans et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2011; Tegan et al., 2015). Moreover, this research was conducted in Germany, i.e., a developed country. The scope could be expanded by investigating the impacts of influencer marketing in a developing country, where consumers' approach to nutrition may be guided by different antecedents (Witkowski, 2007). Although, the demographic variables age and gender were not found to have any impacts on the results. The role of further demographic variables could be controlled for. For example, Kumar and Anand (2016) found that the size of an individual's hometown can account for behavioral differences toward healthy nutrition.

Implications for practice and public policy

This research obtains some important results for practitioners and influencers. The researchers have demonstrated that attractive and sporty influencers can positively affect attitudes toward endorsement posts, engagement and dietary improvement intentions. Although healthy nutrition has been found to be a boring topic (Chan & Tsang, 2011), pairing it with attractive and sporty influencers appears to be a practicable way to boost the issue without causing strong overshadowing effects.

Although both types of influencers have positive effects, the impacts of a sporty influencer are overall stronger on all three variables. A more differentiated picture arises when considering the role of involvement. Influencers might be interested most in the attitudes toward the post and the engagement. Especially, positive engagement is an important asset of influencers, and it may be decisive in their consideration of future campaigns (Cole, 2018). In this context, they can be advised to keep their different target groups in mind. If the target group consists of low-involved consumers, high attractiveness will elicit the most favorable impacts on post attitude, while for high-involved consumers sportiness will have the most positive effects on this variable. Regarding engagement, sportiness will have the most positive effects for low and high involved consumers. However, the positive effect will be even stronger for highly involved consumers. In essence, they have to focus on appearing even more sporty if their target group consists of high-involved consumers.

Practitioners' main goal might be to improve the diet behavior of the consumers. To this end, they can be advised to use sporty influencers – regardless of the involvement level of the target group. An attractive influencer will also deploy positive effects on diet behavior, but they will be weaker compared to a sporty influencer.

Conclusion

In the course of this research, the researchers investigated the highly relevant issue of the suitability of influencers for healthy nutrition. As the costs accruing from an unhealthy diet account for up to 40% of the health care costs in industrialized countries, using the highly popular communication tool of influencer marketing seems to be an expedient way to induce consumers to improve their diet (Candari et al., 2017; Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018).

Our research demonstrated that both attractive and sporty influencers have the potential to impact consumers' diet behavior. Moreover, influencers were shown to benefit, as their posts experienced positive engagement. Importantly, overshadowing effects mostly do not occur, i.e., both the influencer and the call for healthy nutrition can benefit. Some surprising results with regard to the pairing of

influencers and involvement were obtained. Attractive influencers are more effective in convincing consumers with low involvement in healthy nutrition to further improve their diet. In contrast, sporty influencers seem more convincing to consumers who have low involvement in healthy nutrition. This finding produces much potential for future research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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A8. The Scandalous Lives of Social Influencers

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The Scandalous Lives of Social Influencers

ABSTRACT

Social influencer marketing has developed into a powerful forms of marketing communication. Influencers, like any type of endorser, may cause scandals. As influencers' main field of activity is the Internet, a scandal may propagate swiftly and cause damage to the influencer and the endorsed brand. Against this backdrop, we close a research gap by developing a framework that includes ten scandals typically caused by influencers and map the size of the detrimental impacts on the influencer and brand. We verify our assumptions with an empirical investigation including 418 participants. In this way, we fill a gap in scandal frameworks and align our work with research on other types of celebrities. The results reveal significant differences in the seriousness of different scandals. Even supposedly minor scandals, such as the use of swearwords or commercial sharenting, have negative impacts on the influencer and the endorsed brand.

In light of the growing trend of influencer marketing, ample research has been conducted on its success factors (Lin et al. 2018). However, one success factor has rarely been considered: Influencers' moral integrity, i.e., the absence of scandals. This is all the more surprising because the absence of scandals has been identified as the first and most important requirement for the success of any celebrity – above other much more frequently discussed requirements such as attractiveness, expertise or trustworthiness (Amos et al. 2015). Particularly for an influencer, scandals have the potential to be even more detrimental than for any other type of celebrity. As influencers' main field of activity is the Internet, a major scandal may become a worldwide event in a matter of hours (Piazza and Jourdan 2018). Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that “The Internet never forgets” (e.g., Pieper and Pieper 2017). This verity became fatal to the beauty influencer Jeffree Star when a video from years earlier in which he said a bad word to someone came back to haunt him (Ford 2019). In addition, a scandal caused by an influencer is likely to become dangerous for an endorsed brand, which will be considered “guilty by association” (Appel et al. 2020; Kintu and Ben-Slimane 2020). Moreover, a better understanding of scandals in social media has been identified as a crucial topic for future advertising research (Voorveld 2019). These findings demonstrate the crucial importance of a sound understanding of influencer-related scandals and, consequently, the necessity for further research on this issue. In the course of this work, we examine ten influencer-specific scandals in the following categories: (1) Misinformation & Lie-Based Scandals, (2) Hate Speech & Bad Language Scandals and (3) Sharenting. As no framework for influencer scandals currently exists, we address the problem from two sides: We adapt (1) models developed for other kinds of celebrities (e.g., Abeza et al. 2020; Ekström and Johansson 2008; Thompson 2013) as well as a (2) framework for scandals that can occur on social media (DePaula et al. 2018). We pose the following questions: Which

scandals have the worst impacts on the influencer and brand? Are there some (minor) scandals that are not hazardous or may even be positive? To answer these questions, we examine and rank the effects of scandals on the influencer and endorsed brands through a survey employing 429 data sets analyzed by variance and cluster analyses in SPSS. In this way, we hierarchize and structure influencer scandals. Some of the results are surprising. For example, the seriousness of misinformation and lie-based scandals does not increase in accordance with the predictions of lie theories. Moreover, even relatively small transgressions, such as the use of swearwords or sharenting, can have detrimental effects on both the influencer and the brand.

THEORY

Influencers are individuals who create valuable content, have strong reputations in specific fields (Cha et al. 2010; Kim et al. 2017) and are followed by a large number of users on online social networks (De Veirman et al. 2017). Like any public figure, influencers can be involved in scandals (Kintu and Ben-Slimane 2020). A scandal can broadly be defined as a publicized instance of transgression, either real or alleged, that runs counter to social norms, typically resulting in condemnation and discredit (Adut 2005). Although the base of academic literature on influencer-related scandals is small, it can be assumed that a scandal will be detrimental for influencers because they can be successful only if they are trusted by their followers (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). A scandal in the public eye could cause them to lose many followers, trust and partnerships as brands do not want to be associated with bad publicity (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). A scandal caused by an influencer also affects an associated brand negatively in a direct way. The scandal diffusion model states that firm stakeholders (e.g., consumers) update their evaluation of a company based on the information they receive, including the

comments and opinions of other social media users around the world. Consequently, when hearing about a scandal in which an influencer endorser is involved, a consumer may revise his or her purchase decisions (Jourdan et al. 2019).

A theoretical structuration of influencer-related scandals has not yet been proposed. To obtain a plausible overview of influencer scandals, we approach the issue from two sides by reviewing (1) scandal structures developed for other types of celebrities and (2) a framework for general social media scandals. A first approach to structuring celebrity-related scandals suggests delimiting scandals based on their context: Scandals involving celebrities can be classified as (a) “on-the-field scandals” or (b) “off-the-field scandals”. An “on-the-field scandal” refers to a scandal that a celebrity commits in the context of his or her profession (e.g., an athlete dopes himself/herself), while an “off-the-field scandal” describes a transgression that is disconnected from the endorser’s profession (e.g., an athlete commits a traffic offense) (Abeza et al. 2020; Chien et al. 2016; Hughes and Shank 2005; Kwak et al. 2018).

Other approaches structure scandals based on their nature. For example, regarding politicians, Thompson (2013) and Ekström and Johansson (2008) suggest the tetrad of (a) talk scandals, (b) sexual scandals, (c) financial scandals and (d) power scandals. Concerning general social media scandals, DePaula et al. (2018) suggest a division into (a) misinformation, (b) hate speech, and (c) the misuse of user-generated information for targeted commercial and political advertising based on personal profiles.

Prior works on other types of celebrities have studied celebrities *in general* (e.g., Wang and Kim 2019) or focused on specific kinds of celebrities, such as athletes (e.g., Abeza et al. 2020). Thus, a research gap with respect to influencers remains. At least eight of our ten scandals are so specific to influencers that they are not covered by the extant work. Moreover, extant

studies (which do not focus on influencer marketing) do not consider specific influencer-related engagement variables, such as intention to continue to follow the influencer. We consider the triad of the (1) immorality of the scandal, (2) impacts on the influencer and (3) impact on the brand. This distinction is highly relevant as the effects of scandals may differ. For example, Wang and Kim (2019) argued that fans of Justin Bieber heavily condemned his racist jokes but nevertheless continued to support the celebrity.

Regarding influencers, studies on scandals, especially on “on-the-field scandals”, are still scarce. Noteworthy in this context is the work of Cocker et al. (2021) who analyzed mostly minor transgressions (e.g., overindulgence, oversaturation or overemphasis). These mainly refer to clumsy influencer communication that annoys or tires followers (e.g., if an influencer reads from a script, this feels boring and untrustworthy to followers). In our work, we focus on presumably more serious scandals.

Important pioneering work on an “off-the-field scandal” was carried out by Kintu and Ben-Slimane (2020). They conducted an explorative case study of the “Operation Varsity Blues Scandal” involving the influencer Oliva Jade Gianulli, whose parents were accused of bribing officials to have their daughters accepted into prestigious U.S. colleges. Kintu and Ben-Slimane (2020) analyzed the reaction of twelve companies linked to the influencer. In the course of our work, we aim to complete the picture by analyzing the impacts of ten “on-the-field” scandals, which usually have more serious ramifications for consumer perceptions than “off-the field scandals” (Hughes and Shank 2005). Therefore, we focus on the perceptions of consumers regarding the immorality of the scandal as well as their perceptions of the influencer and the endorsed brand. To this end, we adapt the aforementioned general framework on social media scandal types by DePaula et al. (2018). In places, we refine it with the classification by

Thompson (2013) and Ekström and Johansson (2008). The proposed frame of reference is depicted in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 near here].

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Misinformation & Lie-Based Scandals

The first kind of scandal that can occur on social media, according to the framework of DePaula et al. (2018), is based on misinformation and lies. An individual lies if he or she makes a false statement, believes that the statement is false and intends to deceive another person or intends to cause another person to have false beliefs (Carson 2006). Victims of lies experience shock and disbelief, followed by an emotional reaction (negative emotions such as anger, sadness, regret, antipathy, disappointment) and a cognitive behavioral reaction (e.g., distancing, losing trust, withdrawal from the relationship or thirst for revenge). The strength of these consequences is mediated by the importance of the issue that was the subject of the lie (Beata et al. 2015). In influencer marketing, numerous scenarios present the temptation to conceal the truth behind a lie. Influencers can lie about the sponsored nature of their content or their life.

In 2018, the sports influencer Sosa posted a picture of a PlayStation football game he was supposed to endorse. In the picture, next to the game, lay a letter from the endorsed company. On closer inspection, the sentence "Please refrain from mentioning that you received the product as a gift" was visible in the letter. Scorn and derision across social networks were the consequence. In the end, Sosa deleted the post (Noack 2018). Such an *(1) undisclosed sponsored post* is a serious issue as the most frequently recognized immoral behavior of influencers is related to a lack of

disclosure (Čop and Culiberg 2020). Consumers have been found to increasingly disfavor sponsored posts, which is why influencers hesitate to disclose sponsorship, although it is compulsory in certain countries (Ershov and Mitchell 2020). Nonetheless, an undisclosed sponsored post may have even more severe consequences: van der Struis (2018) suggested that followers could experience a “parasocial break-up” after they become aware of the sponsored nature of the content.

Influencers are also expected to be (2) *personally convinced* by the products they endorse: A major asset of influencers (in contrast to traditional celebrities) is that they are expected to tell their honest opinion; if they endorse a product they are expected to be convinced by it, not (merely) because of pay (Evans et al. 2017; Schouten et al. 2019). Only if influencers honestly recommend the brand they such as best are consumers ready to follow that recommendation and start shopping at the recommended firm (Janssen and Williams 2021). Consumers determine the true conviction of influencers by their level of consistency (Edvardsson and Boestam 2018), i.e., if an influencer one day recommends a brand as “his/her favorite” and another day awards this characteristic to a different brand, consumers will gradually realize that the influencer is not personally convinced by his/her statements.

Influencers may lie not only about their true feelings towards a product but also about aspects related to their everyday life. In 2018, the fashion influencer Johanna Olsson posted a series of photos on Instagram showing her in the beautiful scenery of different Parisian locations – at least it seemed so. Attentive followers noticed that the photos had been (3) *manipulated*. Olsson had not traveled to Paris; instead, she had been photoshopped into the scenery of the fanciest locations in the city (van Velzen 2018). Rosenlund and Jørgensen (2018) highlighted that as influencers have to be approachable and emotionally honest with their audience, this kind

of transgression is penalized to a greater degree by the community than any other form of transgression.

Sometimes, the entire life of an influencer may be nothing but a lie. In the course of the Lonelygirl15 controversy, it was revealed that the influencer Bree Avery (Jessica Rose) was an entirely (4) *fictional character* and that her social media accounts were actually run by the media company EQAL (Rosenlund and Jørgensen 2018). If the life of an influencer appears to be entirely staged and has nothing to do with reality, this deprives him or her of a major, fundamental asset. The fact that influencers have a life that (in contrast to, e.g., actors) is not too far removed from that of their followers and that they are more approachable has been found to be a major advantage over more aloof celebrity types. It specifically offers the potential for personal identification and demonstrates credibility as well as approachability (De Veirman et al. 2017; Djafarova and Rushworth 2017; Mettenheim and Wiedmann 2021; Schouten et al. 2019).

By being dishonest, influencers destroy one of their major assets, as credibility has been identified as a factor that positively distinguishes influencers from traditional celebrities. In particular, the credibility of an influencer has been found to be a decisive factor that strongly affects brand attitude and purchase intention (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017; Wiedmann and von Mettenheim 2020). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H 1.1: An undisclosed sponsored post will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

H 1.2: Endorsement without conviction will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

H 1.3: A manipulated photo will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

H 1.4: Being a fictional character will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

Hate Speech & Bad Language Scandals

The second kind of scandal that can occur on social media according to the framework of DePaula et al. (2018) is based on hate speech and bad language. These scandals are also represented in the Thompson (2013) and Ekström and Johansson (2008) model as “talk scandals”.

Some influencers have been reported to (1) *swear* a lot. This could be a problem, as swear words have traditionally been considered unsuitable for public domain mass media (Fägersten 2017) and the traditional communicative goal of swearing is to abuse, insult or derogate. The socially established quality of being offensive entails restrictions on the use of swear words, especially in public contexts (McEnery 2009). Repetitive swearing has the potential to alienate viewers or potential subscribers. For example, the video game influencer PewDiePie has been criticized for swearing too much (Fägersten 2017).

Access to a large audience can entice influencers to (2) *gossip* about someone they dislike. Gossiping affects the impression that receivers of gossip form about the gossiper (Cantarero et al. 2019). People who such as others are evaluated positively, whereas those who dislike others tend to be disliked, which is described as the TAR (transfer of affect recursively)

effect (Gawronski and Walther 2008). Frequent gossipers are increasingly disliked and are seen as less powerful than those who gossip less (Farley 2011). How fatal gossiping about someone can be is exemplified by the lifestyle influencer Playmatetessi. She used her prominent position to publicly gossip about a woman suffering from cancer whom she apparently disliked. Consequently, Playmatetessi lost many fans, and YouTube demonetized her videos (Ingame 2021).

Influencers sometimes also attack their followers directly by (3) *insulting* them. An insult is an expression or statement (or sometimes behavior) that is disrespectful or scornful. Insults may be intentional or accidental (Davidson and Manning 2010). The video game influencer MontanaBlack has been reported to insult fans because he feels that they invade his private life. He allegedly called them “cocksuckers” or “wankers” (TAG24 NEWS Deutschland GmbH 2020). Insults may have negative consequences for influencers as they entail the experience of being gratuitously offended and the corresponding feelings of shame, guilt, and anger (Gabriel 1998).

Influencers may also hold (4) *extremist* views, in particular, (5) *racism* (Rogers 2020). Extremists evince the characteristics of being against any compromise, being entirely sure of their position, advocating and sometimes using violence to achieve their ends, being nationalistic and intolerant of dissent within their group and demonizing the other side (Wintrobe 2006). Racism in particular involves prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people because they are of a different ethnicity (Oxford University Press 2021; Schaefer 2008). Racists are commonly viewed as “bad people” (Walfall 2020). They are associated with a bundle of negative characteristics, such as being immoral, ignorant, bigoted, prejudiced and mean-spirited (DiAngelo and Dyson 2018). Influencers associated with extremism and/or racism have

experienced very negative consequences. The influencers Milo Yiannopoulos and Alex Jones were removed from major social media platforms, which had a significant impact on their visibility, the maintenance of their fan bases and the flow of their income streams (Rogers 2020). Yiannopoulos has claimed to have become bankrupt, in part due to cancellations of a business deal and public appearances (Beauchamp 2018; Maurice 2019). Jones has seen the view counts and the impact of his posts and videos decline (Wong 2018). Importantly, racism can also negatively impact the willingness of companies to cooperate with influencers. In 2017, Disney's Maker Studios discontinued its affiliation with the video game influencer PewDiePie after a series of videos were found to include anti-Semitic sentiment (Fägersten 2017).

It is apparent that all forms of hate speech elicit negative feelings and behavioral reactions among consumers. In addition, the offline hate speech of traditional celebrities has been demonstrated to tarnish attitudes towards the celebrity endorser and the purchase intention of endorsed brands (Wang and Kim 2019). Overall, we hypothesize the following.

H2.1: Common use of swearwords will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

H2.2: Gossiping will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

H2.3: Insulting followers will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

H2.3: Extremism will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

H2.5: A racist slur will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

Sharenting

In addition to the scandal types included in DePaula et al.'s (2018) framework, we find a further scandal in Thompson's (2013) and Ekström and Johansson's (2008) model that can be adapted to influencers, namely, a type of power scandal (sharenting).

Sharenting describes a situation in which the influencer depicts his/her infant on social media or appears jointly with the infant (Blum-Ross and Livingstone 2017). This is a potential power scandal, as the influencer uses (or potentially misuses) the power he/she has over the infant to force it to appear on social media (Ekström and Johansson 2008; Thompson 2013). From the perspective of communication science, this may seem advantageous, as the baby schema (a set of facial and body features that make a creature appear "cute" (Glocker et al. 2009; Lorenz and Martin 1971)) is a means of emotional activation and is commonly used in advertising to attract a great deal of attention (Kotler et al. 2015; Kroeber-Riel and Gröppel-Klein 2019). However, the problem that occurs when an influencer employs his or her infant in pictures or videos is that it may be considered exploitation. The influencer uses the infant to increase attention for commercial purposes, with no self-interest on the part of the infant (Webb 2013). The infant does not have any legal right to the earnings that his or her parents generate

through sharenting (Masterson 2020). Therefore, sharents may receive sharply negative responses (Grégoire et al. 2009; Hegner et al. 2017; Holiday et al. 2020). Further critiques fear infringement of the infant's right to privacy (Wayne 2016) and even the exposure of the infant to pedophiles or online grooming (Tait 2016). These considerations have been found to pose a challenge for both brands and their influencers. Although research on sharenting is limited, initial results indicate that mothers disapprove of influencers who carry out commercial sharenting (Holiday et al. 2020).

H3: Sharenting will be considered (a) immoral and will have a negative effect on (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

Ranking Scandals

To rank “misinformation and lie-based scandals”, the “size of the lie” must be determined; for this approach, different criteria can be applied. The size of a lie can be measured as the (1) distance between the reported and true facts (Neubert 2014). Furthermore, (2) lies potentially costing the target money and causing trouble are rated as more reprehensible and less acceptable (Gao 2012). Consequently, to compare the seriousness of lie-based scandals, it must be determined how far the pretense is from the truth and whether it costs the target money. Regarding the first criterion of distance between reported and true facts, we find the “fictional character” to be the worst, as it constitutes a fundamental lie that encompasses the entire life of the influencer; the three other scandals refer only to certain aspects of the influencer's life. Referring to the second criterion, namely, the potential cost to the target, we find the “undeclared sponsored post” and the “endorsement without conviction” to be worst, as the influencer's lie

disingenuously leads the user to consider buying an item he or she might not have considered otherwise. Therefore, we hypothesize the following system.

H4: The effects on (a) immorality and (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand will be more adverse for the scandal types “being a fictional character”, “undeclared sponsored post” and “endorsement without conviction” than for “a manipulated picture”.

To rank online hate speech, Sharma et al. (2018) proposed a classification system rooted in Sternberg’s (2003) psychological elaboration. It encompasses three classes. Class I encompasses the mildest forms of hate speech, which are sarcasm, irony, trolling and bullying. Class II encompasses a medium degree of hate speech, consisting of accusations, trespassing, intimidation, threat/fear and enmity. Class III includes the most serious forms of hate speech, which are violence, extremism (e.g., racism) and propaganda. Based on this, we propose the following hierarchy.

The common use of swear words might belong to the first, mild category. In fact, the impacts of the common use of swear words might be neutral or even positive: The use of swear words is not uncommon in private, interpersonal contexts (Culpeper 1996). Swearing is a feature of informal, spoken interaction between close friends (Adams 2016; Fägersten 2017; Jefferson et al. 1987; Stapleton 2003, 2010). Along these lines, influencers’ frequent swearing can reduce social distance and create the illusion of intimacy. Moreover, the use of swear words in mass media has become more acceptable in recent years (Fägersten 2017). Fägersten (2017) argued that the video game influencer PewDiePie might, surprisingly, benefit from the fact that he swears often.

Based on an exemplary post that Sharma et al. (2018) present in their work, it can be suggested that “gossiping” and “insults” belong to class II. Likewise, the system suggests placing extremism and racism in category III. Actually, racism might be the overall worst transgression. Works attempting to rank the transgressions of ordinary people (e.g., Castelli and Tomelleri 2008) or celebrities (e.g., Wang and Kim 2019) consistently confirm this. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H5: The adverse effects on (a) immorality and (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand will increase according to the following hierarchy: (1) use of swearwords, (2) gossiping and insulting and (3) extremism and racist slurs.

We expect the negative effects of the scandal of sharenting to be rather low. In fact, this transgression – such as the frequent use of swearwords – might be neutral or even positive. Although, as mentioned above, the practice of sharenting is criticized from an academic perspective, commercial sharenters have experienced mainly positive reactions, including positive, even enthusiastic engagement by followers, e.g., in the form of favorable comments or even gifts for the infant (Dobson and Jay 2020). Therefore, we propose that the drawbacks of sharenting are more prevalent from the academic perspective and are not strongly represented in the reactions of followers.

H6: Compared to all other scandals, sharenting will have the least adverse effects on (a) immorality and (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention of the endorsed brand.

Because our ultimate goal is to develop a hierarchy of scandals, we merge the preceding mentioned hypotheses into the following research question:

RQ: How does the seriousness of the scandals differ?

METHODOLOGY

The data collection was performed via an online questionnaire from July through November 2020 in Germany. The questionnaire was shared on the SurveyCircle, PollPool, and Thesius research platforms. Only participants who affirmed that they were following at least one influencer were eligible to participate. For the purpose of data cleaning, the algorithm Time_RSI, which detects invalid answers (Leiner 2019), was run. In total, 418 data sets were employed (Mage = 24.72 years). An overview of the demographic data is provided in Tables 1-3.

[Table 1 near here]

[Table 2 near here]

[Table 3 near here]

The questionnaire was designed as follows. In the first step, participants were asked whether they knew and followed at least one influencer. Participants who provided a negative response to this question were not eligible to participate and, consequently, were excluded from taking part in the questionnaire.

In the second step, the subjects' demographic data were collected. Age and gender were employed as control variables.

In the third step, participants were asked to think about an influencer they knew well and followed. They were asked to provide the name of this influencer as well as some further information on the specialization(s) of the influencer. (Participants who were unable to provide this information were considered to have lied on the introductory question of whether they followed an influencer and were consequently removed.)

In the fourth step, the participants were introduced to the ten scandals investigated in this research. Importantly, they were provided with short definitions of the scandals in the spirit of this work because the participants may not have known (exactly) what was meant by a specific term or might have imagined something else.

In the fifth step, the participants were asked to think about the influencer they had indicated in step three. Then, for each of the ten scandals, they were asked to imagine how they would react if the influencer was involved in them. (The approach of having the participants rate an influencer that they followed allows for the presence of a parasocial relationship between the user and the influencer. This might not have been the case if we had used stimulus material, as the probability that a user had developed a parasocial relationship with a random influencer would have been very low. Nevertheless, the existence of parasocial relationships is of crucial importance to provide realistic results. Parasocial relationships potentially impact users' reaction to scandals. Endorser transgressions pose a dilemma, in this reasoning process, for those who have developed attachments to the endorser and thus struggle to balance their own moral integrity with their affection for the endorser committing transgressive behavior. When an endorser's transgressions compromise one's moral standards, cognitive dissonance occurs. Individuals tend to develop moral reasoning strategies to cope with this dissonance and thereby ease the psychological struggle (Bhattacharjee et al. 2013)). The reactions with regard to the dependent variables (a) degree of immorality and (b) decrease/increase in intention to trust in the influencer, (c) decrease/increase in intention to continue liking of the influencer, (d) decrease/increase in intention to continue following the influencer and (e) decrease/increase in intention to purchase products endorsed by the influencer were recorded on eleven-point Likert scales. Importantly, as some of the scandals might have also elicited positive reactions,

participants had the option to report positive and negative changes induced by the scandal. The records were coded as follows. For (a) immorality, “1” signifies very high *morality*, “6” signifies neutrality (*neither moral nor immoral*), and “11” signifies very high immorality. For the four other dependent variables, “1” signifies the most adverse reaction (e.g., trust in the influencer would *decrease* to the greatest extent), “6” signifies neutrality (e.g., trust in the influencer would neither increase nor decrease) and “11” signifies the most favorable reaction (e.g., trust in the influencer would *increase* to the greatest extent).

RESULTS

Common Method Bias

The model was first checked for a common method bias via Harman’s (1976) single-factor method. In line with the specification of the method, the common factor (35.255%) of the variance was smaller than 50%; thus, no common method bias was present (Eichhorn 2014).

Variance Analysis–Which Scandals are Worst in their Class?

The results were analyzed by means of three sets of five variance analyses (on (1) moral reprehensibility, (2) trust in the influencer, (3) liking of the influencer, (4) intention to continue following the influencer and (5) purchase intention of the endorsed brand) conducted in SPSS. Subsequently, the scandals were grouped by means of Scheffé post hoc tests to see which scandals differed significantly from each other. The post hoc tests group scandals that do not differ significantly from each other into groups that can overlap. In this way, an overview of the hierarchy of the scandals can be obtained. The first set included only the Misinformation and

Lie-Based Scandals (to answer H1, H4), the second set contained the Hate Speech and Bad Language Scandals (to answer H2, H5), and the third set included all scandals (to answer H3, H6 and the RQ). Ultimately, a cluster analysis was conducted using the cluster centers of the five dependent variables (to answer the RQ).

The results of all the ANOVAs showed that on average, all scandals were considered to have a negative impact on the five dependent variables. Furthermore, the variance analyses showed that overall, for all dependent variables, significant differences existed between the scandals ($p < 0.000$).

The results of the variance analyses and post hoc tests are shown in Tables 4-9. Since the scores of the scandals remained *above* 6 for moral integrity and below 6 for trust, liking, following and purchase intention, hypotheses 1 – 3 are entirely supported. Presumptions that some of the “minor” scandals might be considered neutral or even positive did not prove to be correct.

[Table 4 near here]

[Table 5 near here]

[Table 6 near here]

[Table 7 near here]

[Table 8 near here]

[Table 9 near here]

In the following discussion, we aggregate scandals that do not differ significantly from each other into groups, i.e., scandals in one group are equally serious. We present the groups in order of increasing severity.

H4 (a) – (e) on the hierarchy of the Misinformation and lie-based scandals can, all things considered, not be confirmed (Tables 4 and 5): Regarding (a) immorality, the hierarchy of the results yields three groups. There are two relatively minor scandals (being a fictional character and undisclosed sponsored post). An undisclosed sponsored photo appears to be a scandal of medium severity. A manipulated photo appears to be the most serious scandal. Concerning (b) trust and (c) liking, all the scandals differ significantly from each other, and each scandal forms an individual group. For both, the scandals' seriousness increases in the following order: Undisclosed sponsored posts, fictional character, manipulated photo, and endorsement without conviction. With respect to (d), three partially overlapping groups are extant: An undisclosed sponsored post is the sole minor scandal, fictional characters and manipulated photos are medium-level scandals, and manipulated photos and endorsements without conviction form a group of major scandals. With respect to (e) purchase intention, undisclosed sponsored posts and fictional characters form one group of minor scandals. Manipulated photos and endorsements without conviction are the worst scandals.

In contrast to H4, most parts of H5 can at least partially be supported (Tables 6 and 7). Concerning (a) immorality, three groups can be identified. Swearwords are the least serious scandal. Gossiping, extremism and insulting followers constitute a medium group. Racist slurs are the most severe scandal. This finding partially supports H5 (a). Concerning (b) trust, swearwords are the least serious scandal. Gossiping is a minor-medium scandal. Insulting followers and extremism appear to form a group of major-medium scandals. Finally, racist slurs are the most severe scandal. This partially supports H5 (b). Regarding (c) liking, (d) following and (e) purchase intention, all scandals form their own groups. For all three, the hierarchy of

escalating severity is as follows: Common use of swearwords, gossiping, insulting followers, extremism and racism. This partially supports H5 (c), (d) and (e).

Finally, H6 (a) – (e) predicted that sharenting would be the least severe scandal in every respect. This can be partially supported. Sharenting is the least severe scandal for most of the variables apart from (a) moral reprehensibility and (d) following, where it is both the second-least severe. However, for all of the variables, there is at least one other scandal with a severity that does not differ significantly from sharenting (Table 8). This partially supports H6 (b), (c) and (e).

Which Scandals are the Worst Overall?

Variance Analysis. To answer the ultimate research question (i.e., determining the worst scandals overall), we carried out a variance analysis (Tables 8 and 9). This yielded the result that being a fictional character, sharenting, the undisclosed sponsored post and common use of swearwords were the scandals with the least detrimental effects on all dependent variables. Racism and extremism were the scandals with the most detrimental effects. A detailed overview on the differences and the significance levels is provided in Tables 8 and 9.

Cluster Analysis. In addition to the variance analysis we also conducted a hierarchical cluster analysis to answer the ultimate research question. To this aim we used the rescaled distance cluster combination and squared Euclidian distance in SPSS. We initially standardized the scales to allow for comparability. The clusters were formed based on the averages of the five independent variables: (a) Immorality, (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention (Table 10).

[Table 10 near here]

The procedure for the cluster analysis is illustrated in Table 10 and in the dendrogram (Figure 2). The dendrogram reads from left to right and describes the process of clustering. The horizontal axis reflects the heterogeneity. In SPSS, this is normalized in the range from 0 to 25. All cases are listed individually on the left side of the dendrogram. First, each case corresponds to a respective cluster, which can be seen from the fact that each case has its "own" short, horizontal line. These clusters are gradually merged from left to right to form larger clusters. Vertical lines illustrate that two clusters are merging (Schwarz et al. 2021).

[Figure 2 near here].

The ideal number of clusters is usually determined by taking into account the greatest increase in heterogeneity in the dendrogram. In the example, the greatest increase in heterogeneity is between a three-cluster solution and a one-cluster solution. That is, the dendrogram suggests a two-cluster solution (Schwarz et al. 2021). Since this seems plausible in terms of theoretical content, a two-cluster solution is adopted.

Overall, this yields two ultimate groups of (1) minor and (2) major scandals. The group of (1) minor scandals is composed of undisclosed sponsored posts, fictional characters, manipulated photos, sharenting, and common use of swearwords. The group of (2) major scandals includes endorsement without conviction, gossiping, extremism, insulting followers and racist slurs.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined the impacts of ten influencer scandals on (a) immorality and (b) trust in the influencer, (c) liking of the influencer, (d) following the influencer and (e) purchase intention. Our results revealed that all scandals have negative impacts on all of these constructs

without exception. This also applies for the contentious transgressions “use of swearwords” and “sharenting”, although their negative impact is small.

We then developed hypotheses on the different degrees of seriousness of the scandals. Concerning misinformation- and lie-based scandals, counterintuitive results were produced: Surprisingly, the transgressions of an undisclosed sponsored post and being a fictional character were relatively minor scandals. In contrast, manipulated photo and the endorsement without conviction scandals were rated as much more serious.

Concerning hate speech and bad language scandals, in essence, our prediction was validated. The use of swearwords is a relatively minor scandal. Gossiping and insulting followers is of medium seriousness. The most serious scandals are extremism and racist slurs.

Overall, a racist slur appears to be the most serious scandal, followed by extremism (except for the variable immorality, where insulting followers is the second worst). Likewise, for all variables except immorality, sharenting and undisclosed sponsored posts are the least serious scandals (in varying order).

Finally, it should be noted that the impacts of the scandals on the five dependent variables were all similar, with differences in details only. At best, the small differences between immorality and the four other dependent variables are noteworthy. For example, immorality is the only variable for which gossiping and endorsement without conviction do not differ significantly from extremism. It is also noteworthy that an endorsement without conviction has especially detrimental effects on purchase intention.

IMPLICATIONS

Practical Implications

The results provide numerous insights for influencers and social media managers. Both groups can learn that all analyzed scandals are rated as negative without exception; therefore, it is better to avoid them. The potentially assumed positive effects of the scandal of sharenting and the use of swear words did not materialize.

Influencers who want to be perceived as trustworthy should avoid using racist slurs at all costs. The least serious scandals in this respect are sharenting and undisclosed sponsored posts and the common use of swearwords. To maintain their likeability, influencers should likewise avoid racist slurs and extremism. There is a strikingly negative effect of insulting followers on likeability. The least detrimental effects on influencers' likeability are caused by sharenting, undisclosed sponsored posts and being a fictional character. As trustworthiness and likeability are antecedents of various brand-related variables, such as the brand attitude of the endorsed brand (Bakker 2018; Wiedmann and von Mettenheim 2020), social media managers should likewise be aware of these findings.

To avoid losing a high number of followers, influencers should especially avoid racist slurs and extremism. An undisclosed sponsored post and sharenting entail the smallest drawbacks for this variable. These findings are likewise of high importance for influencers, as the number of followers may be a decisive criterion for the remuneration of the influencer or even for the fundamental question of whether an influencer is deemed suitable for cooperation with a brand (Cole 2018).

Social media managers who want to maintain high purchase intention for their brand should likewise avoid endorsements by influencers involved in racist slurs or extremism. The least detrimental effects are caused by sharenting and an undisclosed sponsored post. Overall,

practitioners can use our results to develop moral clauses that reduce or cancel the remuneration of an influencer endorser depending on the scandal they become involved in.

A final interesting finding is that the transgression of being a fictional character is, against expectations, a relatively minor scandal. In light of this, social media managers can be encouraged to balance the relatively small risks of this opportunity against potential opportunities. In fact, the creation of a fictive influencer may allow the development of a character who has other excellent characteristics, such as high physical attractiveness or an ideal personality, which may be crucial characteristics in influencer marketing (Schouten et al. 2019; Wiedmann and von Mettenheim 2020).

Theoretical and Research Implications

In this paper, some surprising results emerged. Against theoretical considerations, an undisclosed sponsored post and being a fictional character are relatively minor scandals. It is especially striking that these scandals are less adverse than a mere manipulated photo. In future research, explanations for this rather unexpected finding could be developed. An approach could incorporate the finding that by now, users have realized that influencers are not always authentic characters who represent their true selves (Aw and Chuah 2021).

Our results underscore how, even in the modern realm of modern influencer marketing, the use of swearwords has a small, though detrimental, effect. Presumptions that suggest swearing in the media is fully acceptable today (Fägersten 2017) are not supported.

Moreover, our results could be compared with results obtained with other forms of online endorsers, such as artificial intelligence influencers; prior results have indicated that consumers

react differently to transgressions committed by artificial intelligence influencers (Thomas and Fowler 2021).

Another major issue for future research is discovering ways to address the negative consequences of scandals or factors that can mitigate their effects. The impacts of an apology post/video or donation could be investigated (Ford 2019). Further factors rooted in the person of the influencer or the user may have an impact on the reaction towards the scandal. On the side of the influencer, this may be his or her physical attractiveness and gender (Desantts and Kayson 1997) or bad boy/bad girl image (Bennett et al. 2020). Moreover, regarding athlete-type celebrities, excellent performance has been demonstrated to be a scandal-appeasing method (Sato et al. 2015). How could such a means of compensation work for influencers? Likewise, the user's gender (Edwards and La Ferle 2009), degree of admiration for the influencer (Akturan 2011), dark personality traits (Yakut 2021) and moral standards (Wang and Kim 2019) may have an impact on the strength of the reaction to the scandal. Of course, it would be even better to stop a scandal before its full damage is realized.

Finally, in this work, we focused solely on “on-the-field scandals” (i.e., a scandal that a celebrity commits in the context of his or her profession; Abeza et al. 2020). In future works, “off-the-field scandals” could be investigated in an attempt to build a similar hierarchical classification system.

CONCLUSION

In this work, we closed a major research gap on the issue of influencer-related scandals. We provided relevant contributions by presenting the structure and hierarchy of ten influencer “on-the-field scandals”.

Both influencers and practitioners can gain key takeaways. Racist slurs and extremism are to be avoided at all costs, as they undeniably have the most detrimental effects; however, ostensibly small transgressions such as sharenting or the use of swearwords are by no means benign – on the contrary, they have the potential to cause harm to both influencers and brands.

This study explored the issue of influencer “on-the-field scandals”. Future research should investigate “off-the field scandals” related to influencers. Moreover, the factors that aggravate or mitigate an influencer scandal offer great potential for future research.

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TABLES

Table 1. Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percent
female	325	77.8
male	92	22.0
others	1	0.2
Total	418	100.0

Table 2. Age Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percent
18	2	.5
19	1	.2
20	8	1.9
21	38	9.1
22	47	11.2
23	55	13.2
24	57	13.6
25	67	16.0
26	53	12.7
27	30	7.2
28	17	4.1
29	15	3.6
30	10	2.4
31	4	1.0
32	4	1.0
33	3	.7
34	3	.7
35	2	.5
36	2	.5
Total	418	100.0

Table 3. Income Distribution

Income	Frequency	Percent
No own income	40	9.6
Less than 250 €	14	3.3
250 € - 500 €	66	15.8
500 € - 1000 €	140	33.5
1000 € - 1500 €	70	16.7
1500 € - 2000 €	30	7.2
2000 € - 2500 €	21	5.0
2500 € - 3000 €	13	3.1
3000 € - 3500 €	1	.2
3500 € - 4000 €	1	.2
4000 € or more	4	1.0
unknown	18	4.3
Total	418	100.0

Table 4. Variance Analysis of Misinformation & Lie-Based Scandals

Multiple Comparisons							
Scheffé							
Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Immorality	Undisclosed Sponsored Post	Endorsement without conviction	-1.861*	.180	.000	-2.36	-1.36
		Manipulated Photo	-1.170*	.180	.000	-1.67	-.67
		Being a Fictional Character	.421	.180	.139	-.08	.92
	Endorsement without Conviction	Undeclared sponsored post	1.861*	.180	.000	1.36	2.36
		Manipulated Photo	.691*	.180	.002	.19	1.19
		Being a Fictional Character	2.282*	.180	.000	1.78	2.78
	Manipulated Photo	Undeclared sponsored post	1.170*	.180	.000	.67	1.67
		Endorsement without conviction	-.691*	.180	.002	-1.19	-.19
		Being a Fictional Character	1.591*	.180	.000	1.09	2.09
	Being a Fictional Character	Undeclared sponsored post	-.421	.180	.139	-.92	.08
		Endorsement without conviction	-2.282*	.180	.000	-2.78	-1.78
		Manipulated Photo	-1.591*	.180	.000	-2.09	-1.09
Trust	Undisclosed Sponsored Post	Endorsement without conviction	1.610*	.137	.000	1.23	1.99
		Manipulated Photo	1.007*	.137	.000	.62	1.39
		Being a Fictional Character	.507*	.137	.003	.12	.89
	Endorsement without Conviction	Undeclared sponsored post	-1.610*	.137	.000	-1.99	-1.23
		Manipulated Photo	-.603*	.137	.000	-.99	-.22
		Being a Fictional Character	-1.103*	.137	.000	-1.49	-.72
	Manipulated Photo	Undeclared sponsored post	-1.007*	.137	.000	-1.39	-.62
		Endorsement without conviction	.603*	.137	.000	.22	.99
		Being a Fictional Character	-.500*	.137	.004	-.88	-.12
	Being a Fictional Character	Undeclared sponsored post	-.507*	.137	.003	-.89	-.12
		Endorsement without conviction	1.103*	.137	.000	.72	1.49
		Manipulated Photo	.500*	.137	.004	.12	.88
Like	Undisclosed Sponsored Post	Endorsement without conviction	1.507*	.138	.000	1.12	1.89
		Manipulated Photo	1.077*	.138	.000	.69	1.46
		Being a Fictional Character	.445*	.138	.015	.06	.83
	Endorsement without Conviction	Undeclared sponsored post	-1.507*	.138	.000	-1.89	-1.12
		Manipulated Photo	-.431*	.138	.021	-.82	-.05
		Being a Fictional Character	-1.062*	.138	.000	-1.45	-.68
	Manipulated Photo	Undeclared sponsored post	-1.077*	.138	.000	-1.46	-.69
		Endorsement without conviction	.431*	.138	.021	.05	.82
		Being a Fictional Character	-.632*	.138	.000	-1.02	-.25
	Being a Fictional Character	Undeclared sponsored post	-.445*	.138	.015	-.83	-.06
		Endorsement without conviction	1.062*	.138	.000	.68	1.45
		Manipulated Photo	.632*	.138	.000	.25	1.02
Following	Undisclosed Sponsored Post	Endorsement without conviction	1.330*	.135	.000	.95	1.71
		Manipulated Photo	1.017*	.135	.000	.64	1.40
		Being a Fictional Character	.656*	.135	.000	.28	1.03
	Endorsement without Conviction	Undeclared sponsored post	-1.330*	.135	.000	-1.71	-.95
		Manipulated Photo	-.313	.135	.148	-.69	.07
		Being a Fictional Character	-.675*	.135	.000	-1.05	-.30
	Manipulated Photo	Undeclared sponsored post	-1.017*	.135	.000	-1.40	-.64
		Endorsement without conviction	.313	.135	.148	-.07	.69
		Being a Fictional Character	-.361	.135	.068	-.74	.02
	Being a Fictional Character	Undeclared sponsored post	-.656*	.135	.000	-1.03	-.28
		Endorsement without conviction	.675*	.135	.000	.30	1.05
		Manipulated Photo	.361	.135	.068	-.02	.74
Purchase Intention	Undisclosed Sponsored Post	Endorsement without conviction	1.749*	.140	.000	1.36	2.14
		Manipulated Photo	.816*	.140	.000	.42	1.21
		Being a Fictional Character	.349	.140	.102	-.04	.74
	Endorsement without Conviction	Undeclared sponsored post	-1.749*	.140	.000	-2.14	-1.36
		Manipulated Photo	-.933*	.140	.000	-1.33	-.54
		Being a Fictional Character	-1.400*	.140	.000	-1.79	-1.01
	Manipulated Photo	Undeclared sponsored post	-.816*	.140	.000	-1.21	-.42
		Endorsement without conviction	.933*	.140	.000	.54	1.33
		Being a Fictional Character	-.467*	.140	.011	-.86	-.07
		Undeclared sponsored post	-.349	.140	.102	-.74	.04
		Endorsement without conviction	1.400*	.140	.000	1.01	1.79

Being a Fictional Character	Manipulated Photo	.467*	.140	.011	.07	.86
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*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5. Scheffé Post-Hoc Test on Misinformation & Lie-Based Scandals

Immorality				
Subset for Alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3
Being a Fictional Character	418	6.27		
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418	6.69		
Manipulated Photo	418		7.86	
Endorsement without Conviction	418			8.55
Sig.		0.139	1	1

Trust					
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3	4
Endorsement without Conviction	418	3.12			
Manipulated Photo	418		3.73		
Being a Fictional Character	418			4.23	
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418				4.73
Sig.		1	1	1	1

Like					
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3	4
Endorsement without Conviction	418	2.95			
Manipulated Photo	418		3.38		
Being a Fictional Character	418			4.01	
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418				4.45
Sig.		1	1	1	1

Following				
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3
Endorsement without Conviction	418	3.25		
Manipulated Photo	418	3.56	3.56	
Being a Fictional Character	418		3.92	
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418			4.58
Sig.		0.148	0.068	1

Purchase Intention				
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3
Endorsement without Conviction	418	2.37		
Manipulated Photo	418		3.3	
Being a Fictional Character	418			3.77
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418			4.11
Sig.		1	1	0.102

Table 6. Variance Analysis of Hate Speech & Bad Language Scandals

		Multiple Comparisons						
Scheffé								
Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Immorality	Gossiping	Insulting Followers	-.263	.187	.738	-.84	.31	
		Common Use of Swearwords	1.481*	.187	.000	.91	2.06	
		Racism	-1.122*	.187	.000	-1.70	-.55	
		Extremism	-.244	.187	.789	-.82	.33	
	Insulting Followers	Gossiping	.263	.187	.738	-.31	.84	
		Common Use of Swearwords	1.744*	.187	.000	1.17	2.32	
		Racism	-.859*	.187	.000	-1.43	-.28	
		Extremism	.019	.187	1.000	-.56	.59	
	Common Use of Swearwords	Gossiping	-1.481*	.187	.000	-2.06	-.91	
		Insulting Followers	-1.744*	.187	.000	-2.32	-1.17	
		Racism	-2.603*	.187	.000	-3.18	-2.03	
		Extremism	-1.725*	.187	.000	-2.30	-1.15	
	Racism	Gossiping	1.122*	.187	.000	.55	1.70	
		Insulting Followers	.859*	.187	.000	.28	1.43	
		Common Use of Swearwords	2.603*	.187	.000	2.03	3.18	
		Extremism	.878*	.187	.000	.30	1.45	
	Extremism	Gossiping	.244	.187	.789	-.33	.82	
		Insulting Followers	-.019	.187	1.000	-.59	.56	
		Common Use of Swearwords	1.725*	.187	.000	1.15	2.30	
		Racism	-.878*	.187	.000	-1.45	-.30	
	Trust	Gossiping	Insulting Followers	.636*	.145	.001	.19	1.08
			Common Use of Swearwords	-1.031*	.145	.000	-1.48	-.58
			Racism	1.679*	.145	.000	1.23	2.13
			Extremism	1.000*	.145	.000	.55	1.45
Insulting Followers		Gossiping	-.636*	.145	.001	-1.08	-.19	
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.667*	.145	.000	-2.12	-1.22	
		Racism	1.043*	.145	.000	.59	1.49	
		Extremism	.364	.145	.182	-.08	.81	
Common Use of Swearwords		Gossiping	1.031*	.145	.000	.58	1.48	
		Insulting Followers	1.667*	.145	.000	1.22	2.12	
		Racism	2.711*	.145	.000	2.26	3.16	
		Extremism	2.031*	.145	.000	1.58	2.48	
Racism		Gossiping	-1.679*	.145	.000	-2.13	-1.23	
		Insulting Followers	-1.043*	.145	.000	-1.49	-.59	
		Common Use of Swearwords	-2.711*	.145	.000	-3.16	-2.26	
		Extremism	-.679*	.145	.000	-1.13	-.23	
Extremism		Gossiping	-1.000*	.145	.000	-1.45	-.55	
		Insulting Followers	-.364	.145	.182	-.81	.08	
		Common Use of Swearwords	-2.031*	.145	.000	-2.48	-1.58	
		Racism	.679*	.145	.000	.23	1.13	
Like		Gossiping	Insulting Followers	.469*	.127	.009	.08	.86

		Common Use of Swearwords	-964*	.127	.000	-1.36	-.57
		Racism	1.400*	.127	.000	1.01	1.79
		Extremism	.868*	.127	.000	.48	1.26
	Insulting Followers	Gossiping	-.469*	.127	.009	-.86	-.08
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.433*	.127	.000	-1.82	-1.04
		Racism	.931*	.127	.000	.54	1.32
		Extremism	.400*	.127	.043	.01	.79
	Common Use of Swearwords	Gossiping	.964*	.127	.000	.57	1.36
		Insulting Followers	1.433*	.127	.000	1.04	1.82
		Racism	2.364*	.127	.000	1.97	2.76
		Extremism	1.833*	.127	.000	1.44	2.22
	Racism	Gossiping	-1.400*	.127	.000	-1.79	-1.01
		Insulting Followers	-.931*	.127	.000	-1.32	-.54
		Common Use of Swearwords	-2.364*	.127	.000	-2.76	-1.97
		Extremism	-.531*	.127	.002	-.92	-.14
	Extremism	Gossiping	-.868*	.127	.000	-1.26	-.48
		Insulting Followers	-.400*	.127	.043	-.79	-.01
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.833*	.127	.000	-2.22	-1.44
		Racism	.531*	.127	.002	.14	.92
Following	Gossiping	Insulting Followers	.543*	.130	.002	.14	.95
		Common Use of Swearwords	-.718*	.130	.000	-1.12	-.32
		Racism	1.562*	.130	.000	1.16	1.96
		Extremism	1.086*	.130	.000	.68	1.49
	Insulting Followers	Gossiping	-.543*	.130	.002	-.95	-.14
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.261*	.130	.000	-1.66	-.86
		Racism	1.019*	.130	.000	.62	1.42
		Extremism	.543*	.130	.002	.14	.95
	Common Use of Swearwords	Gossiping	.718*	.130	.000	.32	1.12
		Insulting Followers	1.261*	.130	.000	.86	1.66
		Racism	2.280*	.130	.000	1.88	2.68
		Extremism	1.804*	.130	.000	1.40	2.21
	Racism	Gossiping	-1.562*	.130	.000	-1.96	-1.16
		Insulting Followers	-1.019*	.130	.000	-1.42	-.62
		Common Use of Swearwords	-2.280*	.130	.000	-2.68	-1.88
		Extremism	-.476*	.130	.010	-.88	-.07
	Extremism	Gossiping	-1.086*	.130	.000	-1.49	-.68
		Insulting Followers	-.543*	.130	.002	-.95	-.14
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.804*	.130	.000	-2.21	-1.40
		Racism	.476*	.130	.010	.07	.88
Purchase Intention	Gossiping	Insulting Followers	.450*	.129	.016	.05	.85
		Common Use of Swearwords	-.577*	.129	.001	-.97	-.18
		Racism	1.478*	.129	.000	1.08	1.88
		Extremism	1.069*	.129	.000	.67	1.47
	Insulting Followers	Gossiping	-.450*	.129	.016	-.85	-.05
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.026*	.129	.000	-1.42	-.63
		Racism	1.029*	.129	.000	.63	1.43
		Extremism	.620*	.129	.000	.22	1.02
		Gossiping	.577*	.129	.001	.18	.97

Common Use of Swearwords	Insulting Followers	1.026*	.129	.000	.63	1.42
	Racism	2.055*	.129	.000	1.66	2.45
	Extremism	1.646*	.129	.000	1.25	2.04
Racism	Gossiping	-1.478*	.129	.000	-1.88	-1.08
	Insulting Followers	-1.029*	.129	.000	-1.43	-.63
	Common Use of Swearwords	-2.055*	.129	.000	-2.45	-1.66
Extremism	Extremism	-.409*	.129	.040	-.81	-.01
	Gossiping	-1.069*	.129	.000	-1.47	-.67
	Insulting Followers	-.620*	.129	.000	-1.02	-.22
	Common Use of Swearwords	-1.646*	.129	.000	-2.04	-1.25
	Racism	.409*	.129	.040	.01	.81

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7. Scheffé Post Hoc Test of Hate Speech & Bad Language Scandals

Immorality					
Scheffé					
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3	
Common Use of Swearwords	418	7.41			
Gossiping	418		8.89		
Extremism	418		9.14		
Insulting Followers	418		9.16		
Racism	418			10.01	
Sig.		1	0.738	1	

Trust					
Scheffé					
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3	4
Racism	418	1.62			
Extremism	418		2.3		
Insulting Followers	418		2.67		
Gossiping	418			3.3	
Common Use of Swearwords	418				4.33
Sig.		1	0.182	1	1

Like						
Scheffé						
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3	4	5
Racism	418	1.42				
Extremism	418		1.95			
Insulting Followers	418			2.35		
Gossiping	418				2.82	
Common Use of Swearwords	418					3.78
Sig.		1	1	1	1	1

Following						
Scheffé						
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3	4	5
Racism	418	1.48				
Extremism	418		1.96			
Insulting Followers	418			2.5		
Gossiping	418				3.05	
Common Use of Swearwords	418					3.76
Sig.		1	1	1	1	1

Purchase Intention						
Scheffé						
Subset for alpha = 0.05	N	1	2	3	4	5
Racism	418	1.58				
Extremism	418		1.99			
Insulting Followers	418			2.61		
Gossiping	418				3.06	
Common Use of Swearwords	418					3.63
Sig.		1	1	1	1	1

Table 8. Variance Analysis of all Scandals

Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Immorality	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	-1.861 ^a	0.185	0	-2.62	-1.1
		Manipulated Photo	-1.170 ^a	0.185	0	-1.93	-0.41
		Sharenting	0.029	0.185	1	-0.73	0.79
		Gossiping	-2.203 ^a	0.185	0	-2.96	-1.44
		Insulting Followers	-2.467 ^a	0.185	0	-3.23	-1.71
		Common Use of Swearwords	-0.722	0.185	0.084	-1.48	0.04
		Racism	-3.325 ^a	0.185	0	-4.09	-2.57
		Extremism	-2.447 ^a	0.185	0	-3.21	-1.69
		Being a Fictional Character	0.421	0.185	0.817	-0.34	1.18
		Being a Fictional Character	0.421	0.185	0.817	-0.34	1.18
Endorsement without Conviction	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	1.861 ^a	0.185	0	1.1	2.62
		Manipulated Photo	0.691	0.185	0.122	-0.07	1.45
		Sharenting	1.890 ^a	0.185	0	1.13	2.65
		Gossiping	-0.342	0.185	0.945	-1.1	0.42
		Insulting Followers	-0.605	0.185	0.295	-1.37	0.16
		Common Use of Swearwords	1.139 ^a	0.185	0	0.38	1.9
		Racism	-1.464 ^a	0.185	0	-2.22	-0.7
		Extremism	-0.586	0.185	0.345	-1.35	0.17
		Being a Fictional Character	2.282 ^a	0.185	0	1.52	3.04
		Being a Fictional Character	2.282 ^a	0.185	0	1.52	3.04
Manipulated Photo	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	1.170 ^a	0.185	0	0.41	1.93
		Endorsement without Conviction	-0.691	0.185	0.122	-1.45	0.07
		Sharenting	1.199 ^a	0.185	0	0.44	1.96
		Gossiping	-1.033 ^a	0.185	0	-1.79	-0.27
		Insulting Followers	-1.297 ^a	0.185	0	-2.06	-0.54
		Common Use of Swearwords	0.447	0.185	0.753	-0.31	1.21
		Racism	-2.156 ^a	0.185	0	-2.92	-1.4
		Extremism	-1.278 ^a	0.185	0	-2.04	-0.52
		Being a Fictional Character	1.591 ^a	0.185	0	0.83	2.35
		Being a Fictional Character	1.591 ^a	0.185	0	0.83	2.35
Sharenting	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	-0.029	0.185	1	-0.79	0.73
		Endorsement without Conviction	-1.890 ^a	0.185	0	-2.65	-1.13
		Manipulated Photo	-1.199 ^a	0.185	0	-1.96	-0.44
		Gossiping	-2.232 ^a	0.185	0	-2.99	-1.47
		Insulting Followers	-2.495 ^a	0.185	0	-3.26	-1.73
		Common Use of Swearwords	-0.751	0.185	0.057	-1.51	0.01
		Racism	-3.354 ^a	0.185	0	-4.11	-2.59
		Extremism	-2.476 ^a	0.185	0	-3.24	-1.72
		Being a Fictional Character	0.392	0.185	0.875	-0.37	1.15
		Being a Fictional Character	0.392	0.185	0.875	-0.37	1.15
Gossiping	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	2.203 ^a	0.185	0	1.44	2.96
		Endorsement without Conviction	0.342	0.185	0.945	-0.42	1.1
		Manipulated Photo	1.033 ^a	0.185	0	0.27	1.79
		Sharenting	2.232 ^a	0.185	0	1.47	2.99
		Insulting Followers	-0.263	0.185	0.991	-1.02	0.5
		Common Use of Swearwords	1.481 ^a	0.185	0	0.72	2.24
		Racism	-1.122 ^a	0.185	0	-1.88	-0.36
		Extremism	-0.244	0.185	0.995	-1	0.52
		Being a Fictional Character	2.624 ^a	0.185	0	1.86	3.38
		Being a Fictional Character	2.624 ^a	0.185	0	1.86	3.38
Insulting Followers	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	2.467 ^a	0.185	0	1.71	3.23
		Endorsement without Conviction	0.605	0.185	0.295	-0.16	1.37
		Manipulated Photo	1.297 ^a	0.185	0	0.54	2.06
		Sharenting	2.495 ^a	0.185	0	1.73	3.26
		Gossiping	0.263	0.185	0.991	-0.5	1.02
		Common Use of Swearwords	1.744 ^a	0.185	0	0.98	2.5
		Racism	-0.859 ^a	0.185	0.01	-1.62	-0.1
		Extremism	0.019	0.185	1	-0.74	0.78
		Being a Fictional Character	2.888 ^a	0.185	0	2.13	3.65
		Being a Fictional Character	2.888 ^a	0.185	0	2.13	3.65
Common Use of Swearwords	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	0.722	0.185	0.084	-0.04	1.48
		Endorsement without Conviction	-1.139 ^a	0.185	0	-1.9	-0.38
		Manipulated Photo	-0.447	0.185	0.753	-1.21	0.31
		Sharenting	0.751	0.185	0.057	-0.01	1.51
		Gossiping	-1.481 ^a	0.185	0	-2.24	-0.72
		Insulting Followers	-1.744 ^a	0.185	0	-2.5	-0.98
		Racism	-2.603 ^a	0.185	0	-3.36	-1.84
		Extremism	-1.725 ^a	0.185	0	-2.49	-0.96
		Being a Fictional Character	1.144 ^a	0.185	0	0.38	1.9
		Being a Fictional Character	1.144 ^a	0.185	0	0.38	1.9
Racism	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	3.325 ^a	0.185	0	2.57	4.09
		Endorsement without Conviction	1.464 ^a	0.185	0	0.7	2.22
		Manipulated Photo	2.156 ^a	0.185	0	1.4	2.92
		Sharenting	3.354 ^a	0.185	0	2.59	4.11
		Gossiping	1.122 ^a	0.185	0	0.36	1.88
		Insulting Followers	.859 ^a	0.185	0.01	0.1	1.62
		Common Use of Swearwords	2.603 ^a	0.185	0	1.84	3.36
		Extremism	.878 ^a	0.185	0.007	0.12	1.64
		Being a Fictional Character	3.746 ^a	0.185	0	2.99	4.51
		Being a Fictional Character	3.746 ^a	0.185	0	2.99	4.51
Extremism	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	2.447 ^a	0.185	0	1.69	3.21
		Endorsement without Conviction	0.586	0.185	0.345	-0.17	1.35
		Manipulated Photo	1.278 ^a	0.185	0	0.52	2.04
		Sharenting	2.476 ^a	0.185	0	1.72	3.24
		Gossiping	0.244	0.185	0.995	-0.52	1
		Insulting Followers	-0.019	0.185	1	-0.78	0.74
		Common Use of Swearwords	1.725 ^a	0.185	0	0.96	2.49
		Racism	-0.878 ^a	0.185	0.007	-1.64	-0.12
		Racism	-0.878 ^a	0.185	0.007	-1.64	-0.12
		Racism	-0.878 ^a	0.185	0.007	-1.64	-0.12

Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval			
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Trust	Being a Fictional Character	Being a Fictional Character	2.868*	0.185	0	2.11	3.63		
		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.421	0.185	0.817	-1.18	0.34		
		Endorsement without Conviction	-2.282 ²	0.185	0	-3.04	-1.52		
		Manipulated Photo	-1.591 ¹	0.185	0	-2.35	-0.83		
		Sharenting	-0.392	0.185	0.875	-1.15	0.37		
		Gossiping	-2.624 ⁴	0.185	0	-3.38	-1.86		
		Insulting Followers	-2.888 ⁸	0.185	0	-3.65	-2.13		
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.144 ⁴	0.185	0	-1.9	-0.38		
		Racism	-3.746 ⁴	0.185	0	-4.51	-2.99		
		Extremism	-2.868 ⁸	0.185	0	-3.63	-2.11		
		Trust	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	1.610 ⁷	0.143	0	1.02	2.2
				Manipulated Photo	1.007 ⁷	0.143	0	0.42	1.6
				Sharenting	-0.136	0.143	1	-0.73	0.45
				Gossiping	1.431 ⁷	0.143	0	0.84	2.02
				Insulting Followers	2.067 ⁷	0.143	0	1.48	2.66
				Common Use of Swearwords	0.4	0.143	0.555	-0.19	0.99
				Racism	3.110 ⁷	0.143	0	2.52	3.7
				Extremism	2.431 ¹	0.143	0	1.84	3.02
				Being a Fictional Character	0.507	0.143	0.184	-0.08	1.1
Trust	Endorsement without Conviction			Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.610 ⁰	0.143	0	-2.2	-1.02
				Manipulated Photo	-.603 ⁷	0.143	0.039	-1.19	-0.01
				Sharenting	-1.746 ⁴	0.143	0	-2.34	-1.16
				Gossiping	-0.179	0.143	0.997	-0.77	0.41
				Insulting Followers	0.457	0.143	0.336	-0.13	1.05
				Common Use of Swearwords	-1.211 ¹	0.143	0	-1.8	-0.62
				Racism	1.500 ⁷	0.143	0	0.91	2.09
				Extremism	.821 ¹	0.143	0	0.23	1.41
				Being a Fictional Character	-1.103 ⁵	0.143	0	-1.69	-0.51
				Trust	Manipulated Photo	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.007 ⁷	0.143	0
		Endorsement without Conviction	.603 ³			0.143	0.039	0.01	1.19
		Sharenting	-1.144 ⁴			0.143	0	-1.73	-0.55
		Gossiping	0.423			0.143	0.461	-0.17	1.01
		Insulting Followers	1.060 ⁹			0.143	0	0.47	1.65
		Common Use of Swearwords	-.608 ⁸			0.143	0.035	-1.2	-0.02
		Racism	2.103 ⁴			0.143	0	1.51	2.69
		Extremism	1.423 ⁷			0.143	0	0.83	2.01
		Being a Fictional Character	-0.5			0.143	0.203	-1.09	0.09
		Trust	Sharenting			Undeclared Sponsored Post	0.136	0.143	1
Endorsement without Conviction	1.746 ⁴					0.143	0	1.16	2.34
Manipulated Photo	1.144 ⁴					0.143	0	0.55	1.73
Gossiping	1.567 ⁷					0.143	0	0.98	2.16
Insulting Followers	2.203 ⁷					0.143	0	1.61	2.79
Common Use of Swearwords	0.536					0.143	0.122	-0.05	1.13
Racism	3.246 ⁴					0.143	0	2.66	3.84
Extremism	2.567 ⁷					0.143	0	1.98	3.16
Being a Fictional Character	.644 ¹					0.143	0.017	0.05	1.23
Trust	Gossiping					Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.431 ¹	0.143	0
				Endorsement without Conviction	0.179	0.143	0.997	-0.41	0.77
				Manipulated Photo	-0.423	0.143	0.461	-1.01	0.17
				Sharenting	-1.567 ⁷	0.143	0	-2.16	-0.98
				Insulting Followers	.636 ⁶	0.143	0.02	0.05	1.23
				Common Use of Swearwords	-1.031 ¹	0.143	0	-1.62	-0.44
				Racism	1.679 ⁷	0.143	0	1.09	2.27
				Extremism	1.000 ⁹	0.143	0	0.41	1.59
				Being a Fictional Character	-.923 ⁵	0.143	0	-1.51	-0.33
				Trust	Insulting Followers	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.067 ⁷	0.143	0
		Endorsement without Conviction	-0.457			0.143	0.336	-1.05	0.13
		Manipulated Photo	-1.060 ⁹			0.143	0	-1.65	-0.47
		Sharenting	-2.203 ⁷			0.143	0	-2.79	-1.61
		Gossiping	-.636 ⁶			0.143	0.02	-1.23	-0.05
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.667 ⁷			0.143	0	-2.26	-1.08
		Racism	1.043 ⁵			0.143	0	0.45	1.63
		Extremism	0.364			0.143	0.694	-0.23	0.95
		Being a Fictional Character	-1.560 ⁹			0.143	0	-2.15	-0.97
		Trust	Common Use of Swearwords			Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.4	0.143	0.555
Endorsement without Conviction	1.211 ¹					0.143	0	0.62	1.8
Manipulated Photo	.608 ⁸					0.143	0.035	0.02	1.2
Sharenting	-0.536					0.143	0.122	-1.13	0.05
Gossiping	1.031 ⁷					0.143	0	0.44	1.62
Insulting Followers	1.667 ⁷					0.143	0	1.08	2.26
Racism	2.711 ¹					0.143	0	2.12	3.3
Extremism	2.031 ⁷					0.143	0	1.44	2.62
Being a Fictional Character	0.108					0.143	1	-0.48	0.7
Trust	Racism					Undeclared Sponsored Post	-3.110 ⁷	0.143	0
				Endorsement without Conviction	-1.500 ⁹	0.143	0	-2.09	-0.91
				Manipulated Photo	-2.103 ⁵	0.143	0	-2.69	-1.51
				Sharenting	-3.246 ⁴	0.143	0	-3.84	-2.66
				Gossiping	-1.679 ⁷	0.143	0	-2.27	-1.09
				Insulting Followers	-1.043 ⁵	0.143	0	-1.63	-0.45
				Common Use of Swearwords	-2.711 ¹	0.143	0	-3.3	-2.12
				Extremism	-.679 ⁷	0.143	0.007	-1.27	-0.09
				Being a Fictional Character	-2.603 ⁴	0.143	0	-3.19	-2.01
				Trust	Extremism	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.431 ¹	0.143	0
		Endorsement without Conviction	-.821 ¹			0.143	0	-1.41	-0.23

Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Like	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Manipulated Photo	-1.423*	0.143	0	-2.01	-0.83	
		Sharenting	-2.567*	0.143	0	-3.16	-1.98	
		Gossiping	-1.000 ^o	0.143	0	-1.59	-0.41	
		Insulting Followers	-0.364	0.143	0.694	-0.95	0.23	
		Common Use of Swearwords	-2.031*	0.143	0	-2.62	-1.44	
		Racism	.679 ^o	0.143	0.007	0.09	1.27	
		Being a Fictional Character	-1.923*	0.143	0	-2.51	-1.33	
		Being a Fictional Character	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.507	0.143	0.184	-1.1	0.08
			Endorsement without Conviction	1.103 ^o	0.143	0	0.51	1.69
			Manipulated Photo	0.5	0.143	0.203	-0.09	1.09
			Sharenting	-.644 ^o	0.143	0.017	-1.23	-0.05
			Gossiping	.923 ^o	0.143	0	0.33	1.51
		Endorsement without Conviction	Insulting Followers	1.560 ^o	0.143	0	0.97	2.15
			Common Use of Swearwords	-0.108	0.143	1	-0.7	0.48
			Racism	2.603*	0.143	0	2.01	3.19
	Extremism		1.923 ^o	0.143	0	1.33	2.51	
	Undeclared Sponsored Post		1.507 ^o	0.135	0	0.95	2.06	
	Manipulated Photo		1.077 ^o	0.135	0	0.52	1.63	
	Sharenting		-0.029	0.135	1	-0.58	0.53	
	Gossiping		1.639 ^o	0.135	0	1.08	2.19	
	Insulting Followers		2.108 ^o	0.135	0	1.55	2.66	
	Common Use of Swearwords		.675 ^o	0.135	0.003	0.12	1.23	
	Racism		3.038*	0.135	0	2.48	3.59	
	Extremism		2.507 ^o	0.135	0	1.95	3.06	
	Being a Fictional Character		0.445	0.135	0.286	-0.11	1	
Manipulated Photo	Undeclared Sponsored Post		-1.507*	0.135	0	-2.06	-0.95	
	Manipulated Photo		-0.431	0.135	0.337	-0.99	0.13	
	Sharenting	-1.536 ^o	0.135	0	-2.09	-0.98		
	Gossiping	0.132	0.135	1	-0.42	0.69		
	Insulting Followers	.600 ^o	0.135	0.02	0.04	1.16		
	Common Use of Swearwords	-.833 ^o	0.135	0	-1.39	-0.28		
	Racism	1.531 ^o	0.135	0	0.98	2.09		
	Extremism	1.000 ^o	0.135	0	0.44	1.56		
	Being a Fictional Character	-1.062 ^o	0.135	0	-1.62	-0.51		
	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.077 ^o	0.135	0	-1.63	-0.52		
	Endorsement without Conviction	0.431	0.135	0.337	-0.13	0.99		
	Sharenting	-1.105 ^o	0.135	0	-1.66	-0.55		
	Gossiping	.562 ^o	0.135	0.044	0.01	1.12		
	Insulting Followers	1.031 ^o	0.135	0	0.48	1.59		
	Common Use of Swearwords	-0.402	0.135	0.45	-0.96	0.15		
Racism	1.962 ^o	0.135	0	1.41	2.52			
Extremism	1.431 ^o	0.135	0	0.87	1.99			
Being a Fictional Character	-.632 ^o	0.135	0.009	-1.19	-0.08			
Sharenting	Undeclared Sponsored Post	0.029	0.135	1	-0.53	0.58		
	Endorsement without Conviction	1.536 ^o	0.135	0	0.98	2.09		
	Manipulated Photo	1.105 ^o	0.135	0	0.55	1.66		
	Gossiping	1.667 ^o	0.135	0	1.11	2.22		
	Insulting Followers	2.136 ^o	0.135	0	1.58	2.69		
	Common Use of Swearwords	.703 ^o	0.135	0.001	0.15	1.26		
	Racism	3.067 ^o	0.135	0	2.51	3.62		
	Extremism	2.536 ^o	0.135	0	1.98	3.09		
	Being a Fictional Character	0.474	0.135	0.197	-0.08	1.03		
	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.639 ^o	0.135	0	-2.19	-1.08		
	Endorsement without Conviction	-0.132	0.135	1	-0.69	0.42		
	Manipulated Photo	-.562 ^o	0.135	0.044	-1.12	-0.01		
	Sharenting	-1.667 ^o	0.135	0	-2.22	-1.11		
	Insulting Followers	0.469	0.135	0.21	-0.09	1.02		
	Common Use of Swearwords	-.964 ^o	0.135	0	-1.52	-0.41		
Racism	1.400 ^o	0.135	0	0.84	1.96			
Extremism	.868 ^o	0.135	0	0.31	1.42			
Being a Fictional Character	-1.194 ^o	0.135	0	-1.75	-0.64			
Insulting Followers	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.108*	0.135	0	-2.66	-1.55		
	Endorsement without Conviction	-.600 ^o	0.135	0.02	-1.16	-0.04		
	Manipulated Photo	-1.031 ^o	0.135	0	-1.59	-0.48		
	Sharenting	-2.136 ^o	0.135	0	-2.69	-1.58		
	Gossiping	-0.469	0.135	0.21	-1.02	0.09		
	Common Use of Swearwords	-1.433 ^o	0.135	0	-1.99	-0.88		
	Racism	.931 ^o	0.135	0	0.37	1.49		
	Extremism	0.4	0.135	0.46	-0.16	0.96		
	Being a Fictional Character	-1.663 ^o	0.135	0	-2.22	-1.11		
	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-.675 ^o	0.135	0.003	-1.23	-0.12		
	Endorsement without Conviction	.833 ^o	0.135	0	0.28	1.39		
	Manipulated Photo	0.402	0.135	0.45	-0.15	0.96		
	Sharenting	-.703 ^o	0.135	0.001	-1.26	-0.15		
	Gossiping	.964 ^o	0.135	0	0.41	1.52		
	Insulting Followers	1.433 ^o	0.135	0	0.88	1.99		
Racism	2.364 ^o	0.135	0	1.81	2.92			
Extremism	1.833 ^o	0.135	0	1.28	2.39			
Being a Fictional Character	-0.23	0.135	0.968	-0.79	0.33			
Common Use of Swearwords	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-3.038*	0.135	0	-3.59	-2.48		
	Endorsement without Conviction	-1.531 ^o	0.135	0	-2.09	-0.98		
	Manipulated Photo	-1.962 ^o	0.135	0	-2.52	-1.41		
	Sharenting	-3.067 ^o	0.135	0	-3.62	-2.51		
	Gossiping	-1.400 ^o	0.135	0	-1.96	-0.84		
Racism	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-3.038*	0.135	0	-3.59	-2.48		
	Endorsement without Conviction	-1.531 ^o	0.135	0	-2.09	-0.98		
	Manipulated Photo	-1.962 ^o	0.135	0	-2.52	-1.41		
	Sharenting	-3.067 ^o	0.135	0	-3.62	-2.51		
	Gossiping	-1.400 ^o	0.135	0	-1.96	-0.84		

Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval			
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Extremism		Insulting Followers	-0.931*	0.135	0	-1.49	-0.37		
		Common Use of Swearwords	-2.364*	0.135	0	-2.92	-1.81		
		Extremism	-0.531	0.135	0.079	-1.09	0.02		
		Being a Fictional Character	-2.593*	0.135	0	-3.15	-2.04		
		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.507*	0.135	0	-3.06	-1.95		
		Endorsement without Conviction	-1.000*	0.135	0	-1.56	-0.44		
		Manipulated Photo	-1.431*	0.135	0	-1.99	-0.87		
		Sharenting	-2.536*	0.135	0	-3.09	-1.98		
		Gossiping	-0.868*	0.135	0	-1.42	-0.31		
		Insulting Followers	-0.4	0.135	0.46	-0.96	0.16		
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.833*	0.135	0	-2.39	-1.28		
		Racism	0.531	0.135	0.079	-0.02	1.09		
		Being a Fictional Character	-2.062*	0.135	0	-2.62	-1.51		
		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.445	0.135	0.286	-1	0.11		
		Endorsement without Conviction	1.062*	0.135	0	0.51	1.62		
		Manipulated Photo	.632*	0.135	0.009	0.08	1.19		
		Sharenting	-0.474	0.135	0.197	-1.03	0.08		
		Gossiping	1.194*	0.135	0	0.64	1.75		
		Insulting Followers	1.663*	0.135	0	1.11	2.22		
		Being a Fictional Character		Common Use of Swearwords	0.23	0.135	0.968	-0.33	0.79
Racism	2.593*			0.135	0	2.04	3.15		
Extremism	2.062*			0.135	0	1.51	2.62		
Endorsement without Conviction	1.330*			0.136	0	0.77	1.89		
Manipulated Photo	1.017*			0.136	0	0.46	1.58		
Sharenting	0.057			0.136	1	-0.5	0.62		
Gossiping	1.533*			0.136	0	0.97	2.09		
Insulting Followers	2.077*			0.136	0	1.52	2.64		
Common Use of Swearwords	.816*			0.136	0	0.26	1.38		
Racism	3.096*			0.136	0	2.54	3.65		
Extremism	2.620*			0.136	0	2.06	3.18		
Being a Fictional Character	.656*			0.136	0.006	0.1	1.21		
Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.330*			0.136	0	-1.89	-0.77		
Manipulated Photo	-0.313			0.136	0.806	-0.87	0.25		
Sharenting	-1.273*			0.136	0	-1.83	-0.71		
Gossiping	0.203			0.136	0.987	-0.36	0.76		
Insulting Followers	.746*			0.136	0	0.19	1.31		
Common Use of Swearwords	-0.514			0.136	0.112	-1.07	0.04		
Racism	1.766*			0.136	0	1.21	2.32		
Extremism	1.289*			0.136	0	0.73	1.85		
Being a Fictional Character	-0.675*	0.136	0.003	-1.23	-0.12				
Following Undeclared Sponsored Post		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.017*	0.136	0	-1.58	-0.46		
		Endorsement without Conviction	0.313	0.136	0.806	-0.25	0.87		
		Sharenting	-0.959*	0.136	0	-1.52	-0.4		
		Gossiping	0.517	0.136	0.107	-0.04	1.08		
		Insulting Followers	1.060*	0.136	0	0.5	1.62		
		Common Use of Swearwords	-0.201	0.136	0.988	-0.76	0.36		
		Racism	2.079*	0.136	0	1.52	2.64		
		Extremism	1.603*	0.136	0	1.04	2.16		
		Being a Fictional Character	-0.361	0.136	0.63	-0.92	0.2		
		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.057	0.136	1	-0.62	0.5		
		Endorsement without Conviction	1.273*	0.136	0	0.71	1.83		
		Manipulated Photo	.959*	0.136	0	0.4	1.52		
		Gossiping	1.476*	0.136	0	0.92	2.04		
		Insulting Followers	2.019*	0.136	0	1.46	2.58		
		Common Use of Swearwords	.758*	0.136	0	0.2	1.32		
		Racism	3.038*	0.136	0	2.48	3.6		
		Extremism	2.562*	0.136	0	2	3.12		
		Being a Fictional Character	.598*	0.136	0.022	0.04	1.16		
		Following Undeclared Sponsored Post		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.533*	0.136	0	-2.09	-0.97
				Endorsement without Conviction	-0.203	0.136	0.987	-0.76	0.36
Manipulated Photo	-0.517			0.136	0.107	-1.08	0.04		
Sharenting	-1.476*			0.136	0	-2.04	-0.92		
Insulting Followers	0.543			0.136	0.068	-0.02	1.1		
Common Use of Swearwords	-0.718*			0.136	0.001	-1.28	-0.16		
Racism	1.562*			0.136	0	1	2.12		
Extremism	1.086*			0.136	0	0.53	1.65		
Being a Fictional Character	-0.878*			0.136	0	-1.44	-0.32		
Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.077*			0.136	0	-2.64	-1.52		
Endorsement without Conviction	-0.746*			0.136	0	-1.31	-0.19		
Manipulated Photo	-1.060*			0.136	0	-1.62	-0.5		
Sharenting	-2.019*			0.136	0	-2.58	-1.46		
Gossiping	-0.543			0.136	0.068	-1.1	0.02		
Common Use of Swearwords	-1.261*			0.136	0	-1.82	-0.7		
Racism	1.019*			0.136	0	0.46	1.58		
Extremism	0.543			0.136	0.068	-0.02	1.1		
Being a Fictional Character	-1.421*			0.136	0	-1.98	-0.86		
Following Undeclared Sponsored Post				Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.816*	0.136	0	-1.38	-0.26
				Endorsement without Conviction	0.514	0.136	0.112	-0.04	1.07
		Manipulated Photo	0.201	0.136	0.988	-0.36	0.76		
		Sharenting	-0.758*	0.136	0	-1.32	-0.2		
		Gossiping	.718*	0.136	0.001	0.16	1.28		
		Insulting Followers	1.261*	0.136	0	0.7	1.82		
		Racism	2.280*	0.136	0	1.72	2.84		
		Extremism	1.804*	0.136	0	1.24	2.36		

Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Racism		Being a Fictional Character	-0.16	0.136	0.998	-0.72	0.4	
		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-3.096*	0.136	0	-3.65	-2.54	
		Endorsement without Conviction	-1.766*	0.136	0	-2.32	-1.21	
		Manipulated Photo	-2.079*	0.136	0	-2.64	-1.52	
		Sharenting	-3.038*	0.136	0	-3.6	-2.48	
		Gossiping	-1.562*	0.136	0	-2.12	-1	
		Insulting Followers	-1.019*	0.136	0	-1.58	-0.46	
		Common Use of Swearwords	-2.280*	0.136	0	-2.84	-1.72	
		Extremism	-0.476	0.136	0.199	-1.04	0.08	
		Being a Fictional Character	-2.440*	0.136	0	-3	-1.88	
		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.620*	0.136	0	-3.18	-2.06	
		Endorsement without Conviction	-1.289*	0.136	0	-1.85	-0.73	
		Manipulated Photo	-1.603*	0.136	0	-2.16	-1.04	
		Sharenting	-2.562*	0.136	0	-3.12	-2	
Extremism		Gossiping	-1.086*	0.136	0	-1.65	-0.53	
		Insulting Followers	-0.543	0.136	0.068	-1.1	0.02	
		Common Use of Swearwords	-1.804*	0.136	0	-2.36	-1.24	
		Racism	0.476	0.136	0.199	-0.08	1.04	
		Being a Fictional Character	-1.964*	0.136	0	-2.52	-1.4	
		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-6.56*	0.136	0.006	-7.12	-6.01	
		Endorsement without Conviction	.675*	0.136	0.003	0.12	1.23	
		Manipulated Photo	0.361	0.136	0.63	-0.2	0.92	
		Sharenting	-5.98*	0.136	0.022	-6.54	-5.42	
		Gossiping	.878*	0.136	0	0.32	1.44	
		Insulting Followers	1.421*	0.136	0	0.86	1.98	
		Common Use of Swearwords	0.16	0.136	0.998	-0.4	0.72	
		Racism	2.440*	0.136	0	1.88	3	
		Extremism	1.964*	0.136	0	1.4	2.52	
Purchase Intention	Undeclared Sponsored Post	Endorsement without Conviction	1.749*	0.136	0	1.19	2.31	
		Manipulated Photo	.816*	0.136	0	0.26	1.37	
		Sharenting	-0.433	0.136	0.336	-0.99	0.13	
		Gossiping	1.060*	0.136	0	0.5	1.62	
		Insulting Followers	1.510*	0.136	0	0.95	2.07	
		Common Use of Swearwords	0.483	0.136	0.178	-0.08	1.04	
		Racism	2.538*	0.136	0	1.98	3.1	
		Extremism	2.129*	0.136	0	1.57	2.69	
		Being a Fictional Character	0.349	0.136	0.676	-0.21	0.91	
		Endorsement without Conviction	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.749*	0.136	0	-2.31	-1.19
			Manipulated Photo	-9.33*	0.136	0	-9.89	-8.77
			Sharenting	-2.182*	0.136	0	-2.74	-1.62
			Gossiping	-6.89*	0.136	0.002	-7.45	-6.33
			Insulting Followers	-0.239	0.136	0.96	-0.8	0.32
Common Use of Swearwords	-1.266*		0.136	0	-1.82	-0.71		
Racism	.789*		0.136	0	0.23	1.35		
Extremism	0.38		0.136	0.549	-0.18	0.94		
Being a Fictional Character	-1.400*		0.136	0	-1.96	-0.84		
Manipulated Photo	Undeclared Sponsored Post		-8.16*	0.136	0	-8.72	-7.6	
	Endorsement without Conviction		.933*	0.136	0	0.37	1.49	
	Sharenting		-1.249*	0.136	0	-1.81	-0.69	
	Gossiping		0.244	0.136	0.954	-0.31	0.8	
	Insulting Followers		.694*	0.136	0.002	0.14	1.25	
	Common Use of Swearwords	-0.333	0.136	0.739	-0.89	0.23		
	Racism	1.722*	0.136	0	1.16	2.28		
	Extremism	1.313*	0.136	0	0.75	1.87		
	Being a Fictional Character	-0.467	0.136	0.224	-1.02	0.09		
	Sharenting	Undeclared Sponsored Post	0.433	0.136	0.336	-0.13	0.99	
		Endorsement without Conviction	2.182*	0.136	0	1.62	2.74	
		Manipulated Photo	1.249*	0.136	0	0.69	1.81	
		Gossiping	1.493*	0.136	0	0.93	2.05	
		Insulting Followers	1.943*	0.136	0	1.38	2.5	
Common Use of Swearwords		.916*	0.136	0	0.36	1.47		
Racism		2.971*	0.136	0	2.41	3.53		
Extremism		2.562*	0.136	0	2	3.12		
Being a Fictional Character		.782*	0.136	0	0.22	1.34		
Gossiping		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.060*	0.136	0	-1.62	-0.5	
		Endorsement without Conviction	.689*	0.136	0.002	0.13	1.25	
		Manipulated Photo	-0.244	0.136	0.954	-0.8	0.31	
		Sharenting	-1.493*	0.136	0	-2.05	-0.93	
		Insulting Followers	0.45	0.136	0.277	-0.11	1.01	
	Common Use of Swearwords	-5.77*	0.136	0.035	-6.33	-5.21		
	Racism	1.478*	0.136	0	0.92	2.04		
	Extremism	1.069*	0.136	0	0.51	1.63		
	Being a Fictional Character	-7.11*	0.136	0.001	-7.67	-6.55		
	Insulting Followers	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-1.510*	0.136	0	-2.07	-0.95	
		Endorsement without Conviction	0.239	0.136	0.96	-0.32	0.8	
		Manipulated Photo	-6.94*	0.136	0.002	-7.5	-6.38	
		Sharenting	-1.943*	0.136	0	-2.5	-1.38	
		Gossiping	-0.45	0.136	0.277	-1.01	0.11	
Common Use of Swearwords		-1.026*	0.136	0	-1.58	-0.47		
Racism		1.029*	0.136	0	0.47	1.59		
Extremism		.620*	0.136	0.013	0.06	1.18		
Being a Fictional Character		-1.160*	0.136	0	-1.72	-0.6		
Common Use of Swearwords		Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.483	0.136	0.178	-1.04	0.08	
		Endorsement without Conviction	1.266*	0.136	0	0.71	1.82	

Dependent Variable	(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
		Manipulated Photo	0.333	0.136	0.739	-0.23	0.89
		Sharenting	-.916 [*]	0.136	0	-1.47	-0.36
		Gossiping	.577 [*]	0.136	0.035	0.02	1.14
		Insulting Followers	1.026 [*]	0.136	0	0.47	1.58
		Racism	2.055 [*]	0.136	0	1.5	2.61
		Extremism	1.646 [*]	0.136	0	1.09	2.2
		Being a Fictional Character	-0.134	0.136	0.999	-0.69	0.42
	Racism	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.538 [*]	0.136	0	-3.1	-1.98
	Racism	Endorsement without Conviction	-.789 [*]	0.136	0	-1.35	-0.23
	Racism	Manipulated Photo	-1.722 [*]	0.136	0	-2.28	-1.16
	Racism	Sharenting	-2.971 [*]	0.136	0	-3.53	-2.41
	Racism	Gossiping	-1.478 [*]	0.136	0	-2.04	-0.92
	Racism	Insulting Followers	-1.029 [*]	0.136	0	-1.59	-0.47
	Racism	Common Use of Swearwords	-2.055 [*]	0.136	0	-2.61	-1.5
	Racism	Extremism	-0.409	0.136	0.429	-0.97	0.15
	Racism	Being a Fictional Character	-2.189 [*]	0.136	0	-2.75	-1.63
	Extremism	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-2.129 [*]	0.136	0	-2.69	-1.57
	Extremism	Endorsement without Conviction	-0.38	0.136	0.549	-0.94	0.18
	Extremism	Manipulated Photo	-1.313 [*]	0.136	0	-1.87	-0.75
	Extremism	Sharenting	-2.562 [*]	0.136	0	-3.12	-2
	Extremism	Gossiping	-1.069 [*]	0.136	0	-1.63	-0.51
	Extremism	Insulting Followers	-.620 [*]	0.136	0.013	-1.18	-0.06
	Extremism	Common Use of Swearwords	-1.646 [*]	0.136	0	-2.2	-1.09
	Extremism	Racism	0.409	0.136	0.429	-0.15	0.97
	Extremism	Being a Fictional Character	-1.780 [*]	0.136	0	-2.34	-1.22
	Being a Fictional Character	Undeclared Sponsored Post	-0.349	0.136	0.676	-0.91	0.21
	Being a Fictional Character	Endorsement without Conviction	1.400 [*]	0.136	0	0.84	1.96
	Being a Fictional Character	Manipulated Photo	0.467	0.136	0.224	-0.09	1.02
	Being a Fictional Character	Sharenting	-.782 [*]	0.136	0	-1.34	-0.22
	Being a Fictional Character	Gossiping	.711 [*]	0.136	0.001	0.15	1.27
	Being a Fictional Character	Insulting Followers	1.160 [*]	0.136	0	0.6	1.72
	Being a Fictional Character	Common Use of Swearwords	0.134	0.136	0.999	-0.42	0.69
	Being a Fictional Character	Racism	2.189 [*]	0.136	0	1.63	2.75
	Being a Fictional Character	Extremism	1.780 [*]	0.136	0	1.22	2.34

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 9. Scheffé Post Hoc Test of all Scandals

Immorality							
Scheffé	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Being a Fictional Character	418	6.27					
Sharenting	418	6.66	6.66				
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418	6.69	6.69				
Common Use of Swearwords	418		7.41	7.41			
Manipulated Photo	418			7.86	7.86		
Endorsement without Conviction	418				8.55	8.55	
Gossiping	418					8.89	
Extremism	418					9.14	
Insulting Followers	418					9.16	
Racism	418						10.01
Sig.		0.817	0.57	0.753	0.122	0.295	1.000

Trust									
Scheffé	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Racism	418	1.62							
Extremism	418		2.30						
Insulting Followers	418		2.67	2.67					
Endorsement without Conviction	418			3.12	3.12				
Gossiping	418				3.30	3.30			
Manipulated Photo	418					3.73	3.73		
Being a Fictional Character	418						4.23	4.23	
Common Use of Swearwords	418							4.33	4.33
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418							4.73	4.73
Sharenting	418								4.87
Sig.		1.000	0.694	0.336	0.997	0.461	0.203	0.184	0.122

Like									
Scheffé	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Racism	418	1.42							
Extremism	418	1.95	1.95						
Insulting Followers	418		2.35	2.35					
Gossiping	418			2.82	2.82				
Endorsement without Conviction	418				2.95	2.95			
Manipulated Photo	418					3.38	3.38		
Common Use of Swearwords	418						3.78	3.78	
Being a Fictional Character	418							04.01	04.01
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418								4.45
Sharenting	418								4.48
Sig.		0.79	0.460	0.210	1.000	0.337	0.450	0.968	197

Following							
Scheffé	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Racism	418	1.48					
Extremism	418	1.96	1.96				
Insulting Followers	418		2.50	2.50			
Gossiping	418			3.05	3.05		

Endorsement without Conviction	418				3.25	3.25		
Manipulated Photo	418				3.56	3.56	3.56	
Common Use of Swearwords	418					3.76	3.76	
Being a Fictional Character	418						3.92	
Sharenting	418							4.52
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418							4.58
Sig.		0.199	0.68	0.68	0.107	0.112	0.630	1.000

Purchase Intention									
Scheffé									
	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Racism	418	1.58							
Extremism	418	1.99	1.99						
Endorsement without Conviction	418		2.37	2.37					
Insulting Followers	418			2.61	2.61				
Gossiping	418				3.06	3.06			
Manipulated Photo	418					3.30	3.30		
Common Use of Swearwords	418						3.63	3.63	
Being a Fictional Character	418						3.77	3.77	
Undisclosed Sponsored Post	418							4.11	4.11
Sharenting	418								4.55
Sig.		0.429	0.549	0.960	0.277	0.954	0.224	0.178	0.336

Table 10. Proximity Matrix

Proximity Matrix										
Case	Squared Euclidean Distance									
	1: Racist Slur	2: Extremism	3: Insulting Followers	4: Endorsement without conviction	Gossiping	6: Manipulated Photo	7: Being a Fictional Character	8: Common Use of Swearwords	9: Undisclosed sponsored post	10: Sharenting
1: Racist Slur	0.000	1.899	4.791	10.480	10.692	20.201	38.258	29.075	45.886	49.211
2: Extremism	1.899	0.000	0.973	3.829	4.152	10.004	23.215	16.392	29.516	32.263
3: Insulting Followers	4.791	0.973	0.000	1.555	1.196	5.474	16.903	10.491	21.331	23.471
4: Endorsement without conviction	10.480	3.829	1.555	0.000	0.681	1.994	9.963	5.300	13.098	15.341
5: Gossiping	10.692	4.152	1.196	0.681	0.000	1.877	10.406	5.002	12.985	14.574
6: Manipulated Photo	20.201	10.004	5.474	1.994	1.877	0.000	3.526	0.871	5.210	6.434
7: Being a Fictional Character	38.258	23.215	16.903	9.963	10.406	3.526	0.000	1.408	1.171	1.751
8: Common Use of Swearwords	29.075	16.392	10.491	5.300	5.002	0.871	1.408	0.000	2.030	2.768
9: Undisclosed sponsored post	45.886	29.516	21.331	13.098	12.985	5.210	1.171	2.030	0.000	0.219
10: Sharenting	49.211	32.263	23.471	15.341	14.574	6.434	1.751	2.768	0.219	0.000

This is a dissimilarity matrix

FIGURES

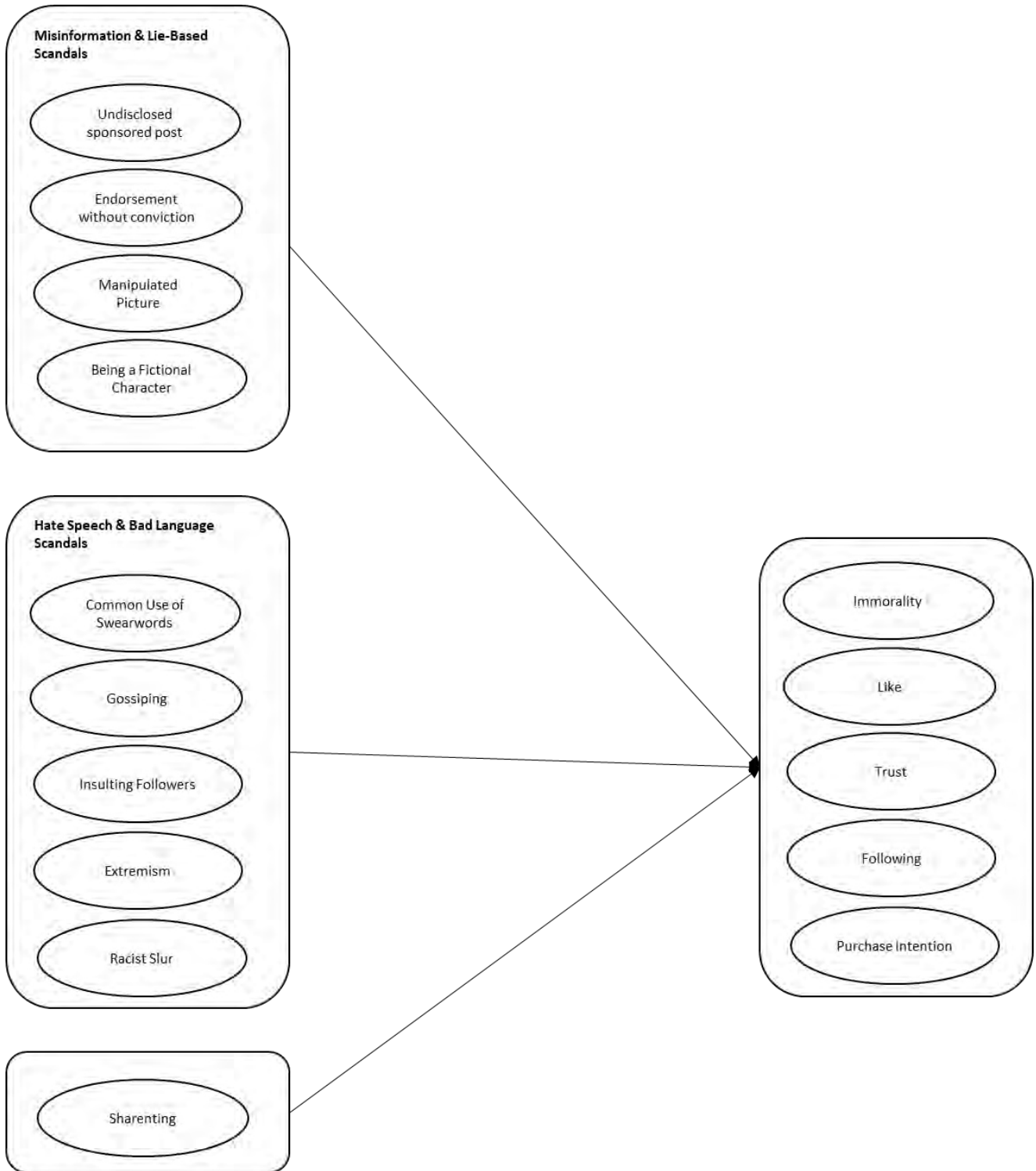


Figure 1. Frame of Reference

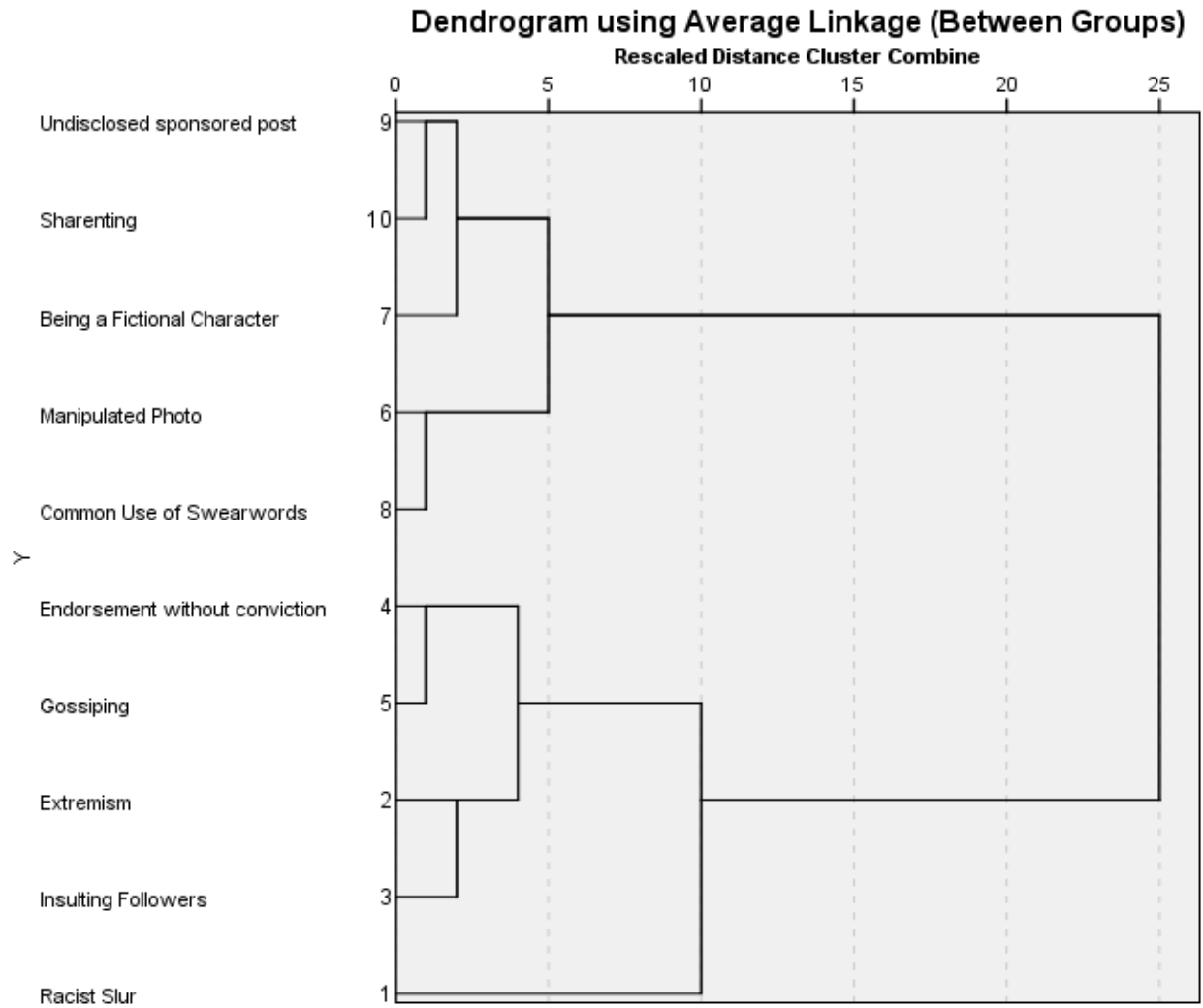


Figure 2. Dendrogram

Evidence of Co-Authorship and Definition of Responsibilities

The presented research articles were jointly developed by co-authors. All content is completely based on collective and collaborative elaboration, whereby the following responsibilities were defined within the respective modules:

Module 1: Influencer Distinctive Factors

Responsibilities of *“Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers’ winning formula?”* Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Module 2: Contingencies on Consumers

Responsibilities of *“The complex triad of congruence issues in influencer marketing”* Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Responsibilities of *“The Role of Fashion Influencers’ Attractiveness – A Gender-Specific Perspective”* Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Module 3: Contingencies on Products

Responsibilities of *“The counterintuitive case of influencer marketing for hedonic and utilitarian services”* Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Responsibilities of *“The relevance of demographic similarity and factuality in social influencer communication – A comparison between hedonic and utilitarian conditions.”* Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Responsibilities of *“Aristotele meets social influencers – implications of ancient philosophy for modern marketing communications.”* Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Responsibilities of *“Social Influencers and Healthy Nutrition – The Challenge of Overshadowing Effects and Uninvolved Consumers.”* Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Module 4: The Hazards of Influencer Marketing

Responsibilities of “*The Scandalous Lives of Social Influencers*” Walter von Mettenheim: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Hypothesis Development, Methodology, Results, Implications, Conclusion; Klaus-Peter Wiedmann: Supervision

Further Publications

von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K-P. (2022): How to Employ Social Influencers for Improving Consumer's Diet, paper presented at the 2022 AMA Winter Academic Conference, February 18-20, Las Vegas, Nevada, 2022.

von Mettenheim, W.; Wiedmann, K-P. (2021): Why Brands Should Use Female Influencers to Endorse Male Fashion, paper presented at the 50th Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual Conference, Virtual, June 1-4, 2021.

von Mettenheim, Walter (2021): Social Adaptation Theory – Does It Adapt To Social Influencer Marketing?, paper presented at the 2021 AMA Winter Academic (Virtual) Conference, February 17-19, 2021.

von Mettenheim, W. & Wiedmann, K.-P (2020): The Relevance Of Demographical Similarity And Factuality In Social Influencer Marketing, paper presented at the 2020 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual (Virtual) Conference, December 14-19, 2020.

von Mettenheim, W. & Wiedmann, K.-P (2020): Social Influencers in Hedonic and Utilitarian Conditions, paper presented at the 2020 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual (Virtual) Conference, December 14-19, 2020.

Wiedmann, K.-P., & von Mettenheim, W. (2019): The interaction of consumer, endorser and brand personality in social influencer marketing, paper presented at the 47th Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual Conference, Vancouver, Canada, May 29-31, 2019.

Wiedmann, K.-P., & von Mettenheim, W. (2019): An adaptation of the source credibility model on social influencers, paper presented at the 22nd Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) World Marketing Congress (WMC), Edinburgh, Scotland, July 9-12, 2019.

Wiedmann, K.-P., & von Mettenheim, W. (2017): Idle speculation or proficient prognosis? – How to employ celebrity endorsement models smartly, paper presented at the AMS Annual Conference, Coronado, USA, May 24-26, 2017.

Wiedmann, K.-P., & von Mettenheim, W. (2016): True love or fatal attraction? – The controversial relationship between luxury brands and celebrities, paper presented at the Global Marketing Conference, Hong Kong, China, July 21-24, 2016.