



“FYI, I was paid a lot of money to tell you about this product”

Disclosure and remuneration in sponsored Instagram posts of social influencers.

The effects on source attitude and source credibility, and the underlying role of persuasion
knowledge

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Abstract

The first goal of this study was to investigate whether disclosure in sponsored online Instagram posts, posted by social influencers, had a negative effect on source credibility and source attitude. The second goal was to investigate if disclosure activates persuasion knowledge and whether this had a negative, mediating effect on source credibility and source attitude. Lastly, it was investigated whether remuneration had a moderating negative effect on the relationship between disclosure and persuasion knowledge, and on source credibility and source attitude. A 2 (disclosure/no disclosure) x 2 (remuneration/no remuneration) between-subjects experiment was conducted amongst 208 Dutch females. The study revealed that disclosure did not have a direct effect on source credibility and source attitude. Nevertheless, the underlying mechanism of persuasion knowledge was shown to be relevant; disclosure activated persuasion knowledge and lead to less credibility and a negative source attitude. Additionally, the findings showed that sponsored posts of social influencers that included remuneration did not lead to an activation of persuasion knowledge. This study has theoretical implications, because it supports existing research on the importance of persuasion knowledge as an underlying process that explains the negative effects of disclosure in sponsored posts. Due to persuasion knowledge, disclosure negatively affects source credibility and source attitude for social influencers.

Keywords: disclosure, source credibility, source attitude, persuasion knowledge, remuneration, social influencers, Instagram, sponsored posts

Introduction

Influencer marketing is a new social media strategy used by companies in order to build and maintain an online reputation for their brand. One way brands promote their product online is by choosing a third-party to do the promotion, for example social influencers (MarketingFacts, 2016). Social influencers are ordinary internet users (Abidin, 2015), who upload self-generated content on their own social media channels such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (Abidin, 2016). The most popular and successful social influencers can earn money by cooperating with brands and by promoting the brand on their own social media account (MarketingFacts, 2016).

Whereas companies in the past mainly used ‘mainstream’ celebrities such as actors, musicians or athletes to endorse (i.e. promote) their products (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Cunningham & Bright, 2012; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; McCornick, 2016), they now often choose to use social influencers. A reason for this could be that social influencers are perceived with less scepticism amongst consumers, because consumers see them as more authentic than mainstream celebrities (Jerslev, 2016). Due to their online status and growing popularity, social influencers are hired by brands to promote products on their own social media channels; they show the product in a picture, or talk about the brand in a video. When doing so, social influencers often mention that they received the product from the brand by including a disclosure in their posts.

A disclosure informs the audience that they are viewing sponsored content in non-commercial messages (Boerman, van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012), and an added disclosure can make consumers more aware that a social influencer posted a sponsored post. This awareness can influence the consumer’s attitude towards the social influencer, because the consumer is informed that the social influencer was paid to post this message (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015). Earlier research has demonstrated that a disclosure in sponsored content

leads to negative consumer attitudes for brands and sources, as well as lower source credibility (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Boerman et al., 2012; Campbell, Mohr, & Verlegh, 2013; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Attitudes towards the source of a sponsored post are based on the consumers' feelings and opinions towards that source (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The source's credibility is based on expertise, attractiveness, and trust (Ohanian, 1990). Although influencers are generally viewed as more credible and sincere amongst their followers (Jerslev, 2016), cooperating with a brand for financial compensation may affect this credibility. Because disclosure informs consumers that a source was paid to post the message, it may impact consumers' perceptions of credibility and negatively influence consumers' attitude towards this source (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The negative effects of disclosure have been researched extensively through the years, but there is a shortcoming in research on the effects for social influencers. While research found social influencers to be authentic and honest, it is unclear how a disclosure affects their credibility and the attitudes that consumers have towards them. Therefore, the first aim of this study is to examine the effect of disclosure in social influencers' sponsored content on source credibility and source attitude.

An underlying mechanism that possibly affects the relation between disclosure, source attitude and source credibility is persuasion knowledge (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Campbell et al., 2013). The knowledge that consumers have about sales strategies is called persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The persuasion knowledge model by Friestad and Wright (1994) explains the relation between sales-strategies used by brands, the way consumers perceive these strategies, and how consumers cope with these persuasion attempts. Persuasion knowledge becomes activated when consumers recognize sponsored content, and research has found that a disclosure in sponsored content enhances the activation of persuasion knowledge (Campbell et al., 2013). In addition, a disclosure can indirectly lead to

more negative attitudes and lower source credibility due to the activation of persuasion knowledge (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). These studies show that persuasion knowledge serves as an underlying mechanism which explains how and why a disclosure leads to negative source attitudes and less source credibility. The present study will further investigate the role of persuasion knowledge, in order to find whether it is also a relevant mechanism that can explain the effect of disclosures in online sponsored posts, posted by social influencers. Thus, the second aim of this paper is to further investigate whether persuasion knowledge serves as an underlying process in the relation between disclosure and source credibility and source attitude, when social influencers are used as the source.

Furthermore, the inclusion of remuneration in sponsored posts may influence the activation of persuasion knowledge (Ha & Stoel, 2008). Remuneration is a way of economically rewarding consumers in the form of free products, loyalty programs, or offering discount on products (Glynn Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social influencers who collaborate with brands often offer their followers remuneration too (MarketingFacts, 2016). While the intention of a brand is to build a relationship with its consumers, these interactions can be perceived as sales-driven (Ha & Stoel, 2008). Consumers recognize the underlying motives of a reward (i.e. increasing sales), which may lead to the activation of persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Ha & Stoel, 2008; Verlegh, Verkerk, Tuk & Smidts, 2004). While social influencers often include remuneration in their sponsored posts, no research has yet examined how this affects them. The present study will investigate whether remuneration will indeed activate persuasion knowledge in online posts and if it affects consumer reactions towards social influencers.

Thus, this study will investigate the effect of disclosure and remuneration used in sponsored posts of social influencers. With an online experiment, the study aims to provide

new insights into the effect of disclosure, the role of persuasion knowledge, and the perceptions of social influencers amongst consumers. Finally, the study aims to provide new theoretical implications on the use of disclosure and remuneration in sponsored content, as well as practical implications about the use of disclosure for social influencers and marketers.

Theoretical framework

Social Influencers

Generally, social influencers are described as “bloggers,” “YouTubers,” or “Instagrammers” who have become famous online by gathering a large audience of online followers (Abidin, 2015), but this definition is rather limited. Another term often used is ‘micro-celebrity’, which is based on the fact that social influencers are often famous in smaller niches and therefore have a smaller audience than conventional celebrities (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016). Because most social influencers are famous in specific niches, it allows for a strong relationship between them and their followers (Abidin, 2016). Social influencers share their personal lives online, and their followers stay updated about their lives through blogs, pictures, or videos on social media. Because they have a lot in common with their followers, their followers see them as sincere, authentic and accessible (Jerslev, 2016). The most famous social influencers are also able to earn money through their online social media channels, by including advertisements and sponsored content in their online posts (Abidin, 2015). By cooperating with brands, in the form of advertising products on their own channels for financial compensation, social influencers earn money; the more popular they are, the more money they earn (Abidin, 2015; O’Connor, 2017; Jin & Phua, 2014).

In the past, the online cooperation between social influencers and brands was not always immediately visible. Social influencers would promote a product amongst their followers, without followers being aware that the social influencer had been paid to do so (Stichting Reclame Code, 2014). In 2014, the Dutch ‘Stichting Reclame Code’ (SRC)

introduced rules and regulations about advertising on social media (SRC, 2014). This was done to inform unaware consumers that the content they saw was sponsored and that the social influencer was paid to write or talk about the product. According to the 'Reclame Code Social Media', social influencers are now obliged to inform their audiences about sponsored content by including a disclosure, stating that they received the product for free, or are paid to talk about it. (SRC, 2014).

The aim of including a disclosure, according to the 'Reclame Code Social Media' rules, is to provide honest advertising (SRC, 2014). However, because influencer marketing is a relatively new phenomenon, there is limited research on the effects of including disclosure on online sponsored content and the effect it has on consumer perceptions (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Research has shown that social influencers have a lot of influence on their followers due to their authentic and credible appearance (Abidin 2015; 2016; Jerslev, 2016). For this reason, they may have a large impact on e.g. consumers' buying processes (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). However, sponsorship disclosure may influence these consumer-source relations. The present study will investigate the different effects of disclosure in sponsored content on a social influencers' credibility and the attitudes that consumers have towards social influencers.

The Effects of Disclosure in Sponsored Content

Sponsored messages are often included in non-commercial content, where the product or service is not promoted by the actual brand or company, but by other sources (Cain, 2011). Therefore, consumers often do not immediately recognize this form of advertising as an advertising message (Cain, 2011). As a result, it is difficult for consumers to identify the intentions of the content and whether or not the message is focused on promoting a brand. This form of advertisement can be considered misleading, as the consumer is not aware of the fact he or she is viewing an advertisement (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998). By including a

disclosure in sponsored content, in which the source states that there is cooperation with a brand, the consumer is informed that brands have paid the source to include their product or service in the content (Boerman et al., 2012; SRC, 2014). The main goal of including a disclosure is informing consumers that they are viewing sponsored content, which as a result makes them more aware of the persuasive intentions of the advertisement (Boerman et al., 2012).

Including a disclosure in sponsored content can affect consumers' perceptions regarding the brand in a negative way, because consumers become aware that they are viewing sponsored messages when they were expecting an honest message (Cain, 2011). Research has shown that including a disclosure in television content leads to scepticism towards the brand and a less positive brand attitude (Cain, 2011). Other studies also found negative effects on the use of disclosures. More specifically, research reveals that consumers' brand attitudes are more negative when a disclosure is included in sponsored content in television programmes and paper magazines (Boerman, van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2014; Boerman et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2013; Dekker & van Reijmersdal, 2013).

A disclosure may not only affect the brand, but also the credibility of the source who posts the sponsored content. Source credibility can be defined as the perception of consumers on how credible, honest and true the sender of the message is (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Ohanian, 1990). Credibility consists of three factors; attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of the source (Ohanian, 1990). Attractiveness of the source is an important factor in persuasive advertisements (Tripp, Jensen & Carlson, 1994). Even when an endorser may not be an actual expert, attractiveness can influence the perceptions of the target group and make the endorser (i.e. the social influencer) be perceived as an expert (Erdogan, 1999). Expertise refers to the credible claims of the source, whether the source has the accurate knowledge or experience, and whether consumers can use the source to gain more understanding about a

certain service or product (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Erdogan, 1999). Trustworthiness of the source relates to the perceptions of consumers the source's honesty, believability and integrity (Erdogan, 1999). When the source is paid by a brand to promote a product or service, and uses a disclosure to inform consumers, it may affect their credibility because consumers see the source as biased towards the product (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015; Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Consumers perceive the source as dishonest because he or she only writes about a product because he or she receives money for it, not because he or she truly likes the product. As a result, consumers may lose trust (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015; Erdogan 1999). Thus, based on these studies, it is expected that including a disclosure in online sponsored content will also have a negative effect on the credibility of social influencers.

Furthermore, research has shown that by including disclosure in sponsored content, the attitude of consumers towards the source may also be negatively affected (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015). Source attitude can be described as the feelings, ideas, and opinions of a consumer towards the source (Tripp et al., 1994). A consumer's attitude can be influenced by many different aspects, such as the attractiveness or likeability of the source (McGuire, 1985; Silvera & Austad, 2003), but also by including a disclosure (Cain, 2011). Colliander and Erlandsson (2015) demonstrated that using a disclosure in sponsored blogposts had a negative impact on the readers of the blog, because they perceived the source as misleading. This resulted in a more negative attitude towards the source. Other research by Hwang and Jeong (2016) also found negative effects due to a disclosure in online sponsored content, resulting in less favourable attitudes. These studies show that a source is perceived as less attractive, when a disclosure is included in the message posted by the source; because the disclosure makes consumers aware that the source was paid to post the message. This results in less favourable attitudes towards the source. Therefore, it is expected that a similar effect will occur when a disclosure is included in sponsored content posted by social influencers.

The present study will investigate the impact of social influencers as a source of sponsored content and will analyse the possible effects of disclosures. Based on the literature about disclosure, it is expected that disclosure in sponsored content leads to negative attitudes and less credibility towards both the brand and the source. These negative effects are found in both traditional media channels as well as in online sponsored content (Campbell et al., 2013; Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015; Dekker & van Reijmersdal, 2013). Even though social influencers are generally perceived as sincere, credible and authentic (Abidin 2015; 2016; Jerslev, 2016), including a disclosure in sponsored content is likely to affect the credibility of the influencer and the attitude of consumers towards the influencer as a source. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formed (visualized in Figure 1, path 1a and 1b):

H1: An online sponsored post with a disclosure will lead to [a] a more negative source attitude, and [b] to less source credibility, compared to an online sponsored post without a disclosure.

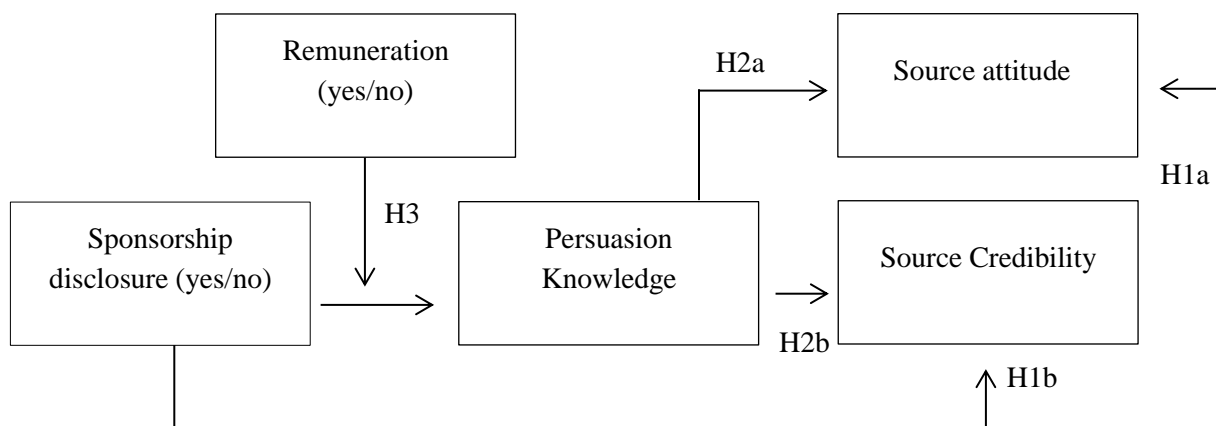


Fig 1. *Conceptual framework*

Persuasion Knowledge as an Underlying Mechanism

An underlying mechanism that may influence the relationship between disclosure and the level of credibility and source attitude is persuasion knowledge. When consumers are exposed to sales and marketing strategies over a longer period of time, they become more aware of these sales tactics. As a result, consumers learn to recognize and cope with these persuasion attempts; this is called persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The Persuasion Knowledge Model by Friestad and Wright (1994) describes the interaction of ‘agents’ (most often marketers) attempts at persuasion, and the ‘target’s’ (consumers) coping behaviours. Interactions with friends and family, general knowledge about marketing, observing advertisements and other people’s feelings and thoughts all contribute to an individual’s development of persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). At a certain point, consumers will recognize the persuasion attempts of marketers, their persuasion knowledge will be activated, and consumers can choose how to respond to these attempts because of their learned coping behaviour (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Most often, consumers who have started to understand the way marketers try to manipulate and persuade them will try to defend themselves from those persuasion attempts (Boerman, Willemsen & van der Aa, 2017).

One way in which persuasion knowledge becomes activated is when consumers see sponsored content, and a disclosure helps consumers to recognize sponsored content (Campbell et al., 2013). Disclosure in sponsored content may activate persuasion knowledge, because it makes consumers aware that they are viewing advertising (Boerman et al., 2012). Research has demonstrated that a disclosure informs consumers about the persuasive attempts of the content, which activates persuasion knowledge that indirectly can lead to negative attitudes towards the brand and diminished purchase intentions (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Janssen, van Sprang & Fransen, 2017).

The recognition of sponsored content activates the cognitive dimension of persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2012; Rozendaal, Lapierre, van Reijmersdal & Buijzen, 2011). The cognitive dimension relates to the ways consumers are able to identify content as an advertising message, what the aim of the message is (i.e. selling), and who is behind the message (i.e. a brand) (Rozendaal et al., 2011). Boerman et al. (2012) investigated the mediating role of persuasion knowledge and showed that the cognitive dimension was activated when participants recognized advertisements due to the disclosure in the sponsored content. The disclosure informed consumers that the post was in fact a form of advertisement. Eventually, the recognition of sponsored content due to the disclosure lead to negative brand attitudes amongst consumers (Boerman et al., 2012)

Persuasion knowledge not only affects the brand itself, but may also have a negative effect on consumers' source attitude and the credibility of the source. Artz and Tybout (1999) found that different types of messages can have different effects on the persuasiveness of the message, and eventually on the credibility of the source. In their study they included a disclosure in an advertisement which stated that the source had received monetary compensation for promoting this message. This resulted in the activation of persuasion knowledge, and a decrease in source credibility (Artz & Tybout, 1999). Other research showed that when consumers became aware that the source had a self-interest in promoting the message (i.e. the source would receive benefits from publishing the promoted content) the persuasion of the message was less effective, which would result in negative responses towards the source and more negative consumer attitudes (Wiener, LaForge and Goolsby, 1990). The empirical research discussed above shows that when consumers become aware of sponsored content, persuasion knowledge becomes activated. In many cases persuasion knowledge has a negative effect on the attitude of consumers, for both brands and sources, and a decrease in credibility of the source (Janssen et al., 2017; Wiener et al., 1990). Based on

the existing literature, the following is expected when persuasion knowledge will be included in the model (see figure 1, path 2a and 2b):

H2: An online sponsored post with a disclosure will activate persuasion knowledge, which will lead to [a] a more negative source attitude, and [b] to less source credibility compared to an online sponsored post without a disclosure.

The Moderating Role of Remuneration

An additional factor that may affect the relation between disclosure and persuasion knowledge, is the inclusion of remuneration in sponsored content (Ha & Stoel, 2008).

Remuneration in the form of economic rewards is seen as a motivator for consumer-brand engagement (Muntinga, Moorman & Smit, 2011; Wang, Yu, Wei, 2012). A brand can offer its consumers a reward, with the intention that consumers consider it a token of appreciation (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Types of remuneration include offering loyalty programmes to consumers, letting them participate in contests, offering discount codes or coupons, or even job offers (Glynn Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Tsai & Men, 2013).

Remuneration is also used in influencer marketing. Social influencers post content which can includes discount codes for products, they promote contests, or they create awareness for brands by giving away free products. These remuneration options are provided to the influencer by the brand they cooperate with (MarketingFacts, 2016).

Even though brands use remuneration to create a more positive brand engagement and more online social interaction between brand and consumer (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011), studies have shown that consumers recognize these incentives as sales-tactics and as a persuasion attempt (Verlegh, et al., 2004). When these provided incentives are perceived as a sales-tactic, it may activate persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In addition,

research found that consumers may still engage with brands to receive the free products or sales discounts, while already being aware of the persuasion attempt and recognizing the underlying sales motive (Ha & Stoel, 2008; Tsai & Men, 2013). When remuneration is perceived as sales-driven, consumers are less affected by the good intentions of the remuneration; because they see it as a motive for brands to sell products instead of building a sincere relationship with consumers (Ha & Stoel, 2008). Finally, research found that offering monetary incentives only has a temporary effect; once the reward is removed, the intended desired behaviour will fade (Ha & Stoel, 2008; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kurland, 1995). Based on these studies it seems that consumers are often aware of the sales-driven motives behind remuneration. Instead of remuneration contributing to a better consumer-brand relationship, consumers often only interact with the brand in order to get free products or other incentives. Thus, based on these studies it is expected that remuneration is likely to activate persuasion knowledge, because consumers perceive it as a sales-strategy.

Based on the expectation that disclosure will activate persuasion knowledge, (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Boerman et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2013; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016), and that remuneration can lead to the activation of persuasion knowledge (Ha & Stoel, 2008; Verlegh et al., 2004), the present study will investigate whether including remuneration in disclosures has a moderating effect on the activation of persuasion knowledge, and additionally on source credibility and source attitude. Based on the literature, the following hypothesis is formed (see figure 1, path 3):

H3: An online sponsored post with a disclosure will activate persuasion knowledge, which will lead to [a] a more negative source attitude, and [b] to less source credibility compared to an online sponsored post without a disclosure. This negative effect will be more pronounced for a post that includes remuneration.

Method

Study Design

The current study employed an online experiment with a 2 (disclosure vs no-disclosure) by 2 (with remuneration vs without remuneration) between-subjects design. The effect of the different conditions on the dependent variables of source credibility and source attitude were measured, as well as the role of persuasion knowledge as a mediating variable. Furthermore, remuneration was a moderator in this study. In the experiment participants were shown manipulated Instagram pictures and questions were asked to measure the effects on the dependent variables.

Pre-Test

Before the actual experiment was carried out, a pre-test was conducted among 14 participants (age $M = 22.79$, $SD = 2.19$), in order to find the most suitable influencer for the experiment. The aim of the pre-test was to find a social influencer who was known amongst both men and women. Participants in the pre-test were asked to rate their familiarity with six different social influencers (Mascha Feoktistova, Anna Nooshin, Monica Geuze, Rutger Vink, Sophie Milzink, and Giel de Winter). The social influencers included in the pre-test were selected based on the Influencer Engagement Index: this website provides daily updated information on the most popular Instagram accounts (<https://influencerengagementindex.nl/>). In addition to the index, the Instagram accounts of the social influencers were checked to see whether or not they had posted sponsored content in the past. If the influencer never posted sponsored content before, and participants were aware of that, it could have biased the results.

The results of the pre-test showed that men were very unfamiliar with social influencers. On a scale of 1-10, Monica Geuze was rated most familiar, but the score was still relatively low ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 3.80$). Amongst women, Anna Nooshin was the most well-known influencer ($M = 7.75$, $SD = 2.49$) and therefore she was used in the actual experiment.

Based on these results it was also decided to only use female participants in the study.

Secondly, the pre-test was used to test the effect of hashtags as a disclosure (e.g. #ad, #spon). However, when controlling for this manipulation, only 6 of the 14 participants mentioned seeing the hashtag. Therefore, an additional pre-test was carried out. This time, the disclosure was in the form of a statement above the picture that said ‘This is a paid partnership with *name brand*’. This pre-test was conducted amongst 6 (age $M = 22.50$, $SD = 2.07$) additional participants, and all of them mentioned that this type of disclosure made them aware of the sponsorship. Thus, a statement above the Instagram picture was used in the actual experiment as type of disclosure.

Lastly, the type of remuneration was also decided by the pre-test, by measuring which type of remuneration was recognized the most as an economic reward amongst the participants; offering a free product, providing a discount, or announcing a contest. All three types of remuneration were recognized by the participants as rewards, but offering a free product scored the highest ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.60$), compared to offering discount when buying the product ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.62$), and announcing a contest ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.34$). Therefore the remuneration in the experiment consisted of an offer of free product samples.

Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study were Dutch females between the ages of 16 and 30 years old. This age group is the most active on the social media application Instagram and was therefore selected for this study (MarketingFacts, 2017).

Participants were recruited through both convenience sampling and snowball sampling, online through social media and offline on the campus of Tilburg University. A total of 220 women participated in the study. Before analysing the data, participants who submitted incomplete experiments or otherwise insufficient data were removed from the sample. A final sample of 208 participants, with an average age of 22.50 years old ($SD =$

3.37), was used in the analysis. Most of the participants were studying or completed a study at university level ($n = 100$), or university of applied sciences ($n = 79$). The remaining participants had a degree in intermediate vocational education (Dutch 'MBO', $n = 15$), a high school degree ($n = 15$), or a degree from a different institution ($n = 5$). Regarding the participants social media use, 47.6% rated themselves as familiar, and 46.2% as very familiar with social media, while 30.8% rated themselves as familiar and 47.1% as very familiar with the social media application Instagram. In addition, most participants (42.8%) spend 2-4 hours per day on average on social media, while 34.1% spends less than 2 hours on social media, 19.7% more than 4 hours, and 3.4% even up to 6 hours per day on average. For 167 of the participants (80.3%) Instagram was in the top 3 of their most used social media applications, and for 63 of them (37.7%), it was their number 1 most used social media application.

Every participant was randomly assigned to one of the conditions at the start of the experiment (see table 1). In the introduction, participants were informed about the goal and intentions of the experiment, and that by continuing with the experiment they gave consent to use their data. Before seeing the stimuli, participants had to answer some demographical questions (age, gender and level of education) and they were asked about their social media use and their familiarity with social media and Instagram. After completing these questions, participants were directed to the next section which contained the experiment. First, participants saw the stimulus photo (condition 1: no disclosure, no remuneration; 2: disclosure, no remuneration; 3: no disclosure, remuneration; 4: disclosure, remuneration) for the limited time of 15 seconds. They were not able to see the photo again during the experiment. After seeing the stimuli, participants had to answer the associated questions measuring credibility, attitude and persuasion knowledge. They also rated their familiarity with the social influencer. After answering these questions, the participants were lead to the end of the experiment where they had to answer the final questions regarding their familiarity

with the social influencers, whether they thought that the post they had seen was sponsored, and why they thought that. Finally, they were thanked for their participation and the answers were submitted. The complete experiment with all four conditions can be found in the appendix.

Table 1

Design Of Experiment And Randomisation Of Participants Per Condition

Condition	Randomisation	Disclosure	Remuneration
1	R	No disclosure	No remuneration
2	R	Disclosure	No Remuneration
3	R	No disclosure	Remuneration
4	R	Disclosure	Remuneration

Materials

Instagram is currently in the top 5 of biggest social networks in the Netherlands and used by approximately 36% of the Dutch population between 20 and 39 years old, and 66% of the population younger than 19 years old (MarketingFacts, 2017). Because social influencers are also very active on this application, it was used as the online platform in this experiment (MarketingFacts, 2017). An existing Instagram picture of the social influencer was used and manipulated for this study. The picture itself remained the same, but the caption underneath it was adapted to fit one of the four conditions. In the picture, the social influencer was sitting on the ground, surrounded by make-up and in the middle of the picture there was a tube of Colgate toothpaste. The caption was a general text about the influencer getting ready for a relaxing weekend. In the remuneration condition, the text included a part that informed the consumer about the option of getting a free sample of Colgate toothpaste ('click on the link on my profile to receive a free sample of toothpaste'). The disclosure in the experiment was a short sentence placed above the picture, just below the username of the social influencer. This

sentence informed the consumer about the sponsorship. The statement was ‘Betaald partnerschap met Colgate’ (paid partnership with Colgate).

Self-Report Measures

Source credibility was measured using the source-credibility scale developed by Ohanian (1990). This scale was developed by combining previous scales and has been used in other research before (Boerman et al., 2012; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Participants rated the items measuring attractiveness (unattractive (reversed), beautiful, elegant), trustworthiness (honest, sincere, not trustworthy (reversed), biased (reversed)), and expertise (no expert (reversed), knowledgeable, experienced, qualified) on a 7 point (1=strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) Likert scale (M score = 4.27, SD = 0.85). The scale was very reliable, with Cronbach’s α = 0.82.

Source attitude was measured by combining items from Mackenzie and Lutz (1989), Mitchell and Olson (1981), and Tripp et al. (1994). Four items were used to measure source attitude; ‘My feeling towards the social influencer is good, negative (reversed), favourable, unpleasant (reversed)’. These items were adapted from earlier research measuring attitude (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015; Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Participants had to rate the items on a 7 point (1=strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) Likert scale (M score = 4.71, SD = 1.26). The scale was very reliable, with Cronbach’s α = 0.84.

Persuasion knowledge. The activation of cognitive persuasion knowledge was measured by asking participants three different questions: ‘the Instagram picture is an advertisement’, ‘the Instagram picture is not commercial’(reverse-coded) and ‘the Instagram picture contains advertising’ (adapted from Boerman et al., 2012; van Reijmersdal, Neijens, Smit, 2010; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016;). These items were again measured on a 7 point (1=strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) Likert scale (M score = 5.83, SD = 1.14). The scale was reliable, with Cronbach’s α = 0.74.

Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was administered to check whether participants saw that the post was sponsored. In total, 175 of the 208 participants recognized that the picture they saw was sponsored by the toothpaste brand. Of the 106 participants in the disclosure conditions reported 52% that they saw the disclosure at the top of the picture. This percentage is in line with previous studies (Boerman et al., 2017; Boerman, van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2013). Secondly, most of the participants were familiar with the social influencer used in the experiment. 157 of the participants were to a certain extent familiar with Anna Nooshin (67 participants were a little familiar, 60 familiar, and 22 were very familiar with her). In addition, 57 (27.4%) of those 157 participants followed Anna Nooshin on any type of social media.

Results

In order to test the hypotheses, a moderated mediation analysis was carried out in PROCESS; a macro analysis for SPSS designed by Hayes. Disclosure was used as the predictor, source credibility and source attitude as the dependent variables, persuasion knowledge as the mediating variable and remuneration as the moderating variable. The moderated mediation model by Hayes allows for the analysis of moderating and mediating variables at the same time. Because this study has two outcome variables, two analyses were run: one with attitude as the outcome variable, and a second analysis with credibility as the outcome variable. The mediating effects of persuasion knowledge were tested by bootstrapping with bootstrapping samples of 10,000, a 95% bias corrected and confidence intervals.

Before the statistical analysis, the items from the different scales that were reversed in the experiment were reverse coded, so that for all items a higher score would mean more agreement with the items of the scale. The means and standard deviations for the outcome variables at all levels of the mediating and moderating variables are visualized in table 2.

Table 2

Means And Standard Deviations For All Variables Per Condition

	Disclosure ($n = 106$)		No disclosure ($n = 102$)	
	Remuneration ($n = 52$)	No remuneration ($n = 54$)	Remuneration ($n = 50$)	No remuneration ($n = 52$)
Source credibility	4.16 (0.75)	4.14 (0.78)	4.10 (0.81)	4.67 (0.93)
Source attitude	4.75 (1.31)	4.37 (1.18)	4.50 (1.20)	5.21 (1.21)
Persuasion knowledge	6.18 (0.71)	6.08 (1.06)	5.94 (1.04)	5.12 (1.36)

Direct Effects

The first hypothesis predicted that a disclosure in sponsored posts would have a negative effect on source attitude (H1a) and source credibility (H1b). However, the analysis showed that including a disclosure did not have a significant effect on source attitude, $b = -0.199$, $SE = 0.179$, $p = .265$. In addition, the effect of a disclosure on source credibility was also not significant, $b = -0.132$, $SE = 0.118$, $p = .265$. The effects on source credibility and source attitude were similar for sponsored posts with and without a disclosure. Therefore hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Mediation Effect of Persuasion Knowledge

Hypothesis 2a proposed that a disclosure would activate persuasion knowledge, which would then lead to a more negative effect on source attitude. The analysis showed that disclosure had a significant, positive, direct effect on persuasion knowledge, $b = 0.971$, $SE = 0.207$, $p < .001$, meaning that recognizing a disclosure indeed led to the activation of persuasion knowledge. The mediating effect of persuasion knowledge on source attitude was significant, with a point estimate of -0.102 , $SE = 0.057$, 95% Bca CI $[-0.2425, -0.0150]$. Persuasion knowledge had a significant negative mediating effect on the relation between disclosure and a person's attitude toward the source, and therefore hypothesis 2a could be

supported.

Hypothesis 2b predicted a negative mediating effect of persuasion knowledge which would lead to less source credibility. This mediation effect turned out to be significant, with a point estimate of -0.108 , $SE = 0.042$, 95% Bca CI $[-0.2120, -0.0416]$. A disclosure activated persuasion knowledge, which in turn negatively affected source credibility. Thus, hypothesis 2b was also supported.

Moderation Effect of Remuneration

Hypothesis 3 proposed that the effect of disclosure on source credibility and source attitude through persuasion knowledge would be more pronounced for posts that included remuneration. Although the moderated mediation analysis revealed that the interaction between disclosure and remuneration was significant, the direction was negative, $b = -0.731$, $SE = 0.296$, $p < .014$. Specifically, the effect of disclosure on source attitude through persuasion knowledge was only significant when there was no remuneration present, $b = -0.162$, $SE = 0.093$, 95% Bca CI $[-0.3772, -0.0135]$. When remuneration was present, the moderation was not significant, $b = -0.040$, $SE = 0.037$, 95% Bca CI $[-0.1466, 0.0077]$. Moreover, the effect of disclosure on source credibility through persuasion knowledge was similar as a significant negative moderating effect was found. More specifically, the effect was significant only when no remuneration was present, $b = -0.171$, $SE = 0.068$, 95% Bca CI $[-0.3345, -0.0623]$, and not significant when remuneration was present, $b = -0.042$, $SE = 0.033$, 95% Bca CI $[-0.1260, 0.0115]$. The results of including remuneration in the model showed that persuasion knowledge was only activated when there was no remuneration in the sponsored post. Posts with remuneration did not activate persuasion knowledge. Therefore, hypothesis 3 could not be supported. Figure 2 visualizes the results of the analyses.

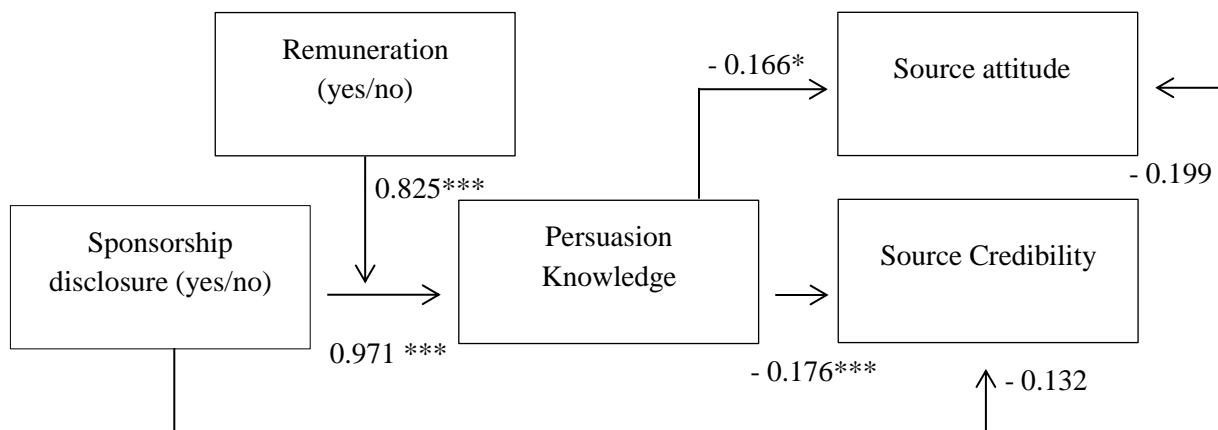


Fig 2. Results of persuasion knowledge, mediating the effect of disclosure on source attitude and source credibility, and the moderating effect of remuneration on the relation between disclosure and persuasion knowledge. The coefficients represent the unstandardized coefficients. Note: * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Additional Analyses

Controlling for other variables. Four additional variables were included in the model to find other possible influencing factors. The variables, which were all separately included in the model, controlled for Instagram use, time spent on social media, familiarity with the social influencer, and following the influencer on social media platforms. Instagram use did not affect source credibility, $b = 0.094$, $SE = 0.058$, $p = .108$, or source attitude, $b = 0.041$, $SE = 0.088$, $p = .642$. However, time spent on social media did have a significant positive effect on source credibility, $b = 0.168$, $SE = 0.069$, $p < .016$, and on source attitude $b = 0.231$, $SE = 0.105$, $p < .028$. The more time that was spent on social media, the more positive the attitude towards the source and the higher the credibility of the source. Familiarity with the influencer had no significant effects on source attitude, $b = 0.341$, $SE = 0.201$, $p = .092$, but it did have a significant positive effect on source credibility $b = 0.413$, $SE = 0.131$, $p < 0.002$. The more familiar someone was with the social influencer, the more credible the social influencer was perceived by the participant. In addition, following the social influencer on social media had a significant positive effect on source attitude $b = 0.689$, $SE = 0.208$, $p < .001$, and also on

source credibility $b = 0.547$, $SE = 0.130$, $p < .001$. Participants who followed the social influencer on social media channels had a more positive attitude towards the social influencer and perceived her as more credible.

Planned Contrasts. In addition to testing the hypotheses, planned contrasts were used to discover differences between the experimental conditions with regards to the two dependent variables. The control condition, without disclosure and without remuneration, was compared to the three other conditions containing disclosure, remuneration, or both. The analyses revealed that source credibility $t(204) = -2.93$, $p < .004$ differed significantly when comparing the control condition to the other three conditions. No significant difference was found for source attitude, $t(204) = -1.44$, $p = .151$. Source credibility $t(204) = 3.12$, $p < .002$, and source attitude $t(204) = 3.61$, $p < .001$ differed significantly when comparing the condition with both disclosure and remuneration to the other three conditions. In addition, no significant differences were found when comparing the two conditions with disclosure to the two conditions without disclosure; source attitude $t(204) = -1.32$, $p = .187$, source credibility $t(204) = -1.19$, $p = .235$. There were also no significant differences comparing the two conditions with remuneration to the two conditions without remuneration; source attitude $t(204) = 0.36$, $p = .720$, source credibility $t(204) = 1.63$, $p = .105$.

Finally, there were significant differences for source attitude $t(204) = -3.52$, $p < .001$, and source credibility $t(204) = -3.31$, $p < .001$ comparing the disclosure condition without remuneration to the disclosure condition with remuneration. Source credibility and source attitude were both higher in the condition without remuneration.

Thus, the contrasts revealed significant differences between the control condition and the other three conditions for source credibility. The differences in source credibility and source attitude were also significant when the condition with both disclosure and remuneration was compared to the other three conditions. In addition, there was a significant

difference between the two disclosure conditions with and without remuneration for source credibility and source attitude. There were no significant differences found for source credibility and source attitude between the conditions with and without disclosure, neither between the conditions with and without remuneration.

Discussion

The present study focused on the effects of disclosure in sponsored Instagram posts posted by social influencers. The first purpose of the study was to investigate whether including a disclosure would influence the credibility of social influencers as the source, as well as the attitude of consumers towards the social influencer. Additionally, the second aim was to discover whether persuasion knowledge had a mediating role in the relation between disclosure and both source credibility and source attitude. Finally, remuneration, in the form of offering free products, was included in the model as a possible moderator of the relation of disclosure and persuasion knowledge, and additionally source credibility and source attitude.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that adding a disclosure would lead to a more negative attitude amongst consumers towards the social influencer, and less source credibility, when including a disclosure. Contrary to the expectations, the present study did not find a significant negative effect of disclosure in sponsored Instagram posts on source attitude, nor on source credibility. Earlier research found that including disclosure in sponsored content often leads to negative attitudes towards either a brand or the source who posts the content (Cain, 2011; Dekker & van Reijmersdal, 2013; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016), and to less credibility of the source (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015; Janssen et al., 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2016). However, it could be the case that disclosure is no longer the most effective factor that informs consumers about sponsored content (Boerman et al., 2017; Wojdyski & Evans, 2015). In addition to the disclosure, participants also mentioned the setting of the picture, the caption, or the product as factors that made them aware that the post was sponsored. These findings reveal that

consumers were able to recognize online sponsored posts due to multiple factors instead of disclosure alone (Wojdynski, 2016).

In addition, the levels of source credibility and source attitude did not differ greatly amongst the conditions with and without disclosure. The planned contrasts showed that disclosure did not lead to significant differences in source credibility and source attitude amongst the different conditions. Earlier research by Lu, Chang and Chang (2014) found that a disclosure in online blogs had no effect on consumers' attitudes; instead they suggested that it was likely that a disclosure was a sign of honest communication about the monetary compensation a source received. These findings, as well as the findings of the present study may indicate that including a disclosure in sponsored posts no longer has the negative effects on source attitude and source credibility that were found in other studies (Colliander & Erlandson, 2015; Dekker & van Reijmersdal, 2013).

Hypothesis 2a predicted that persuasion knowledge would have a mediating effect in the relation between disclosure and source attitude. Specifically, it was expected that a disclosure would activate persuasion knowledge which, in turn, would result in a more negative source attitude. When persuasion knowledge was included in the model the findings indeed reveal that disclosure in sponsored posts activated persuasion knowledge (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Jansen et al., 2017). The disclosure likely made participants more aware of the fact that the post was sponsored, which resulted in the activation of persuasion knowledge. As a result, participants developed a more negative attitude towards the influencer. These results are in line with previous research that showed that persuasion knowledge had a negative effect on consumers' attitudes (Boerman et al., 2017; Wiener et al., 1990). Wiener et al. (1990) found that consumers who saw that the source had a self-interest in promoting a brand (i.e. received payment for the sponsored message), developed a more negative attitude towards the source through the activation of persuasion

knowledge. The disclosure in the present study, which stated that the social influencer had a paid partnership with Colgate, may likely have evoked a similar effect. By seeing the disclosure, consumers learned that the social influencer only promoted a brand because she was compensated for it. As consumers gained this new knowledge, it became part of their persuasion knowledge. In this case, persuasion knowledge was likely the explanation for why a disclosure affected consumers' attitudes towards the influencer. (Cain, 2011; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Wiener et al., 1990)

Hypothesis 2b predicted that persuasion knowledge would also have a negative mediating effect in the relationship between disclosure and source credibility. Similar to the results found for source attitude, persuasion knowledge helped consumers recognize the disclosure, which lead to the negative effect on source credibility (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Friestad & Wright, 1994). The disclosure informed consumers that the social influencer received monetary compensation for the post. Similar to the effects for source attitude, this information likely contributed to the persuasion knowledge of the consumer, which may explain why the disclosure decreased the persuasive attempt of the message and made the influencer less credible (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Friestad & Wright, 1994).

The results of the second hypothesis show that persuasion knowledge is an underlying process that helps consumers recognize the persuasive attempts in sponsored content. Persuasion knowledge serves as the explanation for why disclosure leads to negative effects on source attitude and source credibility. The disclosure increased the awareness of consumers about sponsored content; as a result, consumers learned that a disclosure meant that there was cooperation between the source and the brand. This persuasion knowledge negatively affected the source credibility and source attitude; because consumers knew that the source was paid to say positive things. (Friestad & Wright, 1994). As brands change from traditional advertisements on television and in newspapers (Campbell, 2013), to social media

(Boerman et al., 2017), it seems reasonable that the persuasion knowledge of consumers further expands as well. Consumers have learned to recognize posts with disclosure as new persuasive attempts, and this persuasion knowledge contributes to negative source attitudes and less source credibility (Artz & Tybout, 1999, Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Jansen et al., 2017).

For the third hypothesis it was expected that posts with disclosure that also included remuneration, would have the most pronounced effect on persuasion knowledge (Ha & Stoel, 2008; Verlegh et al., 2004), and that this would lead to the most negative results for source attitude and source credibility. However, the findings show that while both the direct effects of disclosure and remuneration on persuasion knowledge were positive, the interaction effect was negative, where a positive effect was hypothesized. This opposite effect meant that sponsored posts (with disclosure) that did not include remuneration lead to the activation of persuasion knowledge which, in turn, negatively impacted source credibility and attitude. Posts with remuneration did not activate persuasion knowledge.

Tsai & Men (2013) suggested that despite being aware of the persuasive attempts of remuneration, consumers may still decide to engage with brands. The findings of the present study may imply that even though consumers may see the post as sponsored, remuneration in the form of receiving free products makes does not activate persuasion knowledge, and perhaps makes them more appreciative of the sponsored post. Earlier research has shown that economic incentives can be a motivation for consumers to engage with brands on social media (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy & Goodman, 2014; Muntinga et al., 2011). A similar effect may be present in the current study. Instead of perceiving the remuneration as sales-driven (Ha & Stoel, 2008); consumers may tolerate it when the social influencer is paid to promote products on his or her social media channel. The remuneration that is offered may serve as a motivation for viewing the content and provide the consumers with benefits such as free products or

discount (van Doorn et al., 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Furthermore, consumers may perceive the remuneration as a reward (van Doorn et al., 2010), and consider it as a compensation for watching promoted content.

Theoretical & Practical Implications

This study has three implications for theory and research on disclosure in sponsored posts, related to influencer marketing. First, the study revealed that including a disclosure in sponsored posts has no effect on consumer reactions towards social influencers. The disclosure did not lead to negative consumer attitudes, and neither to less source credibility, which means that the findings of the present study cannot not contribute to the existing literature about the negative effects of disclosure (Boerman et al., 2014; Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015; Hwang & Jeong, 2016). These findings also suggest that disclosure is no longer the most important factor that informs consumers about sponsorships. In the present study, 95% of the participants in the disclosure conditions recognized the Instagram posts as sponsored, but only 52% of them recalled the disclosure. These results further substantiate research by Boerman, van Reijmersdal and Neijens (2015), who found that consumers who are frequently exposed to content that contains disclosures, are becoming more familiar with disclosure and remember the use of disclosure in the sponsored content. In the long term, consumers may start paying less attention to these disclosures, and less people will re-call seeing a disclosure (Boerman et al., 2017; Campbell 2013). In addition, given that only 52% of the participants mentioned the disclosure as indicator for the sponsored post, it means that there were other factors which contributed to the sponsorship recognition. In the present study, consumers reported that the caption underneath the picture, the product in the picture, or the setting of the picture, made them recognize the Instagram post as sponsored. This suggests that disclosure is not the only aspect that helps consumers recognize sponsored content. These findings contribute to previous studies which found that aspects such as the

style and tone of the text, including the product in the picture, or links to the website of the sponsor can add to the recognition of sponsorships (Wilkinson, Hausknecht & Prough, 1995; Wojdyski, 2016).

The second implication of the study implies that based on the findings, it can be concluded that persuasion knowledge is an important underlying mechanism which explains the relation between sponsorship disclosures and consumer reactions towards social influencers. It informs consumers about these new sales strategies and affects consumer's ideas, opinions, and attitudes about the content they see (Friestad & Wright., 1994). Consumers who learn to identify sponsored content as a form of advertising develop negative attitudes and regard the influencer as less credible, which contributes new evidence to the existing theories (Boerman et al., 2012; Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Consumers' persuasion knowledge may have expanded in order to understand the different strategies used in different forms of media, from traditional media to online media (Boerman et al., 2017; Cain, 2011; Campbell et al., 2013). The present study may therefore contribute to the existing literature; it demonstrates the importance of persuasion knowledge as an underlying process that can explain the negative effects of disclosure in online sponsored posts from social influencers. The findings also reveal that consumers are already familiar with the relatively new sales-strategy of influencer marketing and the cooperation between social influencers and brands.

Thirdly, the results of this study reveal that posts without remuneration activate persuasion knowledge, which affects the credibility of the influencer and the consumers' attitudes. Although consumers recognized the post with remuneration as sponsored, it did not lead to the activation of persuasion knowledge. These findings do not support existing literature on the negative effects remuneration on persuasion knowledge (Ha & Stoel, 2008; Kurland, 1995; Verlegh et al., 2004), but instead reveal that including remuneration is likely

to be tolerated by consumers. While earlier studies found that remuneration could be perceived in a different way by consumers, being either sales-driven or to build consumer-brand relationships (Ha & Stoel, 2008; Henning-Thurau, 2004), the present study contributes to literature that suggests that the type of consumer perception does not matter (Tsai & Men, 2013). Previous research suggests that regardless of how consumer perceive the intentions of a brand, consumers are still likely to engage with a brand if there is a chance of receiving benefits (van Doorn, 2010; Tsai & Men, 2013). As remuneration does not further affect source credibility or source attitude, it may be the case that it is used by consumers as some sort of motivation or compensation for engaging with a social influencer's post that is sponsored by brands (Dolan et al., 2014; van Doorn, 2010).

Additionally, the present study also provides a practical implication for marketers and social influencers. The study showed that indirectly, social influencers' credibility is affected and consumers' attitudes are influenced due to the activation of persuasion knowledge. As a consequence, it can make consumers more aware of the cooperation social influencers have with brands and thus have a negative effect on the way consumers perceive them. Because social influencers are dependent on their online status in order to remain popular amongst their followers (Abidin, 2016), it is important for them to consider how their messages are perceived by their followers. On the question 'How did you recognize the post was sponsored?' some participants stated by simply seeing the social influencer, they assumed the post was sponsored. Other participants reported that they perceived the influencer as someone who would promote anything, even toothpaste, in order to make money. This could be an indication for social influencers that it is important to think about the way they portray themselves, and the image they have amongst consumers. Social influencers may want to select brands to work with more carefully in the future, as well as the way they promote these brands, as it could affect their reputation.

Furthermore, marketers who develop campaigns in which brands cooperate with social influencers may want to take into account the effects of offering remuneration. It seems that including rewards in online content leads to less persuasion knowledge amongst consumers, which does not further impact the credibility of the influencer and the consumers' attitude in a negative way. Brands may not be affected by these aspects directly, but consumers' opinions about a social influencer could indirectly affect a brands' image (MarketingFacts, 2016).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the current study provides insights into the effects of disclosure and remuneration on the credibility of social influencers and consumers' attitudes, the findings are not without limitations. First of all, additional analyses in this study revealed that consumers recognized other factors in the Instagram posts, besides disclosure, which may have contributed to the activation of persuasion knowledge and helped to recognize sponsored content. Some participants recognized the post as an advertisement by looking at the setting of the picture, the placement of the product, or the pose of the influencer. This could mean that consumers know how to recognize different elements that also inform them about sponsored posts (Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Cowly & Baron, 2008; Wilkinson et al., 1995; Wojdyski, 2016). If so, it could have further implications for the way social influencers are perceived when promoting sponsored posts on Instagram. These factors could also have had an influence on the outcome of the present study. However, the present study focused mainly on the effect of disclosure on persuasion knowledge, and controlling the effect of the other possibilities was beyond the scope of this research. Future research on social influencers could investigate the visibility of products in the picture (Hudson & Hudson, 2006), or whether the setting of Instagram pictures that contain advertisements differ from regular pictures, to see the effect on the activation of persuasion knowledge, as well as potential consequences for the credibility of the social influencer.

Secondly, the present study investigated only one type of remuneration, in the form of giving away free products. Potential future studies may want to investigate other types of remuneration that are commonly used by social influencers as well, such as providing a discount on products of the brand the influencer cooperates with, or asking people to join a competition to win prizes (MarketingFacts, 2016). Earlier research showed that remuneration leads to low-level passive brand engagement, such as merely liking or commenting in order to get a reward, instead of active consumer engagement such as creating or designing new ideas (Dolan et al., 2014). The remuneration in the present study only demanded consumers to click on a link to get a free sample, but providing a discount for a product requires consumers to actually buy a product, and a competition may include writing a motivation or answering a question in a creative way (MarketingFacts, 2016). These types of remuneration could be seen as more active engagement (Dolan et al., 2014), thus it may be interesting to investigate whether different types of remuneration have different effects on persuasion knowledge, or if consumers are appreciative of all these benefits (van Doorn et al., 2010).

Lastly, when controlling for other variables in further analyses, it was found that the time that consumers spend on social media had a positive effect on the credibility of the influencer and the consumer's attitude. There was a similar positive effect for consumers who followed the social influencer actively on social media. It would be interesting to see whether it is the case that consumers, who are more active on social media, and follow the social influencer on social media channels, become more acquainted with the content of the influencer on social media and have a more positive image of the social influencer. Social influencers are positively perceived by their followers, and this is the group of people who actively follow the social influencer on social media (Abidin, 2015; Jerslev, 2016). Therefore there may be a difference in perception amongst people who follow the influencer and possibly have more knowledge about him or her, compared to consumers who only

occasionally see the influencer. Earlier research found that familiarity with celebrity endorsers has a positive effect on the way consumers perceive them (Doyle, Pentecost, Funk, 2014; McCornick, 2016). It could be that seeing a social influencer more often on social media creates the feeling of knowing him or her, and therefore it increases the credibility and creates a more positive image. Future research may want compare different groups of consumers, e.g. active social media users vs. consumers who are less active on social media, or consumers who do and do not follow the social influencer on social media. New research could even take into account the occurrence of parasocial relations between consumers and social influencers; where consumers develop the idea of having a close and intimate bond with a social influencer, because they perceive him or her as someone that knows them personally (Chung & Cho, 2017; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Because social influencers are seen as more authentic than mainstream celebrities (Abidin, 2016), future research could investigate if consumers perceive their relationship with an influencer to be stronger and more personal (Labrecque, 2014) than with mainstream celebrities and whether or not this affects how consumer-social influencers relationships are formed.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to discover the effects of disclosure in sponsored online posts, on the credibility of social influencers and consumers' attitudes towards them. The underlying mechanism of persuasion knowledge was researched, as well as the inclusion of remuneration in online sponsored posts, posted by social influencers. Because social influencers are becoming more and more popular and have a lot of influence on their followers, this study aimed to discover what the effects of informing consumers about sponsored posts are for the source credibility and source attitude of social influencers. The results reveal that disclosure does not directly affect source credibility and attitude. However, the findings do show that persuasion knowledge is an important underlying process in the

relation between disclosure and source attitude and credibility. The indirect effects show that with the activation of persuasion knowledge, the credibility of the social influencer and the consumers' attitudes are affected. The study also shows that including remuneration does not activate persuasion knowledge, which supports the idea that offering economic rewards to consumers could be beneficial for marketers to include in marketing campaigns, and that consumers may use the benefits of receiving free products to compensate watching sponsored content. The study provides theoretical insights for influencer marketing; it shows the importance of persuasion knowledge, as it explains the negative consumers' reactions towards social influencers who include sponsorship disclosures.

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Appendix

1. Introductie

Beste deelnemer,

Dit experiment is een onderdeel van mijn masterscriptie, waarvoor ik onderzoek doe naar social influencers.

Social influencers zijn personen die op sociale media bekend zijn geworden door het maken van foto's en video's over hun persoonlijke leven, hun levensstijl of hun hobby's. Door het delen hiervan zijn ze online bekend geworden en hebben ze veel volgers op hun sociale media accounts.

Voordat het onderzoek start krijg je eerst een aantal vragen over jezelf en je sociale media gebruik te zien. Daarna krijg je een instructietekst te lezen en vervolgens start het experiment. Het invullen van de bijbehorende vragenlijst zal ongeveer 10 minuten duren. Je antwoorden zijn volledig anoniem en je gegevens zullen alleen worden gebruikt voor dit experiment. Dit zal op een vertrouwelijke manier gebeuren.

Mocht je vragen hebben mail dan naar

Hartelijk dank voor je deelname en hulp bij mijn masterscriptie!

Klik op de blauwe knop om te beginnen.

Margot Colen

2. Hierbij geef ik toestemming voor mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek.

☐ Ja

☐ Nee

3. Ik ben een

☐ Man

☐ Vrouw

(Indien man was geselecteerd, vraag 4.)

4. Dit onderzoek is alleen bestemd voor vrouwen, daarom kunnen mannen helaas niet verdergaan naar het experiment. Ik wil je toch hartelijk bedanken voor de moeite om deel te nemen!

5. Wat is je leeftijd (in cijfers)?

6. Wat is je hoogst genoten opleiding, waar je op het moment mee bezig bent of die je afgerond hebt?

- ☐ Middelbaar onderwijs
- ☐ MBO
- ☐ HBO
- ☐ WO
- ☐ Anders

7. De volgende vragen gaan over je sociale media gebruik.

	Totaal onbekend	Onbekend	Een beetje onbekend	Niet onbekend/Niet bekend	Een beetje bekend	Bekend	Ze er bekend
Hoe bekend ben je met sociale media?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hoe bekend ben je met Instagram?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Hoeveel uur besteed je gemiddeld per dag aan sociale media?

- ☐ 0-2 uur
- ☐ 2-4 uur
- ☐ 4-6 uur
- ☐ Meer dan 6 uur per dag

9. Welke 3 sociale media applicaties gebruik je het meest? Kies uit de onderstaande opties je top 3. Doe dit door er de cijfers 1 t/m 3 voor te zetten.

_____ Instagram
_____ Facebook
_____ Snapchat
_____ Twitter
_____ YouTube
_____ Pinterest
_____ Anders:

10. Het experiment zal nu beginnen.

Je krijgt straks een foto te zien, bekijk deze goed. Je krijgt de foto maar een korte tijd te zien, daarna ga je automatisch door naar de vragenlijst met vragen over de foto die je gezien hebt. Je kunt tijdens het invullen van de vragenlijst niet meer terug om de foto te bekijken. Zodra je alle vragen hebt beantwoord worden je antwoorden automatisch opgeslagen.

Er zijn in het experiment geen goede of foute antwoorden mogelijk, het gaat om jouw mening. Als je op de blauwe knop klikt start je met het experiment.

(Hierna kregen de deelnemers 1 van de 4 foto's te zien)



30.162 vind-ik-leuks

annanooshin Na een drukke week eindelijk weekend!
Ik ga vandaag heerlijk genieten van het mooie
herfstweer: make-up, check! Outfit, check! Bright
smile? Check! Wat gaan jullie doen vandaag?



30.162 vind-ik-leuks

annanooshin Na een drukke week eindelijk weekend!
Ik ga vandaag heerlijk genieten van het mooie
herfstweer: make-up, check! Outfit, check! Bright
smile? Check! Wat gaan jullie doen vandaag?



30.162 vind-ik-leuks

annanooshin Na een drukke week eindelijk weekend!
Ik ga vandaag heerlijk genieten van het mooie
herfstweer: make-up, check! Outfit, check! Bright
smile? Check! En helemaal tof: ik geef samen met
Colgate gratis hun nieuwe Bright Smile tandpasta
weg. Klik op de link in mijn profiel en krijg een gratis
proefpakketje thuisgestuurd!



30.162 vind-ik-leuks

annanooshin Na een drukke week eindelijk weekend!
Ik ga vandaag heerlijk genieten van het mooie
herfstweer: make-up, check! Outfit, check! Bright
smile? Check! En helemaal tof: ik geef samen met
Colgate gratis hun nieuwe Bright Smile tandpasta
weg. Klik op de link in mijn profiel en krijg een gratis
proefpakketje thuisgestuurd!

14. Was je voor dit experiment al bekend met de social influencer Anna Nooshin?

- ☐ Ja
- ☐ Nee

(Indien Ja, werd de deelnemer doorgestuurd naar vraag 15 en 16. Indien Nee, werd de deelnemer doorgestuurd naar vraag 17.)

15. Geef op onderstaande schaal aan hoe bekend je bent met de social influencer Anna Nooshin:

	Ze er onbekend	Onbekend	Een beetje onbekend	Niet onbekend/Niet bekend	Een beetje bekend	Bekend	Ze er bekend
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Volg je Anna Nooshin op sociale media?

- ☐ Ja
- ☐ Nee

17. Was je je tijdens het experiment ervan bewust dat het bericht van de social influencer gesponsord was door Colgate tandpasta?

- ☐ Nee, ik had niet door dat dit bericht gesponsord was
- ☐ Ja, ik had door dat het bericht gesponsord was

(Indien Ja, werd de deelnemer doorgestuurd naar vraag 18. Indien Nee, werd de deelnemer doorgestuurd naar vraag 19.)

18. Beschrijf hieronder kort waaraan je zag dat het bericht gesponsord was:

19. Heb je tot slot nog opmerkingen over het experiment, dan mag je die hieronder plaatsen.

Einde Experiment