



# **The effect of social influencer advertising**

A study on the effect of type of sender of an Instagram advertisement in terms of brand attitude, perceived message credibility and brand involvement, and the moderating influence of the level of Instagram involvement.

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## **Abstract**

Even though Instagram is a popular social media platform, little research has been done concerning the effectiveness of social influencer advertising. For this study, the influence of type of sender (social influencer vs. brand) of an advertisement on Instagram was tested on attitude towards a brand, the perceived message credibility and involvement with a brand. Furthermore, the moderating role of the level of involvement (low vs. high) with Instagram was investigated. An experiment was carried out ( $N = 367$ ) which showed that advertisements from a social influencer lead to a more positive brand attitude than brand advertisements. Advertisement from a social influencer did not result in a higher perceived message credibility and brand involvement. In addition, the effect of the type of sender on brand attitude and brand involvement was moderated by the level of involvement with Instagram. Advertisements by a social influencer did affect brand attitude and brand involvement, however only when participants were highly involved with Instagram. The results of this study show that social influencer advertising may be an effective marketing strategy but that its effectiveness depends on characteristics of the audience.

*Keywords:* Social influencers, brands, Instagram, advertising, social media

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## Introduction

Millennials spend more and more time on social media (Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017). In 2017, already 71% of users of the Internet were users of a social network and it was predicted that this number would keep growing. The report of Statista (2019) shows that globally, there are 2.77 billion users of social media, which is around 35% of the world's population. Since every social media platform (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) has different target groups, goals and characteristics, it is important to study these platforms independently, to make sure what strategy works best when it comes to advertisement purposes.

The social media platform Instagram is especially popular among female Millennials and is primarily used for posting and sharing images. Instagram is one of the most famous social media platforms globally. Worldwide, 41% of Instagram users are under 25 years old. The mainly mobile sharing platform entered 1 billion users in 2018 who are monthly active (Statista, 2019). Women between 18 and 40 years old are the most common Instagram users, with 64.1% of women aged between 18 and 40 using Instagram compared to only 22.6% of women who are over 40 (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Due to this growing popularity of social media and Instagram in particular, companies spend more and more of their marketing budget on social media advertising (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018), which is paid, one-way promotional communication in mass media (e.g., sponsored post on Instagram). This type of advertising offers marketers the ability to reach their (potential) consumers directly, and marketers can quickly adjust content to the public's wishes (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

In addition to advertising via a company's own brand account, advertising via social influencers has also become very popular on Instagram. Social influencers are people with a high number of followers, who are followed for their post about a particular subject, such as fashion, beauty or fitness. The phenomenon of advertising via social influencers is called

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social influencer marketing: a marketing strategy in which a familiar person uses his social connections to promote certain products or services (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2018).

Especially on Instagram there are many ordinary people who have gained many followers by sharing photos or videos with their audience (Erz, Marder, & Osadchaya, 2018), and they are an interesting group to use for brand endorsement.

Comparing social influencer marketing with advertising from the brand itself, consumers are less aware that it is a form of advertising. The fact that the observed persuasive intention is less obvious, can be explained by a term called Parasocial Interaction (PSI), which is the illusion of a face-to-face connection with the endorser, together with developing social feelings about him or her after numerous confrontations (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). This is applicable to social influencers more than brands, as many of them update their page (more than) once a day and because influencers often react to posts and other people's comments.

There are several benefits related to the use of social influencers over a company's own Instagram channel. Firstly, when a social influencer posts an advertisement on their Instagram profile this can be considered interpersonal communication, while an advertisement from a brand can be considered mass media advertising. Interpersonal communication has proven to be more effective on influencing attitudes of consumers than with mass media (e.g., brands) (Weimann, 1994). Therefore, advertisement from a social influencer is assumed to have a more positive effect on attitude towards a brand. Secondly, consumers tend to find social influencers more trustworthy and credible than traditional media (Diffley, Kearns, Bennet, & Kawalek, 2011). Therefore, advertisement from a social influencer is assumed to have a higher perceived message credibility. Thirdly, since consumers on Instagram can identify themselves more with social influencers than with a brand, they are encouraged to be more involved (Kapitan & Silvera, 2015). Therefore, advertisement from a social influencer is assumed to have a higher brand involvement. Finally, the more active you are on Instagram

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following social influencers, the more you are confronted with brands and social influencers promoting those brands (Jin & Phua, 2014). Therefore, people who have high involvement with Instagram may feel more attracted to advertisements from a social influencer on this platform, in contrast to people who have low involvement with Instagram.

Scientific research in the field of marketing and social media on social influencer advertising, in particular on the platform Instagram, is limited. Although earlier research found that it is beneficial to use social influencers (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Latiff & Safiee, 2015; Uzunğlu and Kip, 2014), there is limited research in comparing their advertisements to advertisements from brands. Therefore, in this study, we will compare Instagram advertisement from a social influencer with Instagram advertisement from a brand itself.

The above leads to the following main research question:

*‘What is the effect of type of sender of an Instagram advertisement on brand attitude, perceived message credibility and brand involvement, and to what extent is this moderated by the level of Instagram involvement?’*

## Theoretical framework

### Instagram

Over the years, social media became an important way of how we communicate every day. Especially Instagram is one of the most famous and fastest growing platforms. This platform was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and is now owned by Facebook (Cutler, 2012). In contrast to other platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, Instagram is mainly based on photos (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Users can view the posts of the people they follow in their so-called feed or by clicking on the profile of a user. The mobile application launched in 2010 and rapidly gained one million mobile users (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). At the moment, Instagram has over 1 billion monthly active users. Worldwide 500 million Instagram users are active every single day (Ahlgren, 2019).

Instagram enables their users to create a public self-representation (Chua & Chang, 2016). The profile or feed of Instagram users can be called a personal photo diary, since users are only able to upload photos or videos. When comparing this platform to for example Facebook, users not only use Instagram for connecting with their friends, but also for connecting with people they do not personally know (Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017).

Getting likes and gaining followers is one of the main motivations to use Instagram (Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, & Murphy, 2018). A research by Jin and Phua (2014) found that users with a high number of followers are perceived as more likeable, mostly because they are perceived as popular. Nowadays, there are more and more of these popular users active on Instagram, also known as social influencers. These social influencers have substantially more followers than the regular Instagram users, and are followed for their posts about particular topics, such as fashion and beauty (Casaló, Flaviá, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). This type of social influencer is sometimes called a micro-celebrity: “the concerted and strategic

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cultivation of an audience through social media with a view to attaining celebrity status” (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017, p. 196).

### **Social influencers**

**Social influencers and advertising.** Social influencers (or micro-celebrities) have the power to influence the attitude and behavior of their audience (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Social influencers have gained their popularity and fame via participating on social media platforms, like Instagram. They gather followers by allowing their audience a look into their lives, which gives the audience the feeling as if they know them personally (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011).

These social influencers give marketers great potential, as they start to realize the power Instagram has (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Latiff and Safiee (2015) have found that with Instagram, marketers can advertise via their own brand page, or they can choose to engage with social influencers. When using social influencers, this is called social influencer advertising, which is considered as the use of specific people on social media with a large number of followers who can influence (potential) consumers of a brand by endorsing the products of that brand (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). This type of advertising then can be applied by marketers to reach their consumers. Therefore, Instagram has proven to be helpful for brands to promote their products or services.

Brands who use social influencers to promote their products or services approach social influencers who are in a comparable niche as their products and are therefore in line with their target audience. There are multiple ways for a brand to collaborate with social influencers, for example via sponsored content or product placement (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). Social influencers share content related to the brand with their followers. This leads to a beneficial relationship between brands and social influencers, since they both get



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something out of it (e.g., free products or money).

By using social influencers brands benefit in different ways. Firstly, it is a relatively inexpensive form of marketing, while it provides brands the ability to reach a specific target audience directly (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). Secondly, social influencer advertising gives brands online presence that is perceived as trustworthy among social media users (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Instagram users have the habit to follow and interact with other users who share their interests, such as in fashion or beauty. In addition to that, they also tend to follow people who create attractive content or who they simple like because of how they look or their lifestyle (Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017). Thus, since with social influencer advertising brands can reach many consumers in a short time period and the fact that social influencer advertising is low in costs when comparing it to traditional brand advertisement, it is becoming more and more a smart move for a brand to attract consumers via social media.

**Social influencers vs. celebrity endorsers.** Social influencer advertising is to an extent similar to celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsement is defined as marketers employing celebrities to promote their products (Pringle & Binet, 2005). For example, celebrities often lend their names to ads for products or services for which they may or may not be the experts. Such endorsers are seen as dynamic with attractive and likeable qualities (Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2013). Earlier research has found that celebrity endorsement has positive effects on the responses of consumers. Those positive effects include gaining attention (Tom et al., 1992), create positive brand attitudes (Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008) and strengthen brand awareness (Poghosyan, 2015).

However, recent studies have found that sometimes celebrity endorsing can also bring negative effects. For example, since a celebrity is a public figure, he or she can become involved in a scandal, which is negative for the company that works with them (Erdogan,

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1999). Another example is that a celebrity endorser can promote too many products from different brands and niches at the same time. According to Tripp, Jensen and Carlson (1994) this makes consumers more cynical towards the company the celebrity is endorsing.

Social influencers are increasingly used as endorsers (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). The reason is that people can identify themselves more with social influencers than celebrities. Unlike celebrities, social influencers did not reach fame in the traditional way. They are not public figures and their influence is not spread via indirect media channels (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). Most of the social influencers were unknown individuals prior to the rise of Instagram and have gained fame by actively participating. Therefore, they are not only admirable celebrities, but also regular people, such as a girl next door. This makes them more like the audience that sees their content, which in turn makes them more identifiable (Forbes, 2016). Research shows that people value social influencers the same as their real-world friends (Jargalsaikhan & Korotina, 2016). Therefore, it seems that contrary to celebrity endorsers, social influencers are seen as more approachable.

### **Advertisement via social influencers versus the brand itself**

Consumers are more influenced by other individuals in their decision-making than by media or brands (Watts & Dodds, 2007). The two-step flow theory of Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) states that information is distributed top-down via opinion leaders, who share information with others and influence them. In line with the two-step flow theory, the influential hypothesis adds that influential individuals are the ones who diffuse opinions, innovations, behaviors and product trends in society (Aral & Walker, 2012). Since social influencers are influential people and valued under their followers, they can be seen as opinion leaders (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). These opinion leaders are very important for brands,

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because when these opinion leaders share their opinion, the reach and influence of the brand is likely to increase.

Consumers are more influenced by people than by brands because of the perceived persuasive intention. With personal sources the commercial objectives are less clear, the content seems genuine, there is no (clear) indication of personal gain and they are perceived as more credible, which makes consumers rely more on them than organizational sources such as brands (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Cheung and Thadani (2012) found that a source of information in the personal sphere has a strong impact on the preferences and choices consumers make.

These findings are closely related to the readily available knowledge about influencing. When consumers see an attempt to influence, several defense mechanisms occur, which means that they resist the attempted influence. These defense mechanisms then lead to a more critical mindset and their attitudes will become more negative (van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, & Buijzen, 2012). Since consumers are generally suspicious of commercial advertisements (Utz, Kerkhof & van den Bos, 2012), it is expected that a social influencer provides more positive results than a brand.

### **The effect of social influencer advertising on brand attitude and perceived message credibility**

Whether an advertisement comes from a social influencer or a brand can affect consumers' attitudes towards a brand and how credible the message of an advertisement is perceived. Instagram users consider the social influencers they follow to be credible sources of information and tend to follow their advice (Chu & Kamal, 2008). There are several explanations why social influencer advertising may be more effective than brand advertising, which will be discussed below.

**Interpersonal communication.** Interpersonal communication is considered as communication between two people, whereas mass communication involves sending a message to a large number of people (e.g., via newspapers or television) (Reardon & Rogers, 1988). In the decision-making process, mass communication has proven to be more of use when it comes to sharing knowledge, whereas interpersonal communication is important when it comes to persuasion (Rogers, 2003). In line with that finding, interpersonal communication has proven to be more effective on influencing the attitudes of consumers than with mass media such as brand advertising (Weimann, 1994). For example, Wu and Wang (2011) found that impressions and reviews about a brand, and experiences with a brand via electronic word-of-mouth (which is comparable to social influencers) are perceived as more credible than corporate messages.

When a social influencer posts an advertisement on Instagram this can be considered interpersonal communication, while an advertisement from a brand can be considered mass communication. By sharing their experiences through Instagram, social influencers' communication resembles interpersonal communication, and the social influencer creates an online community together with her/his audience in a particular Instagram niche, e.g., fashion or beauty. This relates to a study from Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld (2008), who argue that when individuals realize that an individual (in this case the social influencer) is part of an online community, they will easier be influenced in their attitude. Jin and Phua (2014) also found that social influencers are seen by their fans as co-users, regardless of whether they are real endorsers of a brand or not. The underlying concept is internalization: the recipient takes over the opinion or attitude of the sender because he thinks that the information is precise (Vartanian, Herman, & Polivy, 2005). A reason for this "power" is their high level of credibility, since consumers tend to believe the message of someone who has tried and used certain products of a brand (Uzunglu & Kip, 2014).

**Parasocial Interaction.** A second way to explain the positive effect of social influencer advertising is Parasocial Interaction (PSI), which was initially described by Horton and Wohl (1956) as the feeling of a “face-to-face relationship” with a media personality (p. 188). The present study describes parasocial interaction the same as Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985, p. 156): “interpersonal involvement of the media user with what he or she consumes”. According to Goh, Heng and Lin (2013) it is difficult for brands to generate PSI, since brands are an organization instead of a real person like a social influencer. Most of the existing literature in PSI has been conducted in the field of television and radio, and mainly for media characters, such as presenters, actors, and celebrities (Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

However, more recently, PSI has also been analyzed in other fields, including websites and blogs (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). Blogs are a good example of media producing PSI that can be linked to Instagram (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). Instagram is valued as a microblog for the fact that users take photos of their daily life and share them accompanied by a sentence or story. Because of PSI, social influencers’ messages are valued equal to word-of-mouth, which in turn makes the message more credible (Jin & Phua, 2014).

It is expected that followers who enter into a parasocial relationship with these social influencers by following their content will feel a bond between themselves and the social influencer and have the feeling to know him or her personally. In addition, Perse and Rubin (1989) even state that consumers feel as if they know and understand the media personality in the same way that they do their real friends, and this feeling of friendship increases over time. Thus, it can be expected that the messages social influencers send are also more convincing and therefore perceived as more credible.

In those cases of PSI, it can be expected that the message from the social influencer becomes part of the construction of that person’s reality, and the positive attitudes will be taken over by consumers. Therefore, since people feel they have an interpersonal connection

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with people and because they see social influencers as experts in their field (Xiang, Zheng, Lee, & Zhao, 2016), we expect that in contrast to brands, social influencers can positively influence the attitudes of their followers.

**Social Comparison Theory.** A third way to explain the positive effect of social influencer advertising is with the Social Comparison Theory of Festinger (1954), which theorizes people judge themselves by comparing what they own and consume with what others own and consume. This theory is still validated by contemporary studies (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011). Since social influencers are seen by their followers as their real-world friends, they compare themselves to those social influencers, which makes it more likely that followers adopt their attitude (Woods, 2016). For example, when a social influencer states that they like (i.e., have a positive attitude) a certain brand or product, the consumer is likely to share that opinion. Ohanian (1991) also found that advertisement with high credibility lead to a more positive attitude than advertisement with low credibility. In this light, social influencer marketing appears to be a good strategy: social influencers are seen as opinion leaders who exercise a lot of influence, even when endorsing products. Even though consumers look up to them, they are still seen as real people and similar to ordinary consumers (Jin & Phua, 2014). In line with this reasoning, Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) argue that consumers nowadays not easily value brand advertisements, since consumers are more likely to believe the message of people who are like themselves.

Social comparison works through comparing yourself with other people (Festinger, 1954). Since a brand is an organization and cannot be considered as a person, the Social Comparison Theory is not applicable to them. Brands circumvent this by using models in their advertisements (Richins, 1991), trying to make the message more personal on their brand page on Instagram. However, this is expected to be less effective because the commercial

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purposes of brands are still obvious. As mentioned before, by recognizing an attempt to influence, defense mechanisms occur (van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal & Buijzen, 2012; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). As a result, the message advertised by the brand will not be perceived as credible or taken over quickly.

In sum, because social influencers are seen as credible sources of information, are seen as experts in their field, and people trust social influencers' messages more than brand advertising, we pose the following hypotheses:

H1a: Advertisement on the Instagram profile of a social influencer results in a more positive brand attitude than an advertisement on the Instagram profile of a brand.

H1b: Advertisement on the Instagram profile of a social influencer results in a higher perceived message credibility than an advertisement on the Instagram profile of a brand.

### **The effect of social influencer advertising on brand involvement**

We expect that social influencer advertising will also lead to more brand involvement than brand advertising. Brand involvement is an important construct in assessing advertising effectiveness because traditional constructs, such as satisfaction and perceived quality, appear to be unable to explain consumer behavior (Hollebeek, 2011). However, there is a lack of clarity on the terminology of brand involvement, brand commitment and brand loyalty, as they are used interchangeably between studies (Calder & Malthouse, 2008; Godlewski & Perse, 2010; Traylor, 1981; Traylor & Benoy, 1984). Although studies that examined brand involvement remained conceptual of nature and empirical research is lacking (Bolton 2011; Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft 2010), the overall outcome of literature examining brand involvement is that consumers who are highly involved with a brand, are more committed and loyal (Traylor, 1981; Traylor & Benoy, 1984).

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Van Doorn et al. (2010) define brand involvement as a behavioral actions towards a brand or organization that goes beyond the purchase of a product and is the outcome of motivational reasoning. Instead of being passive recipients of brand-related messages, consumers devote proactively to brand interactions. Another study by Calder and Malthouse (2008) defines that brand involvement is more than just liking and implies that brand involvement is seen as a stronger form of connectedness between the consumer and the brand. For example, a consumer could advise someone else to buy a product from the brand or share the content or experiences with the brand. As the consumer engages in more such activities and develops a deeper relationship with the brand, the level of involvement will increase. In this study, we define brand involvement as the willingness to share advertisements from the brand and the willingness to endorse the brand.

Social connection is an important reason for consumers to use social media, and therefore has a major influence on behavior (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009). Instagram has the highest involvement rate of all social media (Krallman, Pelletier, & Adams, 2016). For example, 20% of consumers share content from a social influencer on their own social media account (“New Research: the value of influencers on Twitter”, 2016). Marketing statistics also show that 30% of consumers are more likely to buy a product that is recommended by a social influencer (“Influencer marketing statistics that will surprise you in 2018”, 2018). Therefore, advertisements on Instagram from social influencers are expected to lead to higher brand involvement than advertising messages from a brand.

Another factor that can explain why brand involvement will be higher by using social influencers is the involvement people experience with social influencers (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). This involvement consists of the following five concepts: Identification with the characters (to what extent does someone see himself as that character), wishful identification (to what extent does someone wants to be the character), similarity (to what extent does



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someone perceives similarity with the character), parasocial interaction (to what extent someone feels a connection with the character) and likeliness (to what extent does someone see similarities with a character) (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). It is assumed that since consumers on Instagram can identify themselves more with social influencers than with a brand, they see the social influencer as a friend, and may experience parasocial interaction with the influencer, they are encouraged to be more involved with the brand these social influencers are endorsing. This has been shown in the field of reality television (Godlewski & Perse, 2010), but may thus also be the case for social influencers.

The above information leads to the following hypothesis:

H1c: Advertisement on the Instagram profile of a social influencer results in higher brand involvement than an advertisement on the Instagram profile of a brand.

### **Instagram involvement as a moderator**

Previous research on social influencer advertising has devoted little attention to individual differences that may explain the effects of social influencer advertising. We expect there to be a difference between individuals who are highly involved with Instagram and individuals who are lowly involved with Instagram. Earlier research has distinguished multiple types of social media users, which are categorized in terms of their behavior on social media (Krasnova et al., 2013). Highly involved social media users are individuals who engage in social media actively (e.g., posting, liking and commenting). Lowly involved users are individuals who only view the content and are not participating in an active way. These two different types of users experience different emotions when using social media and thus may experience different effects from the messages they see (Krasnova et al., 2013).

Therefore, this study includes the level of Instagram involvement in determining the effect of type of sender on brand attitude, perceived message credibility and brand involvement.

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By actively following social influencers users are constantly confronted with brands and social influencers promoting those brands. Thus, for active users those social influencers can become a group they compare themselves with (Jin & Phua, 2014). How frequently individuals use social media is positively related to how often they compare themselves to others (Lee, 2014). Because of this comparison to others, it can be expected that highly involved individuals will be familiar with social influencers and see them as an expert they can refer to, while individuals with low involvement with Instagram perhaps do not feel as if an advertisement on Instagram from a social influencer is valuable.

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is formed:

H2a/b/c: The positive effect of advertisement on the Instagram profile of a social influencer on (a) brand attitude, (b) perceived message credibility, and (c) brand involvement is more pronounced when involvement with Instagram is high than when involvement with Instagram is low.

The hypotheses are visualized in the Conceptual Model in Figure 1.

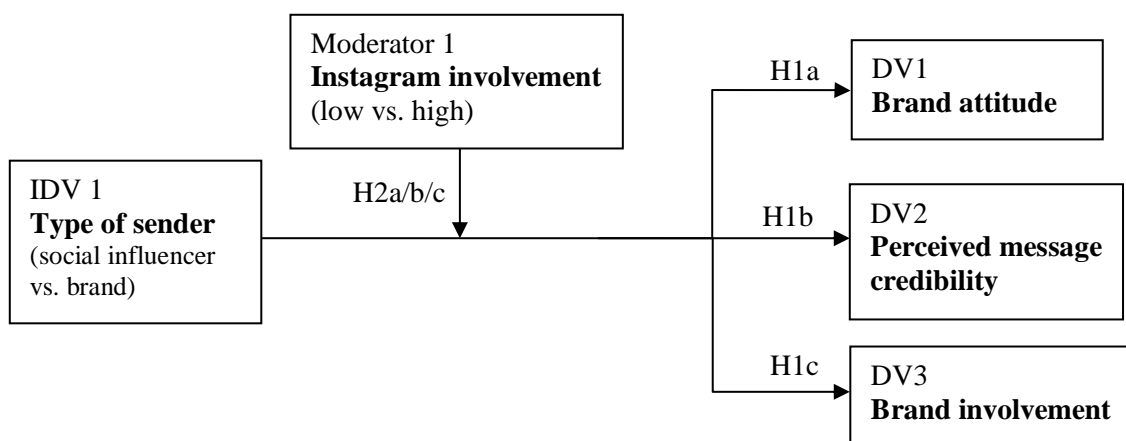


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

## **Method**

### **Design**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether type of sender has an influence on brand attitude, perceived message credibility and brand involvement, and to what extent this is moderated by the level of Instagram involvement. The experiment utilized a 2 x 2 x 2 mixed design, with type of sender (social influencer vs. brand) as a between-subject factor, type of branch (fashion vs. beauty) as within-subject factor and level of Instagram involvement (low vs. high) as a moderator. The study took place between April 2019 and June 2019.

### **Fashion and beauty branch**

To make sure the results were more generalizable, both fashion and beauty products were analyzed in this study. Fashion and beauty are seen as traditionally feminine domains (Duffy & Hund, 2015). In 2014, beauty already was the fourth-leading industry with the biggest power of social influencers. These social influencers, named “beauty gurus” online, are known for using their skills in makeup and skincare (Forbes, 2016). Furthermore, among the social media platforms currently available, an increasing number of active Instagram users is related to the fashion branch (“Why fashion brands are thriving on Instagram, 2016”). Instagram is the most used social media platform by social influencers in the fashion industry, and this is expected to continue in the near future (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). For these reasons, the fashion and beauty branch were chosen for this study.

### **Participants**

All the participants in this study were females. Women between the ages of 18 and 40 years old are the most common Instagram users, with 64.1% of women between the ages of

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18 and 40 using Instagram compared to only 22.6% of women over 40 (Pew Research Center, 2018). In addition, the majority of social influencers tailor to a female audience (Gannon & Prothero 2018; IndaHash Labs 2017).

For this study a quantitative research was conducted among 424 participants. Participants were gathered through Facebook and WhatsApp. Of the 424 participants, 57 participants were excluded from the analysis because they did not belong to the target group. For that reason, the results are based on 367 participants. All of them were females and in the age ranging from 18 to 40 years old. The mean age was 23.35 ( $SD = 2.33$ ). Their level of education can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Level of education of participants*

<b>Level of education</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
High school	9 (2.5%)
MBO	26 (7.1%)
HBO	180 (49.0%)
WO	152 (41.4%)
Total	367 (100%)

## Materials

The main independent variable of interest consists of two conditions, namely (1) an advertisement on Instagram from a social influencer on Instagram and (2) an advertisement on Instagram from a brand on Instagram. The manipulated advertisements in the experiment consisted of an Instagram post, either a social influencer or from a brand, depending on the condition. In the social influencer condition, the social influencer's profile name and picture were shown, together with a text underneath the post, stating that the new collection of the

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brand she was wearing was available in stores. The brand's name was also tagged in the text. In addition, the brand that the social influencer was wearing/having on was tagged in the photo. In the brand condition, the brand's profile name and same picture as in the social influencer condition were shown, together with a text underneath the post, stating that the new collection of the brand she was wearing/having on was available in stores. The pictures of the social influencers were found on their Instagram pages and were manipulated in Photoshop.

A total of three social influencers in the beauty branch (Mascha Feoktistova, Serena Verbon and Nikki de Jager) and three social influencers in the fashion branch (Anna Nooshin, Noor de Groot and Negin Mirsalehi) were used as the stimuli for the first condition. A total of three beauty brands (Maybelline, L'Oréal Paris and MAC) and three fashion brands (NA-KD, Loavies and Levi's) were used as the stimuli for the second condition. They were chosen based on their similar niche on Instagram and same degree of popularity among female Instagram users. The stimuli are shown in Appendix B.

### **Procedure**

An online survey was created with Qualtrics. In the message with the link to the survey it was told that the research was about advertising techniques and filling in would only take five minutes. When filling in the online survey, participants first saw a short introduction. In this introduction the subject of the survey was briefly explained. After that it was mentioned that all data would be processed anonymously and confidentially, and consent was requested from all participants. When agreeing to take part in the study, the participants agreed on being between 18 and 40 years old. After this, the participants could start with the online survey in which they were randomly assigned to either the social influencer condition or the brand condition. Subsequently, each participant was shown two stimuli, one beauty advertisement and one fashion advertisement, each time followed by a questionnaire. They

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were randomly assigned to one of the three beauty advertisements (either from a social influencer or a brand, based on the condition) and one of the three fashion advertisements (either from a social influencer or a brand). After reviewing the Instagram advertisements, the participants were asked several demographic questions and had to rate their level of activity on Instagram. Lastly, the participants were thanked for volunteering in this study. The complete Qualtrics survey can be found in Appendix A.

### **Measurements**

For each advertisement, the participants were asked to rate their attitude towards the brand, their perceived credibility of the message and how involved they felt with the brand. For every measurement the scales were translated and used in Dutch, since the survey was completely in Dutch as well. Involvement with Instagram was measured after the participants rated the two stimuli, right before the end of the survey.

*Brand attitude* was measured on a 7-point scale with six items measuring whether participants found the brand appealing - unappealing, good - bad, pleasant - unpleasant, likable - unlikable, enjoyable - unenjoyable, and attractive - unattractive (Spears & Singh, 2012). Means were calculated over the items to create a scale for attitude towards the brand. Attitude towards fashion brands had good reliability ( $\alpha = .96$ ). Attitude towards beauty brands also had good reliability ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

*Perceived message credibility* was measured on a 7-point scale with three items measuring whether the advertisement was believable - unbelievable, trustworthy - untrustworthy, and credible - not credible (Andrews, Burton, & Netemeyer, 2000). Means were calculated over the items to create a scale for perceived message credibility. Perceived message credibility for fashion brands had good reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Perceived message credibility for beauty brands also had good reliability ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

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For this research, *brand involvement* was sharing the advertisement and endorsing of the brand. Sharing was measured by answering the statement ‘How likely is the chance that you would share this Instagram post with your network?’. This was done using a 7-point semantic differential scale that ranged from unlikely to likely, improbable to probable, impossible to possible, and uncertain to certain (Taylor, Strutton, & Thompson, 2012). Endorsing of the brand was measured with the statements ‘I would recommend \*brand\* products to my friends’, ‘I would recommend \*brand\* products to others’, ‘If my friends are looking for such a product, I will tell them about \*brand\*’ and ‘I would advise my friends to buy a product from \*brand\*’, with four 7-point semantic differential scales (disagree to agree) (Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010; Gelbrich, 2011).

Table 2

*Factor analysis Component Matrix brand involvement for fashion and beauty*

<b>Items</b>	<b>Factor 1: Fashion</b>	<b>Factor 1: Beauty</b>
Sharing: (Un)likely	.83	.76
Sharing: (Im)probable	.83	.75
Sharing: (Im)possible	.83	.79
Sharing: (Un)certain	.83	.77
Endorsing: Recommend to friends	.77	.76
Endorsing: Recommend to others	.77	.77
Endorsing: Telling friends	.70	.71
Endorsing: Advise friends to buy	.77	.78

The factor structure of brand involvement was assessed by performing a principal component factor analysis. The results of this analysis for both fashion and beauty are specified in Table 2. Before interpreting the results of the factor analysis, it was checked if the

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factor analysis is an appropriate technique to use for clustering the data. Both Bartlett's tests were significant ( $p < .001$ ) indicating that the variables in the dataset are indeed related. Moreover, with a value of 0.84 and .83, KMO's measure for sampling adequacy is well above the 0.5 minimum value, which means that a substantial proportion of the variance can be accounted for by the factors. Hence, we can proceed by interpreting the factor structure. The first factor analysis showed two factors. For fashion, two components had an eigenvalue above 1 (5.034 and 2.188), that explained 90.27% of the variance. For beauty, two components had an eigenvalue above 1 (4.648 and 2.546), that explained 89.93% of the variance. However, since brand involvement is seen as one construct according to the literature (Godlewski & Perse, 2010), it was chosen to set the fixed number of factors to one with an adequate solution, which explained 62.92% of the variance. The eight items measuring brand involvement all have a loading well above .40, meaning that they indeed cluster well together. The factor loadings for this final solution are presented in Table 2. Means have been calculated over the items to create a scale for brand involvement. Brand involvement for the fashion branch had good reliability ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Brand involvement for the beauty branch also had good reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Instagram involvement* consists of several subscales. The first subscale is Instagram use. To measure use, we asked (1) how many days per week the participant used Instagram (0 – 7), followed by how many minutes per day the participants used Instagram on a typical day. These were then combined in minutes per week. Second, we asked (1) how many people the participants followed, and (2) how many followers they had. Third, a 7-point activities scale which contained seven items, altered from a study by Ting (2014), was used to measure participant's actions on the platform (Cronbach's Alpha was 0.77). The scale consisted of 5-points ranging from 1 = never to 5 = frequently. The items used were slightly adapted. The word "friend" was changed to "someone", since the platform is not only about



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communicating with friends. Moreover, we added the item ‘How often do you visit the profile of a social influencer?’. Finally, six items from Ellison and Steinfield (2007) were used to measure participants’ involvement on Instagram (Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.83). The items consisted of six statements which the participants had to answer on a 5-point scale, that ranged from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. Originally, the items contained statements about Facebook, but this was changed to Instagram. An example of a statement is “I feel out of touch when I have not logged onto Instagram for a while” and “I feel I am part of the Instagram-community”. The five scales measuring Instagram involvement were standardized and used together to measure Instagram involvement. We conducted a factor analysis to check if we could take all subscales together as one scale measuring Instagram involvement.

Table 3

*Factor analysis Component Matrix for Instagram involvement*

<b>Items</b>	<b>Factor 1</b>
Z Instagram per week	.79
Z Number of followers	.75
Z Number of following	.71
Z Activity last three months	.69
Z Instagram statements	.63

The factor structure of brand involvement was assessed by performing a principal component factor analysis. The results of this analysis are specified in Table 3. Before interpreting the results of the factor analysis, it was checked if the factor analysis is an appropriate technique to use for clustering the data. Bartlett’s test was significant ( $p < .001$ ) indicating that the variables in the dataset are indeed related. Moreover, with a value of 0.74,

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KMO's measure for sampling adequacy is well above the 0.5 minimum value, which means that a substantial proportion of the variance can be accounted for by the factors. Hence, we can proceed by interpreting the factor structure. One component had an eigenvalue above 1 (2.559), that explained 51.17% of the variance. The five items measuring Instagram involvement all have a loading well above .40, meaning that they indeed cluster well together. The factor loadings for this final solution are presented in Table 3. Means were calculated over the items to create a scale for Instagram involvement. Instagram involvement had good reliability ( $\alpha = .76$ ). By using mean split, this scale was recoded, distinguishing between low Instagram involvement ( $\leq -.01$ ) and high Instagram involvement ( $\geq .00$ ).

## Results

To address the research question, a 2 x 2 x 2 mixed MANOVA was conducted, with type of sender (social influencer vs. brand) as a between-subject factor, type of branch (fashion vs. beauty) as within-subject factor and level of Instagram involvement (low vs. high) as a moderator. The dependent variables were brand attitude, perceived message credibility and brand involvement. Descriptive statistics regarding the variables are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Errors of brand attitude, perceived message credibility and brand involvement with Instagram involvement*

	Low Instagram involvement		High Instagram involvement	
	Social influencer	Brand	Social influencer	Brand
	Brand attitude fashion	4.99 (0.12)	5.10 (0.12)	5.56 (0.12)
Brand attitude beauty	4.68 (0.13)	4.60 (0.13)	5.34 (0.13)	4.64 (0.13)
Perceived message credibility fashion	4.32 (0.14)	4.82 (0.14)	4.69 (0.14)	5.01 (0.14)
Perceived message credibility beauty	4.06 (0.15)	4.26 (0.15)	4.60 (0.15)	4.51 (0.15)
Brand involvement fashion	2.81 (0.13)	2.98 (0.13)	3.72 (0.13)	3.47 (0.13)
Brand involvement beauty	2.65 (0.12)	2.91 (0.12)	3.43 (0.12)	3.15 (0.12)

For brand involvement, results of the Levene's test were significant ( $p = .003$  and  $.008$ ), suggesting that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated. However, the ANOVA is fairly robust against the violations of these assumptions, but the outcomes may not be completely reliable. Mauchly's test of sphericity was not computed, since there were only two levels of the within variable.

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The Repeated Measures ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the type sender on brand attitude  $F(1, 363) = 4.293, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = .012$ . Advertisement by a social influencer ( $M = 5.14, SD = 1.25$ ) resulted in a more positive brand attitude than advertisement from a brand ( $M = 4.93, SD = 1.19$ ). However, there was a significant interaction effect of type of sender and type of branch on brand attitude  $F(1, 363) = 6.075, p = .014, \eta_p^2 = .016$ . As can be seen in Figure 2, for the beauty branch there is a difference ( $M_{diff} = .393, SE = 0.13, p = .003$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 5.01, SE = 0.09$ ) and advertisement from a brand ( $M = 4.62, SE = 0.09$ ). However, for the fashion branch there is no difference ( $M_{diff} = .030, SE = 0.12, p = .802$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 5.28, SE = 0.09$ ) and advertisement from a brand ( $M = 5.25, SE = 0.09$ ). Hypothesis 1a is partly supported.

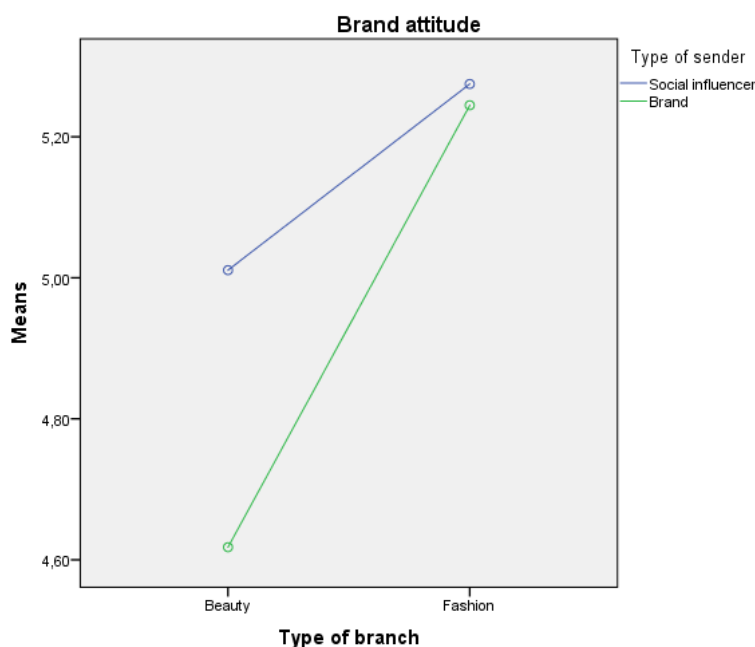


Figure 2. Interaction plot for type of sender and type of branch on brand attitude.

In addition to that, the Repeated Measures ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of the type sender on perceived message credibility  $F(1, 363) = 3.278, p = .071, \eta_p^2 =$

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.009. Advertisement by a social influencer ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) does not result in a higher perceived message credibility than advertisement from a brand ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ). In addition, there was a significant interaction effect of type of sender and type of branch on perceived message credibility. As can be seen in Figure 3, regarding perceived message credibility in the beauty branch there is no difference ( $M_{diff} = .062$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $p = .682$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ) and advertisement from a brand ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ). However, for the fashion branch there is a difference ( $M_{diff} = .413$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p = .004$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ) and advertisement from a brand ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ), though opposite as expected. These results are not in line with Hypothesis 1b.

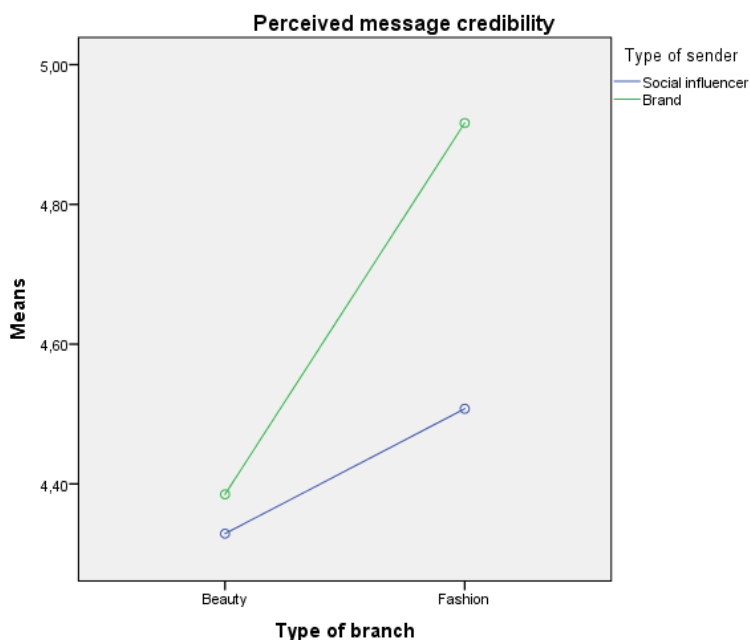


Figure 3. Interaction plot for type of sender and type of branch on perceived message credibility.

Lastly, the Repeated Measures ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of the type sender on brand involvement  $F(1, 363) = .069$ ,  $p = .793$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .000$ . Advertisement by a social influencer ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) does not result in a higher brand involvement than

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advertisement from a brand ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). There was no significant interaction effect of type of sender and type of branch on brand involvement  $F(1, 363) = 0.047$ ,  $p = .829$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .000$ . These results are not in line with Hypothesis 1c.

The Repeated Measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of type of branch on brand attitude  $F(1, 363) = 36.644$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .092$ . Fashion advertisements ( $M = 5.26$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) resulted in a higher brand attitude than beauty advertisements ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ). There was also a significant main effect of type of branch on perceived message credibility  $F(1, 363) = 26.165$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .067$ . Fashion advertisements ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) resulted in a higher perceived message credibility than beauty advertisements ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ). There also was a significant main effect of type of branch on brand involvement  $F(1, 363) = 11.658$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .031$ . Fashion advertisements ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) resulted in higher brand involvement than beauty advertisements ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ).

There was a significant interaction effect of type of sender and Instagram involvement on brand attitude  $F(1, 363) = 4.837$ ,  $p = .028$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .013$ . As can be seen in Figure 4, for people with low Instagram involvement there is no difference ( $M_{diff} = -.013$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p = .928$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ) or advertisement from a brand ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ) on brand attitude. For people with high Instagram involvement there is a difference ( $M_{diff} = .436$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $p = .003$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ) or advertisement from a brand ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ) on brand attitude. This is in line with Hypothesis 2a.

There was no significant interaction effect for type of sender and Instagram involvement on perceived message credibility  $F(1, 363) = .848$ ,  $p = .358$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .002$ . This is not in line with Hypothesis 2b.

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There was a significant interaction effect for type of sender and Instagram involvement on brand involvement  $F(1, 363) = 5.012, p = .026, \eta_p^2 = .014$ . As can be seen in Figure 5, for people with low Instagram involvement there is no difference ( $M_{diff} = -.213, SE = 0.15, p = .163$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 2.73, SE = 0.11$ ) or advertisement from a brand ( $M = 2.95, SE = 0.11$ ) on brand attitude. For people with high Instagram involvement there is a marginal difference ( $M_{diff} = .270, SE = 0.15, p = .078$ ) between advertisement from a social influencer ( $M = 3.58, SE = 0.11$ ) or advertisement from a brand ( $M = 3.31, SE = 0.11$ ) on brand attitude. This is not in line with Hypothesis 2c.

There was no significant three-way interaction effect between type of sender, type of branch and level of Instagram involvement on brand attitude  $F(1, 363) = 1.470, p = .226, \eta_p^2 = .004$ , perceived message credibility  $F(1, 363) = 0.161, p = .688, \eta_p^2 = .000$  and brand involvement  $F(1, 363) = 0.326, p = .568, \eta_p^2 = .000$ .

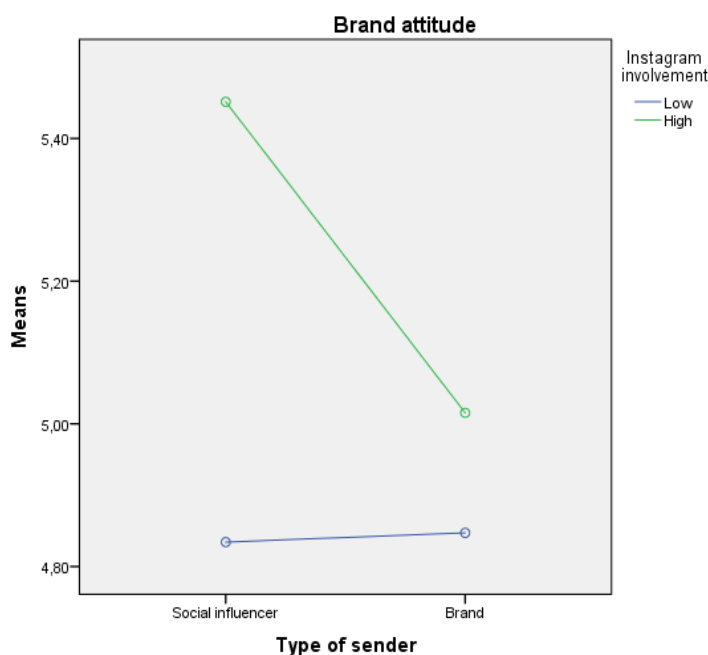


Figure 4. Interaction plot for type of sender and Instagram involvement on brand attitude.

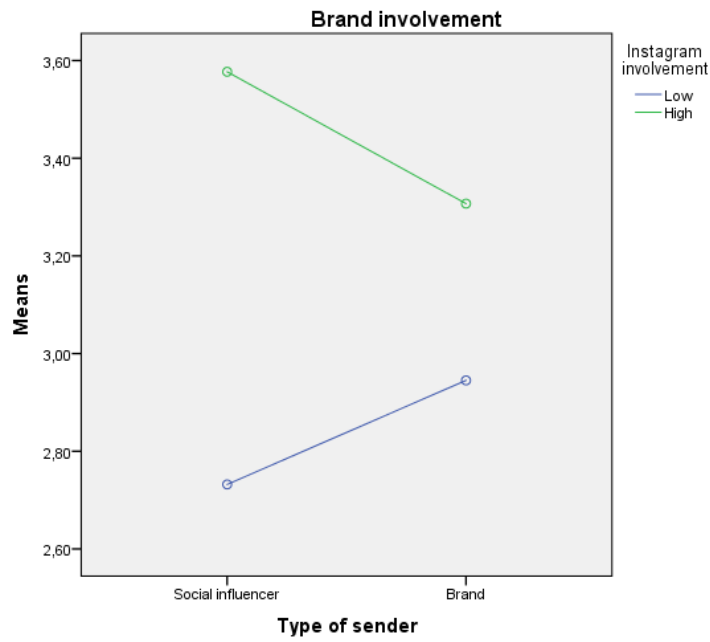


Figure 5. Interaction plot for type of sender and Instagram involvement on brand involvement.



## Discussion

### Discussion of the research results

The current study examined the difference between advertisements on Instagram from a social influencer and advertisements on Instagram from a brand and how this affected brand attitude, perceived message credibility and brand involvement. In addition to that, this study analyzed the moderating role of Instagram involvement on the relationship between the type of sender and the dependent variables. The main goal of this study was to find out which sender of an advertisement would be the best advertising strategy on Instagram.

Hypothesis 1a assumed that advertisements on Instagram from a social influencer would result in a more positive brand attitude than advertisements on Instagram from a brand. The results of the current study confirm this hypothesis. This is in line with previous studies about brand attitudes (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Ghose & Wiesenfeld, 2008; Uzunğlu & Kip, 2014; Weimann, 1994). According to the theory, people experience more of a bond with a social influencer and feel they are part of an online community together with the social influencer due to PSI or perceived interpersonal communication. This makes advertisements from social influencers more credible and thus makes people feel more positive about the brand. Interestingly, the effect was stronger for the beauty branch. It is possible that fashion is more about personal taste which is not affected that much by who endorses something (i.e., if you like a skirt it does not matter who is promoting it), while for beauty it does depend on who is endorsing it, because you need to be convinced that the make-up product is a good product that does what it claims. That is, you need to see that the influencer is actually using the product to look better.

Hypothesis 1b assumed that advertisements on Instagram from a social influencer would result in a higher perceived message credibility than advertisements on Instagram from a brand. Surprisingly, the results of the current study tend towards the opposite direction (just

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failed to reach significance); advertisement on Instagram from a brand results in a higher perceived message credibility. In addition, this effect is stronger for the fashion branch than for the beauty branch. This is the opposite of what was expected from earlier research (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014; Wu & Wang, 2011).

A reason for this can be given by using the theory of Alcañiz, Cáceres and Pérez (2010), who found that a brand itself is seen as a communication source and its own credibility determines the effectiveness, and thereby the credibility of the message. Therefore, a reason why people rated brands higher on perceived message credibility is that perhaps the brands used in this study are seen as very credible, since they are so popular and famous. This relates to the assumption that when a brand promotes a product on Instagram, it is clear that it is an advertisement, but when a social influencer promotes a product on Instagram, it may not be immediately clear that it is a form of advertisement. When afterwards it becomes clear that the social influencer is advertising, the message becomes less credible.

Hypothesis 1c assumed that advertisements on Instagram from a social influencer would result in a higher level of brand involvement than advertisements on Instagram from a brand. The results of the current research show that the type of sender per se does not influence a person's involvement with a brand. However, this result is explained by the significant interaction effect with Instagram involvement, but the effects of people with low and high Instagram involvement are the opposite of each other (both close to significant).

Hypothesis 2a/c assumed that the positive effect of advertisements on the Instagram profile of a social influencer on (a) brand attitude and (c) brand involvement would be more pronounced when involvement with Instagram is high than when involvement with Instagram is low. The results of this study confirm this hypothesis. For highly involved Instagram users, for whom Instagram is a large part of their life, social influencers may become an important comparison group to which they look to when searching for advice or new ideas. Therefore,

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those people see social influencers as a source of reference, copying the opinion the social influencer has towards a brand and thereby result in higher brand attitude and brand involvement.

Hypothesis 2b assumed that the positive effect of advertisements on the Instagram profile of a social influencer on perceived message credibility would be more pronounced when involvement with Instagram is high than when involvement with Instagram is low. The results of this study reject this hypothesis. A reason for this is that in the first place, advertisement from a social influencer did not provide a higher perceived message credibility than advertisement from a brand. Therefore, the positive effect cannot be more pronounced. Furthermore, there is no difference between highly involved and lowly involved Instagram users. It could be that the brands used in this study are seen as very credible, and since they are so popular and famous, the perceived message credibility will not be affected by how involved you are with Instagram.

Finally, the results of the current study show a difference in results between branches. In general, the fashion branch is rated more positively than the beauty branch. A possible explanation for this may be that women between the age of 18 and 40 years old are more into fashion than they are into beauty. Faces on Instagram are photoshopped on a regular basis (Kong, 2015). This makes it difficult to appraise what the effect of the make-up product is, and which parts are made more beautiful by using Photoshop (e.g., does the model have a flawless face because of the foundation or because of the smooth filter on Photoshop?). This can result in a less positive attitude towards beauty advertisements in general on Instagram since it is faked so easily.

**Theoretical implications**

First and foremost, this study showed that an advertisement on Instagram from a social influencer gives different results than an advertisement on Instagram from a brand. In earlier studies, the focus was mainly on general internet advertising and celebrity endorsement or bloggers (Pringle & Binet, 2005; Choi, Lee & Kim, 2013; van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, & Buijzen, 2012) and social influencers were not taken into consideration since they represent a relatively new group of independent people (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Therefore, relatively little is known in the field of social influencers. The current research builds on these earlier studies by offering new insights into the effects of the use of social influencers for advertisements. The finding that social influencer advertising on Instagram leads to a more positive attitude towards a brand can therefore be added to the earlier studies on advertising on social media.

Moreover, contrary to what the majority of research suggests, advertisement on Instagram from a social influencer does not result in a higher perceived message credibility than advertisement on Instagram from a brand. These results are an important contribution to the literature, as they are in contrast to what was expected from previous studies. Wu and Wang (2011) found that impressions and reviews about a brand, and experiences with a brand via electronic word-of-mouth are perceived as more credible than corporate messages. The current study contradicts this finding, showing that brand messages are perceived as more credible than expressions by social influencers (i.e., electronic word-of-mouth).

In addition, despite the fact that earlier studies found that social influencers are a reliable source of information (Jin & Phua, 2014; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014), it does not necessarily translate to the message being perceived as credible. Regarding social influencers, researchers must detach the credibility of the source (i.e., the social influencer) from the credibility of the message. These new insights can serve as starting points

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for further research in the field of social influencer advertising and perceived message credibility on Instagram.

This study fills a gap in the literature by adding Instagram involvement as a moderator. The results show that the outcomes are different for individuals who are lowly involved with Instagram than for individuals who are highly involved with Instagram. Therefore, it can be concluded that the effects of type of sender on the variables cannot be viewed separately from the level of Instagram involvement of the receiver. Thus, individual differences in how people use Instagram and social media in general may have a huge role in the effectiveness of social influencer advertising and social media advertising in general. This is the first study investigating the moderating role of Instagram involvement, so future research regarding this moderating influence is necessary.

In addition to that, where earlier research focuses primarily on traditional constructs such as customer satisfaction (Godlewski & Perse, 2010), perceived quality (Kim, Choe, & Petrick, 2018), attitudes (Uzunğlu & Kip, 2014) or purchase intention (Bansal & Voyer, 2000), this research also pays attention to brand involvement. The reason for taking brand involvement into account is because the above traditional constructs appear to be unable to explain consumer behavior. Brand involvement has already been investigated in the field of reality television (Godlewski & Perse, 2010), however research in the field of social influencers is limited. Brand involvement is an important element in explaining consumer behavior in the field of social influencers, and therefore an important aspect to take into account.

### **Practical implications**

From a practical point of view, the results of this study are relevant to brands. Firstly, this research shows that when a brand wants to advertise, they should not always make use of

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a social influencer, as it is not always the optimal way to influence the attitudes of Instagram users. For brands, this means that they first need to decide what they want to achieve with their advertising strategy. Social influencers are most valuable when the goal is to improve the attitude towards the brand, while their own brand page should be used to improve the perceived message credibility. Therefore, it is crucial that brands actively think about their advertising strategy and what goals they want to achieve with it, before choosing the sender type.

Secondly, this research shows that there is a difference in results when a distinction is made between individuals who are lowly and highly involved with Instagram. This shows that it is important for brands to gain insight into and invest in their followers on Instagram to see if they are lowly or highly involved with Instagram. Nowadays, organizations invest heavily in optimizing their customer database, knowing who their customer is and how they behave online (e.g., traffic analysis on websites). It is remarkable that organizations do nearly nothing to retrieve customer information on Instagram. This undiscovered field of crucial information needs to be exploited. When a brand wants a good advertising strategy it is detrimental that they learn more about their followers on Instagram and respond to it accordingly.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

In addition to the fact that the current study provides new insights into advertisement techniques, this research also has several limitations and gives reason for future research on social influencer advertising on Instagram. First of all, it could be that the type of sender was not clear enough in the manipulations, because the social influencer appears in both the social influencer advertisements as in the brand advertisements. The fact that the channel does not cause significant effects on perceived message credibility and brand involvement could be due to this. Although the type of sender of the advertisements differs between a social

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influencer and a brand, a social influencer is still shown in both cases. It would be interesting to compare these results with, for example, brand advertisements in which no influencer is used.

This relates to the fact that the current study was not able to bring a real-world situation in using Instagram, which especially could have had an influence on the perceived message credibility. In a normal situation, participants would scroll down their Instagram timeline and sporadically see an advertisement. In this study, participants saw a screenshot of one Instagram post from either a social influencer or a brand. Future studies should arrange a more real-world Instagram environment, in which people can scroll in an Instagram feed and click on social influencer's or brand's profiles. By doing this, participants are more likely to feel as if they are actually on their Instagram, which better reflects reality.

Lastly, although the social influencers and brands used for this study were selected based on several previously determined characteristics, the different types of senders could have been pretested in order to gather more information about how they are perceived by the participants. It could be that participants had a strong negative feeling about a certain social influencer or brand, which may have influenced their attitudes towards the advertisements. Future research should test this beforehand, so it can be assured that participants' attitudes are formed by the manipulation and not by their prejudgments and them being biased prior to the experiment.

### **Conclusion**

This study gives important insights concerning advertising with social influencers. The results show that social influencers have a positive effect on attitude towards a brand. However, social influencer advertisements do not result in more positive brand involvement. Concerning perceived message credibility, it almost seems that brands are seen as a more

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credible source than social influencers. Furthermore, it can be concluded from the results that people who are highly involved with Instagram value the social influencer even more when it comes to attitude towards and involvement with a brand. The findings thus confirm the assumption that advertisements from a social influencer have a different result than advertisement from a brand.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Online Qualtrics survey



Beste deelnemer,

Deze enquête van de Universiteit Tilburg gaat over advertenties op het platform Instagram.

Je krijgt steeds een advertentie op Instagram te zien met daarna een aantal bijbehorende vragen over jouw mening. Deelname is geheel vrijwillig en anoniem.

Het invullen van de vragen voor het onderzoek duurt ongeveer 5 minuten. Je hebt het recht om op elk moment met het onderzoek te stoppen. Voor vragen kun je terecht bij Tessa Nijs, door een e-mail te sturen naar

Wanneer je op "Ik ga akkoord" klikt, bevestig je dat je deelname aan dit experiment geheel vrijwillig is, dat je 18 jaar of ouder bent en dat je je ervan bewust bent dat je jouw deelname aan dit onderzoek op elk moment kan stopzetten.

Ik wil je alvast heel erg bedanken voor je deelname!

Tessa Nijs  
Master Communication and Information Sciences  
Tilburg University

Ik ga akkoord, begin de vragenlijst.

Ik ga niet akkoord, ik wil niet deelnemen.



Er volgt nu een afbeelding van een advertentie op Instagram **van het beauty merk MAC Cosmetics**. Dit is een make-up merk dat vaak samenwerkingen aan gaat met social influencers. **Het beauty merk MAC Cosmetics heeft dit bericht op haar Instagram geplaatst**. Kijk goed naar de afbeelding en lees de bijbehorende caption. Na de afbeelding volgen vragen over de advertentie.



## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

Ik vind het bericht:

Ongeloofwaardig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Geloofwaardig
Onbetrouwbaar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Betrouwbaar
Onoprecht	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Oprecht

Hoe groot is de kans dat je deze advertentie zou delen op Instagram met jouw netwerk?

Onwaarschijnlijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Waarschijnlijk
Waarschijnlijk niet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Waarschijnlijk wel
Absoluut niet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Absoluut wel
Onmogelijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Mogelijk

Beantwoord de volgende stellingen.

	Helemaal mee oneens	Mee oneens	Deels mee oneens	Niet mee oneens/Niet mee eens	Deels mee eens	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik zou de producten van dit merk aanbevelen aan mijn vrienden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou de producten van dit merk aanbevelen aan anderen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wanneer mijn vrienden op zoek zijn naar een product zoals dit, zou ik ze over dit merk vertellen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou mijn vrienden adviseren een product van dit merk te kopen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Wie was de zender van de Instagram advertentie die je zojuist hebt gezien?

Social influencer Nikkie de Jager (@NikkieTutorials)


Het beauty merk MAC Cosmetics



## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

Er volgt nu een afbeelding van een advertentie op Instagram van het fashion merk NA-KD. Dit is een kleding merk dat vaak samenwerkingen aan gaat met social influencers. Het fashion merk NA-KD heeft dit bericht op haar Instagram geplaatst. Kijk goed naar de afbeelding en lees de bijbehorende caption. Na de afbeelding volgen vragen over de advertentie.

**N A**  
**K D** nakdfashion



12.482 vind-ik-leuks

**nakdfashion** De nieuwe collectie van @nakdfashion ligt nu in de winkels!

20 APRIL 2019

The image shows an Instagram post from the account 'nakdfashion'. At the top left is the brand logo 'N A K D' and the name 'nakdfashion'. To the right is a three-dot menu icon. The main image is a photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top and a patterned, textured jacket, sitting in a car at night with city lights in the background. Below the image are icons for heart, comment, share, and bookmark. The caption reads '12.482 vind-ik-leuks' followed by 'nakdfashion De nieuwe collectie van @nakdfashion ligt nu in de winkels!' and the date '20 APRIL 2019'.





## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

Beantwoord de volgende stellingen.

	Helemaal mee oneens	Mee oneens	Deels mee oneens	Niet mee oneens/Niet mee eens	Deels mee eens	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik zou de producten van dit merk aanbevelen aan mijn vrienden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou de producten van dit merk aanbevelen aan anderen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wanneer mijn vrienden op zoek zijn naar een product zoals dit, zou ik ze over dit merk vertellen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou mijn vrienden adviseren en product van dit merk te kopen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Wie was de zender van de Instagram advertentie die je zojuist hebt gezien?

Het fashion merk NA-KD

Social influencer Anna Nooshin



Wat is je geslacht?

Man

Vrouw

Zeg ik liever niet

Wat is je leeftijd? (in cijfers)



## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

Wat is je hoogst genoten opleidingsniveau?

Middelbare school

MBO

HBO

WO

Anders, namelijk



Maak je gebruik van Instagram?

Ja

Nee

## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

Hoe veel dagen in de week maak je gebruik van Instagram?

 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Op een dag dat je instagram gebruikt, hoeveel minuten maak je dan gebruik van Instagram?

Hoeveel volgers heb je op Instagram? (cijfer)

Hoeveel accounts volg je op Instagram? (cijfer)

## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

Hoe vaak in de laatste drie maanden heb je:

	Nooit	Zelden	Soms	Regelmatig	Vaak
Een foto of video geplaatst?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Een foto of video geliket?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reactie gegeven onder een foto of video?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Iemand getagd in jouw post?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Een hashtag gebruikt bij jouw post?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Een hashtag gebruikt om naar iets te zoeken?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Een profiel van een merk bezocht?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Een profiel van een social influencer bezocht?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Geef aan in hoeverre je het eens bent met de volgende stellingen.

	Helemaal oneens	Oneens	Neutraal	Eens	Helemaal eens
Instagram maakt deel uit van mijn dagelijkse activiteiten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben trots om mensen te vertellen dat ik op Instagram zit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram is onderdeel geworden van mijn dagelijkse routine.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik voel me niet up to date als ik een tijdje niet op Instagram ben geweest.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik voel dat ik deel uitmaak van de Instagram-community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou het jammer vinden als Instagram stopt.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Dit was het einde van de vragenlijst! Bedankt voor het deelnemen.

## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

## Appendix B: Stimuli

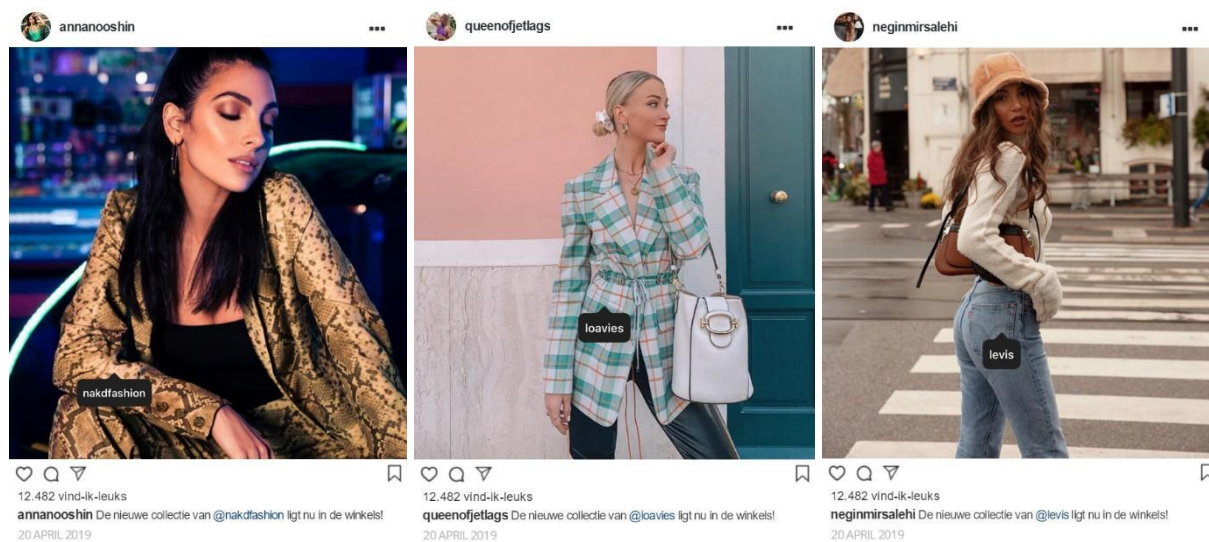


Figure 6. Stimuli social influencer condition, fashion.

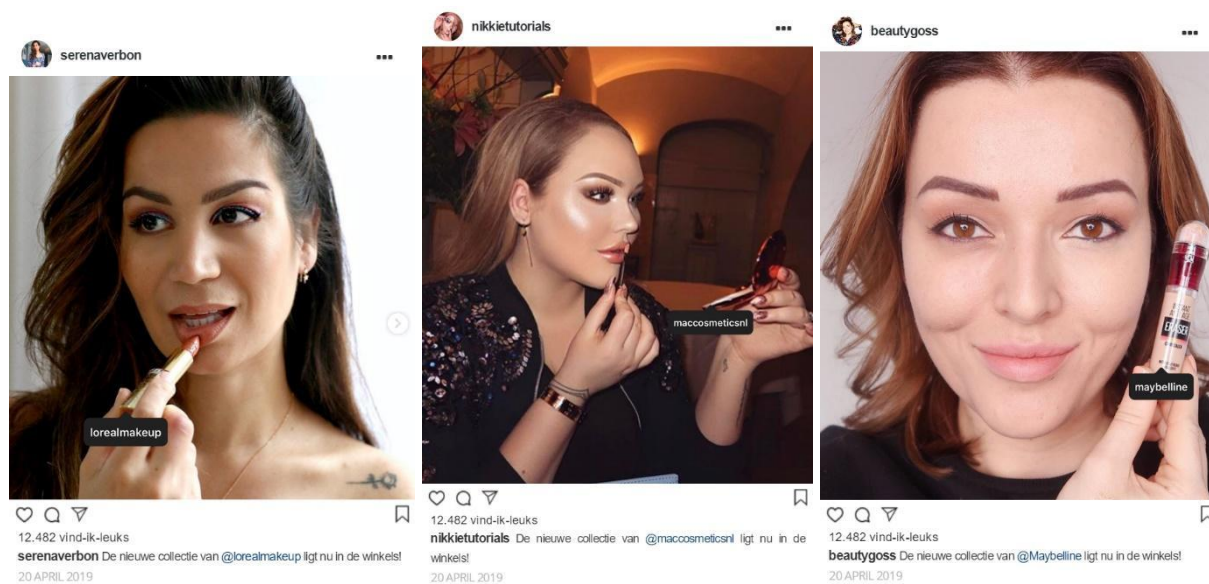


Figure 7. Stimuli social influencer condition, beauty.

THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCER ADVERTISING

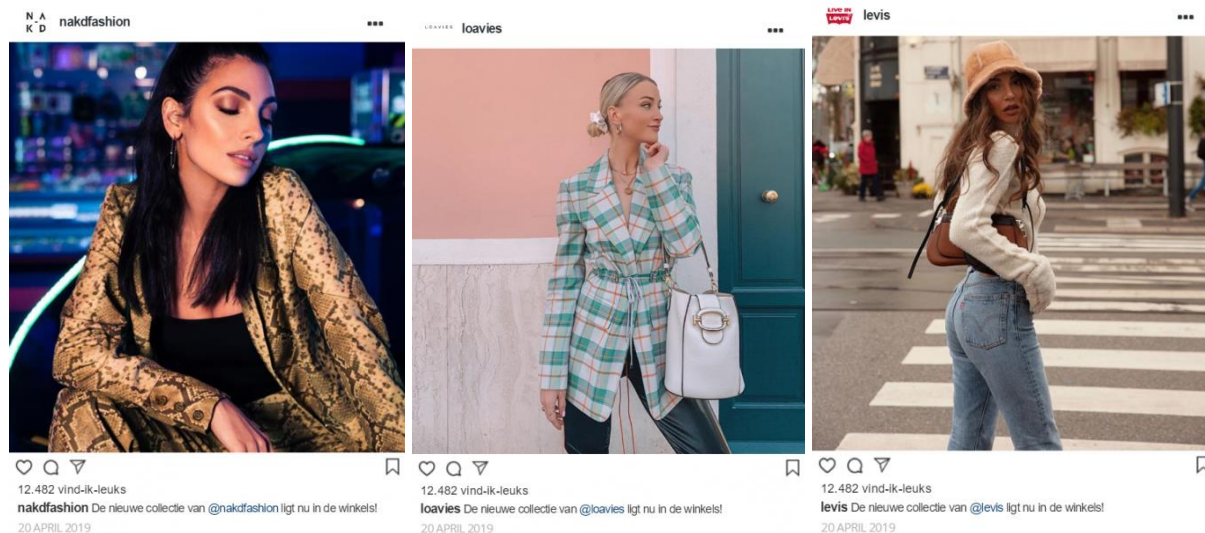


Figure 8. Stimuli brand condition, fashion.

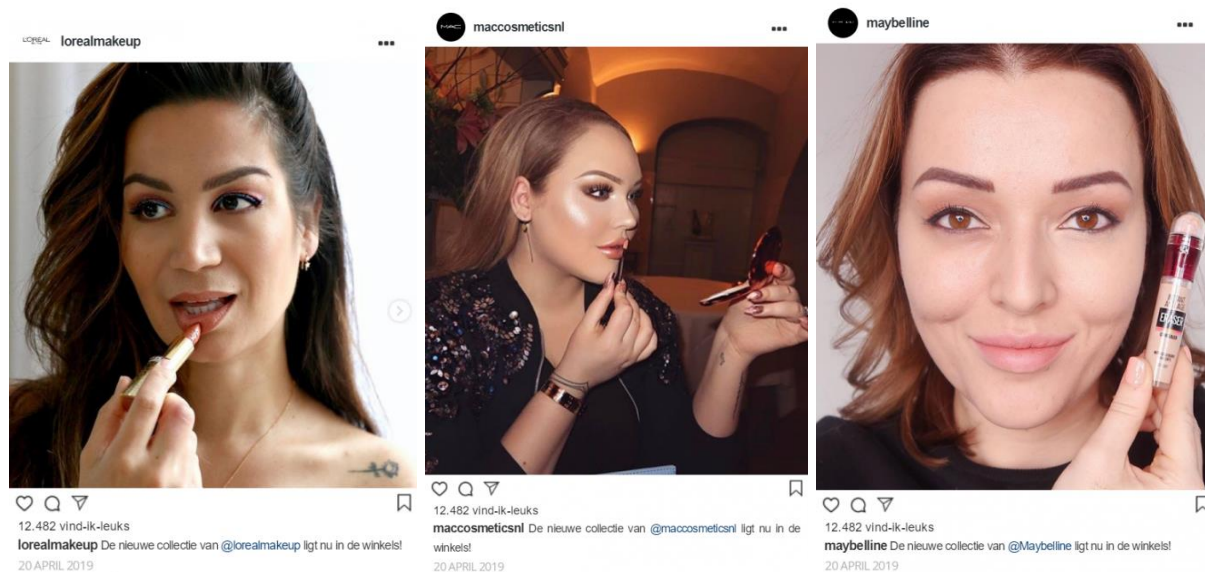


Figure 9. Stimuli brand condition, beauty.