The persuasiveness of momfluencers in influencing dietary choices of first-time mothers

Anna Kooimans (2107786)

Master's Thesis

Communication and Information Sciences

Specialization: Business Communication and Digital Media

Department of Communication and Cognition

School of Humanities and Digital Sciences

Tilburg University, Tilburg

Supervisor: L.J.M. Chateau

Second reader: A.P. Schouten

June 20, 2024

Technology statement

1. Did you use any tools or services to paraphrase text from other sources (for example, a thesaurus or the Academic Phrase bank)? Please name them.

Quillbot was used as inspiration to paraphrase sentences.

2. Did you use any tools or services to check spelling or grammar? Please name them.

Grammarly was used to check for grammar and spelling.

3. Did you use any tools or services to typeset the given text? Please name them.

No.

4. Did you use any tools or services to generate part of text? If so, please name them.

Chat GPT was used to come up with ideas and for inspiration.

5. Did you use any generative AI tools or software for other aspects of your thesis? If so, please name them.

No.

Abstract

First-time mothers increasingly use the internet, such as Instagram, for parental advice and tips on parenting or nutrition. With no prior experience, they often seek out similar mothers online, making them susceptible to the influence of momfluencers. This study explored how first-time mothers perceived and responded to the persuasive strategies employed by momfluencers and what factors contributed to the perceived effectiveness of health-related content in influencing dietary choices on Instagram. Ten first-time mothers were interviewed to deepen the understanding of their responses to momfluencers' persuasiveness using a semi-structured interview guide and by presenting content from a momfluencer focusing on emotional appeal, sponsored content, and educational value. The findings highlight that first-time mothers perceive the educational value type content as most persuasive in promoting healthy food intake. Furthermore, while first-time mothers are open to inspiration and recommendations, they tend to rely more on expertise and authoritative sources, such as the nutrition center or an expert momfluencer, for dietary advice to enhance credibility. This study contributes to the literature on the persuasiveness of momfluencers and provides more in-depth knowledge on their impact on the dietary choices of first-time mothers, an area previously unexplored. Future research could further delve into their persuasive impact on dietary choices, focusing on a more diverse demographic group.

Keywords: first-time mothers, momfluencers, persuasive strategies, dietary choices, health-related content

Table of contents

The persuasiveness of momfluencers in influencing dietary choices of first-time mothers 6
Theoretical framework 9
Social media influencers 9
The role of momfluencers 11
First-time mothers 12
First-time mothers and food intake 13
Persuasive techniques 14
Method 15
Participants 16
Materials 16
Procedure 18
Analysis 18
Results 19
Demographics participants 20
Experiences as first-time mothers 21
Instagram usage and interaction 21
Perception of momfluencers 22
Mothers' motivation for following 22
Content engagement 23
Feelings arising from viewing momfluencer content 23
Food intake 24
Encouragement by momfluencers to follow a healthy diet 24
Changing dietary choices 25
Persuasive techniques 25
Emotional appeal 25
Sponsored post 26
Educational value 26
Enhancing credibility and relatability momfluencers' content 27
Factors influencing effectiveness of health-related content 27
Discussion 28
Interpretation of the results 28
Persuasive techniques 28
Factors influencing effectiveness 31
Limitations 32

Future research 33
Conclusion 33
References 35
Appendix 43
Appendix A: Interview guide 43
Appendix B: Information letter 47
Appendix C: Informed consent 49
Appendix D: Coding scheme (theoretical framework) 51
Appendix E: Final coding scheme 53

The persuasiveness of momfluencers in influencing dietary choices of first-time mothers

For decades, mothers have exchanged and listened to the stories and counsel of others (Ouvrein, 2022). Mothers continue to exchange and read stories on social networking sites (SNS), carrying on this tradition in the digital sphere. Motherhood identities and experiences are highlighted in a way that was maybe not feasible, or at least not as conspicuously, before the regular usage of such sites, which makes the visibility of motherhood on SNS particularly intriguing (Capdevilla, 2022). From an influencer perspective, momfluencers have become essential in portraying motherhood within the social media landscape. According to Hannah Ryan, senior campaign director at an influencer agency, momfluencers have one of the strongest and most convincing voices on social networking sites (Keegan, 2023).

Momfluencers have been successful in gaining a sizable following on social media by providing genuine glimpses into their personal lives (Van Den Abeele et al., 2023). Many followers of momfluencers discover their first taste of mainstream culture by meeting a mother whose embodiment of motherhood shocks, inspires, enrages, or enlightens them about something about themselves, good or bad (Petersen, 2023). Therefore, recognition and identification are important factors regarding this topic. According to Abidin (2015), the relatability of the content is a way to persuade your followers to identify with them. Momfluencers focus on personal and relatable aspects of motherhood and could, therefore, influence other mothers online.

Next to the personal and relatable content momfluencers offer, they frequently focus on portraying motherhood in a romanticized way but hardly ever depict the difficulties and realities of the role (Le Moignan et al., 2017). This may lead mothers to compare themselves socially with the idealized portrayals of motherhood they encounter online. Feelings of inadequacy may result from comparison, especially upward comparison, in which people assess themselves against the ideal (Festinger, 1954). While there could be debate about the

helpfulness or harmfulness of momfluencers, social networking sites have developed into a useful tool for keeping track of common experiences, knowledge, and guidance about getting pregnant, giving birth, and raising children (Chee et al., 2023).

When it comes to parenting advice and health information, a significant portion of today's mothers are turning more and more to social networking sites (SNSs) like Instagram, whereas previous generations of parents typically relied on family, friends, and healthcare professionals in their immediate environment (Moon et al., 2019). Therefore, social media provides instant access to health information from like-minded individuals, which is more likely to be ideologically aligned than evidence-based (Frey et al., 2023). An example of a community of affinity could be like-minded mothers sharing tips on parenting or meal suggestions for kids. Health experts are becoming increasingly concerned about the quality of health-related information available online as a result (Germic et al., 2021).

Health-related content can be detailed specifically as food-related content. Since food is a hot topic among mothers, companies took advantage of this and teamed up with momfluencers to market their goods (Routh, 2023). A company that frequently works together with influencers is HelloFresh, a meal-kit company (HelloFresh, n.d.). Various momfluencers promote the brand by making videos like momfluencer @miniliefde making a smoothie with her daughter with the smoothie box from HelloFresh (Erin Noelle, 2023). The primary gatekeepers of children's diets are their parents, particularly the moms in the family, whose views and consumption decisions are now frequently influenced by the viewpoints of social media influencers (Beuckels & De Jans, 2022), which indicates that food decisions and purchases are influenced online. Previous research states that influencer marketing has successfully encouraged children to eat foods low in nutritional value; however, it is less determined whether influencers can also be utilized to promote a healthy diet (De Jans et al.,

2021). Therefore, more insights on effective persuasive strategies by momfluencers on food intake need to be investigated in more depth.

This study focuses on how first-time mothers perceive and respond to the persuasive strategies of momfluencers. First-time mothers are women confronted with a new role they have never played before, being a mother. First-time mothers may be regarded as especially vulnerable to the possible effects of social media influencers because of the significant physical, emotional, psychological, and social difficulties they encounter throughout the early stages of parenthood (Chee et al., 2023). While first-time mothers have no prior experience in taking care of a child, advice from other mothers online could be helpful (Ouvrein, 2022). Therefore, first-time mothers are susceptible to being influenced on their purchases by momfluencers, for example, due to little experience and knowledge they may have, while several studies have focused on the influence of social media influencers on the purchase intentions of first-time mothers (Masuda et al., 2022; Liu & Zheng, 2024), research on how momfluencers influence the dietary choices of first-time mothers have yet to be explored.

The current study delves into the influence of momfluencers on first-time mothers' dietary choices to understand how the persuasive strategies used by momfluencers affect their consumer behavior and to provide deeper insights into the impacts on public health. While many studies focus on momfluencers' motivations or persuasiveness on mothers online, little to no research has been done regarding momfluencers and their influence on food intake. It is interesting to find out whether first-time mothers are persuaded by dietary choices and what factors contribute to this persuasiveness. Therefore, this study delves into the persuasive strategies employed by momfluencers on the dietary choices of first-time mothers, with the following research question:

RQ: *How do first-time mothers perceive and respond to persuasive strategies employed by 'momfluencers' in promoting healthy food intake on Instagram, and what factors contribute to the perceived effectiveness of health-related content in influencing their dietary choices?*

Theoretical framework

To understand the role of social media influencers, particularly momfluencers, in this study, we will examine the persuasive techniques used to influence dietary choices and health behavior and the role of first-time mothers. This literature review dives into these diverse topics accordingly.

Social media influencers

For this literature review, it is crucial to understand what social media influencers are and how they engage online. Social media influencers are digital content creators characterized by their sizable online following, unique brand identity, and consistent partnerships with corporate sponsors (Duffy, 2020). Social media influencers incorporate brand endorsements into their posts and personal narratives to create content that seems genuine and has value for consumption (Lou & Yuan, 2019) compared to regular paid advertising. Authenticity, crucial for an influencer's capacity to persuade others, is particularly enhanced by the consistency and originality of the content, as discovered by Zniva et al. (2023). Influencers establish trust with their audience by demonstrating authenticity using transparency (Wellman et al., 2020). Because viewers are more likely to think they will obtain reliable counsel or a sincere opinion about particular business or items, influencer-endorsed products are seen as more authentic and credible (Folkvord, 2020).

However, when authenticity and brand promotion collide, urgent concerns regarding the morality of influencer marketing arise (Duffy, 2020). The innate urge of social media influencers to produce content related to their interests may be distracted by business offers

that give them the chance to endorse things or companies they would not otherwise be interested in (Audrezet et al., 2020). Nevertheless, according to Wellman et al. (2020), influencers make decisions about sponsored content based on authenticity, which guides them as they think about how to make money by collaborating with commercial businesses while at the same time building a close, trustworthy bond with their audience. Building a close and reliable online relationship could contribute to developing a parasocial relationship from the follower's point of view.

A parasocial relationship, defined by Horton & Wohl (1956), is one-sided and developed by the follower over time and may be characterized by little to no sense of duty, effort, or responsibility on the side of the social media influencer. The more you feel connected to the influencer, the more likely you are, as a follower, to perform the same (buying) behavior. Three factors are crucial in the formation of parasocial relationships: the audience traits, the source or communicator attributes, and the way the two interact with each other (Yuan & Lou, 2020). These parasocial relationship attributes explain how the influencer's persuasive power affects the follower concerning advertising effectiveness (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Because influencers uphold the notion that we are purchasing something through a person we know or trust, these parasocial relationships significantly increase the strength of shop ability (Petersen, 2023) or purchase intention.

Influencers are capable of influencing the purchase intention of their followers. Due to our constant and voluntary access to them, momfluencers have a significant influence on the purchasing behaviors of individuals, particularly mothers (Petersen, 2023b). A survey commissioned by Business Instagram states that the average mother checks Instagram six times each day, while 68% of millennial mothers use the platform daily (Özkan, 2021). In light of the current study, mothers are a dominant factor regarding their children's food intake, resulting in purchase decisions. According to several studies, mothers play a crucial

role in terms of nutrition in the household, responsible for the children's food intake and making food available at home (Damen et al., 2019; Kueppers et al., 2018). Mothers using platforms like Instagram may experience influences that affect their food choices. Hence, it holds great relevance to get more insight into the role of momfluencers and their impact on the buying decisions of other first-time mothers.

The role of momfluencers

Momfluencers use personalized content, focusing on motherhood and dealing with parenting in a recognizable way to the follower (Hunter, 2016). Mothers are likely to engage with such content because it reflects on firsthand experience and, in addition, places a high value on the information provided by these momfluencers (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Since momfluencers are more approachable compared to companies and traditional celebrities, mothers find it easy to relate to and are more likely to value their opinions and advice as legitimate (Abidin, 2015). As stated before, because momfluencers uphold the notion that we are purchasing something through a person we know or trust, these parasocial relationships increase the strength of our shop ability (Petersen, 2023). Therefore, mothers feel engaged and may identify with these momfluencers based on the guidance, recommendations, and inspiration momfluencers offer.

According to Kumar & Schoenebeck (2015), mothers tend to focus on four different kinds of photos while posting: milestones, hilarious pictures, pictures with friends and family, and endearing pictures. Next to these four types of content, momfluencers incorporate sponsored content by promoting a product or service. In a study on momfluencers and mothers' food assessment by Beuckels & De Jans (2022), mothers prefer sponsored Instagram posts from momfluencers over those from brands, which has a favorable impact on purchase intention, post engagement, source legitimacy, and the food's suitability for children. This shows that momfluencers have a powerful influence on mothers and might

have an even more powerful impact on first-time mothers. If momfluencers adopt a mentorship or expert role toward mothers, their actions could have a substantial impact on the mental and physical health of their audience (Chee et al., 2023).

First-time mothers

First-time mothers and so-called primigravida, women who are currently pregnant with their first child, are confronted with a new role: becoming a mother. Since primigravida and first-time mothers have no prior experience to draw from, the advice of other mothers on the Internet is especially beneficial (Ouvrein, 2022). Transitioning from a known, present reality to an unknown, new reality is part of being a mother (Baker & Yang, 2018). The whole perinatal period is a period of psychological shift during which the woman develops competence and confidence in her position as a mother, in addition to physiological change as the body heals from pregnancy (Mercer, 2004). However, being a mother can be challenging and cause uncertainty and insecurity among young mothers. Therefore, first-time mothers form an adequate target group for those momfluencers.

First-time mothers tend to look up to other mothers and compare themselves to these mothers to find out if they are performing motherhood in the right way. In literature, social comparison theory describes the notion that people are driven to compare their thoughts and talents to others to assess their own (Festinger, 1954). Mothers may feel inferior to other mothers they see online due to comparisons between their experiences and idealized, even faultless representations of motherhood (Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2022). Besides comparing yourself to the momfluencers' type of parenting, mothers may also compare their dietary choices with other momfluencers. This results in the fact that mothers may socially compare themselves with someone whose kids consistently seem to eat healthy (Vogel et al., 2014), also referred to as an upward comparison. An upward comparison happens when someone feels they don't match up to the comparison objective (Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2022). Our

perception of the quality and quantity of our own meals is influenced by comparisons with the meals of others (Polivy, 2017).

Mothers' motivation to follow momfluencers on Instagram may vary based on their food assessment. Lee et al. (2021) identified four main reasons for following social media influencers on Instagram: consumerism, authenticity, envy, and creative inspiration. For first-time mothers, these motivations may intersect with the desire to gather information on motherhood. Mothers may follow the "intuitive mothering" discourse, which is based on the views and knowledge of other mothers (Beuckels & De Jans, 2022). Next to "intuitive mothering", mothers may follow the "medicalized mothering" discourse, where first-time mothers may feel socially positioned and influenced to believe that they are ignorant and in need of professional advice and information from healthcare providers to address problems (Price et al., 2017). This approach may lead first-time mothers to seek an appropriate diet for their children and to become well-informed or skilled in nutrition.

First-time mothers and food intake

Even though several mothers make decisions based on information they find online, research shows that there is a lack of reliable, fact-based nutritional advice on the internet that is interactive and collaborative (Zarnowiecki et al., 2020). Momfluencers who offer simply personal experiences and lack education on the subject are perceived as less credible than experts who share content with their followers (Beuckels & De Jans, 2022). However, mothers' impression of the suitability of food for children and their intention to purchase increases when they see typical momfluencers are more aligned with companies (Beuckels & De Jans, 2022). However, the study of Folkvord et al. (2020) demonstrates that in order to market a healthy product effectively, influencers must build a warm, personal connection with their audience. Thus, the trust between the influencer and the viewer is more important in this situation than the level of expertise of the specific influencer.

With a specific focus on first-time mothers, several factors might influence the food assessment of these mothers. According to Damen (2019), children's eating choices are significantly influenced by the moms' level of education. Compared to moms with only a high school or primary education, women with college degrees feed their kids more fruits and vegetables (Saldiva et al., 2014). Given the variety of personal, societal, community, and environmental factors that impact mothers and families, choosing nutritious foods seems to be a complicated process (Arora et al., 2021). However, characteristics that make it easier for mothers to incorporate more fruits and vegetables include having the information and abilities necessary to plan and cook healthful meals (Dumas et al., 2020). Therefore, first-time mothers are empowered to make healthier choices for their children if they have access to trustworthy and understandable nutritional information and helpful advice.

Persuasive techniques

In the light of theoretical backgrounds, we can find several theories in literature on how social media influencers, and therefore, momfluencers persuade their followers. Various persuasive techniques are compared accordingly. Social media influencers frequently use emotional appeals to strengthen persuasion (Lee & Theokary, 2021). Cute content frequently elicits emotional responses and persuades users to feel or act in particular ways (Golonka et al., 2023). One of the most persuasive factors influencing human behavior is cuteness, which may even increase compassion (University of Oxford, 2016). Therefore, momfluencers portraying their children online may contribute to this emotional appeal regarding their followers.

According to Liu & Zheng (2024), the most important factors influencing the relationship between social media influencers and their followers are their authenticity, followed by their homophily and the educational value of their content. As first-time mothers have no prior experience and require information on motherhood, easily accessible information from a

momfluencer they feel associated with online is valuable for these mothers. Moon et al. (2019) highlight that mothers value having constant and immediate access to an endless supply of information via social media. Moreover, Park et al. (2023) found that mothers benefit from platforms like Instagram, which allow them to quickly and easily address parenting challenges and seek parenting resources. Therefore, Instagram serves as an ideal platform for mothers to gather information online, where content with educational value is essential.

Another technique used by momfluencers to persuade their followers is incorporating sponsored posts. According to Gross & Von Wangenheim (2022), sponsored posts have a higher level of user engagement than non-sponsored posts, which has a beneficial impact on social media engagement. Brand awareness and the "willingness to act on ad-conveyed information" are improved when consumers have faith in sponsored advertisements (Soh et al., 2009). Moreover, momfluencers posting sponsored content on Instagram are perceived as more persuasive compared to a brand promoting sponsored content (Beuckels & De Jans, 2022). Therefore, the persuasiveness of sponsored posts is enhanced when momfluencers are perceived as credible and authentic.

To conclude, this study identified three crucial persuasive techniques that are tangible to test, such as using emotional appeal when showing their child, providing educational value through nutritional advice, and making recommendations while incorporating sponsored content. These techniques are crucial and can be tested directly for their effectiveness.

Method

Based on a qualitative research approach, several interviews were conducted to examine how first-time mothers perceive and respond to persuasive strategies of momfluencers in promoting healthy food intake. This approach was chosen to investigate

what factors contribute to the effectiveness of the momfluencers' content on the dietary choices of mothers because qualitative research allows for a deeper exploration of first-time mothers' perspectives and experiences. Using a qualitative interview approach is an effective method for assisting individuals in expressing implicit thoughts, feelings, and understandings by making things plain that were previously implicit (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Using a qualitative approach, you can refine your preconceptions and expand on your thought process while examining and assessing the problems from a comprehensive angle (Jamshed, 2014). The aim is to obtain subjective data regarding a specific subject or experience (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Therefore, this approach focuses on interpreting the meaning of participants' experiences and comprehending people's perspectives and reactions related to momfluencers.

Participants

In the current study, ten first-time mothers were interviewed (*M = 28.9, SD = 2.77)*. The requirements for the participants were that they were Dutch-speaking, first-time mothers who used Instagram, and additionally, they had to follow at least one momfluencer. By ensuring that participants were directly exposed to the content and persuasive strategies used by momfluencers, the last requirement allowed them to respond effectively to questions regarding this topic. The participants were recruited via personal networks using snowball sampling. In this method, one participant recommended another participant, who was then recruited and interviewed. This approach was chosen to facilitate the recruitment of first-time mothers who might be interested in participating and took advantage of pre-existing social relationships to make it easier to reach out to them.

Materials

A semi-structured interview guide was used during the interview. This approach was chosen because it allows for unplanned follow-up questions, which can be asked during the

interview (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019), where it seeks even deeper into the perceptions and responses of the participants. To facilitate interaction, opening questions should be general and easy to respond to while still being relevant to the research topic (Knott et al., 2022). Therefore, the interview guide was designed by starting with broad questions. To eventually dive into more specific questions. Before the interview was conducted, the interview guide was tested on wording and structure with two first-time mothers. The complete interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

The interview started with several demographic questions, like age and educational background. Additionally, participants were asked about their social media usage, engagement with momfluencers, and perception of persuasive strategies used by momfluencers. To examine how first-time mothers perceive and respond to persuasive strategies of momfluencers in promoting healthy food intake, they were shown different types of content of a momfluencer during the interview. An Instagram momfluencer and nutrition coach, who focuses on teaching babies, toddlers, and preschoolers how to eat healthier, was chosen for this purpose. To minimize potential bias and ensure that participants' preconceived notions or opinions did not influence the results, a micro-momfluencer was selected. According to Forbes (2021), micro-influencers have followers between 10,000 and 50,000. This choice was made to increase the likelihood that participants were not previously familiar with the momfluencer, thereby avoiding any pre-existing perceptions.

The different types of content shown are based on their relevance and tangibility to the persuasive techniques identified in the theoretical framework and entail emotional appeal, sponsored content, or educational content. Three types of content for this momfluencer on Instagram were chosen accordingly. Content type 1 focuses on emotional appeal, where the momfluencer shares and cooks a recipe in a video and is visible with her daughter, strengthening the maternal bond and being able to respond to the first-time mother's emotion

(Viviènne, 2023-a). Content type 2 is a sponsored post in which the momfluencer runs a win for a high chair and indirectly promotes the brand of the chair while cooking. In the video, the momfluencer is visible, as well as her daughters (Viviènne, 2023-b). Content type 3 is an educational post where the momfluencer shares meal tips in a video where only her daughter is visible eating soup (Viviènne, 2024). Different types of content were chosen to compare different persuasive strategies. After showing each type of content, the participants were asked several questions regarding the persuasive strategies used. Lastly, the participants were asked about the factors influencing the effectiveness of health-related content.

Procedure

After the participants were recruited, they received an information letter via email to explain the purpose of the study. The information letter can be found in Appendix B. Interviews were conducted between the 8th of May and the 27th of May. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online via Google Meet, with two interviews conducted at the first-time mother's house and eight interviews conducted online. During the interview, the participants were handed an informed consent, which can be found in Appendix C. Both the information letter and informed consent form are developed based on the GDPR checklist of Tilburg University for student research. After signing the informed consent, the interview began, and with the participants' permission, the interview was recorded via a mobile phone. During the interviews, participants were shown different types of content from a momfluencer. Participants who participated online were sent a web link to the Instagram post via chat, while those in face-to-face interviews viewed the content on a laptop. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Analysis

After all the interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed accordingly using Microsoft Word. All verbal communication, like laughter and pauses, was transcribed

accordingly. The transcribed interviews were checked regarding the anonymity of the participants, and any identifiable information was rephrased and anonymized. The interviews were first analyzed using a thematic analysis to identify patterns, main themes, and sub-themes. Next, an abductive approach was used to analyze the data. An abductive approach, also known as a deductive-inductive approach, operates recursively by bouncing back and forth between the interview data and theoretical framework (Knott et al., 2022). Deductively, a set of codes was used based upon the theoretical framework, like the authenticity of influencers, parasocial relationships, mothers' motivation for following momfluencers, and persuasive techniques. The coding scheme can be found in Appendix D. Inductively, new codes were developed based on the interview data, including themes like food intake and enhancing credibility and relatability of momfluencers' content. The final coding scheme can be found in Appendix E.

Results

This study explored how first-time mothers perceive and respond to persuasive strategies used by momfluencers on Instagram to promote healthy food intake. Additionally, it sought to identify the factors that influence the perceived effectiveness of health-related content in influencing dietary choices. Ten first-time mothers were interviewed, and the results were analyzed based on various themes, codes, and sub-codes derived from the coding scheme. These themes include experiences as first-time mothers, Instagram usage and interaction, perception of momfluencers, food intake, persuasive techniques, enhancing credibility and relatability of momfluencers' content, and factors influencing the effectiveness of health-related content. The listed themes will be discussed in more depth in the following sections, but first, an overview of the demographics will be given.

Demographics participants

The participants were asked several sociodemographic questions regarding their age, educational background, marital status, and children. Most participants obtained a university master's degree (60%), while two participants (20%) obtained a University of Applied Sciences bachelor (HBO), one participant (10%) obtained a university bachelor and the remaining participant (10%) completed level four MBO (secondary vocational education). Most participants were not married but do live together (50%). The remaining participants are married (30%) or have a registered partnership (20%). All participants had one child aged between five weeks and four years. Table 1 illustrates the different ages of the participants' children.

Table 1

The ages of the participants' children

Participants	**Child age**
Participant 1	4 years
Participant 2	6 months
Participant 3	6 months
Participant 4	7 months
Participant 5	5 weeks
Participant 6	1 year
Participant 7	11 months
Participant 8	5 months
Participant 9	16 months
Participant 10	1 year
Mean age	**12.425 months**

Experiences as first-time mothers

Being a mother overlaps with a new phase where your whole life changes. Life comes with a new perspective, and finding the right balance with your newborn can be challenging sometimes. All participants report on the positive aspects of motherhood in which they feel much love for their baby and express that it is an enrichment for life. This is a special time period where participants see the development of their children and grow in their role as mothers. Simultaneously, eight participants also indicated that motherhood can sometimes be exhausting occasionally. Maternal insecurities come into play because you are doing everything for the first time, in addition to an overload of emotions and the numerous choices you have to make with an overload of information online. Yet motherhood is perceived as predominantly positive.

Instagram usage and interaction

All participants use the platform daily, which varies from viewing once a day to several times a day. Most mothers describe themselves as passive Instagram users, primarily consuming content rather than sharing it themselves. Participants who do post content tend to share stories more frequently than actual posts, focusing on their baby, milestones, or activities. One participant mentioned occasionally participating in giveaways hosted by momfluencers to win child-related products, indicating a more active level of user engagement.

All participants mention interacting with motherhood content to see what keeps other mothers busy and to gain information and advice. This content ranges from momfluencers to more informative accounts. Based on the algorithm, participants indicate to get in touch with new momfluencers or accounts, illustrated by: *"I do get targeted content based on my interests, and because of that, I started following a few people" (participant 3).* Furthermore,

participants interact with friends and family, food, sports, animals, fashion and lifestyle, funny content, music, and household content.

Perception of momfluencers

Mothers' motivation for following

The main reason for following momfluencers is their relatability. Identification refers to the level of relatability that participants feel towards the momfluencer. Participants indicate that it is important to identify with the momfluencer, which is best illustrated by: *"They not only share fun things but just the reality, that sometimes it's just pretty though too"* (participant 9). In line with this is the authenticity of the momfluencer, expressed in an honest way: "*I think the reason why I follow them is the inspiration they offer and also that they do occasionally just be honest also about the downsides"* (participant 4). In contrast, several participants mentioned following a momfluencer with triplets because it intrigues and interests them as a unique brand identity. In addition, the motivation of other participants depended on the emotional appeal the momfluencer offered, inspiration, guidance, and recommendations.

The reason for following different momfluencers mentioned by participants is that momfluencers offer various types of content. For example, to see different perspectives or parenting styles. In addition, several participants mentioned that they had been following influencers for a considerable time, even before becoming mothers. As these participants transitioned into motherhood, they noticed that the content of influencers they followed also began to include more motherhood-related topics. These influencers became momfluencers. This natural evolution in the influencers' content led to coincidentally following multiple momfluencers.

Content engagement

A pattern discovered based on the responses about content engagement is the importance of authenticity and transparency. When content focuses on honest stories and shares struggles or dilemmas, participants tend to engage more with it. Recognition is again a crucial factor, illustrated by: *"Content that matches most how I do it"* (participant 7). Additionally, participants indicate that engagement is higher for content focused on child development, lifestyle and nutrition, inspiration, and learning new topics regarding nutrition. However, the phase mothers are currently in with their babies and what they are looking for varies. Engagement is lower for some participants when momfluencer incorporates extensive sponsored posts, causing doubts among mothers regarding the credibility of the momfluencer. This is illustrated by: *"Suppose momfluencers praise something immensely, then sometimes I still find it quite difficult to know if they really stand behind that product or if they post this because you get paid for it, so I am critical of that"* (participant 4). Lastly, some participants mentioned that engagement is lower when the child's privacy is not protected or misused.

Feelings arising from viewing momfluencer content

The feelings arising from viewing momfluencer content differ among participants. Half of the participants mention feelings of self-confidence, affirmation, and inspiration, recognizing themselves in the momfluencer. This is illustrated by: *"Especially the feeling that what you do, it will be fine"* (participant 3), and they take it with a grain of salt. However, the other half of the participants have mixed feelings. They may feel self-confident in their role and experience recognition, they could also feel inadequate as mothers and socially compare themselves with momfluencers. This is illustrated by: *"It can give you a sense of security, someone who experiences the same thing at that time, but when I see other people and it goes a lot smoother with feeding, then sometimes that can cause a bit of uncertainty"* (participant 5). Several participants mentioned that it depends on how calm the

baby is, which can influence to what extent they socially compare themselves with other momfluencers.

Food intake

Encouragement by momfluencers to follow a healthy diet

Most participants highlight how they are positively encouraged by momfluencers to follow a healthy diet. For example, momfluencers share practical recipes, tips, and personal experiences regarding nutrition, explain the benefits, and present information in a factual manner. In addition, momfluencers create awareness about specific dietary information, such as checking labels for nutrients, and they recommend specific products. In contrast, some participants also mentioned that some of the content regarding a healthy diet is unrealistic illustrated by: *"It motivates me to offer more varied food, on the other hand, I think it should not get too crazy, like giving the child a 10-course meal. I think no one has time for this, so that is very unrealistic"* (participant 2). This causes a mother to be unable to identify with the momfluencer because the food offered does not reflect her own life.

Furthermore, participants highlight the unrealistic content because they are pushed to a certain level, like only biological or anthroposophical. This confuses participants: *"She does occasionally go so far that I can get a bit confused now and then"* (participant 4) or shows contradictory information online: *"I am pushed by that one side to feel guilty if I buy a supermarket product and not from the organic shop, and so I also follow many people who do not, who just buy the Olvarit jar as well"* (participant 7). Therefore, momfluencers can encourage first-time mothers to follow a healthy diet, but for their content to effectively support and engage with their audience, the content needs to be realistic and relatable. Lastly, three participants mentioned that the momfluencers they follow do not engage in nutritional content or momfluencers do not encourage them.

Changing dietary choices

The dietary choices of participants are not necessarily changed because nutrition in the household follows a specific pattern. Additionally, when the child is functioning and eating well, participants indicate that there is less need to change dietary choices. However, dietary choices can be influenced in some ways. Most participants mention being open to trying new things and getting inspired by the content they see. For example: *"You also have quite a lot of that content where you see children tasting new things, and when I see that, it does motivate me to think of oh, when was the last time [child's name] had something new"* (participant 6). Therefore, seeing the content might make mothers socially compare the dietary choices of their child to those of the momfluencers they see online. Most participants also indicate that when momfluencers share their personal experiences with a specific brand or product, which might influence their choices in adopting these recommendations, illustrated by: *"They always eat this kind of yogurt, it pleases the kids, let me try it too"* (participant 1).

Persuasive techniques

Emotional appeal

Participants indicated that the positive aspects of the emotional appeal type content are due to its personalized nature. Seeing the momfluencer with her daughter and observing the child's happiness evokes happy feelings. Additionally, participants are more persuaded by the activity of cooking or baking with their child compared to trying the actual recipe. In contrast, two participants were not pleased to see the child on screen frequently, concerning the child's privacy, which made the content less persuasive for them. Moreover, some participants mentioned that the content is unrealistic: *"You just have to have the time to start doing this again with your baby outside of all the other things I also have to do"* (participant

7). For some, the content was not relatable due to the older age of the children in the videos, which indicates how crucial relatability is in the content participants see.

Sponsored post

Participants have mixed feelings regarding the sponsored post-type content. Several participants indicated that it is nice to show how to involve your child in cooking, making it relatable: *"I can also see myself letting my little son help with all sorts of things and playfully letting him help with them"* (participant 10). However, participants also questioned the credibility of the momfluencer due to the brand promotion, such as when a chair is being sold. Therefore, the sponsored-type content was perceived as less persuasive compared to the other content types.

Educational value

Most participants react positively to the educational content type, appreciating practical and multipurpose tips. The momfluencer does not dictate what you should make but tries to make healthy food more enjoyable. Participants indicate that the simplicity of the content is crucial, illustrated by: *"You do get triggered quickly by something that then stands as nutritious, but also quick and easy, so I guess this does appeal to me a bit more"* (participant 5). However, mixed feelings arise about the credibility of the influencer. Some participants noted that the momfluencer is also a nutrition coach, which makes the content more trusted, indicating that a momfluencer's background can influence how the content is perceived, whereas other participants would preferably rely on the nutrition center. To conclude, the emotional appeal and educational content type were perceived as most persuasive by participants.

Enhancing credibility and relatability momfluencers' content

Participants mention various techniques that could help enhance the content of other momfluencers online, making it more relatable, credible, and persuasive. Recurring strategies identified by participants primarily focus on enhancing the reliability of the content. For instance, incorporating scientific sources and expert advice into momfluencers' health-related content enhances its credibility. This is best illustrated by: *"Linking it to something where there is confidence or where you feel it is validated"* (participant 4). So first-time mothers need to hold on to the advice from momfluencers where there is confidence.

Moreover, participants mentioned the importance of momfluencers' content related to sharing tips on how to eat, techniques or nutritional benefits, and not necessarily what you eat. Next to that, the simplicity of the content is crucial because participants indicate that first-time mothers need easy and nutritious recipes. Furthermore, participants suggested that momfluencers should target more on lower-budget families more by featuring recipes with fewer ingredients, making them more accessible and easier to make. One participant noted the importance of excluding promotions from the content provided by momfluencers.

Factors influencing effectiveness of health-related content

Several factors influence the effectiveness of health-related content mentioned by participants. Participants noted that the personal experiences of momfluencers contribute to the effectiveness of health-related content. For example, sharing experiences on what works best for their kids in terms of nutrition and the relatability of the content can make mothers feel confident in their role as mothers. Moreover, participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of the expertise of the momfluencer, such as being a dietician and a mother. This is best illustrated by: *"Then when I see it in the title, for example, that it is a coach, I trust that a bit more than someone who posts on social media every week with a giveaway"* (participant 5). Therefore, the credibility of the momfluencer is crucial, especially regarding

brand promotion participants are more skeptical. Participants did not mention noticing much contradictory information, but if they did, they were more likely to rely on their own opinion or consult the nutrition center (online) if it suited their child.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out how first-time mothers perceive and respond to persuasive strategies employed by momfluencers in promoting healthy food intake and investigate what factors contribute to the perceived effectiveness of health-related content in influencing dietary choices. This section will analyze and interpret the results in more depth, explain the limitations of the study, and provide suggestions for future research regarding first-time mothers and the persuasiveness of momfluencers.

Interpretation of the results

Persuasive techniques

Participants were persuaded most by content that employed emotional appeal and educational value. Due to its personalized nature, most participants responded positively to the emotional appeal type of content, where seeing a mother and her daughter in a regular kitchen cooking food evokes emotional and relatable feelings. This implies that participants are attracted by the emotional stimuli, which aligns with the findings of Lang et al. (2008), where portraying everyday situations can evoke emotional feelings. Moreover, participants were more eager to perceive the activity of cooking together compared to trying the actual recipe, which again indicates that mothers are more persuaded by the emotional appeal of cooking together than influenced by their dietary choices.

Some participants mentioned that engagement is lower when the child's privacy is not protected or misused within the content seen. This aligns with Van Den Abeele et al. (2024), highlighting the possibility for momfluencers to safeguard privacy by anonymizing kids

within their content. However, according to Murad et al. (2014), the primary element influencing consumers' purchasing power is the representation of children online, which again contrasts with the participants reporting the child being in the picture a lot, which made the content less persuasive for them. Moreover, to be persuaded and relate to the momfluencer, the age of the momfluencer's child and the relatability to the participants' child age is crucial. Whereas, otherwise the content of the momfluencer would be used simply for inspiration instead of applying it immediately in their household. The difference between content serving as inspiration instead of application is significant, as it highlights how crucial relatability is in the content perceived by the participants.

The momfluencers' credibility is questioned by some participants when the content includes brand promotion. According to Duffy (2020), when authenticity and brand promotion collide, urgent concerns regarding the morality of influencer marketing arise. However, a crucial note was made during the interviews by the participants. Showing the sponsored chair in the content (the participants got to see it) made it relatable because it shows how to involve your child in cooking. Moreover, the personal experience of the momfluencer is repeatedly highlighted as crucial when promoting a brand. Due to the fact that these mothers have no prior experience they are open to recommendations, information, and guidance. Seeing these personal experiences helps mothers feel more motivated and inspired to try new products and make dietary changes. Momfluencers must share their honest experience and, most importantly, show how the child experiences or likes the food product, which enables persuasion.

Some participants perceived the content as unrealistic because, as mothers, they often lack the time to cook extensive meals or bake with their children due to work and other obligations. Mothers who witness near-flawless, idealized depictions of parenthood may compare their experiences to those of momfluencers they see online and feel inadequate

(Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2022). Social comparison can create feelings of inferiority; however, participants also recognized that the content they see is often unrealistic for an ordinary mother. Participants highlight the unrealistic content because they are pushed to a certain level on Instagram, like influencers focusing on only biological food or in an anthroposophical way, which causes confusion and shows contradictory information online. It is, therefore, important for mothers to see content that fits their diet and is relatable and easy to purchase. Consequently, mothers seek simple, nutritious meals and are more persuaded when a momfluencer shows the simplicity of the content and meal, making it easy to access and follow.

Mothers seek practical tips and content that serve as multipurpose, highlighting the educational value of the momfluencer content. Mothers receive tips to make healthy eating more enjoyable and inspiration to try out new techniques or recommendations to apply. However, the mother's expertise in food can make a difference in how the content is perceived. According to Beuckels & De Jans (2022), regular momfluencers are less successful at promoting food because they have less authority compared to momfluencer experts, like nutritionists, which aligns with the findings of participants about the importance of the nutritional background of the mother, ensuring substantial reliability. Yet many participants still appear to prefer information from the nutrition center.

Participants mentioned several techniques that could help enhance the content and make it more persuasive. Advice from an expert momfluencer is crucial, where mothers receive advice from a mother and expert, making it relatable and applicable. Mothers use momfluencer content more as inspiration, so content that capitalizes on nutritional benefits or tips to apply. Mothers need relatable content that is simple and nutritious, which aligns with the findings of Abidin (2015) that the relatability of the content is a way to persuade your followers to identify with them. Furthermore, participants may have viewed the content more

as inspiration for future use rather than something they could immediately apply because of the age disparity regarding the children seen in the content compared to their own children. Therefore, this could have influenced how the participants perceived the content shown.

Factors influencing effectiveness

The effectiveness of health-related content is influenced by several factors. Participants have contradictory responses: on one hand, they valued the personal experiences of other mothers who share what works best for their kids regarding nutrition. However, this contrasts with the findings of Beuckels & De Jans (2022), who found that momfluencers offering only personal experiences without an educational background are perceived as less credible than experts sharing content. On the other hand, participants also emphasized the importance of the expertise of the momfluencer. For mothers to feel recognized and build trust, the momfluencer must be both an expert and a mother, ensuring both reliability and credibility.

To conclude, participants found content with educational value more persuasive in promoting healthy food intake because it provided practical inspiration and tips they could incorporate into their baby's nutrition. In contrast, content with emotional appeal was more engaging due to the activity's emotional appeal rather than the actual healthy food itself. The perceived effectiveness of health-related content was influenced by factors such as the personal experiences of the momfluencer, the relatability of the content, and the expertise of the momfluencer. Furthermore, when the momfluencer had both professional and personal knowledge, the credibility of the momfluencer was increased. Therefore, first-time mothers need realistic content, easily applicable and delivered by momfluencers perceived as credible and relatable.

Limitations

Several limitations regarding the scope of this study should be noted. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only first-time mothers, most of whom had completed a master's degree. While this allowed for an in-depth qualitative analysis, the findings may not be generalizable to a broader population. Secondly, the content shown to the participants during the interviews featured children of a higher age compared to the participants' children. This age disparity may have made it difficult for participants to relate to the content, as their children are still very young and not able at this age to engage in activities like cooking.

In addition, several participants mentioned during the interviews that the momfluencers they follow, or momfluencers they come across online, do not necessarily focus on nutritional content. This lack of focus on nutrition may introduce potential biases in the study. Participants might experience social desirability, providing answers they believe are expected of them instead of their own feelings and thoughts. This social desirability bias might limit the study, making it appear that nutritional content is more persuasive or prevalent than it actually is. Yet, participants were also presented with nutritional content. Therefore, they would have been able to give an honest opinion based on the content they saw.

Lastly, during the interviews, it became clear that the phase mothers are currently in with their babies and what they are looking for varies. This causes participants' responses to differ when looking at informational needs, which aligns with the findings of Park et al. (2023), who found that depending on the babies' months of age, mothers required varied parenting advice, with mothers being more in demand of information when the baby was younger. Therefore, the difference between informational needs limits the study because it makes it more difficult to generalize the findings to all first-time mothers.

Future research

Future research could delve into how persuasive strategies are perceived among a more diverse group of first-time mothers, whereas this study consisted of mostly higher educated first-time mothers. Therefore, future research could delve into more diverse educational and cultural backgrounds of first-time mothers. In addition, one of the interviews mentioned that the participant's partner (male) was responsible for cooking at home. This also indicates that not only first-time mothers but also their partners are more and more in charge of the household and thus also an important group to investigate. Therefore, future research could delve into how men are persuaded into healthy eating choices online to break down the stereotypes or compare the perceived persuasiveness between men and women.

Conclusion

This study delved into the persuasive strategies employed by momfluencers in promoting healthy food intake on Instagram and what factors contributed to the perceived effectiveness of health-related content in influencing dietary choices. Despite the limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the impact of momfluencers on the dietary choices of first-time mothers. This study highlighted the importance of educational value in content while promoting healthy food intake by providing practical advice, while content focusing on emotional appeal was perceived as persuasive due to the activity's emotional appeal rather than the actual healthy food itself.

For most people, dietary choices have a specific pattern within the household, which makes it difficult to influence them. While mothers are open to inspiration and recommendations, they tend to rely more on expertise and authoritative sources, like the nutrition center or an expert momfluencer, for dietary advice. Ultimately, this highlights the importance of credible and expert-based content in persuading mothers to adopt specific dietary practices for their children.

The phase mothers are currently in with their babies and what they are looking for varies, making the informational needs of first-time mothers differ, which influences the perceived persuasiveness. First-time mothers are in need of momfluencers who offer both personal experiences, making the content relatable, as well as expert-based content to enhance the credibility of the momfluencer. The combination of both personal and professional advice may influence the dietary choices of first-time mothers. With these limitations in mind, future research could delve into more knowledge on momfluencers and their persuasive impact on dietary choices, particularly among diverse demographic groups.

References

Abidin, C. (2015). Micromicrocelebrity: Branding Babies on the Internet. *M/C Journal*, *18*(5). https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1022

Arksey, H., & Knight, P. (1999). *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA43658047

Audrezet, A., De Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. G. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, *117*, 557–569. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008

Baker, B., & Yang, I. (2018). Social media as social support in pregnancy and the postpartum. *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare*, *17*, 31–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2018.05.003

Beuckels, E., & De Jans, S. (2022). 'My Mom Got Influenced by Yours': The persuasiveness of mom influencers in relation to mothers' food assessments and decisions. *Appetite*, *178*, 106269. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2022.106269

Capdevila, R., Dann, C., Lazard, L., Roper, S., & Locke, A. (2022). #mothersday: Constructions of motherhood and femininity in social media posts. *Feminism & Psychology*, *32*(3), 336–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/09593535221107832

Chee, R. M., Capper, T., & Muurlink, O. (2023). The impact of social media influencers on pregnancy, birth, and early parenting experiences: A systematic review. *Midwifery*, *120*, 103623. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2023.103623

Damen, F. W., Luning, P. A., Fogliano, V., & Steenbekkers, B. L. (2019). What influences mothers' snack choices for their children aged 2–7? *Food Quality and Preference*, *74*, 10–20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2018.12.012

De Jans, S., Spielvogel, I., Naderer, B., & Hudders, L. (2021). Digital food marketing to children: How an influencer's lifestyle can stimulate healthy food choices among children. *Appetite*, *162*, 105182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2021.105182

DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: a balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, *7*(2), e000057. https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2018-000057

Duffy, B. (2020). Social Media Influencers. *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119429128.iegmc219

Dumas, A., Lemieux, S., Lapointe, A., Provencher, V., Robitaille, J., & Desroches, S. (2020). Factors influencing engagement and dietary behaviour change of mothers and their children in a blog-delivered healthy eating intervention: a process evaluation of a randomised controlled trial. *Public Health Nutrition*, *24*(9), 2689–2703. https://doi.org/10.1017/s136898002000484x

Erin Noelle [miniliefde]. (2023, February 6). *Afgelopen weekend ging ik met Keet de keuken in. Ik ben niet altijd die moeder die hiervoor de tijd neemt*. [Reel]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/C3BBnJmohbW/

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, *7*(2), 117–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202

Folkvord, F., Roes, E., & Bevelander, K. E. (2020). Promoting healthy foods in the new digital era on Instagram: an experimental study on the effect of a popular real versus fictitious fit influencer on brand attitude and purchase intentions. *BMC Public Health*, *20*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09779-y

Forbes. (2021, June 2). Micro-Influencers: When smaller is better. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/06/02/micro-influencers-when-smaller-is-better/?sh=2241d5cd539b

Frey, E., Bonfiglioli, C., & Frawley, J. (2023). Parents' use of social media for health information before and after a consultation with health care professionals: Australian Cross-Sectional Study. *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting*, *6*, e48012. https://doi.org/10.2196/48012

Germic, E. R., Eckert, S., & Vultee, F. (2021). The impact of Instagram Mommy Blogger content on the perceived Self-Efficacy of Mothers. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(3), 205630512110416. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211041649

Golonka, E. M., Jones, K., Sheehan, P., Pandža, N. B., Paletz, S. B. F., Rytting, C. A., & Johns, M. (2023). The construct of cuteness: A validity study for measuring content and evoked emotions on social media. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1068373

Gross, J., & Von Wangenheim, F. (2022). Influencer Marketing on Instagram: Empirical Research on Social Media Engagement with Sponsored Posts. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *22*(3), 289–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2022.2123724

HelloFresh. (n.d.). *Influencer-samenwerking met HelloFresh*. https://www.hellofresh.nl/about/influencers

Horton, D., & Wohl, R. (1956). Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction. *Psychiatry MMC*, *19*(3), 215–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049

Hunter, A. (2016). Monetizing the mommy: mommy blogs and the audience commodity. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(9), 1306–1320. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2016.1187642

Hwang, K., & Zhang, Q. (2018). Influence of parasocial relationship between digital celebrities and their followers on followers' purchase and electronic word-of-mouth intentions, and persuasion knowledge. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *87*, 155–173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.029

Jamshed, S. Q. (2014). Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation. *Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacy*, *5*(4), 87. https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-0105.141942

Keegan, M. (2023, May 17). How momfluencers came to dominate influencer marketing. *PR Week*. https://www.prweek.com/article/1823199/momfluencers-dominate-influencer-marketing

Kirkpatrick, C. E., & Lee, S. (2022). Comparisons to picture-perfect motherhood: How Instagram's idealized portrayals of motherhood affect new mothers' well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *137*, 107417. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107417

Knott, E., Rao, A. H., Summers, K., & Teeger, C. (2022). Interviews in the social sciences. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, *2*(1). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-022-00150-6

Kueppers, J., Stein, K., Groth, S. W., & Fernandez, I. D. (2018). Maternal and child dietary intake: The role of maternal healthy-eater self-schema. *Appetite*, *125*, 527–536. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2018.01.014

Kumar, P., & Schoenebeck, S. (2015). The Modern Day Baby Book. *Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, 1302–1312. https://doi.org/10.1145/2675133.2675149

Lang, P., Bradley, M. M., & Cuthbert, B. N. (2008). International affective picture system: Affective ratings of pictures and instruction manual. *Technical Report A-8 University of Florida, Gainesville, FL*. https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1370285712545076738

Lee, M. T., & Theokary, C. (2021). The superstar social media influencer: Exploiting linguistic style and emotional contagion over content? *Journal Of Business Research*, *132*, 860–871. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.11.014

Lee, J. A., Sudarshan, S., Sussman, K. L., Bright, L. F., & Eastin, M. S. (2021). Why are consumers following social media influencers on Instagram? Exploration of

consumers' motives for following influencers and the role of materialism. *International Journal of Advertising*, *41*(1), 78–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1964226

Le Moignan, E. L., Lawson, S., Rowland, D., Mahoney, J., & Briggs, P. (2017). Has Instagram fundamentally altered the "Family snapshot"? *In Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 4935–4947. https://doi.org/10.1145/3025453.3025928

Liu, X., & Zheng, X. (2024). The persuasive power of social media influencers in brand credibility and purchase intention. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02512-1

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer Marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *19*(1), 58–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501

Masuda, H., Han, S. H., & Lee, J. (2022). Impacts of influencer attributes on purchase intentions in social media influencer marketing: Mediating roles of characterizations. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *174*, 121246. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121246

Mercer, R. T. (2004). Becoming a mother versus maternal role attainment. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *36*(3), 226–232. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2004.04042.x

Moon, R. Y., Mathews, A., Oden, R. P., & Carlin, R. F. (2019). Mothers' perceptions of the internet and social media as sources of parenting and health information: Qualitative study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *21*(7), e14289. https://doi.org/10.2196/14289

Murad, K., Saahar@Saabar, S., & Halim, A. A. (2014). Does Cuteness Sell? A content analytic study of children portrayal in press advertisement. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 29–40). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-45-3_4

Ouvrein, G. (2022). Mommy influencers: Helpful or harmful? The relationship between exposure to mommy influencers and perceived parental self-efficacy among mothers and primigravida. *New Media & Society*, 146144482210862. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221086296

Özkan, M. M. (2021, May 9). *Mom influencers ruling the Instagram game*. INFLOW Network. https://inflownetwork.com/mom-influencers-ruling-the-instagram-game/

Park, S., June, K., & Yu, J. (2023). Analysis of parenting informational needs for mothers with infants and toddlers using text-mining. *Children And Youth Services Review*, *145*, 106768. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106768

Petersen, S. (2023). *Momfluenced: Inside the Maddening, Picture-Perfect World of Mommy Influencer Culture*. Beacon Press.

Petersen, S. (2023-b, September 7). "Momfluencers" know how to turn their followers into customers, and it's a lucrative business. *Business Insider*. https://www.businessinsider.com/momfluencers-influence-online-shopping-2023-9?international=true&r=US&IR=T

Polivy, J. (2017). What's that you're eating? Social comparison and eating behavior. *Journal of Eating Disorders*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-017-0148-0

Price, S., Aston, M., Monaghan, J., Sim, M., Murphy, G. T., Etowa, J., Pickles, M., Hunter, A., & Little, V. (2017). Maternal Knowing and social networks: Understanding First-Time mothers' search for information and support through online and offline social networks. *Qualitative Health Research*, *28*(10), 1552–1563. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317748314

Routh, B. J. (2023, November 6). *The rise of the mom influencers*. Forbes India. https://www.forbesindia.com/article/digital-stars-2023/the-rise-of-the-mom-influencers/89495/1

Saldiva, S. R. D. M., Venâncio, S. I., De Santana, A. C., Da Silva Castro, A. L., Escuder, M. M. L., & Giugliani, E. R. J. (2014). The consumption of unhealthy foods by Brazilian children is influenced by their mother's educational level. *Nutrition Journal*, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2891-13-33

Soh, H., Reid, L. N., & King, K. W. (2009). Measuring trust in advertising. *Journal Of Advertising*, *38*(2), 83–104. https://doi.org/10.2753/joa0091-3367380206

Trammell, K. D., & Keshelashvili, A. (2005). Examining the New Influencers: A Self-Presentation Study of A-List Blogs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *82*(4), 968–982. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900508200413

University of Oxford. (2016). *How cute things hijack our brains and drive behaviour*. https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/how-cute-things-hijack-our-brains-and-drive-behaviour

Van Den Abeele, E., Vanwesenbeeck, I., & Hudders, L. (2023). Child's privacy versus mother's fame: unravelling the biased decision-making process of momfluencers to portray their children online. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2023.2205484

Viviènne [kidsvoeding]. (2023-a, October 16). *Dit wil je maken! RECEPT PI-PA POMPOEN CAKE (glutenvrij en suikervrij) bewaar voor later! We love pompoen! je kunt hier*. [Reel]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CydyAJeorId/

Viviènne [kidsvoeding]. (2023-b, March 8). *GESLOTEN. Winactie! Alledrie mijn meiden helpen mij al vanaf jongsafaan in de keuken. Als dreumes hielpen ze al met kleine.* [Reel]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/reel/C4Q2cwBrhVH/

Viviènne [kidsvoeding]. (2024, January 4). *Wist je dat je soep heel eenvoudig voedzamer kunt maken voor kids? ook voor kieskeurige kids? Voeg hennepzaadjes toe (gezonde*. [Reel]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/C1sLzD4rWkI/

Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, *3*(4), 206–222. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000047

Wellman, M. L., Stoldt, R., Tully, M., & Ekdale, B. (2020). Ethics of authenticity: Social media influencers and the production of sponsored content. *Journal of Media Ethics*, *35*(2), 68–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2020.1736078

Yuan, S., & Lou, C. (2020). How Social Media Influencers Foster Relationships with Followers: The Roles of Source Credibility and Fairness in Parasocial Relationship and Product Interest. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *20*(2), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2020.1769514

Zarnowiecki, D., Mauch, C. E., Middleton, G., Matwiejczyk, L., Watson, W. L., Dibbs, J., Dessaix, A., & Golley, R. K. (2020). A systematic evaluation of digital nutrition promotion websites and apps for supporting parents to influence children's nutrition. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, *17*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-020-0915-1

Zniva, R., Weitzl, W., & Lindmoser, C. (2023). Be constantly different! How to manage influencer authenticity. *Electronic Commerce Research*, *23*(3), 1485–1514. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10660-022-09653-6

Appendix

Appendix A: Interview guide

Introduction

Welcome to this interview! First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this study.

The goal of this study: In this study, I am interested in how you perceive and respond to momfluencers promoting healthy food intake and what factors contribute to the effectiveness of health-related content in influencing your dietary choices.

Procedure: First of all, I would like to ask you some demographic questions. Next to that, we will proceed with questions regarding your social media usage, engagement with momfluencers, and your perception of persuasive strategies used. You are welcome to share your experiences, and please know that there is no right or wrong answer. Your point of view is most interesting to me. Your answers cannot be linked to you, and the thesis will not contain your identity. You will always remain anonymous.

Recording: I would like to record the interview to accommodate all of the outcomes. As soon as I transcribe the interview, I will promptly destroy the recordings. Are you okay with me recording the interview? *[Start the recording if the participant agrees with it]*

Informed consent: I would like you to read the informed consent, which requests your permission to participate in the interview and describes your rights as a participant before we start. We can get started with the interview if you agree and don't have any further questions. Do you have any remaining questions?

Context

I will first start with some demographic questions:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your education level?
3. What is your current employment status or occupation?
4. What is your marital status?
5. How old is your child/how old are your children?
6. Could you share some of your experiences as a first-time mother?

Social media usage and influencer engagement

Now, I would like to ask you some questions regarding your social media usage and how you engage with momfluencers online.

7. How would you describe your Instagram usage?
    - How frequently do you use Instagram?
    - How do you use the platform? View, share, and if so, what?
    - What kind of content do you usually interact with on Instagram?
8. How would you describe what a momfluencer is in your own words?
9. What kind of content do momfluencers post in your opinion?
10. Do you follow any momfluencers? And if so, which momfluencers do you follow?
11. Why do you follow these momfluencers?
12. What are your reasons for following different momfluencers?
13. Which type of content from momfluencers do you prefer, and why?
14. How does viewing content from momfluencers on Instagram make you feel as a mother?
    - Does it boost your confidence or does it make you feel inadequate in your role as a mom?

Perception of persuasive strategies

Next, I would like to ask you some questions regarding the persuasive strategies used by momfluencers.

15. How do momfluencers encourage you to have a healthy food intake?
16. Could you give an example of how a momfluencer successfully convinced you to change your dietary choices?
17. How do you believe viewing the dietary choices of momfluencers affects your eating habits?

Next, I would like to show you some content of a momfluencer and afterward ask you to respond.

[Showing content – content-type 1: recipe]

18. What are your thoughts on how persuasive this content is in encouraging healthy dietary choices?

[Showing content – content-type 2: sponsored post]

19. What are your thoughts on how persuasive this content is in encouraging healthy dietary choices?

[Showing content – content-type 3: meal tips]

20. What are your thoughts on how persuasive this content is in encouraging healthy dietary choices?
21. Which kind of content is most effective at persuading you to alter your eating habits? Explain why?
22. Did you find any particular parts of the content to be especially compelling or influential based upon all 3 types of content? What did they look like?
23. How likely are you to plan meals or make food selections based on any of the concepts or recommendations found in the content?
24. What could be done to improve the persuasiveness of the content you viewed?
25. Did the information inspire or give you more confidence to choose better foods? If yes, could you explain how you felt?

Factors influencing the effectiveness of health-related content

26. What distinguishes health-related content produced by momfluencers from other dietary information sources like traditional media as being more compelling or influential?

27. To what extent does trust in momfluencers influence your decision to follow health-related advice?
28. What sets successful momfluencers apart from other momfluencers when it comes to encouraging the consumption of healthy food intake? Are there any particular approaches you think are convincing?
29. Have you ever received contradicting advice about nutritional choices from several momfluencers? If so, how can you sort through all of this contradicting information to determine which advice is best?

Ending

We have now arrived at the last two questions of this study.

30. Do you have any last questions regarding the interview?
31. Are there any things you forgot to say, and still would be valuable for this study?

We have reached the end of the interview. I appreciate you taking the time to complete this study and would like to thank you for your insightful answers. I will analyze your responses accordingly. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you have any more questions or would like to know the findings of this study. I will now stop the recording.

Appendix B: Information letter

Dear participant,

We appreciate your participation in this study on first-time mothers' perspectives and reactions to momfluencers. In this information letter, I would like to inform you about the study, explain the purpose of the study, and inform you about the rights you have as a participant. This study delves into how first-time mothers perceive and respond to persuasive

strategies employed by momfluencers in promoting healthy food intake on Instagram and what factors contribute to the perceived effectiveness of health-related content in influencing dietary choices.

In this study, you will participate in an in-depth interview. Some demographic questions will be asked first. Next, the interview will delve deeper into your social media usage, engagement with momfluencers, and persuasive strategies used by momfluencers. The interview will last approximately one hour.

It is completely voluntary for you to take part in this study. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to end the interview at any moment without giving a reason if you decide to take part. Any personally identifiable information, like your name, will not be requested from you. Your responses will be kept private at all times.

We have security measures in place to guarantee the confidentiality of your data using a secure system of the University, and we will handle it with discretion. Without disclosing any personal information by removing identifying information, we will analyze the responses to the questions. The content will be handled with care and used just for this study. We will record the interview to facilitate proper analysis. Only the interviewer, thesis supervisor, and designated tutor will have access to the audio recordings, which will be erased following data analysis. The interviewer will request your consent before recording. The anonymous data is stored until the thesis is finished and will be destroyed afterward.

In case anything is unclear to you or you have any questions regarding the study, let me know. Please notify the student if you wish to drop out of the study.

Appendix C: Informed consent

This content form verifies your rights as a participant, asks for your confirmation that you intend to participate in the study, and determines whether you are pleased with the information that has been provided about it. In order to take part in the study, please check the relevant box.

	Yes	**No**
Did you manage to read the information letter?		

Did you get a chance to ask the student any more questions regarding the research?		
Did you have adequate knowledge about the study to decide whether or not to participate?		
Did you know this study is completely voluntary?		
Do you know that you have the choice to not respond to questions?		
Are you aware that your withdrawal from the study at any point, for any reason, won't have an impact on the services you receive going forward?		
Is it clear to you that the student will maintain the confidentiality of your data?		
Do you know that you have the right to ask for access, correction, erasure, limitation, or objection to the processing of your data?		
Would you be open to taking part in this research?		

I give my permission to take part in this study by signing this informed consent.

Name participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name student:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix D: Coding scheme (theoretical framework)

Codes based upon the theoretical framework:

- **Characteristics of social media influencers**
    - Sizable online following
    - Unique brand identity
    - Brand endorsements
    - Personal narratives
- **Authenticity of influencer**

    - Consistency of content
    - Originality of content
    - Transparency
    - Trust
    - Authenticity and brand promotion
    - Morality
- **Parasocial relationship**
    - Connectedness
    - Trustworthiness
- **Momfluencers**
    - Personalized content
        - Recognizable
    - Guidance
    - Inspiration
    - Recommendations
        - Sponsored content
- **First-time mothers**
    - Crucial role in household nutrition
    - No prior experience
    - Social comparison
        - Confidence
        - Insecurity
- **Mothers' motivation for following momfluencers**
    - Consumerism
    - Authenticity

    - Envy
    - Creative inspiration
    - Gather information
        - Intuitive mothering
        - Medicalized mothering

- **First-time mothers and food intake**
    - Credibility
        - Personal experiences
        - Expert advice

- **Persuasive techniques**
    - Emotional appeal
        - Positive
        - Negative
    - Authenticity
    - Homophily (bond with other mothers)
    - Educational value
    - Sponsored posts

Appendix E: Final coding scheme

The final coding scheme is based on the theoretical framework, as well as the interview data.

- **Experiences as first-time mother**
    - Positive
        - Fun, special, new
        - Development of child
    - Negative
        - Challenges (e.g. decision-making, social support, social life)

        - Exhausting
        - Emotion overload

- **Instagram usage**
    - Passive
        - Watching (e.g., due to less activities, more at home)
    - Active
        - Watching & sharing (e.g., stories, posts)
        - Participating in giveaways

- **Interaction on Instagram**
    - Motherhood
    - Friends/family
    - Food (e.g., recipes)
    - Sports (e.g. postpartum workout)
    - Animals
    - Fashion/lifestyle
    - Funny posts
    - Music
    - Household

- **Momfluencers**
    - Mothers' motivation for following
        - Relatability
        - Authenticity of momfluencer
        - Emotional appeal momfluencer
        - Inspiration (e.g., exploratory, eventually based on Voedingscentrum)
        - Unique brand identity

        - Guidance
        - Recommendations
    - Reasons for following different momfluencers
        - Coincidentally (following them before they became a mom)
        - Interesting content
        - Different perspectives/parenting style
    - Content engagement
        - Negative
            - Privacy of children not protected
            - Credibility momfluencer (e.g., brand promotion)
        - Positive
            - Authenticity & transparency (e.g., honest stories, struggles, dilemmas
            - Recognition
            - Child development
            - Learn new topics (e.g. regarding nutrition)
            - Lifestyle/nutrition
            - Inspiration (e.g., activities)
    - Feelings arising from viewing momfluencer content
        - Neutral
            - Take with a grain of salt
        - Self-confidence
            - Inspired
            - Recognition
        - Mixed feelings

        - Social comparison
    - Confused
        - Information overload

- **Food intake**
    - Encouragement by momfluencer to follow a healthy diet
        - Negative
            - Unrealistic
        - Positive
            - Sharing recipes, tips (e.g. practical, fresh)
            - Personal experience momfluencer (e.g. benefits)
            - Awareness of dietary information (e.g., checking food labels)
            - Recommendations
    - Changing dietary choices
        - Credibility
            - Personal experiences
        - Positive
            - Brand endorsements
        - No impact
            - Diet is a pattern
            - Child is doing fine
        - No prior experience (as first-time mother)
            - Social comparison
            - Consumerism
            - Gather information, guidance

- **Persuasive techniques**

- Emotional appeal
  - Positive
    - Personalized content (e.g. together with child, child happy)
  - Negative
    - Privacy of children not protected
    - Unrealistic
- Sponsored post
  - Positive
    - Showing how it works
    - Involve child
  - Negative
    - Derived from brand promotion
    - Unrealistic (e.g., to cook/bake everyday)
    - Not relatable
    - Credibility of momfluencer
- Educational value
  - Positive
    - Tips serve as multipurpose, accessible
  - Credibility momfluencer
    - Expert advice

- **Enhancing credibility and relatability momfluencers' content**
  - Scientific sources
  - Sharing tips (how to eat, not what)
  - Benefits healthy food (e.g., with this meal 50g)
  - Simplicity content (e.g. easy recipes, nutritious, quick)

  - Expert advice
  - Targeting at lower budget families
  - No promotion

- **Factors influencing effectiveness of health-related content**
  - Personal experiences
  - Relatability
    - Self-confidence
  - Expertise mother (e.g. dietician)
  - Credibility
    - Brand promotion
  - Contradictory information
    - Rely on own opinion and if it suits the child