UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON ATTITUDES, TRUST & PURCHASE INTENT: TRAVEL USER GENERATED CONTENT

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE

FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

DIEGO PEREZ BRETON BORBON
Norman, Oklahoma
2024

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON ATTITUDES, TRUST & PURCHASE INTENT: TRAVEL USER GENERATED CONTENT

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Doyle Yoon, Chair

Dr. Glenn Leshner

Dr. Jensen Moore

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family. I could not have done this without their support. Because of them, I was able to persevere and successfully find the motivation within me to write this thesis.

Secondly, I would like to extend my gratitude to my chair, Dr. Doyle Yoon. I could not have asked for a better person to guide me through my thesis. After long meetings, and countless discussions, he supported me and mentored me in into writing a thesis I can be proud of. I am really thankful for him to have believed in me and my work. He was always clear and logical on his instructions, and I thank him for taking the time of the day each week to read my work and guide me through the next steps. I could have not been able to complete this thesis without him.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of Instagram nano, micro, and macro influencers on consumer's brand and influencer attitudes, trust and purchase intent toward travel-related content. Using the Persuasion Knowledge Model as a theoretical framework, this study analyzes how the presence or absence of sponsorship disclosures within Instagram posts might mediate and affect consumer's attitudes and behaviors. The purpose of the study is to add to influencer marketing literature by exploring how consumer attitudes and behaviors may vary across types of influencers on the presence or absence of sponsorship disclosure. The study employs a 3 (influencer type: macro-influencer vs. micro-influencer vs. nano-influencers) x 2 (sponsorship disclosure: present vs. not present) between-subjects design experiment. Through a experiment, University of Oklahoma students were randomly assigned to 1 out of 6 possible groups. Participants were shown a fictitious Instagram influencer post promoting a beach resort. After exposure to the Instagram post, trust, attitudes, and purchase intent effects were analyzed. The presence of statistically non-significant results may indicate an intricate relationship between influencers and individuals. This potential complex relationship might benefit from further research incorporation the role of parasocial relationships. Understanding real life relationships between influencers and followers might result in more accurate results. Despite this, the study found that there is an interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship disclosure on participant attitudes toward influencers. A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) showed that non-sponsored posts from micro-influencers received significantly more positive attitudes toward the influencers than sponsored posts from the same influencer type. Additionally, attitudes toward nano-influencers in sponsored and non-sponsored posts were similar. Also, sponsored posts coming from macro influencers showed more positive attitudes

toward the influencer in comparison to non-sponsored posts. Furthermore, the study found that individuals who were exposed to sponsored Instagram posts had low levels of purchase intent. An independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the mean levels of purchase intent between participants exposed to sponsored and non-sponsored Instagram posts. Results showed that participants exhibited both low purchase intent levels toward sponsored posts and lower purchase intent levels in comparison to non-sponsored posts. Finally, an independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the mean levels of influencer attitudes toward sponsored and non-sponsored posts. Results did not only show that participants exhibited negative attitudes toward influencers in sponsored posts, but also that influencer attitude levels were more positive in non-sponsored posts

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As long as consumers are connected to the Internet, especially on phones, they are able to take part in buying activities on-the-go (Bahtar & Muda, 2015). Through mobile phones, consumers generate a bond with their social media platforms, and the bonds formed compel consumers to rely on User-Generated Content (UGC) when making online purchase decisions (Bahtar & Muda, 2015). While practitioners and scholars are beginning to study, recognize, and analyze the importance of influencers and their UGC, few studies have jointly explored the effects of the different types of influencers and their UGC on consumer purchase intent.

In general terms, UGC is any type of content created and uploaded by individuals instead of brand accounts (Beveridge, 2022), which are online representations of non-personal company entities such as The Coca-Cola Company, Hilton Hotels, or Starbucks. UGC can take the form of text, video, or any other type of content created and published by users on social media networks (Geng & Chen, 2021). Furthermore, UGC can be created by micro and macro social media influencers (Masude et al., 2021) or nano-influencers, who tend to be customers of a brand and just wish to share their opinions about a product (Beveridge, 2022). Follower count is what differentiates each type of influencer, with nano-influencers having less than 10,000 followers (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022), micro-influencers having between 10,000 and 50,000 followers (Christison, 2022), macro-influencers having between 100,000 and 1,000,000 followers (Conde & Casais, 2023).

Brands, regardless of their size, can sponsor influencers' UGC. Such sponsored content is defined as the intentional inclusion of branded products and persuasive messages into content that is typically non-commercial (Müller & Christandl, 2019). Sponsored content, or branded UGC, involves any commercial post created by a social media user that is centered around and

influenced by a brand or product. Regardless of whether UGC is branded or not, UGC forms part of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) that encompasses statements (either positive, negative, or both) toward products made by real, potential, or past customers (Bahtar & Muda, 2015).

Individuals' influence within the marketing realm shows how persuasive electronic word of mouth can be (Lisichkova & Othman, 2017). Different types of influencers may influence and elicit different responses and reactions (Conde & Casais, 2023). Because of that, it is important to study how such individuals may distinctively affect the advertising sphere. As marketing efforts evolve, new ways of advertising arise. One of those ways would be the inclusion of sponsored UGC that is influenced by brands and utilized to promote products through different types of social media influencers.

This study used the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) to see how online users react to different types of persuasion messages conveyed by different types of influencers and influencer posts. The PKM states that people learn to identify and fight off marketing efforts (Friestad & Wright, 1994), and as time goes on, people start to learn to identify newer marketing efforts online. Newer marketing efforts include sponsored social media posts. And regardless of such new efforts, sponsorship disclosures of social media posts have the ability of negatively impacting influencers (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022) and brand reputations (Kay et al., 2019). Understanding how UGC coming from different types influencers may affect trust, attitudes, and purchase intentions, are all be explored in this study.

1.1 Study Significance and Contribution to the Field of Strategic Communication

Social media's UGC is important and worthwhile because individuals are the ones believed to influence the marketing and advertising world (Lisichkova & Othman, 2017). Brand messages can be perceived by users as being intrusive and unauthentic (Martinez-López et al.,

2020). Instead, users want to hear from people who they perceive to have an authentic voice and not a scripted message (GRIN, 2022). Because of this, consumers are more likely to trust the recommendations made by their peers and influencers than the messages conveyed by a brand (Barker, 2020). This research has implications for theory and practice; it seeks to conceptualize and investigate different levels of social media influencers (nano-influencers, macro-influencers, and micro-influencers) in terms of theoretical contributions. Using the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) theory, implications about the different attitudes toward influencers could be made. This is because the PKM states that people learn to cope and respond to advertising efforts (Friestad & Wright, 1994), and the nature of nano-influencers (typically non-commercial oriented) and micro and macro influencers (typically commercial oriented) are different. From a strategic communication perspective, this study contributes data that provides empirical evidence on the practicality of social media users and how their UGC affects trust, attitudes, and consequently, consumer interest toward the products and services portrayed in the UGC itself.

1.2 Study Goals and Objectives

This research paper aims to examine the relationship between the user-generated content source (influencer type) and the level of purchase intent toward the products highlighted in different types of UGC (sponsored and non-sponsored). The purpose of the current study is to add to the literature on influencer marketing by conducting an experiment that detail how influencer type may affect consumers' trust, attitudes and purchase intent based on sponsorship disclosure type. Finally, the study uses the Persuasion Knowledge Model to see if persuasion knowledge toward different types of influencer posts mediates consumer purchase intent.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Persuasion Knowledge Model

Theories regarding advertising persuasiveness frequently draw upon psychological models that help explain how messages affect audiences under different circumstances (Ham & Nelson, 2019). However, some models may not fully contemplate factors such as what the audience knows, thinks, or feels about a persuasion process (Ham & Nelson, 2019). These factors are important because they may shape how individuals respond to persuasion messages (Ham & Nelson, 2019). For instance, if a brand hires a social media influencer to advertise a product, but audiences do not feel like the influencer is a true advocate of the brand, they might reject the message. On instances like this one, the audience's knowledge of persuasive messages disrupts the persuasion process (Ham & Nelson, 2019).

Because of the effect that persuasion knowledge may have on individuals' responses to advertising effects, The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), a conceptual piece written by Marian Friestad and Peter Wright, was formulated in order to "present a model of how people's persuasion knowledge influences their responses to persuasion attempts" (Ham, Nelson & Das, 2015, p. 17). The function of the model is to describe the process and predict how persuasion knowledge can impact the persuasion process itself (Ham et al., 2015). The model focuses on individual's understanding of both persuasion motives and strategies (Miksa & Hodgson, 2021). This understanding, or knowledge, enables people to decipher, asses, and respond to marketer's advertising messages (Miksa & Hodgson, 2021).

In part, the Persuasion Knowledge Model explores how the persuasion knowledge that consumers possess influences the outcome of persuasion attempts (Rahmani, 2023). Persuasion knowledge can be defined as "people's beliefs about the psychological events that may result in

persuasion, and the effectiveness and appropriateness of particular persuasion tactics" (Rahmani, 2023, p. 13). In other words, persuasion knowledge refers to people's beliefs about the psychological tactics that persuasion messages use to successfully persuade their targets. But also, consumers' knowledge about marketer's goals and their beliefs regarding how persuasion works (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2021). For example, a psychological tactic that consumers might identify is the use of attractive individuals in advertisements, which they may believe are intended to make consumers want to imitate them (Ham & Nelson, 2019). But it is important to note that the word "believe" in the past sentence is a crucial part of persuasion knowledge. This is because persuasion knowledge is not always true; rather, it reflects consumers perceptions of the persuasive message (Ham & Nelson, 2019).

Although not explicitly mentioned on Friestad and Wright's (1994) original PKM paper, subsequent studies show that there is a difference between objective and subjective persuasion knowledge (Ham & Nelson, 2016). Subjective persuasion model refers to the consumer's perception of how certain persuasion messages work (Ham & Nelson, 2016). For example, a consumer thinks that the background music from an advertisement they saw on TV contained subliminal messages intended to incline viewers to buy the product. On the other hand, objective persuasion refers to the actual persuasion tactic used (Ham & Nelson, 2016). For example, the background music for an advertisement on TV was chosen because of a current pop culture trend. Consumers' subjective persuasion knowledge may not always align with the actual persuasion tactics used by marketers (Ham & Nelson, 2016). However, and regardless of whether or not consumers know the true tactic behind a persuasion message, persuasion knowledge is based on beliefs about persuasion tactics rather the objective facts (Rahmani, 2023)

At the heart of persuasion knowledge lies the concept of persuasion, and to fully understand persuasion knowledge, it is important to grasp what persuasion is and what it entails within the PKM (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2021). In more recent studies, and throughout literature, there are a various definitions and conceptualizations of persuasion, but at its core, Eisend & Tarrahi (2021) describe it as "an intentional effort through communication to influence a receiver who has some degree of freedom of choice" (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2021, p.4). Multiple researchers often think of persuasion as the act of solely changing someone's attitudes, but Eisend & Tarrahi's (2021) definition of persuasion offers a broader view of the concept.

On the other hand, Friestad and Wright depict persuasion from the perspectives of both of targets and agents (Ham et al., 2015).The Persuasion Knowledge Model was created with the goal of "developing an integrated theory of the interplay between agents' and targets' persuasion knowledge, that is, what marketers believe and what consumers believe" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 22).

Targets are the consumers who are exposed to persuasion messages (Ham et al., 2015), or "those people for whom a persuasion attempt is intended" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 2). On the other hand, agents are to the organizations, or individuals who speak in the name of an organization, responsible for communicating the persuasion messages (Ham et al., 2015), or "whomever a target identifies as being responsible for designing and constructing a persuasion attempt" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 2). According to Friestad and Wright's Persuasion Knowledge Model, targets and agents come together in persuasion episodes (e.g. advertisements) (Ham et al., 2015) through their own knowledge structure about persuasion (Ham & Nelson, 2019). Such types of knowledge include, topic knowledge, persuasion knowledge, and

knowledge of the other party (target or agent), and they help each party create a response to the persuasion episode (Ham et al., 2015).

Agent knowledge consists of what consumers believe to be the agent's goals (Ham & Nelson, 2019). Additionally, target knowledge refers to the agents' beliefs regarding their target profile data, buying behaviors, and overall perceptions of the agent (Ham & Nelson, 2019). Furthermore, topic knowledge includes both the agent and the target knowledge about the topic of the persuasion message (e.g. product functions, industry, brand reputation, etc.) (Ham & Nelson, 2019). Finally, and as stated before, persuasion knowledge consists of the beliefs surrounding advertising-related issues, such as marketer's objectives and strategies (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). For agents, their knowledge helps them formulate persuasion attempts, and for targets, persuasion coping behaviors (Ham et al., 2015).

This study involves influencer marketing, which encompasses a partnership between individuals (influencers) and organizations (brands) to market a product online (Matthew, 2018). This collaboration creates a dual-agent dynamic in which both the influencer and the brand serve as persuasion agents. This dual-agency allows for influencers and brands to leverage each other's persuasive attributes. For example, influencer characteristics such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness have been shown to positively affect attitudes and trust in brands (Liu & Zheng, 2024). On the other hand, brands can strengthen influencer marketing efforts by contributing their brand credibility to the partnership. Brand credibility is the reputation and the brand image that an organization builds with their customers over time, which allows them to effectively influence consumer purchases (Pechinski, 2022). Even though both parties may be able to benefit each other and produce an effective influencer marketing post, consumers'

awareness of advertising efforts can still increase perceived bias, decrease trust, and raise sincerity concerns (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020; Pfeuffer & Huh, 2020).

One of the primary uses of persuasion knowledge is for targets to deduce agent's underlying motives (Kirmani, 2009). Research has identified numerous factors that increases the likelihood of suspecting ulterior motives (Kirmani, 2009). Some of these factors include perceived bias and the use of borrowed-interest tactics (Kirmani, 2009), both which are applicable to influencer marketing. Perceived bias can be inferred due to the compensations that influencers obtain from brand collaborations. Additionally, borrowed-interest tactics can be perceived by consumers as brands attach persuasive messages to influencers with an established public interest. Both factors allow for targets to more easily identify agent's ulterior motives, raising suspicions, message resistance, and less favorable attitudes toward both agents (Kirmani, 2009). This suggests that knowledge toward a dual-agent social media post, where both the influencer and the brand act as persuasive agents, can negatively affect attitudes and the post's overall goal of driving sales.

This study puts an emphasis on the target (consumer) persuasion knowledge. This decision was made because existing literature has a predominant focus on target persuasion knowledge, and not agent knowledge (Rahmani, 2023).

2.1.1 Activation of Target Persuasion Knowledge

The presence of persuasion knowledge can be defined as "the process in which a persuasion episode activates valenced perceptions of the underlying motives of an agent in the mind of a target" (Rahmani, 2023). A persuasion episode is part of the target's coping behavior (Ham & Nelson, 2019). When a consumer is faced with a persuasion attempt, they can recall their existing brand attitudes (Ham & Nelson, 2019). By doing so, they can cope, or manage how

they respond to the persuasion message (Ham & Nelson, 2019). Past studies indicate that when persuasion knowledge becomes active in the face of a persuasion message, consumers may be able to pinpoint the underlying motives behind the persuasion attempt (Rahmani, 2023).

Persuasion knowledge reacts with persuasion attempts by engaging in coping behaviors that prioritize consumers' salient goals (Rahmani, 2023). These goals are any objective or psychological outcome that consumers may aspire to obtain after an exposure to a persuasive message (Rahmani, 2023). Such goals and objectives can either be positive or negative (Rahmani, 2023). For example, someone can choose to ignore an advertisement because of their own perceptions of the brand, while someone else might choose to digest the information because of their good relationship with the company. Regardless, most empirical papers about persuasion knowledge suggest that when persuasion knowledge (PK) is activated, negative reactions are more prevalent than positive ones (Rahmani, 2023).

2.1.2 Persuasion Knowledge Today

Eisend & Tarrahi (2021) points out that there are many studies that have explored how consumer's persuasion knowledge affects people's responses to persuasion attempts. While the majority of research suggests that persuasion knowledge leads to negative evaluations of advertising messages, Eisend & Tarrahi (2021) argues that findings may vary. As a result, Eisend & Tarrahi (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 148 papers and 171 data sets to better understand persuasion knowledge and its effects on the marketplace. His research showed that the effects of persuasion knowledge on evaluation and coping were stronger for personalized advertisements, low-involvement products (e.g. basic persuasion tactics as sex appeal and humor), unfamiliar products, and adult samples (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2021).

Furthermore, a more recent study by Lim, Sung, & Hong (2023), explored how persuasion knowledge of online targeted advertising affected views on privacy concerns and how intrusive the ads felt. Today's consumers are more tech-savvy and knowledgeable about online target ads (Lim, et al., 2023). Through online behavioral advertising, marketers are able to track users' behaviors and create personalized online ads based on interests and preferences (Ham & Nelson, 2016). Such practice is said to benefit users as they are provided with more relevant advertising content (Ham & Nelson, 2016) But while the data collected by marketers may communicate more relevant ads, online targeted advertising practices use of personal information face privacy issues (Lim, et al., 2023). Persuasion knowledge about online targeted ads allows user to identify the personal information used in targeted ads, allowing them to better recognize and cope with such persuasion attempts (Lim, et al., 2023).

Lim, et al.'s (2023) study of persuasion knowledge and online targeted advertising consisted of a simulation representing an online user's journey from internet browsing and online shopping, to Instagram feeds. His results showed that participants with high levels of persuasion knowledge toward online targeted advertising exhibited higher confidence on their ability to successfully cope with persuasive messages (Lim, et al., 2023). Additionally, their findings demonstrated that such belief of coping with online advertisements positively affected privacy concerns and ad intrusiveness (Lim, et al., 2023).

Finally, Hwan & Zhang (2018) examined how users' parasocial relationship with social media influencers affects purchase intent and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in relation to persuasion knowledge. Marketers know the influence that online celebrities hold on their followers and regard them as powerful and effective advertising tools (Hwan & Zhang, 2018). In their literature Hwan & Zhang (2018) explain that parasocial relationships can help to better

understand the relationship between social media influencers and the persuasion power they hold over online users (Hwan & Zhang, 2018). Hwan & Zhang (2018) argue that even though the presence of persuasion knowledge has a negative impact on brand attitudes and purchase intent, a strong parasocial relationship with social media influencers may reduce consumers persuasion knowledge.

Hwan & Zhang (2018) conducted an experiment involving 389 social media users who follow social media influencers. Their research not only supported previous findings indicating that persuasion knowledge has a negative effect on both purchase intent and eWOM but found that parasocial relationships with influencers mitigated the negative effects that persuasion knowledge has on purchase intent and eWOM (Hwan & Zhang, 2018). Participant's close relationship with influencers showed to reduce the negative effects that persuasion knowledge has on online users (Hwan & Zhang, 2018). This is important because not all types of influencers may have the same levels of parasocial relationship with their followers. For example, Lehto & Lyu (2020) found that users' levels of parasocial relationship with nano-influencers positively influence brand attitudes and are higher than micro and macro-influencers. Because of this, it is critical to look into how different types of influencers may affect purchase intent and attitudes towards themselves and the brands they advertise

2.1.3 Persuasion Knowledge and Influencer Marketing

Social media influencers revolutionized the digital marketing sphere by being one of the principal online advertising tools that brands utilize (Brüns & Meißner, 2023). To showcase how big influencer marketing is, Geyser (2023) highlighted that influencer marketing had a market size of $16.4 billion in 2022 and expected to reach $21.1 billion by the end of 2023. What sets influencer marketing apart from traditional celebrity endorsers is that influencers usually possess

trustworthy, and engaging content that appeal to wider audiences (Brüns & Meißner, 2023). However, no matter how prominent influencer marketing is nowadays, challenges such as persuasion knowledge might hinder its success.

According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model, individuals perceive the meaning of messages differently when they start to deem it persuasive, thus alerting how they approach such persuasive message (Brüns & Meißner, 2023). Eisend and Tarrahi's (2022) meta-analysis displayed how the presence of persuasion knowledge can result in negative affective responses, attitudes toward brands, and skepticism. Most notable, the same meta-analysis showed that the type of source where persuasion messages came from has the ability to regulate and alter the effects of persuasion knowledge (Eisend and Tarrahi, 2022). Social media influencers fall under what it's called transparent sources. Due to legal requirements imposed on social media influencers, sponsored posts need to be transparent and clearly state an influencer's commercial relationship with a brand through hashtags (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022) and sponsorship disclosures (Instagram, 2023). Such legally imposed transparency can impact social media influencers by raising persuasion knowledge levels. This could have negative consequential effect on sponsored influencer posts because persuasion knowledge makes individuals more aware of ulterior motives and applied tactics (Eisend and Tarrahi, 2022)

Persuasion knowledge has the potential to negatively impact both emotional and behavioral responses toward sponsored influencer posts (Brüns & Meißner, 2023). Recent studies have analyzed how sponsored social media influencer posts are affected by persuasion knowledge and how sponsorship disclosure plays a role in it. For example, a study by Karagür et al. (2022) showed that sponsorship disclosures portrayed in social media influencer's posts lowered the number of likes due to ad awareness and decreased trust. This is important because

trust has the ability to affect purchase intentions (Nordström & Pannula, 2020), and a sponsored influencer post that is not trusted is also an ineffective post for both the brand and the influencer. Following along with what the Persuasion Knowledge Model states, people's views on influencer posts can change depending on whether or not they think their posts are advertising. By activating persuasion knowledge through sponsored influencer posts exposure, Brüns & Meißner (2023) have shown that individuals safeguard themselves from unwanted influence by raising skepticism. Taking in account that persuasion knowledge toward influencer sponsored posts create negative feeling such a decrease in trust, and trust is related to purchase intent (Abreu, 2019), the following hypothesis was stated.

H1: Individuals exposed to sponsored posts have low levels of purchase intent.

2.2 Opinion Leaders

Professional marketers are taking advantage of social media platforms given the sites' role as modern communication vehicles and extended channels that enable brands to better connect with consumers (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Through different social media platforms just like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, and different communication methods just like online blogs and video blogs, users are capable of sharing their opinions and posting reviews about brand products and services on their UGC feed (Silaban et al., 2022). From a commercial viewpoint, social media have turned into an innovative communication medium that allows brands to interact with consumers via promotions and new product releases (Silaban et al., 2022). Such promotional messages are efficiently conveyed through social media as consumers perceive online social platforms to be crucial channels for gathering information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and making decisions (Silaban et al., 2022). As a result of this, marketing and brand strategists may take advantage of online opinion leaders (social media influencers) and try to connect

consumers with their products or services through sponsored endorsements, promotions, and brand reviews (Silaban et al., 2022).

Marketers can make use of different social media platforms and communication methods to spread positive eWOM through opinion leaders (Lin et al., 2018). These opinion leaders often operate in multiple online platforms concurrently, aiding marketers with consumer reach and diversity (Lin et al., 2018). Different types of online opinion leaders exist (nano, micro, and macro influencers), and it is important to differentiate how different types of influencers may affect consumers' attitudes, trust, and purchase intent through different types of UGC (sponsored vs. non-sponsored). This differentiation is important for the development of further knowledge within the communication field of consumer behavior and influencer marketing strategies.

Opinion leaders, such as nano-influencers, are individuals who have an influence over their immediate social circles, including environments such as one's neighborhood, friends, and co-workers (Lin et al., 2018). In addition, opinion leaders can also be individuals with broader societal status, such as micro and macro influencers, and these individuals may include celebrities and experts (Lin et al., 2018). Typically, these opinion leaders are perceived as people who are better informed and have greater knowledge in certain subjects (Lin et al., 2018). In general, they tend to have larger social connections, a certain level of status or prestige within their circles, and education, allowing them to influence others more effectively (Li & Du, 2011). Within the marketing realm, the conceptualization of opinion leadership emerged from the diffusion of innovations theory (Lin et al., 2018). This theory includes various components such as communication channels and the members of a social system (Sahin, 2006). It explains how such components, along with others, persuade individuals to adapt new ideas or practices (Sahin, 2006). Contemporarily, opinion leaders, or influencers, are able to affect the purchasing

decisions of online users because of their personal appeal with their followers, and their perceived knowledge and authority revolving niche matters (Lin et al., 2018).

2.3 Influencer Marketing

Over time, consumers and consumer behaviors have undergone multiple changes (GRIN, 2023). Previously enticed by television commercials and big billboards, consumers now look up to influencers for information (GRIN, 2023). Debates surrounding the effectiveness between traditional marketing and influencer marketing is an ongoing topic of discussion (Saffari, 2023). Traditional Marketing refers to all types of marketing conducted offline (Carmicheal, 2019). Examples include newspaper, radio, or direct mail advertising. On the other hand, influencer marketing, which is a type of digital marketing, refers to the collaboration between social media influencers and brands to promote products or services though endorsements, reviews, or mentions on the influencers' social media platforms (Mathew, 2018). And while both types of marketing have merit, influencer marketing is an emerging advertising approach for multiple companies (Saffari, 2023).

When taking influencer marketing and traditional marketing in consideration, influencer marketing takes the lead in shaping consumer's buying behaviors (GRIN, 2023). With the invention of the Internet and the rise of social media influencers, consumer now have the unlimited freedom over the content that they wish to consume (Mathew, 2018). Because of this, consumers migrate to social media platforms and follow influencers who they feel a connection with (Mathew, 2028). For this reason, influencer marketing is more focused than traditional marketing (GRIN, 2023). While traditional marketing is directed to broad demographics (GRIN, 2023), influencer marketing allows brands to target their ideal audience thorough influencers with a specific follower niche (Saffari, 2023). Also, influencer marketing is more trustworthy.

Influencers, like any other user, are brand consumers, and are generally perceived as having an unbiased opinion (GRIN, 2023). This is because an influencer's following is built upon trust and authenticity, leading to their content being perceived as genuine and personal (Saffari, 2023). Finally, influencer marketing yields higher levels of return on investment (ROI). Not only is influencer marketing capable of generating $6.50 for every $1 spent on it, but past research also suggested that it was able to generate 11 times higher ROI than other forms of digital marketing channels (GRIN, 2023).

With the rise of influencer popularity and influencer marketing effectiveness, it is not a surprise that brands utilize influencers to communicate their advertising messages. Influencers' ability to authentically connect with their followers shows how important they are to the study of communication, but not all influencers might be perceived the same way. Different types of social media influencer exist, and users' attitudes toward them, as well as the influence they have on their followers, may vary depending on the type of influencer they are.

2.4 Social Media Influencers

An influencer is an individual who has the ability to affect the purchasing decisions of their followers (Geyser, 2023). They possess this power thanks to their perceived authority, knowledge, and relationship with their followers (Geyser, 2023). Influencers possess a recognizable niche of social media following, and the size of such following depends from influencer to influencer (Geyser, 2023). The three types of influencers discussed in this study are micro-influencers, macro-influencers, and nano-influencers. Micro-influencers are characterized by having between 10,000 and 50,000 followers (Christison, 2022) and having a more defined and specific audience (HubSpot, 2023). Macro-influencers are characterized by having between 100,000 and 1,000,000 followers, and compared to micro-influencers, they have a more diverse

follower base (Conde & Casais, 2023). Both of these types of social media influencers use their authority in certain areas to engage with their followers and typically promote sponsored content for products or services (Grand Canyon University, 2022). Such sponsored content happens when influencers receive compensation from brands in exchange for creating and sharing UGC promoting a brand's products or services.

On the other hand, nano-influencers often (but not always) create non-sponsored UGC (Beveridge, 2022). Nano-influencers possess less than 10,000 followers, and their follower base consists mostly of friends and acquaintances (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). Nano-influencers' UGC can come from different types of people, such as customers, brand loyalists, or brand employees (Beveridge, 2022). UGC coming from nano-influencers are often not sponsored (Ethos Marketing Team, n.d.). Instead, they are shared with the goal of expressing personal opinions and experiences related to certain brands.

Previous studies researched the effects of micro and macro influencers on consumers' purchase intentions (Kay et al., 2019) as well as the effects of consumer's UGC on purchase intent (Geng & Chen, 2021), but a gap in existing research lacks the understanding of directly comparing the purchasing intention effects and source attributes of UGC coming from micro-influencers, macro-influencers, and nano-influencers. For example, one study found that micro-influencers led to higher levels of purchase intent than macro-influencers, but such a study did not include UGC coming from nano-influencers, instead, it focused on the relationship between influencer sponsorship disclosure and purchase intent (Kay et al., 2019). Additionally, another study found that consumers' UGC and interaction quality lead to higher levels of purchase intent (Geng & Chen, 2021), but it did not examine UGC coming from other types of influencers, such as micro and macro influencers.

There is an expectation from consumers when it comes to UGC. They expect other users' UGC to disclose the negatives and positives of a product (Bahtar & Muda, 2015). This is because users tend to perceive UGC as being trustworthy and unbiased (Bahtar & Muda, 2015). This trust that users have toward UGC forms part of what makes them rely on it when it comes to assistance in making purchasing decisions (Bahtar & Muda, 2015). Problems arise when comparing how UGC from macro and micro influencers compares to UGC from nano-influencers, in particular, how each kind of UGC may affect users' purchase intent toward a product differently. Even though UGC as a whole is perceived as being trustworthy (Bahtar & Muda, 2015), micro and macro influencers often get paid to create content for brands, while nano-influencers might create content to share their unbiased opinions about a product. Since people have great power over the marketing world (Lisichkova & Othman, 2017), it is important to study how UGC coming from different types of individuals may affect user's purchase intent differently.

Through the Persuasion Knowledge Model, users gradually develop knowledge about marketers' persuasion tactics, and therefore, learn to cope and resist such tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Since the PKM is partly based on consumers' perceptions of who is behind a persuasion message (Mayrhofer et al., 2019), social media posts coming from different types of social media influencers might have distinct effects on the way users trust and accept the messages within the posts. Such distinction in trust and acceptance of messages could arise from micro and macro-influencers' higher tendency to create sponsored UGC in comparison to nano-influencers (Ethos Marketing Team, n.d.). Which could consequentially influence perceptions between nano-influencers and micro and macro influencers. Such perceptions could differ because the sponsored posts that micro and macro-influencers are known to regularly share have

the ability to make an influencer appear as someone who compromises their integrity for money gain (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022), which could then affect the perceived trust toward the influencer itself. Because of the different nature between micro and macro influencers and nano-influencers, users' purchase intent toward products featured in social media posts might be differently affected depending on the influencer type.

2.4.1 Trust, Attitudes, and Purchase Intent

Purchase intent is the extent in to which consumers would like to buy a product in the future (Geng & Chen, 2021). Purchase intent is used in this study as the degree to which social media users would like to buy a product after getting exposed to a micro-influencers' UGC, macro-influencers' UGC, or nano-influencers' UGC. General UGC as such tends to be perceived as trustworthy (Bahtar & Muda, 2015), and trust is defined in this study as people's confidence that a source of information is objective, honest (Ohanian, 1990), believable, and unbiased (Nordström & Pannula, 2020). In order for a source to be trustworthy, it needs to align with people's attitudes (Nordström & Pannula, 2020). When an influencer is considered trustworthy, it will positively impact an influencer's ability to shape people's attitudes toward the them and the brands within the their posts (Nordström & Pannula 2020). Finally, just like Belanche et al. (2021), attitudes are defined as individuals' evaluative and emotional tendencies to positively or negatively respond to certain targets. Trust and attitudes are examined in this study because of their relationship to one another, and because of their ability to affect online purchase intentions (Nordström & Pannula, 2020).

2.4.2 Trust and Attitudes Toward Micro and Macro Influencers

There are multiple factors that might affect online consumers' purchase intent, but trust is directly related to influencing purchasing intentions, and trust is one of the multiple attributes

that social media influencers possess (Nordström & Pannula, 2020). When it comes to trustworthiness, users perceive trustworthy influencers as those individuals whose recommendations are perceived as being accurate, credible, and free of prejudice (Nordström & Pannula, 2020). Even though all influencers possess a trust attribute (Nordström & Pannula, 2020), not all influencers are the same due their various kinds. Because of this, perceptions of trustworthiness and attitudes could vary depending on the influencer type. Therefore, purchase intent levels might vary depending on the influencer too.

Previous studies have focused on the different effects that influencers might have on perceived authenticity and trust. In order to broaden their reach, marketers might tend to shift their attention to influencers with a high follower count (Kuester. 2017). However, a higher follower count does not always guarantee high levels of influencer engagement between them and their followers (Kuester. 2017). Engagement is important because just like authenticity, it leads to greater perceived trust (Kuester, 2017), (Abreu, 2019).

Due to their perceived authenticity and engagement levels, literature suggests that micro-influencers are perceived as being more trustworthy than macro-influencers. While some studies have shown that high numbers of followers portray influencers as having higher levels of perceived opinion leadership status, others have shown that influencers with less followers tend to have better engagement and influence levels (Kuester. 2017). For example, Kuster (201) suggests that in comparison to macro-influencers, micro-influencers are perceived as being closer to the average consumer, leading to higher levels of trust. Additionally, micro-influencers have higher engagement rates than macro-influencers (Collabstr, n.d), and according to Kuster (2019), trustworthiness increases in conditions of closeness and intimacy. Finally, Abreu (2019) expresses that micro-influencers are perceived as more authentic than influencers with higher

number of followers. This is important because authenticity leads to trust, which in turn leads to higher levels of purchase intent (Abreu, 2019)

As previously explained, having a higher follower count does not necessarily correspond to a higher perceived trust on influencers. Even though past studies have shown that the higher the number of followers an influencer has, the greater the users' intentions to adopt the influencer's recommendations are (Conde & Casais, 2023), other studies also contradict them. An example of this would be Park et al.'s (2021) research on how micro and mega social media influencers (influencers with over 1 million followers) determine advertising effectiveness. Such research showed that micro-influencers were more persuasive than mega-influencers, and stem from users' perception that micro-influencers are more authentic than mega-influencers (Park et al., 2021).

Additionally, further literature states that micro-influencers are perceived as having higher levels of relatability and trustworthiness than mega influencers (Britt et al., 2020). Such trustworthiness and reliability make micro-influencers easier sources to sympathize and have perceived interpersonal connections with (Britt et al., 2020). Micro-influencers are perceived as being more authentic and trustworthy than mega-influencers because of skepticism toward mega influencers' endorsement sincerity and their possible commercial driven goals (Britt et al., 2020).

Comparing micro-influencers and mega-influencers is relevant to the examination between micro-influencers and macro-influencers because of similar factors that could affect perceived trust and attitudes. Micro-influencers have been shown to be more convincing (Conde & Casais, 2023), genuine (Park et al., 2021), dependable, and trustworthy than mega-influencers (Britt et al., 2020), and as previously mentioned, what differentiates types of influencers are their follower count. Similarly, trust and attitude perceptions between micro and macro influencers

could be different because of preconceptions between an influencer type with a lower follower count and an influencer type with a higher follower count. Since past research has shown micro-influencers to be perceived as being more trustworthy than mega influencers (Britt et al., 2020), and follower count is what differentiates micro and mega influencers, there might be reason to believe that micro-influencers are also perceived as having higher levels of perceived trust and positive attitudes than macro-influencers.

While some studies focus on comparing micro-influencers with mega-influencers, others analyze mega-influencers with macro-influencers. For example, Borger-Tiago, Santiago & Tiago (2023) analyzed the effectiveness of endorsements by mega and macro-influencers. In general, social media influencers are highly effective in creating brand-customer relationships, and for such reason, Borger-Tiago et al., (2023) decided to examine whether mega or macro-influencers were more effective at promoting brands. While many mega-influencers are celebrities who simply transitioned to social media, macro influencers grow their audience online, resulting in higher influence levels (Borger-Tiago et al., 2023).Through a two-way exploratory design, their results showed that influencers with fewer followers (macro) were more effective than celebrities (mega) at engaging consumers (Borger-Tiago et al., 2023). As a result, Borger-Tiago et al., (2023) found macro-influencers to be more successful at creating brand-consumer relationships

Comparing mega and macro influencers is important because it reinforces the idea that higher follower count does not necessarily lead to more persuasive effects. Micro-influencers are perceived as more trustworthy than mega-influencers (Britt et al., 2020). Additionally, macro-influencers are able to generate closer relationships between their followers and the brands they promote (Borger-Tiago et al., 2023). These findings might imply that a lower number of

followers might lead to more positive perceptions of influencers and the products they recommend.

Regardless their number of followers, micro and macro influencers habitual relationship with brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019) could associate them as being an embodiment of the brand itself. Such embodiment might increase consumers' skepticism of an individual because salespeople result in trustworthiness uncertainty due to the source's conflict of interest (Ohanian, 1990). Because of this, nano-influencers, who do not tend to work with brands as much as micro and macro influencers, might be perceived as more trustworthy and obtain more positive attitudes toward them.

2.4.3 Trust and Attitudes Toward Nano-influencers

Trust, and its connection to attitudes are intertwined on their role of affecting purchasing intentions (Nordström & Pannula, 2020). With the emergence of social media networks, consumers no longer trust firm-generated messages, instead, consumers are turning to UGC produced by brand consumers (Chari et al., 2016). UGC that is created by nano-influencers and perceived as trustworthy is able to reduce users' perceived risks, and therefore, it plays an important role in the interaction between UGC and users (Geng & Chen, 2021). Additionally, UGC is perceived by users as being more trustworthy than the content generated and published by companies (sellers) (Geng & Chen, 2021). UGC's ability to build community interaction and authentic information leads users to perceive UGC as more trustworthy, which in turn means that users are aligning their attitudes with them (Nordström & Pannula, 2020), which ultimately leads to higher levels of purchase intent (Geng & Chen, 2021).

The perceived distrust toward brand messages was shown in a study that demonstrated that individuals trusted consumers' generated brand recommendations more than messages

conveyed by companies themselves (Sethna et al., 2017). Social media platforms allow users to publish UGC reviews about products for other users to consider before purchasing from a brand (Sethna et al., 2017). This allows users to share their opinions and preferences about certain products and participate in virtual communities (Sethna et al., 2017). Such trusted UGC is becoming the way users learn about brand products (Chari et al., 2016). UGC that promote products and are created by consumers have the potential to shape the users' perceptions and attitudes of the products (Sethna et al., 2017) (Chari et al., 2016). Such potential can be better highlighted from a survey which showed that 98% of participants deemed such type of UGC trustworthy, and 80% said it affected their purchase intent (Chari et al., 2016). Trust toward UGC regarding brand recommendations over brand messages was also shown in a study by Chari et al. (2016). Such a study found that that skepticism toward brand advertisements fuel trust toward nano-influencer user-generated brand recommendations. (Chari et al., 2016).

Considering that past literature suggests that trust and attitudes are intertwined together to potentially affect consumers' purchase intent, and that influencers' trustworthiness might be perceived differently depending on the type of influencer, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H2a: Individuals perceive nano-influencers as more trustworthy than micro and macro influencers.

H2b: Individuals exhibit higher levels of positive attitudes toward nano-influencers in comparison to micro and macro influencers.

H2b: Individuals exhibit higher levels of purchase intent toward nano-influencers' posts in comparison to posts from micro and macro influencers.

2.5 Sponsorship Disclosure

Brands participate in influencer marketing by paying social media influencers to promote their brand products (Lou & Yuan, 2019), but there are legal requirements when it comes to brands paying influencers for their services (Kay et al., 2019). It is required by law that social media influencers who are being paid to promote a brand must disclose the paid content to their followers (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). This means that in order to not deceive users, influencers must make it clear that they are getting paid to post about a brand. To show such sponsorship disclosure, social media influencers can include the hashtag '#sponsored" (Kay et al., 2019) or "#ad" on their posts (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). Additionally, when creating organic branded content on platforms such as Instagram, the branded content policies requires users to use the "paid partnership" label that is set to appear in the post below the user's handle (Instagram, 2023).

The practice of mixing influencer-sponsored UGC with non-sponsored UGC is called native advertising (Kay et al., 2019). A characteristic of native advertising is that it may take the appearance of typical posts and appear alongside users' organic content feed (Kay et al., 2019). Intermingled with non-sponsored posts, native advertising allows brands to pay influencers to post sponsored reviews, videos, blogs, and more (Kay et al., 2019). Because of this practice, social media influencers' sponsored UGC can blend with other users' UGC and make it difficult to differentiate from non-sponsored content (Kay et al., 2019). Additionally, many social media influencers do not clearly disclose sponsored posts (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022), which strengthens native advertising's deceptive features (Kay et al., 2019). This does not mean that influencers are violating any sponsorship laws, but instead, they are using loopholes to make the sponsorship less noticeable. Some social media influencers might try to hide the fact that a post is sponsored by adding multiple hashtags into their posts and sneaking "#ad" or "#sponsored" so

they are not easily noticeable (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). This is done because of the concern that disclosed sponsorships in influencers' posts can damage the influencers' perceived neutrality and likeability (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022).

Sponsorship disclosures can damage an influencer's reputation as they might make them be perceived as "sell outs" (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022), but they can also damage the attitudes toward a brand (Kay et al., 2019). Most of the literature's sentiment leans with regard to negative feelings toward sponsorship disclosure, which later leads to negative attitudes toward the brand (Kay et al., 2019). For example, past studies have related sponsorship disclosure to negative attitudes toward brands, purchase intent, and the credibility of the influencer (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). Such negative sentiment could be explained by the PKM since sponsorship disclosure could activate consumers' defense mechanisms toward persuasion messages.

2.5.1 Sponsorship Disclosure Effects on Brand Attitudes

To reach and connect with consumers, marketers incorporate their products into traditional media channels such as TV and magazines (Boerman, Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012) as well as modern media channels such as social media platforms (Brüns & Meißner, 2023). Such sponsored content may vary in complexity, ranging from a simple product placement to a more complex scenario where the brand plays a key role in the displayed content (Boerman, Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012). For example, on TV and social media, product placement can simply entail showing a character drink a branded drink or an influencer streaming video games while having a branded product on their side. Additionally, branded products can play a more integral role, by forming part of a TV narrative to a full review by an influencer online. Regardless of the medium, sponsorship disclosure plays an integral role on consumer's attitudes toward the brand.

To better understand how sponsorship disclosure may affect TV viewers, Boerman, Reijmersdal & Neijens (2014) conducted an experiment to examine how sponsorship disclosure timing affects TV viewers' ad recognition, ad critical processing, and brand attitudes. On their experiment, they exposed 209 college students to a TV show, and each participant had an equal chance to be exposed to 1 out of 4 conditions: an episode with no disclosure (control), or episodes with a discloser before, during, or after the sponsored content (Boerman et al., 2014). Results showed that all sponsorship disclosures increased ad recognition, but only sponsorship disclosures shown before and during the sponsored content led to critical processing of the content, which in turn led to negative attitudes toward the sponsored brand (Boerman et al., 2014). Their results may help expand into online sponsorship disclosures because social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook all contain concurrent sponsorship disclose labels in sponsored UGC.

Although advertising agents continue to make use of sponsored content on traditional media, growing consumers' trust on eWOM has elicited online marketing as an important advertising strategy (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020). Consumers are aware that advertisements on traditional media often present biased arguments, which in turn, hurts their credibility (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020). For this reason, consumers place a higher value and trust eWOM more, as it is not always positive (Bahtar & Muda, 2015), and therefore perceived as a reliable source to guide user's purchase decisions (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020).

In terms of social media, De Vierman & Hudders' (2020) analyzed sponsorship disclosure through Instagram posts. Using fictitious influencers and products, they conducted an experiment involving 355 US-bases participants exposed to Instagram posts featuring different types of sponsorship compensations (e.g. gifts, money, etc.) and either a one-sided or two-sided

message (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020). Results indicated that regardless of compensation type, Instagram posts with a sponsorship disclosure negatively affects brand attitudes (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020). Such effect occurs because of ad recognition, which activates skepticism, sequentially affecting influencer credibility (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020). The only time brand attitude was not affected was when influencers used a two-sided message instead of a one sided one (De Vierman & Hudders, 2020).

As previous research suggest, sponsorship disclosure can affect attitudes toward brands, but further research also suggests that attitudes toward the source (e.g. influencers) of a sponsored message might also be affected.

2.5.2 Sponsorship Disclosure Effects on Influencer Attitudes

Influencers' persuasion effects over their followers stems from their perceived credibility and freedom to work alone or along brands (Gerrath, 2021). However, despite multiple influencers partnering with brands, sponsorship disclosures have the potential to negatively impact influencers' reputation (Gerrath, 2021). Sponsored content usually receives negative reactions from online users, which can also negatively affect influencers' credibility and authority (Gerrath, 2021).

There is a noticeable gap in research regarding the effects of sponsorship disclosure on attitudes toward the source of persuasion messages. Instead, the majority of research focuses on brand attitudes. Regardless of this gap, Gallit (2017) conducted a research that examined how sponsorship disclosure may affect online bloggers credibility. They explain that previous research has found that sponsorship disclosure results in lower levels of perceived source credibility (Gallit, 2017). In other words, they argue that a source might be perceived by consumers as biased and false in the presence of a sponsorship disclosure Gallit (2017). These

arguments were supported by Hwang & Jeong (2016), whose research on sponsorship disclosure in blog posts revealed negative perceptions of source credibility and message attitudes among participants exposed to simple sponsorship disclosure. In line with the past study, Gallit's (2017) research showed that when exposed to blog posts, those with higher levels of persuasion knowledge perceived the blogger's credibility lower. Finally, regarding types of sponsorship disclosure, Gallit (2017) found that both direct (transparent) and indirect (non-transparent) sponsorship disclosures had a negative effect on source credibility accompanied by high levels of advertising recognition.

Similar to Gallit's (2017) work, Pfeuffer & Huh (2020) also addressed the impact of different types of sponsorship disclosure on source attitudes, with their work focusing on online reviewers. Because of the increasing problem of sponsored eWOM and unclear disclosure practices, Pfeuffer & Huh (2020) aimed to examine how different disclosure message types affect the ways consumers perceive online reviewers. By exposing participants to mock online consumer product review videos, Pfeuffer & Huh's (2020) study found that when exposed to sponsorship disclosure messages, participants generated negative trust and attitudes toward the reviewer. Additionally, trust on the reviewer was also low when transparently disclosing compensation for sponsored content (Pfeuffer & Huh, 2020).

Regardless of studies showing that sponsorship disclosure may raise concerns about influencers' hidden agendas, (Pfeuffer & Huh, 2020), marketers continue to use influencer marketing strategies to drive sales and expand their reach.

2.5.3 Sponsorship Disclosure Effects on Purchase Intent and Attitudes

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in consumer behavior, with online consumers using social media as one of their primary sources for news and information (Lou, Ma

& Feng, 2020). Because of this, brands have tuned to social media to promote their products both organically and through sponsorships. Presenting a sponsorship disclosure in ads allow for advertising recognition, which in turn activates persuasion knowledge, (Lou et al., 2020) which has been shown to negatively affect purchase intent (Hwang & Zhang 2018). While sponsored content remains a popular form of online advertising, past studies show that sponsorship disclosures raise users' concerns about influencers' ulterior motives and may lead to negative purchase intentions (Pfeuffer & Huh, 2020).

Lou et al., (2020) drew upon the PKM to study the interaction effect of sponsorship disclosure and advertising literacy (skills to analyze and evaluate persuasive messages across media platforms) on users' activation of persuasion knowledge (Lou et al., 2020). Using a mixed design experiment, Lou et al.'s (2020) study found that between two identical posts (disclosure vs. no disclosure), Instagram social media influencers with a sponsorship disclosure were more likely to activate persuasion knowledge. Additionally, they found that when advertising literacy was present, consumers' persuasion knowledge was activated, which led to distrust and dislike toward the post, decreasing both eWOM and purchase intent (Lou et al., 2020).

Sponsored eWOM can also happen within and online setting and outside of social media platforms. Within e-commerce websites, sponsored eWOM takes the form of online reviews, and it is not uncommon for brands to compensate users to write positive reviews about their products or services (Kim, Maslowska & Tamaddoni, 2019). For example, online sponsored reviews on Walgreens are disclosed by providing a statement within the review: "This review was collected as part of promotion" (Kim et al., 2019). Brands are taking advantage of this practice since consumers who encounter eWOM thoroughly analyze and evaluate the information for adoption (Leong, Loi, & Woon, 2022). eWOM does not only grants access to information that is readily

available at any time (Leong et al., 2021), but also, due to its perceived genuity and impartiality (Vierman & Hudders, 2020), it ranks in the top 3 most trusted forms of advertising (Kim et al., 2019).

In order to examine how consumers react to sponsored reviews on e-commerce websites, (Kim et al., 2019) conducted a study analyzing the effects of sponsored and non-sponsored online consumer reviews. His study found that even though sponsored reviews tend to be positive, complex and elaborate, and lean to be less extreme (showing a lower proportion of 1 star or 5-star reviews) than organic reviews, consumers still deem them as less helpful and more suspicious (Kim et al., 2019). Additionally, positive sponsored reviews decreased users' positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward the reviews (Kim et al., 2019).

Previous studies on persuasion knowledge and advertising recognition resulted in reactance, such as skepticism and resistance, toward sponsored content and negative attitudes toward brands (Kim & Kim, 2020). Additionally, previous studies also found that sponsorship disclosure causes people to recognize posts as advertisements, which later causes distrust of the posting itself and less favorable attitudes toward the product in the post (Kim & Kim, 2020). This means that consumers are likely to react negatively to influencers' posts if there is a visible sponsored disclosure. Not only that, but the literature says that sponsorship disclosures also reduce users' intentions to participate in word of mouth and engage with such posts (Kay et al., 2019).

H3: Individuals exposed to sponsorship disclosure messages show a negative attitude toward the a) influencer and b) brand.

2.5.4 Interaction Between Influencer Type and Sponsorship Disclosure

On the other hand, posts from nano-influencers, such as UGC coming from friends and family, may not encounter the same distrust an unfavorable perception issue. This is because nano-influencers are perceived as not having an interest in commercially promoting products (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022).

In regard to sponsorship disclosures, past research such as Ren et al.'s (2023) has studied how different types of social media influencers may affect purchase intent, but there is a lack of research regarding how purchase intent toward micro and macro-influencers' sponsored and non-sponsored posts may affect purchase intent differently from sponsored and non-sponsored posts coming from nano-influencers. One study comparing the effects of sponsorship disclosure between micro and macro influencers found that disclosed UGC from micro-influencers led to higher purchase intent than disclosed UGC from macro-influencers (Kay et al., 2019), but it did not compare how nano-influencers' UGC may affect purchase intent in comparison to them. Additionally, another study examined how sponsored nano, micro, macro, mega, and celebrity influencer posts may affect purchase intent and influencer likeability (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). Such study found that in comparison to nano-influencers, sponsored posts from mega influencers significantly increased user's persuasion knowledge, which in turn decreased trust toward the post and negatively impacted influencer and brand attitudes (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022). Regardless, they study failed to take into account how non-sponsored posts might affect such things too.

Given the rise of influencer marketing, understanding perceptions between different types of influencers might shed a light on how users might potentially perceive sponsored and non-sponsored posts by nano, micro, and macro-influencers in distinct ways. For example, Ren et al.'s (2023) study examined the different ways that users perceive celebrity vs non-celebrity

influencers. Despite the longstanding use of celebrity endorsements (Boerman et al., 2017), Ren et al.'s (2023) study showed a preference for non-celebrity in promoting products on social media.

Due to massive fan bases, celebrities are often perceived as individuals with high levels of source credibility (Boerman et al., 2017). Nevertheless, Ren et al.'s (2023) study aimed to examine potential differences in the effects of celebrity and non-celebrity Instagram influencers on consumer purchase intent. Ren et al.'s (2023) research paper showed that in three different study circumstances, online users leaned more positively toward promotional posts from non-celebrity influencers. Three studies were made, and each study was conducted in a different country (China, South Korea, and the United States) (Ren et al., 2023). Regardless of the country where the study took place, participants repeatedly showed higher levels of purchase intent toward non-celebrity influencers (Ren et al., 2023). Ren et al.'s (2023) study also goes in line with past studies showing that sponsored content from Facebook celebrity influencers raises persuasion knowledge and lowers eWOM (Boerman et al., 2017).

Celebrities are categorized as mega-influencers rather than macro-influencers. And while they are not the focus of this study, it is important recognize how influencers with high vs low number of followers might differently affect user's attitudes towards their respective promotional posts.

In terms of nano, micro, and macro-influencers, Lyu (2020) studied people's parasocial relationships and brand engagement among different types of influencers. Parasocial relationships refer to one-sided feelings of friendliness and identification (Conde & Casais, 2023), and influencers' branding activities have been shown to cultivate parasocial relationships between influencers and their followers. Through an online experiment, Lyu (2020) recruited

832 participants, and after exposing them to different types of social media influencers, the study showed that nano-influencers demonstrated the highest levels of parasocial relationships, followed by micro-influencers, and then macro-influencers. Additionally, the study found that influencer credibility was associated with parasocial relationships, and that parasocial relationships served as a mediator of attitudes toward brands. His study aligns with past studies suggesting that there is a positive relationship between brand attitudes and parasocial relationships (Xie & Feng, 2022).

While Lyu's (2020) study did not focus on disclosed vs non-disclosed influencer posts, his work could provide valuable insights into how users perceive brands and different types of influencers in both sponsored and non-sponsored scenario. This is because parasocial relationships have been found to have a significant effect on the intention to adopt recommendations (Conde & Casais, 2023), and knowing how users perceive their relationships with influencers might help deduce how they respond to their sponsored or non-sponsored content.

Taking into account that sponsorship disclosure can affect attitudes toward brands, purchase intent, (Kay et al., 2019) and influencers (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022), along with user's perception that nano-influencers are generally seen less commercially orientated even when posting sponsored content (Wiley, 2021), the following hypothesis is stated.

H4: There is an interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship disclosure on participant attitudes toward a) influencer, b) brand, and c) purchase intent.

2.6 Persuasion Knowledge as Mediator

The Persuasion Knowledge Model might suggest that UGC created by nano-influencers users might be perceived as more trustworthy than UGC created by both micro and macro social

media influencers. This is because while it is typical for micro and macro influencers to get compensated (monetary or not) by brands to promote their products or services (Lou & Yuan, 2019), the majority of nano-influencers do not (Ethos Marketing Team, n.d.). When such compensation occurs, users may perceive influencers as being "part of" or serve as an extension of the brand itself. Furthermore, the PKM model suggests that users resist persuasion attempts from advertisers (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Consequentially purchase intent may vary between nano-influencers and both micro and macro influencers, as nano-influencers are not generally associated with having a business relationship with brands to promote and review their products (Ethos Marketing Team, n.d.).

One of the main tasks that consumers have is to cope with advertising and marketing media messages (Friestad & Wright, 1994). As time passes, consumers become more and more familiar with the persuasion strategies that advertisers impose on them (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This familiarity, or "knowledge" about marketers' tactics, helps consumers recognize how, when, and why marketers try to persuade them (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Once consumers gain knowledge about the persuasion tactics used on them by marketers, they are able to adapt and respond to such tactics in a way that satisfies their own goals (Friestad & Wright, 1994). As time goes on, consumers' ability to identify marketers' persuasion tactics and respond to them grow (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

PKM is a model that analyzes the elements affecting people's comprehension of persuasion tactics and the knowledge they gain to cope with such persuasion attempts (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). According to Mayrhofer et al. (2019), the PKM is based on three factors: knowledge about a topic, the understanding of persuasive processes, and knowing who is responsible for the persuasion message. People's knowledge about messages having commercial

and persuasive purposes triggers their defense mechanisms (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). The PKM suggests that such a defense mechanism toward commercial messages triggers people into blocking any attempt at persuading them (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). Since social media influencers are an attractive marketing tool for brands (Kim & Kim, 2020), brands tend to take part in influencer marketing and pay social media influencers to promote their brand products. Therefore, users' knowledge of influencer marketing might affect their purchase intent toward products being advertised by social media influencers.

Influencer marketing refers to a form of marketing where brands invest in certain social media influencers, compensating for the promotion of the brand's products to the influencer's audience and the brand's intended consumer base (Lou & Yuan, 2019). On the other hand, nano-influencers do not usually get paid to promote products (Ethos Marketing Team, n.d.). Instead, nano-influencers might promote products because as customers of the brand, they have a genuine enjoyment toward the product (Beveridge, 2022). Even though past studies have shown influencer-produced branded content to be perceived as more authentic than regular brand-generated ads (Lou & Yuan, 2019), influencer marketing is still a persuasion tactic used by marketers. According to the PKM, consumers' knowledge about the brand being responsible for the persuasion message might trigger the consumers' defense mechanism (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). On the other hand, UGC, coming from nano-influencers such as brand consumers, is perceived as a commercial free, trusted source that has the ability to affect how other users think about brands (Muda & Hamzah & Muda, 2021). For such reason, this study looks into whether or not UGC coming from social media micro and macro influencers might have a different effect on purchase intent when compared to UGC coming from nano-influencers. Since persuasion

knowledge levels might affect user's perceptions toward social media posts, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H5a: Individual's perceived persuasion knowledge levels mediate the effects of influencer type on purchase intent.

H5b: Individual's perceived persuasion knowledge levels mediate the effects sponsorship disclosure on purchase intent.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

3.1 Design

In the form of an online experiment, the study used a 3 (influencer type: macro-influencer vs. micro-influencer vs. nano-influencers) x 2 (sponsorship disclosure: present vs. not present) between-subjects design experiment. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of six different groups, and each group included one social media influencer Instagram post as a stimulus. Using Collabstr's (n.d) social media engagement equation, each post contained a realistic amount of likes and comments associated with the type of influencer that the post belonged to.

All participants had an equal chance to get exposed to either a non-sponsored macro-influencer post, a sponsored macro-influencer post, a non-sponsored micro-influencer post, a sponsored micro-influencer post, a non-sponsored nano-influencer post, or a sponsored nano-influencer post. A between-subject design was used to decrease participant habituation. With a between-subjects design, participants did not learn from past conditions and got influenced to answer future responses differently. Additionally, with so many different groups available, a between-subjects design reduced the number of fatigued participants that could have exited the experiment early.

3.2 Sample

Madrio (2023) stated that 85% of college students in the United States use Instagram. Since the experiment exposes participants to Instagram posts, university students' familiarity with the app made the experiment setting more realistic. Because of this, and regardless of age, participants of this study were university students. Finally, the data was collected in the classroom, instructors provided the extra credit for participation, and for those who did not

participate the experiment obtained another opportunity to get the extra credits. The sample consisted of 383 college students of which 173 were included in the final sample. A total of 210 participants were removed from the original sample. Out of 383 participants, 44 did not finish the experiment. Also, 2 participants did not agree to the consent form. Additionally,10 participants confirmed not attending college. Finally, 154 participants did not correctly answer the experiment's manipulation check questions.

The final sample was composed of college students attending the University of Oklahoma who were 87.9% between the ages of 18 and 24, 7.5% between the ages of 25 and 30, 3.5% between the ages of 31-45, and 1.2% over the age of 46. Regarding gender, 62.4% of participants identified themselves as female, 35.3% as male, and 2.3% as non-binary.

3.3 Stimulus

A beach resort was chosen to be part of the Instagram post's content because of the popularity and neutrality that such topic portrays. For starters, around 80% of tourism happens in coastal areas (The Economist, 2022). In addition to that, 88% of travelers use social media to search information and recommendations regarding their travel plans (Oliveira et al., 2019). Moreover, Instagram serves as one of the main sources for travel inspiration (Terttunen, 2017). This idea was supported when 82% of participants who were part of Terttunen's (2017) study said that Instagram played an influential part in their travel plans. This makes Instagram a popular and realistic platform to get exposed to travel content. Additionally, a beach resort can serve as an unbiased brand for people to express attitudes toward. Certain products such as beauty products and race cars, might be targeted to specific demographics such as females, males respectively. On the other hand, travel can serve as a more neutral topic. Instead of relying on

personal biases, users might form opinions about travel based on the UGC recommendations they see online.

Each participant saw a single Instagram post featuring travel within a beach resort. With the exception of the influencer type, all the travel posts shown to participants were identical (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). This means that each post's picture was the same, but the post came from either a macro-influencer, a micro-influencer, or a nano-influencer. The post provided to participants showed a fictitious beach resort. A fictitious beach resort was chosen for participants to not show bias toward real resort brands.

In the case of the sponsored posts, sponsorship disclosure was depicted by including the hashtag "#Sponsored" in the post's caption (Kay et al., 2019) and a paid partnership label below the users' names. Additionally, a fictitious influencer named "Pat Jones" was used for this study. A fictitious influencer was created because exposure to real celebrities could create predispositions between participants and therefore, undermine external validity (Kim & Kim,2020). Additionally, the name "Pat Jones" was chosen because of gender neutrality. Having a gender-neutral influencer decreases possible gender biases toward the influencer. With that said, no actual person was shown in the Instagram post. Showing an influencer with certain demographic aspects might also create bias. Instead, participants were shown an Instagram post of the outside room balcony of a fictious beach resort.

3.3.1 Influencer Type

Regarding influencer follower count, participants were told the number of followers the influencer had, but they were not explicitly informed about the type of influencer it was. The macro-influencer had 540,467 followers. Such a number falls in between the 100,000 to 1,000,000 follower count range of macro-influencers (Conde & Casais, 2023). Also, participants

were told that the micro-influencer had 31,467 followers. Such a number falls in between the 10,000 to 50,000 follower count range of micro-influencers (Christison, 2022). Finally, participants were told that the nano-influencer had 5,467 followers. Such a number falls between the 1 to 10,000 follower count range of nano-influencers (Ethos Marketing Team, n.d.).

The number of likes and comments that each post portrayed was calculated using Collabstr's (n.d) engagement rate equation. The Instagram Engagement Equation provided by Collabstr (n.d) states that engagement rate is calculated by adding up a user's average likes and comments, diving such number by the user's follower count, and then multiplying it by one hundred percent. According to Rella (2022), macro-influencers were shown to have an average engagement rate of 2.5%. Based on such percentage, and the number of followers that the macro-influencer had in the study, the post coming from the macro-influencer had 12,750 likes and 761 comments. Additionally, Collabstr (n.d) also showed that the average engagement rate for Instagram micro-influencers is 3.87%. Based on such percentage, and the number of followers that the micro-influencer had in the study, the post coming from the micro-influencer had 1,080 likes and 137 comments. Finally, Collabstr (n.d) showed that nano-influencers, whose follower base is mostly composed of friends, family, and acquaintances (Geyser, 2022), had an engagement rate of 4.81%. Because of this, the Instagram post coming from nano-influencers in the study had 228 likes and 35 comments.

3.4 Pre-test

Potential stimulus pictures were pre-tested on 10 people to make sure that the content within each post did not appear to be more realistic for either influencer type (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). The stimuli needed to be perceived as being able to realistically come from either a nano-influencer, a micro-influencer, or a macro-influencer. This pre-test was important because it

made sure that the study excluded effects from the content itself (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). Similar to Mayrhofer et al.'s pre-test (2019), participants were only exposed to the content of manipulated posts, (i.e., a picture and the picture's caption) but not the influencer type from where the picture came from. Each participant was exposed to three pictures, and after each exposure, they were asked if they felt like a nano-influencer, micro-influencer, or macro-influencer would be equally likely to post each picture. Finally, participants were asked if they could imagine seeing the pictures on Instagram.

By using the same pictures across influencer posts, the pre-test helped make sure that the measured effects in the final study were attributed to the influencer type and not the pictures themselves. Finally, making sure that all pictures were perceived as equally likely to come from different types of influencers maintained a realistic setting that aligns with participants' typical social media experience.

3.5 Measures

3.5.1 *Perceived Trust*

Each of the subsequent constructs were measured on seven-point agreement Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Based on Geng and Chen's (2021) study, perceived trust toward influencer type was assessed with 3 items, "I think the user's generated content statement is correct", "I think the user's generated content statement is dependable", and "I think the user's generated content statement is honest." A factor analysis with three items presented all items were loaded in a unidimensional factor (KMO = .712, Eigenvalue = 2.262, 75.4% of variance explained, Cronbach α=.835).

3.5.2 Purchase Intent

Based on Geng and Chen's study (2021), purchase intent was measured through three items as well, "After browsing the user generated content, I have a great possibility to consider buying a room at The Beach Resort", "I am willing to buy the resort room recommended in the user generated content", and "I'll recommend to others the resort recommended in the UGC." A factor analysis with three items presented all items were loaded in a unidimensional factor (KMO = .730, Eigenvalue = 2.410, 80.3% of variance explained, Cronbach α=.878).

3.5.3 Persuasion Knowledge

Based on Mayrhofer et al.'s (2019) study, persuasion knowledge was measured using three items, "The post was advertising", "The post was posted without commercial interest" (recoded), and "The post was posted to advertise a product." A factor analysis with three items presented all items were loaded in a unidimensional factor (KMO = .657, Eigenvalue = 2.016, 67.2% of variance explained, Cronbach α=.743).

3.5.4 Brand Attitude

Moreover, the following constructs were all measured using a seven-point semantic differential scale and four items (Very Bad/Very Good, Highly Undesirable/Highly Desirable, Highly Unpleasant/Highly Pleasant, and Highly Disliked/Highly Liked). All measurements were adapted from Kim & Kim's (2020) study. Brand attitudes were measured by asking "How did you feel about the Beach Resort in the Instagram post." A factor analysis with four items presented all items were loaded in a unidimensional factor (KMO = .862, Eigenvalue = 3.444, 86.1% of variance explained, Cronbach α=.945).

3.5.5 Influencer Attitude

Influencer attitude was also measured with a seven-point semantic differential scale and four items (Very Bad/Very Good, Highly Undesirable/Highly Desirable, Highly

Unpleasant/Highly Pleasant, and Highly Disliked/Highly Liked), which is adapted from Kim & Kim's (2020) study. A factor analysis with four items presented all items were loaded in a unidimensional factor (KMO = .861, Eigenvalue = 3.529, 88.2% of variance explained, Cronbach α= .955).

3.6 Manipulation Checks

Manipulation check questions were added into the study to make sure that participants were aware of the stimuli elements that the sponsored, non-sponsored, and influencer type posts possessed.

Participants were asked if the influencer they saw was either a nano, micro, or macro influencer. Additionally, they were asked if they recalled seeing a sponsorship disclosure within the Instagram post. In addition to being able to respond "yes" or "no" to the manipulation check questions, all manipulation check questions had an "unsure" answer option as to not mess with the validity of answers.

3.7 Procedure

Before starting the experiment, participants were asked if they currently attend college, their age, and which social media platforms they typically use. The only screener question in the experiment was if the participants was enrolled in college. If the participants were not in enrolled in college, the experiment automatically ended.

After the first set of demographic questions, participants were asked to read definitions for UGC, nano, micro, and macro influencers (Kim & Kim, 2020). Influencer type definitions were provided so that participants were able to understand the manipulation check question asking to identify the influencer type they were shown. Additionally, the definition for UGC was provided so that participants understood the context of the questions measuring trustworthiness

and purchase intent. To ensure participants read the definitions, the experiment was designed to not let participants click the "next" arrow until 20 seconds had passed in the definitions page.

After that, participants were asked to imagine a situation in which they were scrolling down on Instagram and found the influencer post shown to them (Kim & Kim, 2020). Participants were randomly exposed to one of six conditions (a macro-influencer with a present sponsorship disclosure Instagram post, a macro-influencer without a present sponsorship disclosure Instagram post, a micro-influencer with a present sponsorship disclosure Instagram post, a micro-influencer without a present sponsorship disclosure Instagram post, a nano-influencer with a present sponsorship disclosure Instagram post, and a nano-influencer without a present sponsorship disclosure Instagram post). Similar to the definitions page, participants could not click the "next" arrow until 30 seconds had passed. This ensured participants paid close attention to the influencer post.

After participants were exposed to the controlled macro-influencer post, micro-influencer post, or nano-influencer post, they answered a total of seventeen questions measuring their perceived trust, persuasion knowledge, influencer and brand attitudes, and purchase intent levels.

3.8 Data Analysis

Once the quantitative data was collected from the Qualtrics experiment, it was then exported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS). The researcher then removed all participants who did not pass the manipulation check questions before testing the hypotheses.

To test H1, an independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the mean levels of purchase between participants exposed to sponsored and non-sponsored Instagram posts. To test H2a, H2b, and H3b, a oneway ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the differences in perceived

trustworthiness, influencer attitudes, and purchase intent among participants exposed to nano, micro, and macro-influencers. To test H3a and H3b, an independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the mean levels of influencer and brand attitudes toward sponsored and non-sponsored posts. To test H4a, H4b, and H4c, a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the interaction effects that influencer type and sponsorship disclosure may have on purchase intent, and influencer and brand attitudes. Finally, to test H5a and H5b, a PROCESS analysis was conducted to determine if persuasion knowledge mediates the effects of influencer sponsorship type on participant's purchase intent.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Demographics

A total of 173 college students participated in the study. All responses were received from students at the University of Oklahoma. Even though grade levels were not recorded, all participants were either undergraduate or graduate students at the University of Oklahoma.

All participants had an equal chance to be directed to one out of the six possible study groups. Respondents directed to the first group (n=30, 17.34%) were exposed to a sponsored nano-influencer Instagram post. Respondents directed to the second group (n=31, 17.92%) were exposed to a sponsored micro-influencer Instagram post. Respondents directed to the third group (n=27, 15.61%) were exposed to a sponsored macro-influencer Instagram post. Respondent directed to the fourth group (n=27, 15.61%) were exposed to a non-sponsored nano-influencer Instagram post. Respondents directed to the fifth group (n=29, 16.76%) were exposed to a non-sponsored micro-influencer Instagram post. Finally, respondents directed to the sixth group (n=29, 16.76%) were exposed to a non-sponsored macro-influencer Instagram post.

Regarding gender, Group 1 (n=30) consisted of 40% male, 53.3% female, and 6.7% non-binary participants. Group 2 (n=31) consisted of 22.6% male, 74.2% female, and 3.2% non-binary participants. Group 3 (n=27) consisted of 37% male, 59.3% female, and 3.7% non-binary respondents. Group 4 (n=27) consisted of 25.9% male and 74.1% female participants. Group 5 (n=29) consisted of 37.9% male and 62.1% female respondents. Lastly, Group 6 (n=29) consisted of 48.3% male and 51.7% female respondents.

4.2 Sponsored Posts and Purchase Intent

Hypothesis 1 stated that participants who were exposed to sponsored posts would have low levels of purchase intent. This hypothesis stated that regardless of influencer type, as long as

the Instagram post was sponsored, participants would show low levels of purchase intent toward the post. All posts, regardless of which group they belonged, were analyzed to test H1. Out of all the Instagram posts analyzed, sponsored posts (n=88) and non-sponsored posts (n=85) respectively constituted 50.87% and 49.13% of all stimuli.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether respondents exposed to sponsored Instagram posts exhibited low levels of purchase intent, and to evaluate potential differences in purchase intent levels between sponsored and non-sponsored posts. There was a statistically significant difference in purchase intent levels between sponsored posts (M=2.79, SD=1.48) and non-sponsored posts (M=3.17, SD=1.39); t(171)=1.741, p<.05. Participants exhibited both low purchase intent levels toward sponsored posts and lower purchase intent levels in comparison to non-sponsored posts. Therefore, H1 was supported. Group statistics and independent-samples t-test results for H1 are respectively represented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1.

H1 T-Test Purchase Intent Group Statistics

	Sponsorship Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Purchase Intent	Not Sponsored	85	3.1686	1.39313	0.15111
	Sponsored	88	2.7879	1.48055	0.15783

Table2

H1 Independent-Samples T-test- Participants' purchase intent levels toward sponsored and non-sponsored Instagram posts

	F	Sig.	t	df	One-sided p	Two-sided p

Purchase Intent	Equal variances assumed	1.024	0.313	1.741	171	0.042	0.084
	Equal variances not assumed			1.743	170.885	0.042	0.083

4.3 Influencer type and perceived trustworthiness, attitudes, and purchase intent.

H2a stated that participants would perceive nano-influencers as more trustworthy than micro and macro-influencers. This hypothesis stated that regardless of sponsorship type, participants would perceive nano-influencers as the most trustworthy type of influencer. All posts, regardless of which group they belonged, were analyzed to test H2a. Out of all the Instagram posts analyzed, nano-influencer (n=57), micro-influencer (n=60), and macro-influencer (n=56) posts respectively constituted 32.95%, 34.68%, and 32.37% of all stimuli.

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the potential effect of three different types of influencers on individuals' perceived trustworthiness. Comparisons were made between nano, micro, and macro-influencers. The one-way ANOVA revealed that influencer type did not have a statistically significant effect on perceived trustworthiness, $F(2, 170)=2.15$, $p=.119$. Even though participants showed the highest levels of perceived trustworthiness toward nano-influencers ($M=4.36$, $SD = 1.17$) in comparison to micro ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.17$) and macro-influencers ($M=3.91.$, SD 1.0), the comparison effects were not statistically significant. Therefore, H2a was not supported. Oneway descriptives and ANOVA results for H2a are respectively represented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3

H2a Oneway Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Lower bound	Upper bound	Min	Max
Nano	57	4.3567	1.16643	0.1545	4.0472	4.6662	2	6.67
Micro	60	4.1778	1.17486	0.15167	3.8743	4.4813	1.33	6.33
Macro	56	3.9107	1.1037	0.14749	3.6151	4.2063	1	6
Total	173	4.1503	1.15717	0.08798	3.9766	4.3239	1	6.67

Table 4

H2a ANOVA- Influencer Type on Perceived Trustworthiness

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.689	2	2.844	2.153	0.119
Within Groups	224. 626	170	1.321		
Total	230.315	172			

Hypothesis 2b stated that participants would exhibit higher levels of positive attitudes toward nano-influencers in comparison to micro and macro-influencers. Similar to H2a, hypothesis 2b stated that regardless of sponsorship type, participants would exhibit the highest levels of positive attitudes toward nano-influencers. All nano (n=57), micro(n=60), and macro-influencer (n=56) stimuli were analyzed as well.

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the potential effect of three different types of influencers on individuals' influencer attitudes. The one-way ANOVA showed that influencer type did not have a statistically significant effect on influencer attitudes, $F(2, 170)=0.76$, $p=.470$. Even though results showed that micro-influencers showed the highest levels of influencer attitudes ($M=4.18$, $SD = 1.23$), followed by macro-influencers ($M=4.11$, $SD = 0.92$) and nano-influencers ($M=3.93$, $SD = 1.15$), results were not statistically significant. H2b

was not supported. Oneway descriptives and ANOVA results for H2b are respectively represented in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 5

H2b Oneway Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Lower bound	Upper bound	Min	Max
Nano	57	3.9298	1.15027	0.15236	3.6246	4.235	1	7
Micro	60	4.175	1.2319	0.15904	3.8568	4.4932	1	7
Macro	56	4.1116	0.92186	0.12319	3.8647	4.3585	1	6.5
Total	173	4.0737	1.11086	0.08446	3.907	4.204	1	7

Table 6

H2b ANOVA- Influencer Type on Influencer Attitudes

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.876	2	0.938	0.758	0.47
Within Groups	210.372	170	1.237		
Total	212.248				

Finally, Hypothesis 2c stated that participants would exhibit higher levels of purchase intent toward posts coming from nano-influencers in comparison to micro and macro-influencers. Similar to H2a and H2b, hypothesis 2c stated that regardless of sponsorship type, participants would exhibit the highest levels of purchase intent toward nano-influencer posts. Just like with the other two hypotheses, all nano (n=57), micro(n=60), and macro-influencer (n=56) stimuli were analyzed.

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the potential effect of three different types of influencers on individuals' purchase intent levels. The one-way ANOVA showed that

influencer type did not have a statistically significant effect on purchase intent, F(2, 170)=1.15, p=.321. Even though the data showed participants had the highest levels of purchase intent toward macro-influencers (M=3.16, SD=1.44) in comparison to micro (M=3.01, SD= 1.53) and nano-influencers (M=2.75, SD=1.36), the comparison effects were not statistically significant. Therefore, H2c was not supported. Oneway descriptives and ANOVA results for H2c are respectively represented in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7

H2c Oneway Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Lower bound	Upper bound	Min	Max
Nano	57	2.7544	1.3577	0.17983	2.3941	3.1146	1	5.67
Micro	60	3.0111	1.52563	0.19696	2.617	3.4052	1	6.33
Macro	56	3.1607	1.44389	0.19295	2.774	3.5474	1	5.67
Total	173	2.975	1.44673	0.10999	2.7578	3.1921	1	6.33

Table 8

H2c ANOVA- Influencer type on Purchase Intent

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.784	2	2.392	1.145	0.321
Within Groups	355.219	170	2.09		
Total	360.003	172			

4.4 Sponsorship Disclosure and Negative Brand and Influencer Attitudes

Hypothesis 3 stated that participants who were exposed to sponsorship disclosure messages would exhibit negative attitudes toward the a) influencer and the b) brand they are advertising. This hypothesis stated that regardless of influencer type, participants would show

unfavorable attitudes towards both the influencer and the brand upon exposure to sponsored posts. Just like in H1, all sponsored (n=88) and non-sponsored posts(n=85) from across the six groups were analyzed.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether respondents exposed to sponsored Instagram posts exhibited negative attitudes toward the a) influencer and the b) brand, and to evaluate and to evaluate potential differences in attitude levels between sponsored and non-sponsored posts. Regarding H3a, there was a statistically significant difference in influencer attitude levels between sponsored posts (M=3.93, SD=1.23) and non-sponsored posts (M=4.23, SD=0.95); t(171)=1.789, p=.038. Participants exhibited negative attitudes toward influencers in the sponsored posts and influencer attitude levels were more positive in non-sponsored posts. Therefore, H3a was supported.

Regarding H3b, there was not a statistically significant difference in brand attitude levels between sponsored posts (M=4.80, SD=1.37) and non-sponsored posts (M=4.95, SD=1.23); t(171)=0.752, p=.453. While participants exhibited brand attitude levels that were more positive in non-sponsored posts, the differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, H3b is not supported. Group statistics and independent-samples t-test results for H3a and H3b are respectively represented in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9

H3a and H3b T-Test Group Statistics

	Sponsorship type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
influencer attitudes	Not Sponsored	85	4.2265	0.95011	0.10305
	Sponsored	88	3.9261	1.23419	0.13166
brand attitudes	Not Sponsored	85	4.95	1.22887	0.13329
	Sponsored	88	4.8011	1.36939	0.14598

Table 10

H3a and H3b Independent-Samples T-test- Participants' influencer and brand attitude levels toward sponsored and non-sponsored Instagram posts

		F	Sig.	t	df	One-sided p	Two-sided p
influencer attitudes	Equal variances assumed	1.841	0.177	1.789	171	0.038	0.075
	Equal variances not assumed			1.797	162.969	0.037	0.074
brand attitudes	Equal variances assumed	0.725	0.396	0.752	171	0.227	0.453
	Equal variances not assumed			0.753	170.09	0.226	0.452

4.5 Effects between Influencer Type and Sponsorship Disclosure

Hypothesis 4 stated that there was an interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship disclosure on individuals' attitudes toward a) influencer, b) brand, and c) purchase intent. In more simple terms, Hypothesis 4 proposed an existing relationship between influencer type (nano, micro, and macro-influencer) and sponsorship disclosure. This relationship was proposed to affects people's purchase intent and attitudes toward the influencer and brand.

A two-way MANOVA was conducted to investigate if there was a significant interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship disclosure on purchase intent and attitudes toward influencer and brand. Table 11 includes the descriptive statistics for the dependent disaggregated by the independent variables.

Table 11

Dependent Variable Descriptive Statistics for Disaggregated by the Independent Variable

	influencer type	sponsorship type	M	SD	N
influencer attitudes	Nano	Not sponsored	4.0278	0.88886	27
		Sponsored	3.8417	1.35265	30
		Total	3.9298	1.15027	57
	Micro	Not sponsored	4.6207	1.16807	29
		Sponsored	3.7581	1.15737	31
		Total	4.175	1.2319	60
	Macro	Not sponsored	4.0172	0.60478	29
		Sponsored	4.213	1.17609	27
		Total	4.1116	0.92186	56
	Total	Not sponsored	4.2265	0.95011	85
		Sponsored	3.9261	1.23419	88
		Total	4.0737	1.11086	173
brand attitudes	Nano	Not sponsored	4.6296	1.16307	27
		Sponsored	4.8833	1.31098	30
		Total	4.7632	1.23872	57
	Micro	Not sponsored	5.0948	1.3926	29
		Sponsored	4.5887	1.41502	31
		Total	4.8333	1.41546	60
	Macro	Not sponsored	5.1034	1.09078	29
		Sponsored	4.9537	1.40061	27
		Total	5.0313	1.24048	56
	Total	Not sponsored	4.95	1.22887	85
		Sponsored	4.8011	1.36939	88
		Total	4.8743	1.30061	173
purchase intent	Nano	Not sponsored	3.2716	1.33024	27
		Sponsored	2.2889	1.22469	30
		Total	2.7544	1.3577	57

Micro	Not sponsored	3.1724	1.51086	29
	Sponsored	2.8602	1.54865	31
	Total	3.0111	1.52563	60
Macro	Not sponsored	3.069	1.36968	29
	Sponsored	3.2593	1.5396	27
	Total	3.1607	1.44389	56
Total	Not sponsored	3.1686	1.39313	85
	Sponsored	2.7879	1.48055	88
	Total	2.975	1.44673	173

Using Wilk's Lambda, the multivariate test revealed significant interaction effects between influencer type and sponsorship type on dependent variables (Wilks' lambda = .907, $F(6, 330) = 2.761$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2_{\text{Partial}} = .048$). Table 12 includes the Multivariate Tests portraying Wilk's Lambda.

Table 12

Multivariate Tests

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig	Partial Eta^2	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Influencer type*sponsorhip type	Pillai's Trace	0.096	2.777	6	332	0.012	0.048	16.665	0.877
	Wilk's Lambda	0.907	2.761[b]	6	330	0.012	0.048	16.569	0.875
	Hotelling's Trace	0.1	2.745	6	328	0.013	0.048	16.472	0.873
	Roys's Largest Root	0.055	3.060[c]	3	166	0.03	0.052	9.18	0.709

4.5.1 Main Effects

Tests of between-subjects effects were conducted to examine potential influencer type and sponsorship type effects on the dependent variables. Table 13 includes the data for the Tests of Between-Subjects Effects.

Table 13

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	DV	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Powerd
Influencer type	influencer attitudes	1.985	2	0.993	0.836	0.435	0.01	1.673	0.192
	brand attitudes	2.184	2	1.092	0.643	0.527	0.008	1.285	0.156
	purchase intent	4.236	2	2.118	1.042	0.355	0.012	2.083	0.23
Sponsorship type	influencer attitudes	3.488	1	3.488	2.939	0.088	0.017	2.939	0.399
	brand attitudes	0.775	1	0.775	0.456	0.5	0.003	0.456	0.103
	purchase intent	5.849	1	5.849	2.877	0.092	0.017	2.877	0.392
Influencer type* Sponsorship type	influencer attitudes	8.363	2	4.181	3.523	0.032	0.04	7.047	0.65
	brand attitudes	4.212	2	2.106	1.24	0.292	0.015	2.48	0.267
	purchase intent	9.774	2	4.887	2.404	0.093	0.028	4.808	0.48
Error	influencer attitudes	198.194	167	1.187					
	brand attitudes	283.703	167	1.699					
	purchase intent	339.528	167	2.033					
Total	influencer attitudes	3083.188	173						
	brand attitudes	4401.188	173						

	purchase intent	1891.111	173
Corrected Total	influencer attitudes	212.248	172
	brand attitudes	290.953	172
	purchase intent	360.003	172

There was not a statistically significant main effect of influencer type on influencer attitudes, F(2, 167) = 0.836, p = .435, $\eta^2_{Partial}$ = .010. Even though the data showed that micro-influencers posts (M=4.18, SD=1.23) had the highest levels of influencer attitudes, and nano-influencer posts (M=3.93, SD=1.15) had the lowest levels of influencer attitudes, the results were not statistically significant.

There was not a statistically significant main effect of influencer type on brand attitudes, F(2, 167) = 0.643, p = .527, $\eta^2_{Partial}$ = .008. Even though the data showed that macro-influencers posts (M=5.03, SD=1.24) had the highest levels of brand attitudes, and nano-influencer posts (M=4.76, SD=1.24) had the lowest levels of brand attitudes, the results were not statistically significant.

Finally, there was not a statistically significant main effect of influencer type on purchase intent, F(2, 167) = 1.042, p = 0.355, $\eta^2_{Partial}$ = 0.012. Even though the data showed that macro-influencers posts (M=3.16, SD=1.44) had the highest levels of purchase intent, and nano-influencer posts (M=2.75, SD=1.35) had the lowest levels of purchase intent, the results were not statistically significant.

Furthermore, there was not a statistically significant main effect of sponsorship type on influencer attitudes, F(1, 167) = 2.939, p = 0.088, $\eta^2_{Partial}$ = 0.017. Even though the data showed

that non-sponsored posts (M=4.23, SD=0.95) had higher influencer attitude levels than sponsored posts (M=3.93, SD=1.23), the results were not statistically significant.

There was not a statistically significant main effect of sponsorship type on brand attitudes, F(1, 167) = 0.456, p = 0.500, η^2_{Partial} = 0.003. Even though the data showed that non-sponsored posts (M=4.95, SD=1.23) had higher levels of brand attitude than sponsored posts (M=4.80, SD=1.37), the results were not statistically significant.

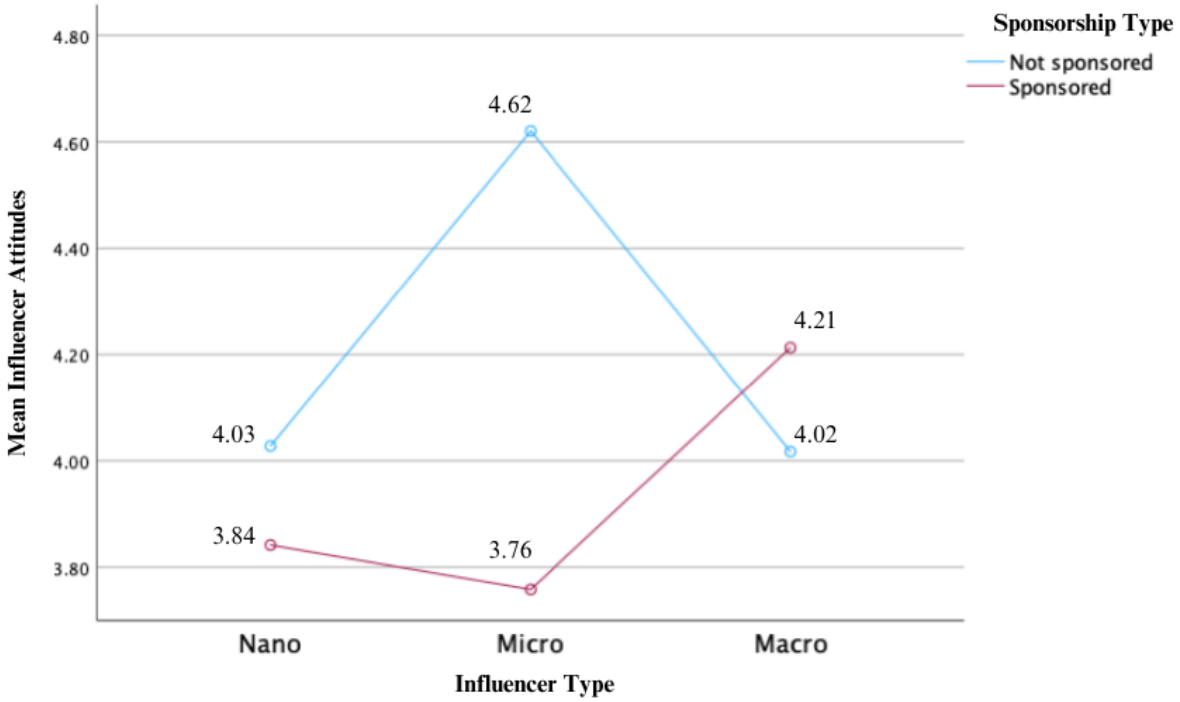
Finally, there was not a statistically significant main effect of sponsorship type on purchase intent, F(1, 167) = 2.877, p = 0.092, η^2_{Partial} = 0.017. Even though the data showed that non-sponsored posts (M=3.17, SD=1.39) had higher levels of purchase intent than sponsored posts (M=2.79, SD=1.48), the results were not statistically significant.

4.5.2 Interaction Effects

Regarding the interaction effects, there was a statistically significant interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship type on influencer attitudes, F(2, 167) = 3.523, $p < .05$, η^2_{Partial} = 0.040. Even though mean influencer attitude scores for sponsored nano-influencer posts (M=3.84, SD=1.35) and non-sponsored nano-influencer posts (M=4.03, SD=0.89) were similar, an interaction effect was indicated by the gap of mean influencer attitude scores between sponsored micro-influencer posts (M=3.76, SD=1.16) and non-sponsored micro-influencer posts (M=4.62, SD=1.17). Additionally, an interaction effect was indicated by the intersection of plots between sponsored macro-influencer posts (M=4.21, SD=1.18) and non-sponsored macro-influencer posts (M=4.02, SD= 0.60). Because of the statistically significant interaction effects results, H4a was supported. Figure 1 shows the estimated marginal means plot of influencer attitudes regarding influencer type and sponsorship type.

Figure 1

Estimated Marginal Means Plot of Influencer Attitudes Regarding Influencer Type And Sponsorship Type.

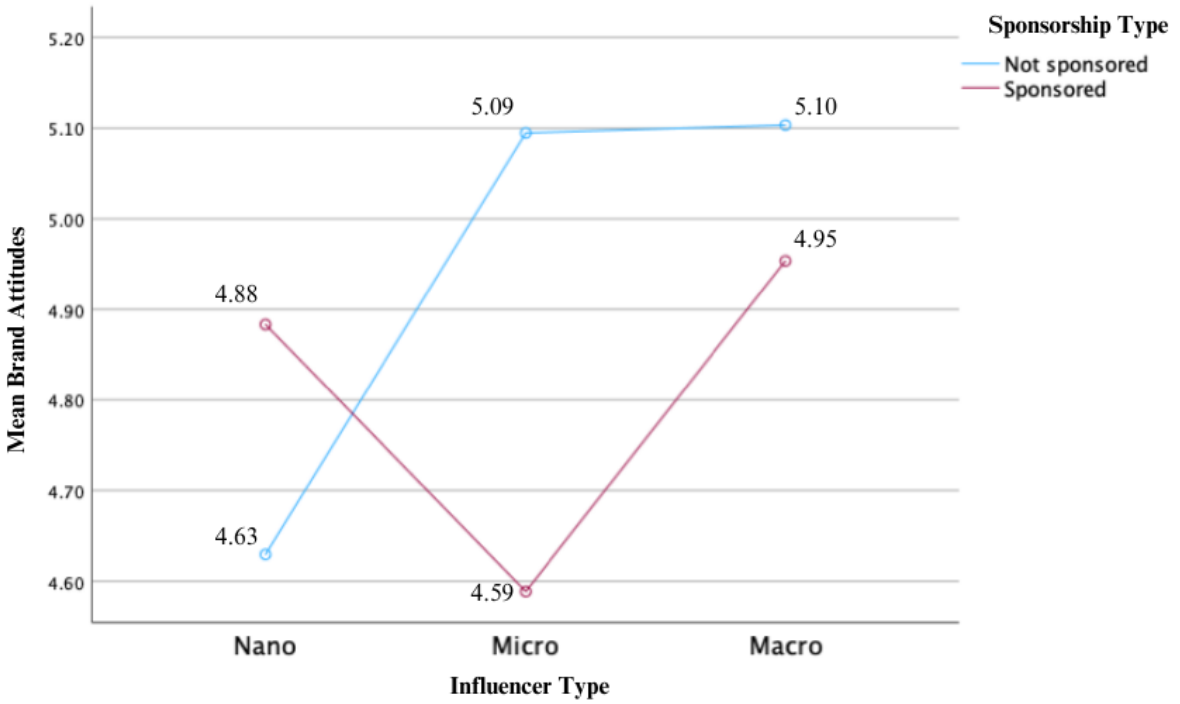


There was not a statistically significant interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship type on brand attitudes, F(2, 167) = 1.240, p = 0.292, $\eta^2_{Partial}$ = 0.015. Results showed that the mean brand attitude scores for sponsored nano-influencer posts (M=4.88, SD=1.31) were higher than for non-sponsored nano-influencer posts (M=4.63, SD=1.16). Additionally, the data also showed that the mean brand attitude scores for sponsored micro-influencer posts (M=4.59, SD=1.42) were lower than for non-sponsored micro-influencer posts (M=5.09, SD=1.39). Finally, the data showed that the mean brand attitude scores for sponsored macro-influencer posts (M=4.95, SD=1.40) were lower than for non-sponsored macro-influencer posts (M=5.10=, SD=1.09). Regardless, results were not statistically significant, and therefore,

H3b was not supported. Figure 2 shows the estimated marginal means plot of brand attitudes regarding influencer type and sponsorship type.

Figure 2

Estimated Marginal Means Plot of Brand Attitudes Regarding Influencer Type And Sponsorship Type.

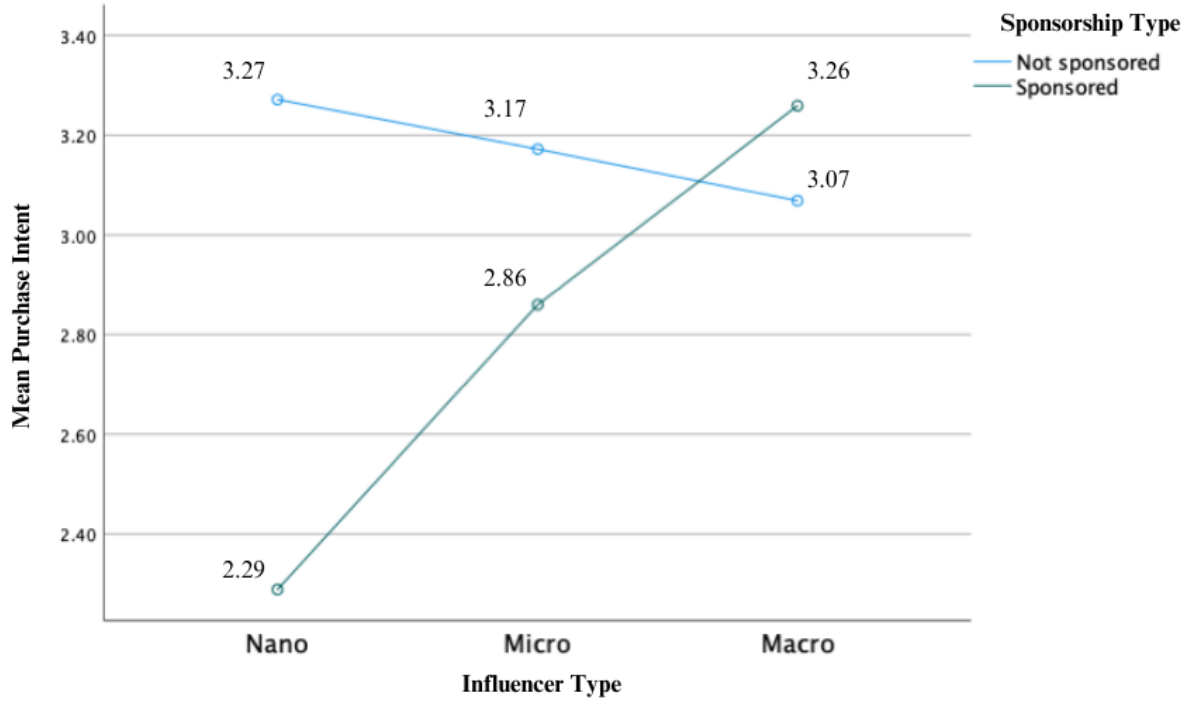


Finally, there was not a statistically significant interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship type on purchase intent, $F(2, 167) = 2.404$, $p = 0.093$, $\eta^2_{Partial} = 0.028$. Results showed that the mean purchase intent scores for sponsored nano-influencer posts (M=2.29, SD=1.22) were lower than for non-sponsored nano-influencer posts (M=3.27, SD=1.33). Additionally, the data also showed that the mean purchase intent scores for sponsored micro-influencer posts (M=2.86, SD=1.55) were lower than for non-sponsored micro-influencer posts (M=3.17, SD=1.51). Finally, the data showed that the mean purchase intent scores for sponsored

macro-influencer posts (M=3.26, SD=1.54) were higher than for non-sponsored macro-influencer posts (M=3.07=, SD=1.37). Regardless, results were not statistically significant, and therefore, H3c was not supported. Figure 3 shows the estimated marginal means plot of purchase intent regarding influencer type and sponsorship type.

Figure 3

Estimated Marginal Means Plot of Purchase Intent Regarding Influencer Type And Sponsorship Type



4.6 Persuasion Knowledge as Mediator for Influencers

H5a stated that participant's perceived persuasion knowledge levels would mediate the effects of influencer type on purchase intent. PROCESS analysis and PROCESS model 4 were used to test variable mediation. Since influencer type is an independent variable with three different levels (nano, micro, and macro-influencers), it was necessary to create binary variables

for each of level. This allowed for an individual analysis of each influencer type's effect on purchase intent though perceived persuasion knowledge. By creating different binary variables for nano, micro, and macro-influencers, each PROCESS analysis exclusively considered the effects of one influencer type at a time. Figures 4, 5, and 6 in the appendix illustrate the mediation models used.

The new binary variables were designed as "nano", "micro", and "macro". For the "nano" variable, participants exposed to nano-influencers were codes as "nano=1" and for all other instances, "not nano=0". Similarly, variable "micro" was coded as "micro=1" for participants exposed to micro-influencers and "not micro=0" for all other influencers. Finally, the variable "macro" was coded as "macro=1" for participants exposed to macro-influencers and "not macro=0" for the remaining influencer types. The value "1" represented participant's exposure to the designated influencer type, and the value "0" represented all other cases. The value assignments filtered out undesired influencer types when one of the new variables was used as an IV in PROCESS. The value of "1" identified the desired influencer to be examined while the value "0" excluded the potential effects of all other influencer types.

4.6.1 Mediating Role of Persuasion Knowledge on Nano-Influencers

To examine the mediating effect of persuasion knowledge between nano-influencers and purchase intent, the binary variable "nano" was designated as the IV, purchase intent as the DV, and persuasion knowledge as the mediator. PROCESS assessed the mediating role of persuasion knowledge on the relationship between nano-influencers and purchase intent. The results revealed a statistically non-significant indirect effect of impact of nano-influencers on purchase intent (b = 0.055, t = 1.133). Furthermore, the direct effect of nano-influencers on purchase intent in presence of the mediator was found marginally significant (b = -0.384, p =.0971).

Hence, no statistically significant data was found showing a mediation effect. Mediation analysis summary for nano-influencers is presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Mediation Analysis Summary for Nano-Influencers

Relationship	*Total Effect*	*Direct Effect*	*Indirect Effect*	*Confidence Interval*		*t-statistics*	*Conclusion*
				Lower Bound	*Upper Bound*		
Nano->Persuasion Knowledge-> Purchase Intent	*-0.329*	*-0.3844*	*0.055*	*-0.032*	*0.1598*	*1.133*	*No Mediation*

4.6.2 Mediating Role of Persuasion Knowledge on Micro-Influencers

To assess the mediating effect of persuasion knowledge between micro-influencers and purchase intent, the binary variable "micro" was designated as the IV, purchase intent as the DV, and persuasion knowledge as the mediator. PROCESS assessed the mediating role of persuasion knowledge on the relationship between micro-influencers and purchase intent. The results revealed a statistically non-significant indirect effect of impact of micro-influencers on purchase intent (b = 0.016, t = 0.319). Furthermore, the direct effect of micro-influencers on purchase intent in presence of the mediator was not statistically significant (b = 0.039, p =.865). Hence, no statistically significant data was found showing a mediation effect. Mediation analysis summary for micro-influencers is presented in Table 15.

Table 15

Mediation Analysis Summary for Micro-Influencers

Relationship	*Total Effect*	*Direct Effect*	*Indirect Effect*	*Confidence Interval*		*t-statistics*	*Conclusion*
				Lower Bound	*Upper Bound*		
Micro->Persuasion Knowledge-> Purchase Intent	*0.055*	*0.039*	*0.016*	*-0.0788*	*0.1298*	*0.319*	*No Mediation*

4.6.3 Mediating Role of Persuasion Knowledge on Macro-Influencers

To analyze the mediating effect of persuasion knowledge between macro-influencers and purchase intent, the binary variable "macro" was designated as the IV, purchase intent as the DV, and persuasion knowledge as the mediator. PROCESS assessed the mediating role of persuasion knowledge on the relationship between macro-influencers and purchase intent. The results revealed a statistically non-significant indirect effect of impact of macro-influencers on purchase intent (b = -0.074, t = -1.377). Furthermore, the direct effect of macro-influencers on purchase intent in presence of the mediator was not statistically significant (b = 0.349, p = .135). Hence, no statistically significant data was found showing a mediation effect. Mediation analysis summary for macro-influencers is presented in Table 16.

Table 16

Mediation Analysis Summary for Macro-Influencers

Relationship	*Total Effect*	*Direct Effect*	*Indirect Effect*	*Confidence Interval*		*t-statistics*	*Conclusion*
				Lower Bound	*Upper Bound*		

Macro->Persuasion Knowledge-> Purchase Intent	*0.275*	*0.349*	*-0.074*	*-0.1943*	*0.0185*	*-1.377*	*No Mediation*

No statistically significant partial or full mediation effects were found for any influencer type. Therefore, H5a was not supported.

4.7 Persuasion Knowledge as Mediator for Sponsorship Disclosure

H5b stated that participant's perceived persuasion knowledge levels would mediate the effects of sponsorship type on purchase intent. Just as with H5a, PROCESS was used to test variable mediation. No additional binary variables were created because sponsorship type has two levels (sponsorship disclosure: present vs not present). Figure 7 in the appendix illustrates the mediation model.

To examine the mediating effect of persuasion knowledge between sponsorship type and purchase intent, sponsorship type was designated as the IV, purchase intent as the DV, and persuasion knowledge as the mediator. PROCESS assessed the mediating role of persuasion knowledge on the relationship between sponsorship type and purchase intent. The results revealed a statistically non-significant indirect effect of impact of sponsorship type on purchase intent (b = -0.194, t = -1.688). Furthermore, the direct effect of sponsorship type on purchase intent in presence of the mediator was found not statistically significant (b = -0.186, p =.438). Hence, no statistically significant data was found showing a mediation effect. Mediation analysis summary for sponsorship type is presented in Table 17.

Table 17

Mediation Analysis Summary for Sponsorship Type

Relationship	*Total Effect*	*Direct Effect*	*Indirect Effect*	*Confidence Interval*		*t-statistics*	*Conclusion*
				Lower Bound	*Upper Bound*		
Sponorship type->Persuasion Knowledge-> Purchase Intent	*-0.381*	*-0.0186*	*-0.194*	*-0.4373*	*0.0151*	*-1.688*	*No Mediation*

No statistically significant partial or full mediation effects were found for sponsorship type. Therefore, H5b was not supported.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing body of strategic communication literature on influencer marketing. Through a 3 (influencer type: macro-influencer vs. micro-influencer vs. nano-influencers) x 2 (sponsorship disclosure: present vs. not present) between-subjects design experiment, the study aimed to explore how different types of social media influencers and the presence or absence of sponsorship disclosure may affect individuals' attitudes, trust, and purchase intent.

Although the study's hypotheses were based on a broad set of past research studies, results portrayed unexpected findings. With the exception of H1, H3a, and H4a, all other study hypotheses were not supported. The unexpected results from the study may suggest a more complicated relationship between influencer type and sponsorship disclosure and might benefit from additional research. This discussion section explores potential implications for the study's unexpected results. Specifically, it focuses on the implications of parasocial relationships, and the limited effects that quantitative metrics (e.g. follower count) may have on user's perceptions of influencers. Finally, implications for H1, H3a, and H4a, and limitations of the study's research method and alternative research methodologies are discussed.

5.1 Interpreting Non-Significant Results

It is important to explore the potential underlying factors behind the study's statistically non-significant results. One aspect to analyze is relationships between influencers and users. The use of fictitious social media influencers in this study may have unintentionally left out an important influencer attribute: parasocial relationships. Without the presence of familiarity and intimacy, the influencers' abilities to affect attitudes, trust, and purchase intent may have been

significantly altered. The stimuli in the current study was neutral in emotion; and no two-way pre-relationship between influencers and users was assumed.

Another aspect is follower count's dependency to influence attitudes, trust, and purchase intent. Sole reliance on follower count may not fully explain how individuals may interact and react to influencer messages. This section aims to explain how the absence of personal connections could have led to the study's unexpected statistically non-significant results.

5.1.1 Importance of Parasocial Relationships

A parasocial relationship is a psychological one-way built association between media users and media characters (Hwan & Zhang, 2018). In more simple words, a parasocial relationship is a one-sided relationship where an individual has an emotional connection to someone whom they might not personally or directly interact with. In the context of this study, parasocial relationships are built between influencers and followers, with followers having the emotional connection toward influencers. Parasocial relationships are built over time through repeated interactions with the same individual (Reynolds, 2022). Because of their strong relation to interpersonal bonds, parasocial relationships can positively affect persuasive outcomes, (Reynolds, 2022), credibility, brand attitudes, purchase intent, eWOM, and increase the intentions to buy sponsored products (Balaban et al., 2022).

The statistically non-significant results from the present study could be better understood by taking into consideration how parasocial relationships between influencers and individuals may affect the latter. This is because participants were exposed to fictitious influencers whom they had no current or prior relationships with. Influencer effects on trust, attitudes, and purchase intent may heavily rely on the strength of the relationships that they build with their followers (Reynolds, 2022; Taillon et al., 2020).

Taillon et al. (2020) found that influencer likeability attributes positively predict influencer attitude's, word of mouth, and purchase intent. Interconnected to likeability, closeness is also examined in Taillon et al.'s (2020) study. A relationship is valued in the base of closeness (social emotional attachment), and Taillon et al.'s (2020) study highlighted the moderating role of closeness. Findings suggested that the more an individual feels a sense of closeness to an influencer, the higher the purchase intent levels will be (Taillon et al., 2020). Such findings may suggest that in absence of intimacy, influencer might not effectively impact consumer's attitudes and behaviors.

Balaban et al. (2022) and Hwan & Zhang (2018) support this by showing that parasocial relationships raises influencer credibility levels and lessens the negative effects that persuasion knowledge has on purchase and eWOM intentions. This is relevant to the study's statistically non-significant results because without a present parasocial relationship between an individual and an influencer, consumers may be potentially more likely to activate their persuasion knowledge levels and become skeptic of influencers sponsored or non-sponsored post intentions.

Reynolds (2022) emphasizes the long-term, persuasive nature of parasocial relationships which in nature are voluntary and provide people with sense of companionship. These strong and lasting relationships between influencers and followers may mediate influencer promotional persuasions effects on consumer's purchase intentions. This is because Reynolds (2022) points out that negative purchase intention effects arise in the absence of a parasocial relationship between influencers and followers. This may suggest that the lack of relationships between participants and influencers in the present study might diminish the effects that the fictitious influencers had on the experiment respondents.

To summarize, parasocial relationships can be a critical component for the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Findings about parasocial relationships suggest multiple relationships between influencers and consumers' perceptions. Such relationships may give a clearer understanding of the statistically non-significant results of the present study. The use of fictitious influencers prevented any type of emotional connection toward the stimuli, which may have limited or altered participants' perceptions of the influencer and the overall Instagram post.

5.1.2 Follower Count in Relation to Parasocial Relationships

By definition, nano, micro, and macro-influencer are solely differentiated by the number of followers they have. Because of this, the present study only used number of followers to categorize each influencer type. Each type of influencer, however, possesses different characteristics (Conde & Casais, 2023). For instance, nano-influencers are highly trusted as they form part of user's social circle (Lin et al., 2018). Micro-influencers tend to have a loyal audice and strong voice within a community (Conde & Casais, 2023). Meanwhile, macro-influencers have a broad following, which some studies have linked to an increased perceived level of expertise (Lin et al., 2018). Despite their differences, such characteristics are formed over time through the relationships they build with their followers. Someone who follows an influencer with 2,000 followers does not immediately consider them a peer, and someone who immediately follows a micro-influencer does no immediately turns into a loyal follower. The non-significant statistical results of the present study could be better understood by taking into account that parasocial relationships are built, and not simply exist as a result of follower count. In the present study, regardless of influencer type, follower count by itself could have not brought upon a personal relationship with the participants, especially with non-familiar, fictitious influencers.

5.2 Implications of Purchase Intent Levels toward Sponsored Posts

H1 stated that individuals exposed to sponsored posts would have low levels of purchase intent. Regardless of influencer type, participants in the study demonstrated low purchase intent levels toward the sponsored Instagram posts. This shows that across different types of influencers, there is still a negative sentiment to purchase from sponsored posts.

Additionally, results also indicated that participants' purchase intent levels were higher on non-sponsored posts. The mean score for purchase intent levels toward sponsored posts was 2.79 (SD=1.48). In comparison, the mean score for purchase intent levels toward non-sponsored posts was 3.17 (SD=1.39). Even though the purchase intent mean scores between sponsored and non-sponsored Instagram posts were relatively close, the study results were statistically significant. This indicates that there is a meaningful association between sponsored posts and low levels of purchase intent in Instagram posts portraying a beach resort. Additionally, statistically significant results also indicate a meaningful difference in purchase intent levels toward sponsored and non-sponsored Instagram posts portraying a beach resort. Support for H1 provides insightful information about the impact of sponsorship disclosure on purchase intent and its implications toward marketing practices.

Within the context of beach resort content, and as stated before, support for H1 suggest that the sponsorship disclosures in Instagram negatively affects purchase intent. Support for this hypothesis aligns with previous persuasion knowledge literature about the negative effects on purchase intent in the presence of advertising (Hwang & Zhang 2018). The low levels of purchase intent toward sponsored posts may suggest just how sensitive consumers are in the presence of transparent sponsorship disclosures. Even though transparency in advertisements is related to integrity and authenticity (Roche, 2023), the sponsored posts in the study still led to negative purchase intent effects. Results might suggest that transparent and honest sponsorship

disclosures, while valued by consumers, is not enough to drive the intended purchase behaviors. Results might be useful for marketers looking to enhance advertising integrity with the goal of driving sales. If sponsorship transparency is not enough to better secure positive purchasing behaviors, marketers might need to consider alternate ways to resonate with consumer's values and positively affect purchase intent.

5.3 Implications of Sponsorship Disclosure on Influencer Attitudes

H3a stated that individuals exposed to sponsorship disclosure messages would show negative attitudes toward the creator (influencer) of the post. Regardless of influencer type, and in the context of travel UGC, the study respondents indicated having negative attitudes towards influencers who posted sponsored posts. This might suggest that the size of an influencer's perceived reach or popularity does not shield them from negative influencer attitudes when posting sponsored posts.

The study's results also indicated that participant's influencer attitudes levels were higher for non-sponsored posts. The mean score for influencer attitudes toward sponsored posts was 3.93 (SD=1.23). In comparison, the mean score of influencer attitudes toward non-sponsored posts was 4.23 (SD=0.95). Similar to H1, the mean scores testing H3a were not relatively too far from each other, but the study's statistically significant results indicate a meaningful association between sponsored posts and negative influencer attitudes. Additionally, and also similar to H1, the statistically significant results indicate a meaningful difference in influencer attitudes between sponsored and non-sponsored post. Support for H3a provides potential valuable insights on influencer attitudes and their perceived commercial driven goals.

The negative attitudes toward the influencers in the sponsored posts may be due to the negative perceptions that consumers have toward individuals with commercial driven-goals

(Britt et al., 2020). Respondents may have viewed influencers negatively because of the potential financial compensation and the lack of sincerity that is associated from a sponsored post. Even though nano-influencers are perceived as less commercial driven than micro and macro-influencers (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022), the presence of sponsorship disclosures in the posts might have sufficiently influenced respondents' negative attitudes toward all the influencers.

To control for the negative influencer attitudes caused by sponsorship disclosures, influencers could share their personal experience with the brand and explain the reasons that led the brand collaboration. This could build trust and sincerity toward the influencer message. In addition to that, influencers could logically and emotionally explain why they chose to collaborate with a certain brand. By aligning their personal values with that of a brand, they could potentially reduce perceived bias and increase the attitudes toward them.

5.4 Implications of Interaction Effects

H4a stated that in the context of Instagram beach resort content, there is an interaction effect between influencer type and sponsorship disclosure on people's attitudes toward influencers. Support for H4a provides insightful information about the complex aspects of influencer marketing. The statistically significant results portrayed in Figure 1 reveal consumer perceptions of influencers and sponsorship disclosures.

The study showed a notable difference in attitudes toward influencers between sponsored and non-sponsored posts, with the most particular difference shown among micro-influencers. Sponsored posts coming from micro influencers was associated with an influencer attitudes mean score of 3.76 (SD = 1.16). Meanwhile, a notable higher influencer attitudes mean score of 4.62 (SD = 1.17) was linked to non-sponsored, micro-influencer posts. The interaction effect was less noticeable for nano-influencers, suggesting that sponsorship type does not drastically impact

influencer attitudes. Such findings may suggest that the authenticity typically portrayed by nano-influencers (Nordström & Pannula, 2020) may reduce the potential negative effects of sponsorship disclosure.

Additionally, a crossover interaction between macro-influencers can be observed in Figure 1. The interaction showed that sponsored macro-influencer posts had a mean influencer attitude score of 4.21 (SD = 1.18), while the non-sponsored posts had an influencer attitude mean score of 4.02 (SD = 0.60). While the literature suggest that people respond to non-sponsored posts more favorably (Gallit, 2017), the higher mean score for sponsored macro-influencer posts might suggest that macro-influencer's perceived topic expertise could reduce the skepticism that people usually relate tot sponsored posts (Chari et al., 2016). The macro-influencer crossover interaction might imply that macro-influencer sponsored posts might raise influencer attitudes due to macro-influencers' expertise in working with brands they are knowledgeable about.

Findings related to H4a have significant implications for influencer marketing. Differences in how influencers are perceived in sponsored and non-sponsored posts suggest that a one-size fits all approach is less than favorable. To not damage their reputation, micro-influencers might consider leaning toward more organic posts practices, as they had the biggest gap in mean influencer attitudes between sponsored and non-sponsored posts. For macro-influencers, the association between sponsorship disclosure and negative influencer attitudes (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022) might not hold. The crossover interaction effect suggests that macro-influencers may be able to improve the attitudes toward them by participating in transparent and clear brand collaborations. Finally, and regarding for nano-influencers, brands could leverage the close relationships that nano-influencers have with their followers (Giuffredi-

Kähr et al., 2022), while influencers can leverage the minimal shifts in influencer attitudes to effectively and regularly advertise products.

Results from this present study contributes to the body of strategic communication literature by providing psychological aspects about influencer marketing. The complexity of persuasion knowledge and its impact on influencer attitudes is expanded through this study. Statistically significant results for H4a suggest that the effects of persuasion knowledge on influencer attitudes is not uniform across all three types of influencers.

5.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Reflecting from the unexpected statistically non-significant results and the statistically significant interaction between influencer and sponsorship type on influencer attitudes, this thesis presents valuable insights into the role of persuasion knowledge on influencer marketing. Within travel UGC, this thesis offers a deeper understanding of the dynamics between influencers and their effect on brand and influencer attitudes, purchase intent and trust. However, multiple limitations were identified to open the door for a broader set of future research.

One limitation was the reliance of quantitative data. Even though quantitative data can provide a large overview of influencer and sponsorship type effects, the results from the study resulted in an overwhelming amount of statistically non-significant results. Such results may suggest that quantitative methods might only partially capture the complex interactions between influencers and consumers. Future research might benefit from conducting qualitative research such as in-depth interviews or content analyses, especially if conducted with participants that possess a pre-existing parasocial relationship with the influencers. This way, qualitative methods can uncover insightful motivations behind consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions based on real life relationships and experiences.

Additionally, the study's sample of Oklahoma university students limited the scope of generalizability. Future research should include different age groups, cultural background, and geographical locations. Expanding the sample to different demographics can create meaningful strategic implications for marketers who wish to advertise across cultures.

Furthermore, the study only analyzes relationships within the Instagram platform. There is a diverse number of social media platforms, and consumers might be affected differently depending on the platform they use. American use different social media platforms for different purposes (Neels, 2023), and therefore, influencers interactions and effects may be different. Additionally, the study focused on an image-based post, and different social media platforms may put a higher focus on short and long video, or text content. Future research should explore influencer effects on different platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and more.

The integration of parasocial relationships as an independent variable might also serve as a critical component to obtain statistically significant results. The present study's discussion suggested that parasocial relationships are critical for accurate influencer effects. While a fictitious influencer was used in this study to reduce bias, future research might benefit from exploring the dynamics between real influencer and followers. Providing respondents with real influencers in a qualitative setting could provide insights into how relationships affect trust, purchase intent, and attitudes. A qualitative method with real influencers and real parasocial relationships would allow for psychological examinations about the contributions that parasocial relationships might have on different types of influencers and sponsorships.

Finally, the study only analyzes influencers and sponsorship types in the context of travel UGC. Travel is a hedonic practice, and utilitarian content might provide different results. Both hedonic and utilitarian possess different consumer motivations. Hedonic motivations are

concerned with the emotional aspect of shopping (Novela et al., 2020). On the other hand, utilitarian shopping motivations surround refer to logical, non-emotional, methodical reasons. Exploring how consumers interact with different types of content may present valuable insight on underlying shopping motivations.

5.6 Conclusion

Along with the Persuasion Knowledge Model, this study examined the effects of different of influencer (nano, micro and macro-influencers) and sponsorship types (sponsored vs non-sponsored) on consumer purchase intentions, trust, and attitudes within travel UGC in Instagram. Despite employing an experimental design experiment and relying on an extensive amount of existing literature, the majority of the study's results were statistically non-significant. This indicated a more complex relationship between influencers, sponsorship type, and consumer.

The thesis suggests that the statistically non-significant results that emerged from the study may be a result of the lack of parasocial relationships between participants and the stimuli they were exposed to. These relationships play a crucial role in influencer marketing. Parasocial relationships have the ability to affect credibility, purchase intent, attitudes, and credibility. Because of the absence of parasocial relationships, participants may have not interacted with the study's Instagram posts in a manner that mirrors real life.

The only hypotheses that were supported were hypothesis 1, 3a and 4a. Findings suggest that within travel content, there is an interaction effect between influencer and sponsorship type on influencer attitudes. Micro-influencers experienced the greatest difference of influencer attitudes between sponsored a non-sponsored post. Nano-influencers were minimally affected by sponsorship type, and in terms of influencer attitudes, macro-influencers were the only influencer type that benefited from sponsored content. Finally, the study showed that for the sponsored

posts, participants indicated having negative attitudes toward the influencers and negative levels of purchase intent toward brand advertised in the post.

Regarding the method employed in the study, results could have benefited from adopting a qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach could have attempted to capture the complex relationship between participants and influencers in a more realistic setting with more realistic relationships. Furthermore, to broaden the scope of influencer marketing knowledge, future research might benefit from analyzing different samples and social media platforms.

Even though this study only draws direct conclusions from 3 supported hypotheses, it is still valuable for the field of strategic communication as it highlights the complexity of influencer relationships, suggests the importance of parasocial relationships, and opens several opportunities for future research, specifically in the qualitative method section.

References

Abreu, Renata. "Social media micro-infleuncer marketing and purchasing intention of millenials: The role of perceived authenticity and trust." PhD diss., Dublin Business School, 2019.

Bahtar, A. Z., & Muda, M. (2015). The impact of User–Generated Content (UGC) on product reviews towards online purchasing–A conceptual framework. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, *37*, 337-342

Balaban, D. C., Szambolics, J., & Chirică, M. (2022). Parasocial relations and social media influencers' persuasive power. Exploring the moderating role of product involvement. *Acta Psychologica*, *230*, 103731.

Barker, S. (2020, January 7). *How social media influencers can impact your customers' purchase decisions*. Social Media Today. https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/how-social-media-influencers-can-impact-your-customers-purchase-decisions/569813/

Belanche, D., Casalo, L. V., Flavian, M., & Ibanez-Sanchez, S. (2021). Building influencers' credibility on Instagram: Effects on followers' attitudes and behavioral responses toward the influencer. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *61*, 102585

Beveridge, C. (2022, January 13). *What is user-generated content? and why is it important?*. Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard. https://blog.hootsuite.com/user-generated-content-ugc/

Boerman, S. C., Willemsen, L. M., & Van Der Aa, E. P. (2017). "This post is sponsored" effects of sponsorship disclosure on persuasion knowledge and electronic word of mouth in the context of Facebook. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *38*(1), 82-92.

Boerman, S. C., Van Reijmersdal, E. A., & Neijens, P. C. (2014). Effects of sponsorship disclosure timing on the processing of sponsored content: A study on the effectiveness of European disclosure regulations. *Psychology & Marketing*, *31*(3), 214-224.

Boerman, S. C., Van Reijmersdal, E. A., & Neijens, P. C. (2012). Sponsorship disclosure: Effects of duration on persuasion knowledge and brand responses. *Journal of Communication*, *62*(6), 1047-1064.

Borges-Tiago, M. T., Santiago, J., & Tiago, F. (2023). Mega or macro social media influencers: Who endorses brands better?. *Journal of Business Research*, *157*, 113606.

Brewster, M., & Lyu, J. (2020). Exploring the parasocial impact among nano, micro and macro influencers. In *2020 Itaa Virtual Conferenc.*

Britt, R. K., Hayes, J. L., Britt, B. C., & Park, H. (2020). Too big to sell? A computational analysis of network and content characteristics among mega and micro beauty and fashion social media influencers. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *20*(2), 111-118.

Brüns, J. D., & Meißner, M. (2023). Show me that you are advertising: Visual salience of products attenuates detrimental effects of persuasion knowledge activation in influencer advertising. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *148*, 107891.

Carmicheal, K. (2019, September 24). *Traditional Marketing vs. Digital Marketing: Why not both?*. HubSpot Blog. https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/traditional-marketing-vs-digital-marketing

Chari, S., Christodoulides, G., Presi, C., Wenhold, J., & Casaletto, J. P. (2016). Consumer trust in user-generated brand recommendations on Facebook. *Psychology & Marketing*, *33*(12), 1071-1081

Christison, C. (2023, June 30). *How much do influencers make in 2023?*. Hootsuite. https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-much-do-influencers-make/#:~:text=1%2C000–10%2C000%20followers%20%3D%20Nano%2D,–1%2C000%2C000%20followers%20%3D%20Macro%2Dinfluencer

Collabstr. (n.d.). *Free instagram engagement rate calculator*. https://collabstr.com/instagram-engagement-rate-calculator#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20average%20Instagram,over%2010%20million%20Instagram%20accounts

Conde, R., & Casais, B. (2023). Micro, macro and mega-influencers on instagram: The power of persuasion via the parasocial relationship. *Journal of business research*, *158*, 113708.

De Veirman, M., & Hudders, L. (2020). Disclosing sponsored Instagram posts: the role of material connection with the brand and message-sidedness when disclosing covert advertising. *International journal of advertising*, *39*(1), 94-130.

Eisend, M., & Tarrahi, F. (2021). Persuasion knowledge in the marketplace: A meta- analysis. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 32*(1), 3–22.

Ethos Marketing Team. (n.d.). *Nano-influencers: Who, what, why, when, and how to engage them*. ETHOS. https://www.ethos-marketing.com/blog/nano-influencers-social-media-marketing/#:~:text=Nano%2Dinfluencers%20are%20your%20everyday,%2C%20cat%20videos%2C%20and%20memes

Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1994). The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of consumer research*, *21*(1), 1-31.

Gallit, A., & Arts, J. P. M. (2017). The Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure in Blog Posts on Persuasion Knowledge, Brand Responses and Source Credibility Moderated by Product Involvement.

Geng, R., & Chen, J. (2021). The influencing mechanism of interaction quality of UGC on consumers' purchase intention–an empirical analysis. *Frontiers in psychology*, *12*, 697382.

Geyser, W. (2022, November 15). *Nano vs. Micro-Influencer Marketing: What's the difference?* Influencer Marketing Hub. https://influencermarketinghub.com/nano-vs-micro-influencer-marketing/#toc-0

Geyser, W. (2023, March 24). *What is an influencer? - social media influencers defined [updated 2023]*. Influencer Marketing Hub. https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-an-influencer/

Geyser, W. (2023, October 30). *The state of Influencer Marketing 2023: Benchmark report*. Influencer Marketing Hub. https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/

Giuffredi-Kähr, A., Petrova, A., & Malär, L. (2022). Sponsorship disclosure of influencers–a curse or a blessing?. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *57*(1), 18-34

Grand Cayon University. (2022, May 26). *What is a social influencer?*. GCU. https://www.gcu.edu/blog/performing-arts-digital-arts/what-social-influencer

GRIN. (2023, August 15). *Influencer marketing vs. traditional marketing*. https://grin.co/blog/influencer-marketing-vs-traditional-marketing/

Ham, C. D., & Nelson, M. R. (2016). The role of persuasion knowledge, assessment of benefit and harm, and third-person perception in coping with online behavioral advertising. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *62*, 689-702.

Ham, C. D., & Nelson, M. R. (2019). The reflexive persuasion game: The Persuasion knowledge model (1994–2017). In *Advertising Theory* (pp. 124-140). Routledge.

Ham, C. D., Nelson, M. R., & Das, S. (2015). How to measure persuasion knowledge. *International Journal of Advertising*, *34*(1), 17-53.

HubSpot. (2023). *The Ultimate Guide to Influencer marketing - hubspot*. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/53/Sprout%20Social/hubspot-influencer-marketing-guide%20(1).pdf?sf11500472=1

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.

Hwang, Y., & Jeong, S. H. (2016). "This is a sponsored blog post, but all opinions are my own": The effects of sponsorship disclosure on responses to sponsored blog posts. *Computers in human behavior*, *62*, 528-535.

Instagram. (2023). *How to use the paid partnership label to Tag Organic Branded Content on instagram: Help center*. How to Use the Paid Partnership Label to Tag Organic Branded Content on Instagram | Help Center. https://help.instagram.com/1109894795810258

Karagür, Z., Becker, J. M., Klein, K., & Edeling, A. (2022). How, why, and when disclosure type matters for influencer marketing. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *39*(2), 313–335.

Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2019). When less is more: the impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. *Journal of marketing management*, *36*(3-4), 248-278.

Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H. Y. (2020). Influencer advertising on social media: The multiple inference model on influencer-product congruence and sponsorship disclosure. *Journal of Business Research*, *130*, 405-415.

Kim, S. J., Maslowska, E., & Tamaddoni, A. (2019). The paradox of (dis) trust in sponsorship disclosure: The characteristics and effects of sponsored online consumer reviews. *Decision Support Systems*, *116*, 114-124.

Leong, C. M., Loi, A. M. W., & Woon, S. (2021). The influence of social media eWOM information on purchase intention. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 1-13.

Li, F., & Du, T. C. (2011). Who is talking? An ontology-based opinion leader identification framework for word-of-mouth marketing in online social blogs. *Decision support systems*, *51*(1), 190-197.

Lim, R. E., Sung, Y. H., & Hong, J. M. (2023). Online targeted ads: Effects of persuasion knowledge, coping self-efficacy, and product involvement on privacy concerns and ad intrusiveness. *Telematics and Informatics*, *76*, 101920.

Lin, H. C., Bruning, P. F., & Swarna, H. (2018). Using online opinion leaders to promote the hedonic and utilitarian value of products and services. *Business horizons*, *61*(3), 431-442.

Lisichkova, N., & Othman, Z. (2017). The Impact of Influencers on Online Purchase Intent (Thesis). Retrieved from https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mdh:diva-35754

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), 1-12.

Lou, C., Ma, W., & Feng, Y. (2020). A sponsorship disclosure is not enough? How advertising literacy intervention affects consumer reactions to sponsored influencer posts. *Journal of Promotion Management*, *27*(2), 278-305.

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.

Kirmani, A., & Campbell, M. C. (2009). Taking the target's perspective: The persuasion knowledge model. *Social psychology of consumer behavior*, 297-316.

Kuster, E. N. (2017). *Social influencers: examining source credibility and homophily on Instagram* (Master's thesis, University of Twente).

Madrio, Y. (2023, March 31). *24 statistics proving the power of Instagram in higher education*. Pepperland Marketing. https://www.pepperlandmarketing.com/blog/higher-education-instagram-statistics

Martínez-López, F. J., Anaya-Sánchez, R., Fernández Giordano, M., & Lopez-Lopez, D. (2020). Behind influencer marketing: key marketing decisions and their effects on followers' responses. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *36*(7-8), 579-607.

Masuda, H., Han, S. H., & Lee, J. (2021). Impacts of influencer attributes on purchase intentions in social media influencer marketing: Mediating roles of characterizations. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *174*, 121246.

Mathew, J. (2018, June 30). *Council post: Understanding influencer marketing and why it is so effective*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2018/07/30/understanding-influencer-marketing-and-why-it-is-so-effective/?sh=72b817fc71a9

Miksa, N., & Hodgson, R. (2021). The Persuasion Knowledge Model Within Instagram Advertisements. *Journal of Student Research, 10*(4).

Müller, J., & Christandl, F. (2019). Content is king–But who is the king of kings? The effect of content marketing, sponsored content & user-generated content on brand responses. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *96*, 46-55.

Nordström, L., & Pannula, R. (2020). Under the influence : A quantitative study about social media influencers different attributes effect on online purchase intent. (Thesis). Retrieved from https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mdh:diva-48269

Mayrhofer, M., Matthes, J., Einwiller, S., & Naderer, B. (2020). User generated content presenting brands on social media increases young adults' purchase intention. *International Journal of Advertising*, *39*(1), 166-186.

Muda, M., & Hamzah, M. I. (2021). Should I suggest this YouTube clip? The impact of UGC source credibility on eWOM and purchase intention. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *15*(3), 441-459.

Neels, L. (2023, December 21). *Understanding the different social media platforms: Which one fits your business?: Marin software blog*. Marin. https://www.marinsoftware.com/blog/understanding-the-different-social-media-platforms-which-one-fits-your-business#:~:text=Most%20Americans%20also%20use%20multiple,their%20target%20audience%20most%20effectively.

Novela, S., Sihombing, Y. O., Caroline, E., & Octavia, R. (2020, August). The effects of hedonic and utilitarian motivation toward online purchase intention with attitude as intervening

variable. In *2020 International Conference on Information Management and Technology (ICIMTech)* (pp. 75-80). IEEE.

Oliveira, T., Araujo, B., & Tam, C. (2020). Why do people share their travel experiences on social media?. *Tourism Management, 78*, 104041.

Pechinski, L. (2022, July 14). *What is brand credibility?*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-brand-credibility-lynn-pechinski/

Pfeuffer, A., & Huh, J. (2020). Effects of different sponsorship disclosure message types on consumers' trust and attitudes. *International Journal of Advertising*, *40*(1), 49-80

Rahmani, V. (2023). Persuasion knowledge framework: Toward a comprehensive model of consumers' persuasion knowledge. *AMS Review*, 1-22

Rella. (2022, June 23). *Best practices for Nano, Micro, & Macro Influencers*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/best-practices-nano-micro-macro-influencers-rellasocial/

Ren, L., Lee, S. K., & Chun, S. (2023). The effects of influencer type, regulatory focus, and perceived authenticity on consumers' purchase intention. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *47*(4), 1241-1255.

Reynolds, S. (2022). *Parasocial Relationships with Online Influencers* (Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College).

Roche, A. (2023, December 26). *The importance of transparency in digital marketing*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/importance-transparency-digital-marketing-andrew-roche-otmfc

Sahin, I. (2006). Detailed review of Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory and educational technology-related studies based on Rogers' theory. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET*, *5*(2), 14-23.

Saffari, S. (2023, October 3). *Influencer marketing vs traditional advertising: The verdict.* Influencer Marketing VS Traditional Advertising: The Verdict. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/influencer-marketing-vs-traditional-advertising-verdict-sarah-saffari/

Sethna, B. N., Hazari, S., & Bergiel, B. (2017). Influence of user generated content in online shopping: impact of gender on purchase behaviour, trust, and intention to purchase. *International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing*, *8*(4), 344-371.

Silaban, P. H., Silalahi, A. D. K., Octoyuda, E., Sitanggang, Y. K., Hutabarat, L., & Sitorus, A. I. S. (2022). Understanding hedonic and utilitarian responses to product reviews on youtube and purchase intention. *Cogent Business & Management*, *9*(1), 2062910.

Taillon, B. J., Mueller, S. M., Kowalczyk, C. M., & Jones, D. N. (2020). Understanding the relationships between social media influencers and their followers: the moderating role of closeness. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *29*(6), 767-782.

Terttunen, A. (2017). The influence of Instagram on consumers' travel planning and destination choice (Thesis). Retrieved from https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/129932

The Economist. (2022, July 14). *Are plastic-free beach holidays possible?* https://impact.economist.com/ocean/ocean-health/are-plastic-free-beach-holidays-possible#:~:text=About%2080%25%20of%20all%20tourism,350%20million%20people%20each%20year.

Wiley, D. (2021). *What you need to know about working with Nano Influencers*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/03/08/what-you-need-to-know-about-working-with-nano-influencers/?sh=3edc07466851

Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism management*, *31*(2), 179-188.

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.

Xie, Q., & Feng, Y. (2023). How to strategically disclose sponsored content on Instagram? The synergy effects of two types of sponsorship disclosures in influencer marketing. *International Journal of Advertising*, *42*(2), 317-343.

Zeng, B., & Gerritsen, R. (2014). What do we know about social media in tourism? A review. *Tourism management perspectives*, *10*, 27-36.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Mediation Figures

Figure 4

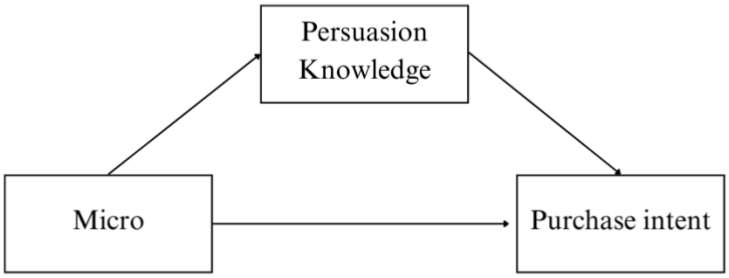


Figure 5

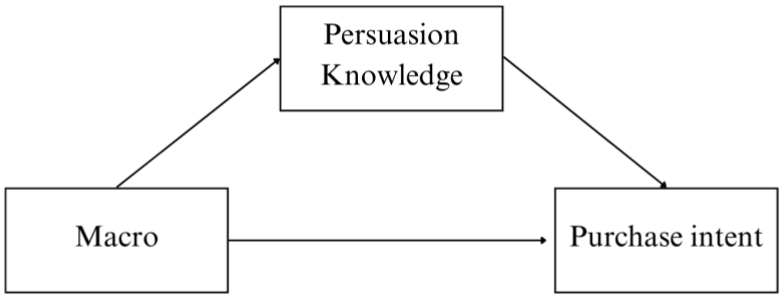


Figure 6

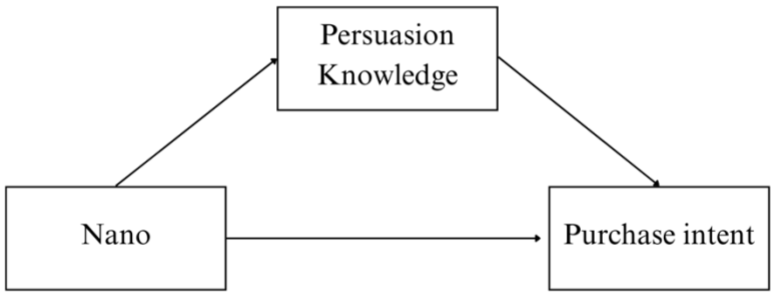
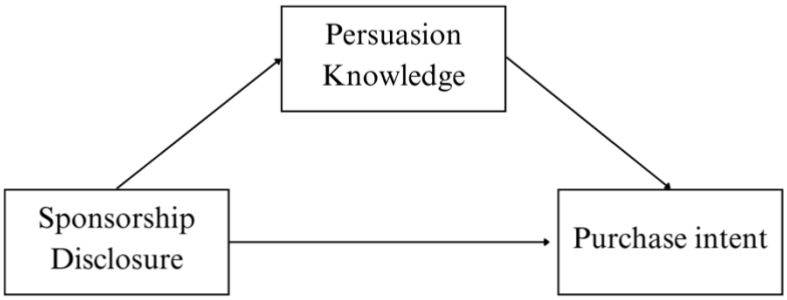


Figure 7



Appendix B: Experiment Recruitment Email

Hi!

I'm Diego Perez Breton Borbon, a student from the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma. I am conducting a research survey to examine how different types of social media influencers might affect social media users.

Your response is important because you can contribute to an essential knowledge base regarding social media influencer and their role in the advertising world. Your responses will be kept confidential.

University students above the age of 18 years are needed to participate in an online survey study that requires 8 to 10 minutes. You will not benefit directly from your participation in the study.

In the final research report, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records. All participants who complete the survey will have the opportunity to submit their email for an extra credit opportunity (only valid if an OU instructor has appointed the survey to be completed for extra credit opportunity in their selected class). Please use the survey link below if you would like to participate.

Link to study survey: https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cMgaLdNCqpqVwUe

For more information about the study, please contact me at diego.a.perezbreton.borbon-1@ou.edu.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Diego Alejandro Perez Breton Borbon

Appendix C: IRB Approval Email

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: October 17, 2023 **IRB#:** 16522

Principal Investigator: Diego Alejandro Perez-Breton Borbon

Approval Date: 10/17/2023

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Examining the Impact of Different Types of Social Media Influencers on Attitudes & Purchase Intent: Travel User-Generated Content

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon. **Please note, the IRB made minor revisions to the online consent form. Please ensure that you are using the IRB approved consent language once data collection begins.**

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix D: IRB Qualtrics Experiment

Examining the Impact of Different Types of Social Media Influencers

Start of Block: Consent Form

Consent Form **Online Consent to Participate in Research**

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma? My name is Diego Alejandro Perez Breton Borbon from the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication and I invite you to participate in my Thesis research project titled "Examining the Impact of Different Types of Social Media Influencers on Attitudes & Purchase Intent: Travel User Generated Content".

This research is being conducted via Qualtrics. You were selected as a possible participant because you decided to take this survey. You must be at least 18 to participate in this study. Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in the research.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the user-generated content from different types of social influencers may affect social media user's attitudes and purchase intent. About 300 people will take part in this research.

If you agree to be in this research, you will need to give answers to questions related to some simple demographic information. In addition, you will look at one out of six possible social media posts and answer several questions regarding your thoughts about it.

Your participation will take between 8 to 10 minutes.

There is a social risk related to collecting data online and the potential for accidental data release. The organization hosting the data collection platform has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. There is a risk that the external organization, which is not part of the research team, may gain access to or retain your data or your IP address which could be used to re-identify you. No assurance can be made about their use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

There are no benefits from participating in this research.

If an University of Oklahoma instructor has appointed a student as one of the participants to complete this survey, the student will be eligible to receive extra credit on the designated instructor's class.

In our research report, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

After removing all identifiers, we might share your data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

You do not have to participate. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you do not have to answer any questions and can stop participating at any time.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact Diego Alejandro Perez Breton Borbon at diego.a.perezbreton.borbon-1@ou.edu or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Doyle Yoon at dyoon@ou.edu.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s). Please print this document for your records. This research has been approved by the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus IRB. IRB Number: 16522 Approval date: 10/17/2023

By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

- ○ I agree (1)
- ○ I do not agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Online Consent to Participate in Research Would you like to be involved in research at the Univer... = I do not agree

End of Block: Consent Form

Start of Block: College?

Q1 Are you currently enrolled in college?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

End of Block: College?

Start of Block: Age?

Q2 What's your age range?

- ○ 18-24 (1)
- ○ 25-30 (2)
- ○ 31-45 (3)
- ○ 46+ (4)

End of Block: Age?

Start of Block: Which SM you use?

Q4 Which of the following social media platforms do you regularly use?

- ☐ Instagram (1)
- ☐ Facebook (2)
- ☐ Snapchat (3)
- ☐ TikTok (4)
- ☐ Other (5)
- ☐ None (6)

End of Block: Which SM you use?

Start of Block: Definitions

Q5 Important definitions to know before study ("Submit" button will appear after 20 seconds).

User-Generated Content: Any type of content created and published by users on social media networks.

Nano-Influencer: Social media users characterized by having less than 10,000 followers and whose followers consist mostly of friends and acquaintances.

Micro-Influencer: Social media users characterized by having between 10,000 and 50,000 followers.

Macro-Influencer: Social media users characterized by having between 100,000 and 1,000,000 followers.

Q129 Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

End of Block: Definitions

Start of Block: Nano-Not Sponsored

Q34 Imagine that while you are scrolling down on Instagram, you stumble upon Pat Jones, a social media user with 5,467 followers. Look carefully at their post recommending The Beach Resort and then answer the questions below ("Submit" button will appear after 30 seconds).

Q130 Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

Page Break

Q15 Which type of influencer were you exposed to?

- Nano-Influencer (1)
- Micro-Influencer (2)
- Macro-Influencer (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q16 Did you see a brand sponsorship disclosure in the Instagram post?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q17 How many followers did the influencer had?

- Less than 10,000 (1)
- Between 10,000-50,000 (2)
- Between 500,000-1,000,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q18 How many likes did the post have?

- Between 200-300 (1)
- Between 1,000-1,500 (2)
- Between 10,000-15,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q19 How many comments did the post have?

- Between 20-50 (1)
- Between 100-200 (2)
- Between 700-1,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Page Break

Q4 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I think the user's generated content statement is correct. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is dependable. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is honest. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q6 How did you feel about The Beach Resort in the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

10 How did you feel about the creator from the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

14 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
After browsing the user generated content, I have a great possibility to consider buying a room at The Beach Resort. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to buy the resort room recommended in the user generated content. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'll recommend to others the resort recommended in the user generated content. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q5 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The post was advertising. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted without commercial interest. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted to advertise a product. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

20 What gender do you identify yourself with?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

End of Block: Nano-Not Sponsored

Start of Block: Nano-Sponsored

Q147 Imagine that while you are scrolling down on Instagram, you stumble upon Pat Jones, a social media user with 5,467 followers. Look carefully at their post recommending The Beach Resort and then answer the questions below ("Submit" button will appear after 30 seconds).

Q148 Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

Page Break

Q149 Which type of influencer were you exposed to?

- Nano-Influencer (1)
- Micro-Influencer (2)
- Macro-Influencer (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q150 Did you see a brand sponsorship disclosure in the Instagram post?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q151 How many followers did the influencer had?

- Less than 10,000 (1)
- Between 10,000-50,000 (2)
- Between 500,000-1,000,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q152 How many likes did the post have?

- Between 200-300 (1)
- Between 1,000-1,500 (2)
- Between 10,000-15,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q153 How many comments did the post have?

- Between 20-50 (1)
- Between 100-200 (2)
- Between 700-1,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Page Break

Q154 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I think the user's generated content statement is correct. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is dependable. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is honest. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q155 How did you feel about The Beach Resort in the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q156 How did you feel about the creator from the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q157 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
After browsing the user generated content, I have a great possibility to consider buying a room at The Beach Resort. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to buy the resort room recommended in the user generated content. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'll recommend to others the resort recommended in the user generated content. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q158 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The post was advertising. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted without commercial interest. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted to advertise a product. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q159 What gender do you identify yourself with?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

End of Block: Nano-Sponsored

Start of Block: Micro-Sponored

Q160 Imagine that while you are scrolling down on Instagram, you stumble upon Pat Jones, a social media user with 31,467 followers. Look carefully at their post recommending The Beach Resort and then answer the questions below ("Submit" button will appear after 30 seconds).

Q161 Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

Page Break

Q162 Which type of influencer were you exposed to?

- Nano-Influencer (1)
- Micro-Influencer (2)
- Macro-Influencer (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q163 Did you see a brand sponsorship disclosure in the Instagram post?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q164 How many followers did the influencer had?

- Less than 10,000 (1)
- Between 10,000-50,000 (2)
- Between 500,000-1,000,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q165 How many likes did the post have?

- Between 200-300 (1)
- Between 1,000-1,500 (2)
- Between 10,000-15,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q166 How many comments did the post have?

- Between 20-50 (1)
- Between 100-200 (2)
- Between 700-1,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Page Break

Q167 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I think the user's generated content statement is correct. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is dependable. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is honest. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q168 How did you feel about The Beach Resort in the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q169 How did you feel about the creator from the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q170 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
After browsing the user generated content, I have a great possibility to consider buying a room at The Beach Resort. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to buy the resort room recommended in the user generated content. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'll recommend to others the resort recommended in the user generated content. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q171 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The post was advertising. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted without commercial interest. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted to advertise a product. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q172 What gender do you identify yourself with?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

End of Block: Micro-Sponored

Start of Block: Micro-Not Sponsored

Q173 Imagine that while you are scrolling down on Instagram, you stumble upon Pat Jones, a social media user with 31,467 followers. Look carefully at their post recommending The Beach Resort and then answer the questions below ("Submit" button will appear after 30 seconds).

Q174 Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

Page Break

Q175 Which type of influencer were you exposed to?

- Nano-Influencer (1)
- Micro-Influencer (2)
- Macro-Influencer (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q176 Did you see a brand sponsorship disclosure in the Instagram post?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q177 How many followers did the influencer had?

- Less than 10,000 (1)
- Between 10,000-50,000 (2)
- Between 500,000-1,000,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q178 How many likes did the post have?

- Between 200-300 (1)
- Between 1,000-1,500 (2)
- Between 10,000-15,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q179 How many comments did the post have?

- Between 20-50 (1)
- Between 100-200 (2)
- Between 700-1,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Page Break

Q180 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I think the user's generated content statement is correct. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is dependable. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is honest. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q181 How did you feel about The Beach Resort in the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q182 How did you feel about the creator from the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q183 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
After browsing the user generated content, I have a great possibility to consider buying a room at The Beach Resort. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to buy the resort room recommended in the user generated content. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'll recommend to others the resort recommended in the user generated content. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q184 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The post was advertising. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted without commercial interest. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted to advertise a product. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q185 What gender do you identify yourself with?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

End of Block: Micro-Not Sponsored

Start of Block: Macro-Not Sponsored

Q186 Imagine that while you are scrolling down on Instagram, you stumble upon Pat Jones, a social media user with 540,467 followers. Look carefully at their post recommending The Beach Resort and then answer the questions below ("Submit" button will appear after 30 seconds).

Q187 Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

Page Break

Q188 Which type of influencer were you exposed to?

- Nano-Influencer (1)
- Micro-Influencer (2)
- Macro-Influencer (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q189 Did you see a brand sponsorship disclosure in the Instagram post?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q190 How many followers did the influencer had?

- Less than 10,000 (1)
- Between 10,000-50,000 (2)
- Between 500,000-1,000,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q191 How many likes did the post have?

- Between 200-300 (1)
- Between 1,000-1,500 (2)
- Between 10,000-15,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q192 How many comments did the post have?

- Between 20-50 (1)
- Between 100-200 (2)
- Between 700-1,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Page Break

Q193 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I think the user's generated content statement is correct. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is dependable. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is honest. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q194 How did you feel about The Beach Resort in the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q195 How did you feel about the creator from the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q196 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
After browsing the user generated content, I have a great possibility to consider buying a room at The Beach Resort. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to buy the resort room recommended in the user generated content. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'll recommend to others the resort recommended in the user generated content. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q197 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The post was advertising. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted without commercial interest. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted to advertise a product. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q198 What gender do you identify yourself with?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

End of Block: Macro-Not Sponsored

Start of Block: Macro-Sponsored

Q199 Imagine that while you are scrolling down on Instagram, you stumble upon Pat Jones, a social media user with 540,467 followers. Look carefully at their post recommending The Beach Resort and then answer the questions below ("Submit" button will appear after 30 seconds).

Q200 Timing
First Click (1)
Last Click (2)
Page Submit (3)
Click Count (4)

Page Break

Q201 Which type of influencer were you exposed to?

- ○ Nano-Influencer (1)
- ○ Micro-Influencer (2)
- ○ Macro-Influencer (3)
- ○ Unsure (4)

Q202 Did you see a brand sponsorship disclosure in the Instagram post?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure (3)

Q203 How many followers did the influencer had?

- ○ Less than 10,000 (1)
- ○ Between 10,000-50,000 (2)
- ○ Between 500,000-1,000,000 (3)
- ○ Unsure (4)

Q204 How many likes did the post have?

- Between 200-300 (1)
- Between 1,000-1,500 (2)
- Between 10,000-15,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Q205 How many comments did the post have?

- Between 20-50 (1)
- Between 100-200 (2)
- Between 700-1,000 (3)
- Unsure (4)

Page Break

Q206 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I think the user's generated content statement is correct. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is dependable. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the user's generated content statement is honest. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q207 How did you feel about The Beach Resort in the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q208 How did you feel about the creator from the Instagram post?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Good
Highly Undesirable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Desirable
Highly Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Pleasant
Highly Disliked	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Highly Liked

Page Break

Q209 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
After browsing the user generated content, I have a great possibility to consider buying a room at The Beach Resort. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to buy the resort room recommended in the user generated content. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'll recommend to others the resort recommended in the user generated content. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q210 Considering the previous Instagram post, select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The post was advertising. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted without commercial interest. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post was posted to advertise a product. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q211 What gender do you identify yourself with?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

End of Block: Macro-Sponsored

Start of Block: Extra Credit

Q125 If you are a University of Oklahoma student and completed this survey for extra credit purposes, please provide the name of your instructor, class, and OU email.

_____

End of Block: Extra Credit

Appendix E: Stimuli


PatJones · Follow
The Beach Resort
1,080 likes
PatJones Loving @TheBeachResort, wishing all my mornings looked like this❤️ ... more
View all 137 comments
5 days ago


PatJones · Follow
Paid Partnership with The Beach Resort
1,080 likes
PatJones Loving @TheBeachResort, wishing all my mornings looked like this❤️ #Sponsored ... more
View all 137 comments
5 days ago

PatJones · Follow
The Beach Resort

12,750 likes

PatJones Loving @TheBeachResort, wishing all my mornings looked like this❤️ ... more

View all 761 comments

5 days ago

PatJones · Follow
Paid Partnership with The Beach Resort

12,750 likes

PatJones Loving @TheBeachResort, wishing all my mornings looked like this❤️ #Sponsored ... more

View all 761 comments

5 days ago