



ANGELS OR VAMPIRES?

An investigation of the effects of visual attention in influencer marketing using eye tracking

MASTER THESIS

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Abstract

Formål - Følgende studie har til formål at undersøge effekten af den visuelle opmærksomhed, der tildeles brands i influenters sponsorerede opslag på det sociale medie Instagram. I denne sammenhæng præsenteres følgende hypoteser: 1) jo længere tid der fikses på brandet og influenten i sponsorerede opslag, jo mere positiv ændring i brand-attitude, 2) jo længere tid der fikses på reklamemarkeringen, jo mere negativ ændring i brand-attitude, og slutteligt 3) eksponering for et sponsoreret opslag af en velkendt influent vil lede til lavere (a) uhjulpent brand-erindring og (b) hjulpet brand-erindring, sammenlignet med sponsorerede opslag af ukendte influenter.

Metode - Studiets kvantitative undersøgelsesdesign er tredelt, startende med en prætest af brand-attitude blandt 20 deltagere, efterfulgt af et eye-tracking eksperiment, samt en afsluttende posttest af brand-erindring og brand-attitude.

Resultater - Studiet fandt ingen signifikant sammenhæng mellem visuel opmærksomhed i sponsorerede opslag og ændring i brand-attitude, hvorfor hypotese 1 og 2 forkastes. Derimod fandt studiet en signifikant lavere grad af hjulpet brand-erindring i et sponsoreret opslag af en kendt influent i modsætning til en ukendt influent, hvilket betyder at hypotese 3(b) accepteres, mens hypotese 3(a) forkastes.

Konklusion - Det konkluderes at visuel opmærksomhed ikke har nogen signifikant effekt på attitude over for det reklamerede brand i et sponsoreret opslag på Instagram. I stedet bevises det, at en velkendt influent reducerer hjulpet brand-erindring signifikant sammenlignet med en ukendt influent. Således finder studiet empirisk evidens for eksistensen af *the vampire effect* indenfor influent-markedsføring.

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1. Introduction

Consumers' attention has for long been of essential value to companies (Zulli, 2018). Within the media environment, audiences are aggregated and sold as commodities to advertisers, who use their airtime to deliver their marketing messages. In the traditional media environment, television advertisers paid on the basis of temporal conditions; for instance, prime-time viewers were considered the most valuable and hence, advertisers would pay a premium for airing their commercials during these time slots. However, in today's media environment, with the advent of social media platforms and digital technology in general, information is distributed through an extensive range of different media outlets and platforms. As a result, audience attention has become scattered (Zulli, 2018). This development has also brought along an overabundance of information and commercial messages. In fact, research estimates that in the span of a day, the average American is exposed to between 4,000 and 10,000 advertisements (Marshall, 2015). This cluttered environment has led some researchers to declare that we are now living in the *attention economy*, where attention not only is one of the most valuable resources, but also a scarcity (Davenport, Beck & Hogan, 2001).

Davenport et al. (2001), which were some of the earliest researchers to introduce the notion of the attention economy, argue that attention should be considered the real currency of businesses and individuals. In the attention economy, capital, labor, information, and knowledge are all in more plentiful supply than ever. What is in short supply is human attention. While attention does share many of the attributes of a monetary instrument, such as the ability to trade or purchase it, a clear distinction between attention and money lies in the fact that, contrary to money, it is not irrelevant from whom the attention emanates (Franck, 2019).

The development of the attention economy has especially been driven by the emergence of social media platforms, which has allowed advertisers to record data about consumers' online behaviors, preferences, and lifestyles and subsequently, to segment the consumers more specifically than ever and ultimately, to target the most relevant ones. Among these

social media platforms is Instagram, which focuses on visual content in the form of photos posted by its users. As the name indicates, users of the platform are encouraged to post instant photos from their daily lives, and share these with their followers. Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has gained a substantial user base, which reached one billion users globally in June 2018 (Statista, 2018a). Instagram has also paved the way for a new breed of celebrities; the *instafamous* (Marwick, 2015). While celebrities historically have proliferated through more traditional broadcast media, the contemporary shift in the media landscape evoked by the emergence of social media has contributed to a major change in fame and celebrity. The celebrity culture is increasingly being populated by more or less ordinary people, who have risen to prominence by “simply” sharing constant details about their everyday lives on Instagram. Different instafamous celebrities have surfaced with different themes of photos, where some are focusing on specific themes such as fashion, beauty, food or lifestyle in the photos that they are posting. This new breed of celebrities is able to amass substantial crowds of followers through their online activities on Instagram, while still remaining relatively unknown to the general population (Marwick, 2015). This combination of a niche orientation while having direct access to an extensive audience of followers has left the instafamous celebrities in very influential positions (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack & Zahid, 2018). As a result of their influential positions, these instafamous celebrities are often associated with the term *influencers*.

Many companies see influencers as an opportunity to gain the attention of their followers by entering partnerships where the influencer recommends or advertises for the company's products or services in return for some type of payment. This is coined *influencer marketing*, which has quickly become one of the most popular marketing tools for many of the companies that are actively using the internet as a strategic communication tool. As such, influencers are seen as digital channels that can mediate messages and affect communities in the digital environment, where messages can be disseminated rapidly and easily (Uzunoğlu & Misci, 2014).

The global Instagram influencer market size was close to 1.8 billion USD in 2018 and is expected to double by 2020 (Statista, 2018b). Evidently, the market for influencer marketing is growing, yet it seems to remain a small part of companies' marketing

budgets, as investments in influencer marketing represented less than one percent of the global advertising spend in 2018 (Statista, 2019). With influencer marketing still being a relatively new phenomenon, influencers have been in advantageous positions to set the price of their followers' attention. The question that then arises is whether the attention gained from influencer marketing is in fact as valuable to the advertised brand as the popularity implies.

This question emerges in a time where many researchers and practitioners have called out companies and influencers for the misleading and covert nature of influencer marketing (e.g. Wojdyski, 2016). For long, influencers and consequently companies have benefited from the grey zone that has existed in terms of disclosing paid partnerships on social media, as this type of advertising does not completely resemble the normal kinds of advertising that the legislation originally addressed. Hence, in a paid post without an explicit sponsorship disclosure, an influencers' positive evaluations of a brand are received by their followers with no knowledge that the positive evaluation is being paid for. In response, regulators across the world are increasingly addressing this with specific guidelines and directions for proper conduct in influencer marketing (International Council for Ad Self-Regulation, 2018).

In spite of the increased popularity and the apparent advantages of influencer marketing, companies have struggled with measuring the effectiveness of their efforts and hence the value of the attention deriving from it (Zulli, 2018). For instance, *reach* and *engagement* are often adopted as the primary key performance indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of influencer marketing (Medium, 2019). In relation to reach, although a certain number of followers has been exposed to the sponsored post, uncertainty remains as to whether the followers in fact noticed and processed the brand message. Engagement, on the other hand, relates to the reactions to the content from the followers in the form of e.g. likes and comments (Zulli, 2018). However, companies have difficulties in attributing the positive sentiments and are thus left in uncertainty in regards to whether these sentiments are directed towards the partnership or the influencer alone. Consequently, to assess the success of their influencer marketing efforts, companies

arguably need to be able to also measure the effect on the brand seen in isolation, on measures more central to the brand than reach and engagement.

Interestingly, taking influencer marketing into the perspective of the attention economy, specific focus on measuring attention seems to be limited among practitioners, despite it being considered one of the most valuable, but also scarce resources. Instead, consumers' attention has often been equated with reach, as well as self-reported memory and recall of the advertised brands. However, advances within neuroscientific research has enabled researchers to measure the actual visual attention devoted to particular objects via eye tracking technology. Hence, by applying the neuroscientific method of eye tracking, companies can obtain more accurate insight into the level of visual attention that they gain from their influencer marketing efforts.

Particularly, the pictorial nature of Instagram arguably calls for companies to consider using eye tracking together with more brand-related measures to measure the effectiveness of their influencer marketing efforts, and ultimately assess the real value of the attention gained from it.

1.1 Research Question

Therefore, present paper will focus on brand-related effectiveness measures combined with neuroscientific measures of visual attention, and thus present the following research question:

RQ: *What is the effect of followers' visual attention towards sponsored posts by an influencer on Instagram on the advertised brand?*

1.2 Scope of the study

Present study will only focus on influencer marketing on Instagram, although we acknowledge that the term is also used for influential personalities on other social media platforms such as YouTube and Snapchat, as well as on blogs. Moreover, present study will only address posts appearing in the news feed on Instagram, and not take into account

other features of the platform such as *Instagram Stories* and the *Explore Page*. Furthermore, present study will only focus on sponsored posts, i.e. posts where the influencer receives a payment in return for a brand endorsement, as opposed to other commercial types of content such as affiliate links and gifted products or services. Present study will be based on one Danish influencer as an exemplifying case to capture the circumstances and the conditions of a typical influencer marketing situation.

In terms of effect, present paper will limit its scope to examine branding-related effect measures of marketing efforts. Hence, when investigating the effect on the advertised brand, measures such as sales and return on investment (ROI) will not be included, although we acknowledge that such measures tend to be the ultimate objective of companies' marketing efforts. This limitation is due to the lack of availability of such data, as well as the difficulty of attributing that data to specific marketing efforts.

1.3 Structure of the paper

The structure of present paper is intended to reflect our philosophical view on conducting scientific research. As researchers, we believe that a reality exists beyond our grasp and that it is possible to obtain objective knowledge about it. However, we also acknowledge that we are not infallible and that the ontological nature of reality is not directly accessible to us. Thus, we adopt the view of critical realism as presented by Roy Bhaskar (2008). Consequently, we consider the ontology of reality to be divided into three overlapping domains; *the domain of real*, *the domain of actual*, and *the domain of empirical* (Bhaskar, 2008). The actual domain consists of all sorts of phenomena, including those we know about and those we do not, whereas the real domain consists of all the structures, forces, and mechanisms that constitute these phenomena. The empirical domain, on the other hand, consists of all the empirical matter that we are able to gather and experience. Hence, the matter that we can experience empirically ought to also exist on the other two domains. Thus, the empirical domain functions as the gateway to investigate and understand the actual phenomena and the structures and forces that constitute them (Bhaskar, 2008). In the case of present paper, the investigated phenomenon is influencer marketing, whereas the force that has contributed to the constitution of its popularity is the presumed effectiveness of it to gain consumer attention. To investigate this phenomenon

and force, biometric activity in the form of eye movements and positions will be measured on the empirical level as a representation of visual attention together with quantitative self-reported data.

The structure of present paper is designed in line with the prevalent directions of critical realism for conducting research (Nygaard, 2012): The first step of our research process is to identify the phenomenon of influencer marketing and define the purpose of the study, which was done in the introduction (see section 1). The second step is to localize and characterize influencer marketing, by loading the phenomenon with meaning. This is obtained by the use of secondary empirical data in our literature review (see section 2), which will deal with both the advantages of the phenomenon for companies, as well as the potential disadvantages. The literature review will however also deal with how marketers traditionally measure effect, in order to assess how present paper will measure effect. From the view of critical realism, secondary empirical data best serves as a foundation in the initial phase of description and characterization (Nygaard, 2012). However, if one seeks to obtain an understanding of hitherto unexplored facets of a phenomenon, in this case influencer marketing, critical realism generally calls for primary empirical data (Nygaard, 2012). Therefore, the knowledge that we obtain in the literature review will be used to first choose the relevant method for gathering empirical data, and second, to formulate hypotheses to test with the chosen method (see section 3). Accordingly, the fourth step of the research process of present paper is to collect and gather primary data about influencer marketing and its effectiveness based on visual attention. Hence, section 4 will elaborate on the chosen method and research design, while section 5 will present the results of the study.

In contrast to the deductive reasoning that usually is applied in classic positivist studies, critical realism argues for the application of abductive reasoning, i.e. to infer the most plausible explanation of the observations (Nygaard, 2012). This is due to the assumed epistemological relativism, namely that knowledge is articulated from various standpoints and is subject to various interests and influences (Nygaard, 2012). Hence, it may be naïve to believe that we are able to settle at an absolute, guaranteed conclusion. As such, the fifth step of the research process in present paper is to concatenate the primary empirical

data with the two other domains of reality, in order to understand and discuss what most likely constitutes the phenomenon (see section 6). This leads us to the sixth and final step of the process, namely presenting the conclusion of the study (see section 7). Subsequent to the conclusion, present paper will deal with the implications of the conclusion (section 8) as well as assess the limitations and consequent future research that ought to be conducted to accommodate any shortcomings and validate the results further.

2. Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to gain insights into the phenomenon of influencer marketing and its effects in a marketing context, to be able to first decide on the most suitable method to answer our research question with and second, to formulate specific hypotheses to test. Consequently, the following literature review is divided into three parts. The first part of the literature review will examine the advantages of influencer marketing from a company's perspective. The second part of the literature review will investigate the covert nature of influencer marketing and the effect of this on the advertised brand when utilizing influencer marketing. The third and final part of the literature review will serve to determine what is generally considered as effectiveness of marketing efforts within marketing research.

In order to review relevant literature for present paper, literature within each part of the literature review is selected based on its significance to the research question. The studies are assessed as significant if either the theory or method of the studies are relevant to the research question, and thus, may help building the hypotheses in present study.

2.1 Part I: The advantages of influencer marketing

Part I of the literature review is divided into two subparts. The first subpart will examine the shared theoretical foundations between influencers and previous theories on endorsement strategies. This part will account for similarities and differences of influencer marketing, as well as the opportunities that it offers companies. The second subpart will account for the theoretical foundations of the persuasiveness of influencers, as well as examine what previous studies have found to be the effects of this on the advertised brands.

2.1.1 From 'Opinion leaders' to 'Influencers'

Companies have for long partnered with influential members of society in order to gain an advantage among their competitors. Therefore, we will in this section put influencer marketing into a historical context, as it seems that influencer marketing is not a completely new phenomenon. In fact, influencer marketing seems to share theoretical foundations with several other types of endorsement strategies that companies have sought to capitalize on throughout the course of time. Thus, in the first part of the literature review we will deal with one of the earliest endorsement theories, namely the opinion leadership theory. Second we will include the theory of celebrity endorsement, as this is very closely related to influencer marketing. Third, we will deal with how influencer marketing distinguish itself from the other two theories. Fourth, we will present the advantages that influencers offer companies by introducing the concept of native advertising.

2.1.1.1 Opinion leadership theory

In 1948, Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (in Katz, 1957) introduced the notion of *opinion leaders* following an analysis of the decision-making processes among American citizens during the course of an election campaign. Although the study by Lazarsfeld et al. has been heavily criticized throughout the years, the theory of opinion leadership remains widely used within marketing literature (Katz, 1957). Contrary to the prevailing view on the flow of mass communication, i.e. that communication is directly transmitted from mass media to the individual, Lazarsfeld et al. (in Katz, 1957) proposed the *two-step flow of communication*. The theory suggested that influences stemming from mass media first reach so-called opinion leaders that in turn pass on what they read or hear to their everyday associates (Katz, 1957). Hence, the theory posited that some individuals hold influential positions, which allow them to affect the decisions of others. Based on the authors' empirical research, a common denominator for these opinion leaders was that they were found to be considerably more exposed to communication from mass media, such as radio, newspapers, and magazines. As a result, they often assumed roles of specialists or experts in the eyes of their peers - but mostly within their main fields of interest. With that being said, while the opinion leaders may be more influential within the

particular sphere of which they are interested, the opinion leaders and the people whom they influence tend to be very much alike. In fact, the parties typically belong to the same primary groups of family, friends, and co-workers, with social relations being built accordingly (Katz, 1957).

While opinion leadership theory centers around influences stemming from social relations among peers, other contemporary theories suggest that influence also can stem from individuals outside people's social network; individuals that are greatly admired for their personal qualities, fame, and celebrity.

2.1.1.2 Celebrity endorsement

Companies have for a long time invested substantial amounts of money in aligning their brands with influential endorsers (Erdogan, 1999). Since the late nineteenth century, companies have allied themselves with celebrities that are seen as attractive and likeable, with the expectation that these qualities are transferred from the endorser to the brand in the mind of the consumers (Erdogan, 1999). Besides transferring these positive qualities to the brand, celebrity endorsers also serve as a mean to create and maintain attention in advertising as a result of their fame (Erdogan, 1999).

In relation to the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser, McCracken (1989) argues that it primarily depends on the meaning that he or she brings to the endorsement process. As such, the variety of meanings that can be conveyed by an endorser is plentiful, e.g. status, gender, age, lifestyle, etc. McCracken (1989) describes the meaning transfer process of celebrity endorsement by dividing it into three stages. First, the relevant endorser is identified based on the desired qualities that reside within the celebrity. Logically, these qualities of the celebrity ought to be of public acquaintance - to some extent at least. In the second stage, these qualities are ideally transferred from the celebrity to the particular product or brand via advertising elements such as visual cues and textual messages. At this stage, it is of significant importance that the advertisement is designed in a way that clearly conveys the essential similarity between the celebrity and the brand, before the qualities can be transformed into meaning. The final stage entails that consumers successfully decode and adopt the intended meaning. According to McCracken, this stage

is where it gets complicated for the companies engaging with celebrity endorsement, because the intended meaning does not simply take off from the brand and enter the mind of the consumer. Hence, an automatic transfer of meaning does not occur - instead, it all depends on the consumers' individual perceptions (McCracken, 1989).

However, with the emergence of social media platforms, Instagram in particular has paved the way for a new breed of celebrities; the instafamous. As this new breed of celebrities is able to amass substantial crowds of followers through their online activities on Instagram, their ability to influence is unprecedented.

2.1.1.3 How Influencers differ

As Martensen et al. (2018) argue, the emergence of social media platforms represents a change in paradigm within marketing, where ordinary consumers have become empowered to gather substantial audiences of followers. With the increasing use of social media platforms among consumers to gather information on which to base purchase decisions, these individuals are left in very influential positions. These opinion leaders that have emerged on social media platforms like Instagram are often associated with the term influencers.

However, influencers differ from opinion leaders and celebrity endorsers in several ways. First, one of the main differences between the influencer and the traditional opinion leader is that today, social relations have changed from being mainly face-to-face to being complemented with or even substituted by mediatized communication via computers, smartphones, and applications, etc. A second difference is the speed and volume at which the opinions of the influencer are spreading as opposed to the traditional opinion leader (Uzunoğlu & Misci, 2014). Due to the internet's ability to disseminate messages rapidly and easily, and possibly with a viral effect, the influencer gains a much broader reach than the traditional opinion leader. This is theorized as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which stems from traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) theory, where the basic assumption is that consumers perceive WOM as more trustworthy and persuasive than traditional media (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). However, with eWOM people have become empowered to

share opinions and recommendations with unprecedented scalability and speed of diffusion (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Finally, the influencer differs from the application of celebrity endorsement in relation to the channels that the endorsed messages are distributed via. Companies have typically applied celebrity endorsements in traditional advertisement formats, as a way to create or maintain attention. In contrast, the endorsements by an influencer is transmitted directly and personally to the influencer's own base of followers. Hence, the influencer inherently becomes the channel.

2.1.1.4 What influencers offer companies

By using influencers as their own channels, influencer marketing offers companies a gateway to address one of today's major commercial challenges, namely to be authentic. In recent years, marketing research has recognized the importance of authenticity as an attribute, as consumers increasingly desire authenticity from products and brands (Fritz, Schoenmueller & Bruhn, 2017). This is emphasized by some researchers declaring that authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing, and proceeding to argue that quality no longer differentiates; authenticity does (Fritz et al, 2017). However, a key question that arises is then what determines the perceived authenticity of a brand - and what the consequences of this are. The existential philosopher Heidegger (1962) defines authentic behavior as being sincere and making explicit value-based decisions. Marketing research suggests that brand authenticity improves message receptivity, enhances perceived quality, and increases purchase intentions among consumers (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018).

However, Beverland (2005) raises the question of whether positioning a brand as authentic is in conflict with the commercial motives that a brand is founded upon. In his paper, Beverland (2005) stresses that the important thing is that consumers perceive the aspects of authenticity as real, not whether those aspects really are authentic. Beverland (2005) proceeds by arguing that to obtain authenticity, companies need to downplay their overt marketing efforts and instead place their brands within communities or subcultures.

In the search for a way to downplay overt marketing efforts, the concept of native advertising has emerged. This is a relatively new form of advertising that mimics the format and style of the publisher (Kim, Lee & Chung, 2017). As such, it is paid content that appears inherently in news article streams or social network feeds (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). In this way, native advertising distinguishes itself from more traditional ways of advertising, by minimizing the level of interruption while still providing sufficient exposure of the advertisement (Kim et al., 2017). This therefore allows companies to distribute commercial messages in a less disruptive way as with traditional types of advertising. Influencer marketing arguably provides companies with similar opportunities, as the sponsored posts published by the influencer will appear as an inherent part of the followers' Instagram news feeds.

The additional benefit of influencer marketing in this regard is that initially, influencers' followers were attracted to following them by the opportunity to access content that originates from other 'ordinary' consumers that were thought to be noncommercial in nature (Audrezet et al., 2018). Thus, followers would find them more trustworthy and authentic than marketer-initiated communication (Mudambi & Schuff in Audrezet et al., 2018). Hence, many companies have utilized this beneficial relationship between the influencer and his or her followers to their own advantage, by engaging in several types of commercial collaborations with influencers. As such, companies can pay to place their brands within the crowds of followers that an influencer has access to, and this can thus be seen as a way to place one's brand within a community, as Beverland (2005) suggest brands ought to do to maintain authenticity.

2.1.2 Influencers' persuasiveness and the effects on the advertised brand

This subpart of the literature review will deal with the theoretical foundations related to how influencers persuade their followers and the consequent effects of it on the advertised brand. In order to do so, we will present two different theories; *source credibility* and *source attractiveness*. These theories have been widely used within endorsement literature to explain the persuasive effects of endorsements, and are deemed applicable to influencer marketing as well by several researchers (e.g. Martensen et al., 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The next question that arises is then, what the actual effect of the

persuasiveness of endorsers is. Much research has sought to document the effects of credibility and attractiveness for companies utilizing endorsements as a marketing tool. Hence, we will include the most relevant of these studies, in order to examine the effect on the advertised brand. As literature on influencer marketing in this regard is somewhat limited, we have chosen to include studies examining the effects of endorsements in general. Following the literature review of studies related to the two central theories, source credibility and source attractiveness, *the halo effect* is presented as a theory that seemingly encapsulates the underlying mechanism of the two theories. However, based on the findings of the studies reviewed, a potentially challenging effect emerges, namely *the vampire effect*. These two effects will thus be accounted for. Lastly, this subpart will present a body of research that suggests a precondition for the effectiveness of endorsements, namely that the persuasiveness of endorsers is only effective under the circumstance of congruency.

2.1.2.1 Source credibility

The theory of source credibility posits that the effectiveness of a message from an endorser depends on the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of that particular endorser (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). The theory is supported by several studies, among others a study by Hovland & Weiss (1951). In their study, the authors examined how the credibility of a source affects the opinion forming immediately after receiving a message. They examined this using a questionnaire by presenting identical pieces of communication to two groups, one in which a trustworthy source was used, and the other in which the communicator was regarded as untrustworthy. A pre-test was conducted before the communication, and a posttest was conducted immediately after. Hovland & Weiss (1951) find that opinions from the pre-test changed immediately after the communication in the direction advocated by the source, to a significantly greater degree when the material was presented by a trustworthy source than when presented by an untrustworthy source. Thus, the findings indicate that information from a perceived credible source can influence opinions and attitudes to a larger degree than an untrustworthy one. The theory of source credibility is widely adopted when dealing with the persuasiveness of celebrity endorsement, but also in relation to influencers and opinion leaders (e.g. Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Ohanian, 1999).

As source credibility theorizes that credibility is based on trustworthiness and expertise, much research has sought to define these two concepts in more detail. In general, it seems that trustworthiness usually refers to the honesty, integrity and believability of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Expertise on the other hand, is often defined as the extent to which the endorser is perceived to be a source of valid assertions (Erdogan, 1999). Important, however, is that both trustworthiness and expertise of an endorser is ultimately determined by the perception among the consumers. Having established the theoretical foundations of source credibility, many researchers have sought to examine the effects of this on the advertised brand in a commercial endorsement context.

A contemporary perspective in the context of influencer marketing is given by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017), who proved that followers are aware that influencers on Instagram are approached by brands to endorse products. But due to the perceived credibility of the influencer, followers believed that the influencers were unlikely to abuse their positions, as they would not wish to damage their reputation by posting a dishonest review. Thus, the influencers' incentive for financial gain did not seem to adversely affect participants' desire to purchase the particular product. In their qualitative study, Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) examine the effects of Instagram as a medium in regards to source credibility, consumer buying intention and social identification with different types of celebrities. Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) find that buying intention is highly likely to be linked with trust and admiration of the influencer on Instagram. As such, the participants appeared to refer to reviews on Instagram to reduce the perceived risk when making a purchase, due to the admiration and trust in their idols. Hence, in their study, the authors not only demonstrate the possible positive effects for brands when utilizing endorsements through Instagram, but also the trust that users of the platform find in the influencers. The findings of Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) were based on qualitative in-depth interviews with a relatively narrow sample, why more research arguably needs to be done to support the results from the authors.

Other studies have examined the effect of source credibility on purchase intention towards the advertised brand. In a study by Müller, Mattke & Maier (2018), the authors observe that

with the popularity of influencer marketing comes a challenge in measuring the effectiveness of it, when the objective for using it is to increase sales. Thus, so far, companies cannot tell if and how their investment in influencer marketing really generates purchase intention. The authors have found that within the literature, three relevant types of perceptions influence customers' purchase intentions: perceptions about the influencer; perceptions about the ad and perceptions about the advertised product. However, it remains unclear how these types of perceptions influence customers' purchase intentions and which configurations of those perceptions actually result into the generation of purchase intention. This leads Müller et al. (2018) to focus on what configurations of perceptions in the context of influencer marketing result in customers' purchase intention.

Drawing on existing literature, the authors apply a quantitative approach and gather data via a questionnaire, to evaluate which configurations of the perceptions of the ad, the perceptions of the influencer and the perceptions of the product, generate purchase intention. The authors identified two configurations that explained the generation of purchase intention: a rational one, which applied to customers believing in the utility of the product, and one emotional configuration, addressing those customers admiring the status of the influencer (Müller et al., 2018). In the rational configuration, the customer assessed the ad based on a cognitive evaluation, whereas the customers in the emotional configuration assessed the ad involving emotions. Central to their findings is that the perception of an influencer to be credible and trustworthy is especially important for the generation of purchase intention. As the study examines one post of one influencer among her followers, the authors mention that future research could examine the influence of those factors among non-followers as well as crosscheck the influence of different products and see if they differ from the authors' results (Müller et al., 2018).

In contrast, Priester & Petty (2003) hypothesize that an untrustworthy endorser may be more effective in influencing attitudes towards the advertised brand than a trustworthy one. The authors define a trustworthy endorser as one whom people perceive to be honest and sincere, whereas an untrustworthy endorser is one about whom people feel suspicion and skepticism. The study is based on the notion introduced in contemporary theories on attitudes and persuasion that persuasion can be a result of two distinct processes; more specifically, attitude can be changed as a result of careful scrutiny of a given advertising

message, or as a result of more associative processes with less cognitive effort, depending on the degree of involvement in the particular product. These opposites represent the degree of message elaboration (Priester & Petty, 2003).

Their hypothesis is based on the argument that if the recipient of the message is confident that a trustworthy endorser will provide accurate and honest information, they will forgo the effort of scrutinizing the message and unthinkingly accept it as valid without any processing. Conversely, if the recipient is unsure about the trustworthiness of the endorser, and hence is in doubt about the accuracy of the information provided, the recipient will likely invest more cognitive effort in scrutinizing the message in order to ascertain if it is cogent and valid. From this perspective, untrustworthy endorsers hold the potential to influence attitudes, by increasing the amount of attention paid to the advertisement (Priester & Petty, 2003). To test this hypothesis, the authors employed a 2 x 2 factorial experiment, with the independent variables being endorser trustworthiness (high or low) and argument quality (strong or weak). The sample consisted of 65 university students. The participants were exposed to various versions of manipulated advertisements within the four possible combinations, and afterwards asked to answer a series of questions about the advertisements. To manipulate endorser trustworthiness, the authors chose two rivaling athletes who at the time received a lot of media attention. Although both rivals were considered to possess expertise about the product, the media generally framed the one athlete as relatively trustworthy, and the other as relatively untrustworthy.

Interestingly, the findings supported the hypothesis that the application of untrustworthy endorsers result in greater message elaboration than trustworthy endorsers (Priester & Petty, 2003). More specifically, the authors found that when trustworthiness of the endorser is low, the recipients engage in greater product-related elaboration. Whereas the trustworthy endorser engendered a rather unthinkingly acceptance of the product-related information, even in cases with low argument quality. The authors also found that under conditions of low source trustworthiness, the quality of the argument has a greater impact on attitude towards the advertised brand than under conditions of high trustworthiness.

It is however necessary to address that besides the rather limited sample of the study, a central point of criticism is arguably the choice of the bases of trustworthiness, i.e. the endorsers in the form of the rivalling athletes. With media attention being the source of the perceived untrustworthiness of one of the endorsers, it seems that this may be for unusual and sensational reasons that are not relevant for typical advertising situations. Yet, as the findings of the study arguably are highly interesting, future research should seek to confirm these further.

In spite of the findings by Priester & Petty (2003), many researchers generally seem to agree that source credibility is an important part of the effectiveness of persuasive attempts, and that this positively affects attitudes and behavioral intentions towards the advertised brand. Although source credibility of the endorser has been proved to have a significant effect on the advertised brand, other literature points towards source attractiveness as a dominant factor of endorsers' persuasiveness.

2.1.2.2 Source attractiveness

Another considerable body of research within the field of endorsement suggests that the attractiveness of the endorser plays a key role in the effectiveness of the persuasion attempt. This is due to the fact that attractiveness is an important cue in the individual's judgment of others (Ohanian, 1990). McGuire (in Erdogan, 1999) introduced the theory of source attractiveness, which asserts that the effectiveness of a message is conditioned by the respondent's perceived level of familiarity, similarity, and liking towards the source of the message, i.e. the endorser. McGuire (in Erdogan, 1999) define familiarity as the respondent's ease of recognition and level of knowledge about the source as a result of exposure. Similarity, on the other hand, is the perceived resemblance between the source and the respondent, in the eyes of the respondent. Finally, liking is defined as some level of affection or attraction towards the source. Combined, these attributes make up the overall attractiveness of a message source. Hence, from the perspective of McGuire (in Erdogan, 1999), attractiveness is not simply a matter of physical appearance, but a combination of desirable characteristics and qualities. According to McGuire (in Erdogan, 1999), the greater level of source attractiveness, the more likely it is that the receiver will undergo the process of identification, which is assumed to occur when the desire to

identify with an attractive endorser leads to the acceptance and adoption of a given message.

In spite of the fact that source attractiveness theory explicates that attractiveness is not simply a matter of physical attractiveness, other researchers have investigated the potential effects of a physically attractive endorser compared to an unattractive endorser. In a study by Kahle & Homer (1985), findings revealed that exposure to a physically attractive celebrity endorser led to significantly more positive attitude and higher purchase intention towards the advertised brand, compared to an unattractive celebrity endorser. Similar to the findings by Kahle & Homer (1985), Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann (1983) also found that an attractive endorser had a significant impact on attitude towards the advertised brand, but only under low involvement conditions. Low involvement conditions refer to circumstances in which purchase decisions do not require much cognitive effort from the individual, e.g. habitual buying behavior towards everyday goods (Rehman, Javed & Nawaz, 2014).

2.1.2.3 The halo effect vs. the vampire effect

In sum, much research within the endorsement literature have documented that credible and attractive message sources hold the potential to enhance attitudes towards brands and products. Yet, it seems that both source credibility and source attractiveness relates to some underlying mechanism where an apparent quality of the endorser spills over on the advertised brand. This is irrespective of whether it is a quality such as credibility, where the consumers find it unlikely that the endorsers are willing to abuse their positions and damage their reputation by posting a dishonest review. Or whether it is a quality such as attractiveness, which evokes the consumers' desire to identify with the endorser, thus making the advertised brand more attractive as well.

A theory that encapsulates this mechanism is the halo effect. The halo effect occurs when individuals assume that others who rank high on one dimension, excel on other dimensions as well (Erdogan, 1999). A common example is that people tend to assume that people who are good looking are also smarter or more knowledgeable. The term was introduced by Thorndike (1920), and has later been described as a *cognitive bias of*

exaggerated emotional coherence (Kahneman, 2011). As the wording indicates, the underlying mechanism is that individuals will tend to unconsciously exaggerate their perceptions of attributes and qualities of other people in order to avoid potential dissonance, because people are more comfortable when all of their judgments towards another person go together (Kahneman, 2011). An important factor of the halo effect is that it amplifies the impact of salient qualities during the first impression in particular (Kahneman, 2011). Sometimes even to a point where subsequent cues are disregarded. Hence, a positive first impression will likely spillover and influence the subsequent perceptions of that person's qualities positively (Kahneman, 2011). Therefore, it seems likely that a positive impression of a given endorser, whether based on credibility or attraction, holds the potential to spillover on the advertised brand.

However, some researchers have found evidence of a seemingly challenging effect. Specifically, while Petty et al. (1983) found that the use of a celebrity endorser had a significant impact on attitude towards the advertised brand, they also found that under low involvement conditions, the use of celebrity endorsers in fact reduced the brand name recognition. Petty et al.'s (1983) finding that celebrity endorsers reduced the brand name recognition resembles what has been theorized as the vampire effect. Erfgen, Zenker & Sattler (2015) define the vampire effect as a decrease in brand recall for an advertising stimulus that features a celebrity endorser versus the same stimulus with an unknown but equally attractive endorser. Research has demonstrated that celebrities may risk overshadowing the advertised brand and in some cases, even to an extent where consumers only recall the celebrity, not the brand (Erfgen et al., 2015). This tendency has been observed to occur for both familiar as well as less familiar brands (Erfgen et al., 2015). Hence, the vampire effect seems as a likely explanation of Petty et al.'s (1983) finding.

Thus, it seems that while the attention gained from endorsers with desirable qualities - whether it is credibility or attractiveness - can lead to a positive effect on the attitude towards the advertised brand, the risk exists that the endorser might end up running off with all of the attention. These opposing effects present a challenge to companies when engaging with celebrity endorsement. However, the existence of vampire effect has not, to

our knowledge at least, been confirmed in the context of influencer marketing. But as influencers share theoretical foundations with celebrity endorsers, the vampire effect seems likely to occur in influencer marketing as well.

2.1.2.4 Congruence as a precondition

A major body of research however suggest that the credibility and attractiveness of an endorser may only enhance the attitudinal evaluation of the advertisement and the brand under conditions where there is a seeming proximity between the characteristics of the brand and the endorser (e.g. Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000). This proposition is known as the *match-up hypothesis*, and generally implies a need for congruence between the brand and the endorser as a precondition for the effectiveness of the endorsement. In his description of the match-up hypothesis, Kamins (1990, p. 5) posits that “[...] *the message conveyed by the image of the celebrity and the image of the product should converge in effective advertisements*”. An attractive endorser may for instance serve as an effective source of information for an attractiveness-related product like e.g. a facial cream. In this way, the inclusion of a congruent endorser may to some consumers inherently convey the qualities of the product. Similar to the halo effect (see section 2.1.2.3), the positive impression of the particular endorser’s appearance may thus spillover on the advertised brand.

Much literature dealing with the match-up hypothesis have focused on the match between a celebrity and a product based on physical attractiveness (e.g. Kahle & Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). Kahle & Homer (1985) even argue that the match-up hypothesis has a positive effect on brand attitude when the celebrity endorser is physically attractive, while Kamins (1990) was not able to confirm this effect. In relation to appearance and physical attractiveness of the endorser, Solomon, Ashmore & Longo (1992) extend the view of the match-up hypothesis and propose *the beauty match-up hypothesis*, which contends that attractiveness and especially the concept of beauty is multidimensional. Specifically, the authors argue that it is possible to distinguish between multiple types of beauty and hence, certain beauty ideals are more appropriately paired with certain types of products than others. In particular, Solomon et al. (1992) demonstrated that correspondence between

specific looks and specific brand images can be orchestrated to more clearly convey the intended image of the advertised brand.

Conversely, Till & Busler (2000) maintain that the expertise of an endorser may be more important for congruence than physical attractiveness. To test this, the authors conducted two experiments, which served to examine the role of physical attractiveness as well as expertise in the match-up hypothesis. The first study examined physical attractiveness as a match-up factor and its impact on brand attitude, purchase intent and key brand beliefs. The second experiment sought to investigate expertise as the match-up factor, by manipulating product and endorser type. Ultimately, the authors found expertise to be more important than physical attractiveness for matching a brand with an appropriate endorser (Till & Busler, 2000).

Focusing specifically on influencers, Albert, Ambroise & Valette-Florence (2017) find that the fit between brand and consumer is more important than the endorser-brand fit. The study was conducted based on the prior research that suggest that the effectiveness of an endorsement depends on the congruence between the brand and endorser. However, the authors argue that the prevailing view on congruence tends to perceive consumers as passive spectators of the brand-celebrity association. In their study, Albert et al. (2017) hypothesize that each potential congruence in an endorsement context, i.e. brand-consumer congruence, consumer-celebrity congruence, and celebrity-brand congruence, will positively affect consumers' brand identification, brand attitude, behavioral intentions and brand commitment. The authors conducted a quantitative two-phase study using self-report measurement among 720 female respondents. Albert et al. (2017) found that the brand-consumer congruence has a significantly stronger positive influence on all four outcomes than the two other types of congruence. These findings challenge the prevailing explanation of endorsement effectiveness as a result of endorser-brand congruence.

Conversely, a study by McCormick (2016) found empirical evidence that supports the original match-up hypothesis, namely that endorser-brand congruence can enhance brand attitude. However, in contrast to the general application of the match-up hypothesis, McCormick (2016) wanted to eliminate the factors of credibility and attractiveness. This was done by including both familiar and unfamiliar endorsers in the study, under the

presumption that the factors of perceived credibility and attractiveness are formed by the individual's prior encounters with and knowledge about the particular endorser. In her study, McCormick chose to focus on females within the generational cohort 20-29 years, with a quantitative approach in the form of a questionnaire. Interestingly, McCormick found that even advertisements that use a celebrity endorser that is unfamiliar to the viewer can lead to more positive attitudes towards the endorsed brand - as long as the match between the endorser and brand is perceived as congruent. It should however be noted that McCormick chose to base the study on only two different celebrity endorsers representing the familiar and unfamiliar factors, and limited to one product category; fashion products. In spite of this, the indication that even an unfamiliar endorser can lead to enhanced brand attitude adds a new dimension to the effectiveness of using brand endorsers beyond credibility and attractiveness.

Focusing on print ads, Dahlén, Lange & Sjödin (2005) also provide an interesting perspective on ad-brand congruence. At the time of their study, Dahlén et al. (2005) observed that no research had been done on incongruence between the ad and the consumers' associations to the brand. Hence, their study set out to fill this gap. The authors draw on theory about information incongruence, where the main finding often is that consumers enjoy solving a puzzle, i.e. when the information in the ad is conflicting with an existing schema in the consumers' minds. This often leads to the cognitive effects of increased processing and elaboration as well as enhanced brand recall and ad recall. In turn, this might enhance ad attitude and brand attitude (Dahlén et al., 2005). Combining this with knowledge from the field of cognitive neuroscience, the authors argue that when the encountered information align with expectations, there is little need to process the information in-depth, which might explain why there is a documented weak effect on ad attitude for familiar brands in these instances (e.g. Chattopadhyay and Nedungadi, 1992). To test whether this holds true for ad-brand incongruence, the authors conducted two quantitative between-subjects studies. The first study tested the effects of ad-brand incongruence on ad attitude, ad credibility, brand attitude and processing of brand-related information. The second study sought to validate the results from the first one, to increase the understanding of ad-brand incongruence by testing variables that may moderate the effects of ad-brand incongruence on brand attitude.

In their first study, Dahlén et al. (2005) found that ad credibility and attitude is lower for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads. Conversely, they found that brand attitude is higher for brand-incongruent ads than for brand-congruent ads. In the second study, Dahlén et al.'s (2005) findings almost replicate the findings from the first study. However, after two exposures, the positive main effect of ad-brand incongruency on brand attitude is no longer significant. This might be due to the fact that there is no longer an element of surprise, as this often is an important mediator of the positive effects of incongruence (Dahlén et al., 2005). Thus, the findings suggest that brand-ad incongruence in fact leads to higher brand attitude because of the cognitive effort demanded to process incongruent information.

Other studies have dealt with the notion of congruence in different ways. For instance, investigating Instagram specifically, Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez (2018) find that perceived originality and uniqueness play a key role in influencing behavioral intentions related to both the influencer, i.e. intention to interact with and recommend the influencer's account, and the advertised brand, i.e. intention to adopt the influencer's brand endorsement. The latter influence is even greater when the consumer finds that the content posted by the influencer matches his or her personality and interests. As such, the authors suggest that the fit should not be between the ad, the brand, or even the influencer, but about perceived originality and uniqueness of the influencer and the personality and interests of the consumer.

Adding to the perception of uniqueness as a key factor of congruence, De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders (2017) argue that cooperating with influencers with high numbers of followers might not be the best marketing choice for companies to promote divergent products, as this decreases the brand's perceived uniqueness and consequently, brand attitudes.

In sum, much research suggests that a precondition for the effectiveness of an endorsement is that a seeming proximity between the characteristics of the brand and the endorser should exist. However, more contemporary research lack agreement about the significance of the congruence between brand, ad, endorser, and consumer. Hence, it

seems that many factors other than credibility and attractiveness could hold the potential to influence the persuasive effects of influencer marketing.

2.1.3 Sub-conclusion: the advantages of influencer marketing

As argued in the first subpart of part I in our literature review, influencer marketing is not as such a new phenomenon, as it shares theoretical foundations with opinion leadership and celebrity endorsement. However, influencers offer companies a unique opportunity to address one of today's major commercial challenges, namely to be authentic. With the influencer being a communication channel on its own, companies can gain the attention of the crowds of followers that the influencer has access to - while reaching the consumers in a less disruptive and more authentic approach.

Two different models have been widely used within the literature on opinion leadership and celebrity endorsement to explain the persuasive effects of endorsement strategies. The source credibility model theorizes that the effectiveness of a message depends on the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness in an endorser, whereas the source attractiveness model asserts that the effectiveness of a message is conditioned by the respondent's perceived level of familiarity, similarity, and liking towards the source of the message.

Although some studies provide conflicting evidence (e.g. Priester & Petty, 2003), most of the reviewed studies have demonstrated the positive effect of source credibility and attractiveness on the advertised brand on various brand-related measures related to attitude and behavior. As argued, the positive effect on the advertised brand stemming from either source credibility or source attractiveness can potentially be ascribed to the halo effect, which can be considered an underlying mechanism that results in a spillover of the endorser's qualities to the advertised brand. However, a challenging effect known as the vampire effect also seems to emerge when dealing with endorsers. Findings reveal that in some instances, the use of celebrity endorsers in fact reduced the brand name recognition. Thus, it seems that while the attention gained from endorsers with desirable qualities can lead to a positive effect on the advertised brand, the risk exists that the

endorser might end up running off with all of the attention. However, the existence of the vampire effect within influencer marketing is yet to be confirmed.

It was also observed that much research posits that congruence is a precondition for the effectiveness of the endorsement. However, contemporary research is divided in regards to which type of congruence is most important, as disagreement prevails about the significance of the congruence between the characteristics of the brand, ad, endorser, and consumer. Yet, a study however found that some effects were greater in an ad that was incongruent with the brand, as this often leads to the increased cognitive efforts of processing and elaboration (Dahlén et al., 2005).

In conclusion, it seems that there exists empirical evidence of the positive effect on the advertised brand when using endorsers. However, the present evidence also seems to be limited to qualitative measures of perceived credibility, attractiveness and congruence and their effect on the advertised brand. Thus, it does not provide much evidence about the actual behavior that endorsement strategies, including influencer marketing, is believed to evoke and how this affects the advertised brand. As the focus of present study is on the attention that companies seek to gain by using influencer marketing, it seems insufficient to solely ascribe its effect to subjective perceptions about the influencer such as perceived credibility and attractiveness.

An area of research which is predominately marked by quantitative measures of attention is that of sponsorship disclosures. This body of literature deals with the covertness of native advertising and attention towards sponsorship disclosures and the includes the subsequent effect of the attention devoted to the sponsorship disclosure on the advertised brand.

2.2 Part II: The covert nature of influencer marketing

As outlined in section 2.1.1.4, native advertising is a type of paid content that appears inherently in news article streams or social network feeds (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). By assimilating the marketing messages into the surrounding media context, the aim is to decrease the disruption that many consumers may experience when being exposed to

traditional advertising and conversely increase the level of engagement with the marketing messages (Jung & Heo, 2019).

It may seem that one of the benefits of native advertising, besides not disrupting the consumers, is the possibility to present advertising in a format which is not always recognized as advertising, or at least not as obviously advertised. A study by Wu et al. (2016) even suggests that when the audience is not aware of what native advertising is, they are less likely to be aware that the article is an advertisement. In these instances, the readers instead tend to follow the *congruency rule*, i.e. expecting a high-credibility company should appear only on a high-credibility media and vice versa (Wu et al., 2016). Consequently, when the readers see an article on a high-credibility media, the content is evaluated as more credible. Hence, as influencers are perceived as credible by their followers (cf. section 2.1.2.1), companies can benefit from this high level of credibility, as the followers would then perceive the brand as more credible. Obviously, this credibility transfer benefits advertisers, but as Wu et al. (2016) find, this beneficial relationship does only apply to instances where the audience does not realize that the native article is advertising. Research however reveal that this often is the case. A study by Wojdyski & Evans (2016) found that less than 8% of the participants realized that a native article was in fact advertising. This finding is a clear demonstration of how effective the native advertising format is in disguising advertising as ordinary content.

However, the covert nature of this kind of advertising has raised ethical concerns. Native advertising has by many been deemed as deceptive and misleading, due to the fact that the persuasive intentions might not be readily identifiable by the consumers who are exposed to it (Jung & Heo, 2019). Governmental authorities have sought to accommodate this via legislation. The Danish Marketing Practices Act states cf. section 6(1) “*A trader's commercial practice must not be misleading by omitting or hiding material information or by providing material information in an unclear, unintelligible, ambiguous or untimely manner.*” (Danish Competition and Consumer Authority, 2017). Furthermore, cf. section 6(4), “*A trader shall clearly identify the commercial intent of any commercial practice, including advertising*” (Danish Competition and Consumer Authority, 2017). This legislation applies for covert advertising on all media and platforms, including social media.

However, the Danish Marketing Practices Act does not state how covert advertising should be marked or how the disclosure of sponsorship should appear. Instead, the Danish Consumer Ombudsman has provided some guidelines for proper conduct. In particular, the Danish Consumer Ombudsman has provided directions for proper sponsorship disclosure in influencer marketing (Forbrugerombudsmanden, 2018). According to these directions, the disclosure of sponsorship should be stated clearly in an Instagram post, if this post is based on an agreement between an influencer and a company. More specifically, if an agreement exists between an influencer and a company about endorsement of the company or the company's product, this should be clearly marked as advertising (Forbrugerombudsmanden, 2018). The Danish Consumer Ombudsman states that if the sponsored post entails text and image, as it does on Instagram, the post will be adequately marked if the disclosure is placed in the photo or in the beginning of the text that is related to the photo. The disclosure should be marked with either "*Reklame*" or "*Annonce*". Moreover, the Danish Consumer Ombudsman is currently considering whether Instagram's standard disclosure stating "*Paid partnership with [company name]*" is sufficient. This consideration is both taken in regards to the use of the wording "Paid partnership" and whether or not the disclosure is legible (Forbrugerombudsmanden, 2018).

The reason behind the legislation concerning the explicitness and clarity of sponsorship disclosures can be ascribed to the notion of *persuasion knowledge* (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In their everyday lives, consumers are increasingly required to interpret and cope with advertising and marketing messages from a seemingly never-ending range of companies. Thus, over time, consumers tend to develop coping skills based on their personal knowledge about the tactics used by companies in these persuasive attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Consumers use this knowledge to identify how, when, and where companies are trying to persuade and influence them. Friestad & Wright (1994) define this knowledge as persuasion knowledge, and present a view on how people's persuasion knowledge influences their responses to persuasion attempts. Friestad & Wright (1994) argue that people learn about persuasion in numerous ways; from observations, education, social interaction, news media, etc. Hence, individuals will also differ in terms of the level of persuasion knowledge that one possesses, and thus how one

will respond to persuasive attempts. As a consequence, the effectiveness of companies' persuasive attempts on people's attitudes and behaviors will vary accordingly, because the acquired persuasion knowledge will shape how people respond to these attempts.

Hence, consumers' persuasion knowledge helps them coping with marketing messages, as it enables them to recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and potentially recall the persuasion attempts. Furthermore, Friestad & Wright (1994) argue that consumers use persuasion knowledge to direct their attention and to process situational information relevant to the selection of response tactics. As a result, the consumers' persuasion knowledge provides them with a basis for critically assessing the validity of the assertions and claims found in advertising.

Contrary to the literature about source credibility and attractiveness of the endorser, much research on native advertising finds that the covert nature of the format affects brand attitude negatively (e.g. Wojdyski, Evans & Hoy, 2018; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016; Sweetser, Ahn, Golan & Hochman, 2016). This is a tendency within sponsorship disclosure literature that applies regardless of the media that the native advertisement is published in. Studying the effect of sponsorship disclosure in native articles, Sweetser et al. (2016) set out to determine the impact of disclosures on credibility and brand attitude, among other factors. In order to do so, the authors made a pre-test/post-test experimental design. The participants were exposed to one of two stimuli; one that disclosed commercial sponsorship of the native advertisement, and one that did not. The stimulus was a native news article, which was placed in several newspapers and journals (Sweetser et al., 2016). For the participants who were exposed to content that was marked as sponsored, attitude towards the advertised brand decreased slightly, but significantly, compared to the baseline level of brand attitude measured in the pre-test. In relation to credibility, the results indicate that the presence or absence of sponsorship did not significantly influence the perceived credibility toward the advertisement (Sweetser et al., 2016).

Wojdyski & Evans (2016) have conducted a similar study of native articles, although focusing on the positioning and wording of the sponsorship disclosure. In their paper, the

authors raised concerns about how much of native advertising's effectiveness is due to consumers not actually realizing that the content they are consuming is in fact advertising. Wojdynski & Evans (2016) hypothesized that a disclosure placed at the top of the article will lead to greater ad recognition. Similarly, they hypothesized that the use of "*advertising*" and "*sponsored content*" wording in the disclosure will lead to greater ad recognition than "*presented by*" and "*brand voice*". Moreover, the authors in turn hypothesized that greater ad recognition will lead to a less positive attitude towards the company. To put these hypotheses to the test, Wojdynski & Evans (2016) first conducted an online questionnaire, where the participants were asked to read the target news story together with an unrelated distractor news story. Afterwards, the participants were asked to answer questions related to the measures of ad recognition and brand attitude. In the second part of the study, the authors conducted an eye tracking experiment. In this experiment, disclosure position was the sole independent variable. The purpose of conducting an eye tracking experiment was to determine whether disclosure position led to differences in visual attention towards the disclosure.

The first part of Wojdynski & Evans' (2016) study revealed that strikingly few respondents, less than 8%, recognized the native article as advertising. Interestingly, the results also revealed that disclosure position does affect ad recognition, however, top-of-the-page position showed to be less effective than disclosures in the middle of the page or in the bottom. Less surprisingly, terminology such as "*advertisement*" and "*sponsored content*" led to greater ad recognition than more vague and ambiguous ones. Moreover, as anticipated, higher ad recognition led to more negative attitudes towards the advertised brand (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). The findings of the eye tracking experiment supported the findings of the first part of the study; visual attention towards the disclosure varied depending on the position condition. Once again, more participants attended to the disclosure if it appeared in the middle or in the bottom of the article, than if it appeared in the top.

Besides position and wording, other studies have also looked at the effect of disclosure timing in sponsored content. In relation to television programs, Boerman, Van Reijmersdal & Neijens (2014) investigated whether the timing of sponsorship disclosure affects

viewers' processing of sponsored content, and whether a disclosure influences the persuasive effect of the sponsored content. In particular, Boerman et al. (2014) focused on four different levels of disclosure timing, namely no disclosure, disclosure prior to the sponsored content, disclosure concurrent with the sponsored content, or disclosure after the sponsored content. To test which disclosure timing was most effective, the authors conducted an experiment with a one-factor, i.e. disclosure timing, between-subjects design. The authors found that when sponsorship disclosure was displayed prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content, this led to more critical processing of the content, ultimately reducing the persuasive effect as well as resulting in less favorable attitudes toward the advertised brand. Conversely, Boerman et al. (2014) did not find these effects when the disclosure was displayed at the end of the program. The authors argued that a likely explanation for this was that the prior or concurrent disclosure primes the recognition of advertising and hence initiates the critical processing of the content, in line with Friestad & Wright's (1994) theory on persuasion knowledge.

Similarly, in a subsequent study, Boerman et al. (2015) set out to test which type of sponsorship disclosure currently recommended by the European Union most effectively enhances the ability to recognize advertising in television programs. The authors observe that most prior studies on the matter have used self-reported measures of memory to determine viewers' attention, which is why Boerman et al. (2015) conducted an eye tracking experiment to measure participants' visual attention, while watching a television program. After the experiment, brand recall was measured by asking participants whether they recalled seeing any brands in the television program, while brand attitude was measured using three 7-point semantic differential scales.

Boerman et al.'s (2015) findings demonstrated that a combination of text and a *product placement* logo was the most effective in increasing the recognition of advertising, followed by the text-only disclosure. Specifically, the authors found that only 8% of the participants fixated on the logo, compared with 88% fixating on the text, and 94% fixating on the combination. The authors hence found that the effects of a sponsorship disclosure on the recognition of advertising were mediated by viewers' attention to the disclosure and the brand placement. Moreover, the authors found that a sponsorship disclosure increases the

recognition of advertising and thus indirectly affects both brand memory and brand attitudes. Thus, the authors conclude that the effects of brand placement disclosures follow three stages: “[...] a disclosure must first attract (visual) attention; subsequently, it activates viewers’ persuasion knowledge; and as a result, it influences the persuasive effects of the brand placement” (Boerman et al., 2015, p. 9). Interestingly, this means that to increase brand memory, attention to the brand placement is not sufficient, as viewers must recognize it as advertising. In relation to brand attitude, the authors demonstrated that the recognition of advertising stimulated by a brand placement disclosure caused viewers to evaluate the brand less positively, also in line with the theory of persuasion knowledge as presented by Friestad & Wright (1994).

In contrast, other researchers have argued that the level of ad recognition is not primarily depending on the prominence of the sponsorship disclosure, but rather on the actual level of persuasion knowledge that the viewer of the ad possesses (Jung & Heo, 2019). Jung & Heo (2019) found no significant effect of the explicitness of disclosure wording on the evaluation of a native article, and hence argued that disclosure wording alone is not sufficient to activate the defense mechanisms, because people might overlook the disclosure. In their study, Jung & Heo (2019) divided the participants into two opposing groups based on a measurement of the participants’ persuasion knowledge. Participants were showed various native advertisements including different disclosure tactics and were afterwards asked a range of questions concerning the perceived persuasive intentions, attitudes toward the ad, and attitudes toward the advertised brand. The results showed that the majority of participants were in fact able to identify the native content as advertising. However, the level of recognition was not affected by the explicitness of the disclosure. Rather, it was affected by the creative elements of the content (Jung & Heo, 2019). This finding suggests that people are familiar with the typical formats of advertising, and thus recognize it even without a sponsorship disclosure. In terms of attitudinal responses, participants who recognized the content as advertising only showed less favorable attitudes towards the ad and the brand when they had high persuasion knowledge (Jung & Heo, 2019).

Very few studies have focused on the effect of sponsorship disclosure on Instagram specifically, but one study that has is by Evans, Phua, Lim & Hun (2017). In their study, the authors examined the effect of disclosure language in Instagram-based influencer advertising on ad recognition, brand attitude, purchase intention, and sharing intention. Evans et al. (2017) conducted a between-subjects experiment with 237 students. To control for the possibility that existing brand attitudes might impact the hypothesized relationships, the authors conducted a pre-test using 10 popular brands, with the goal of finding a brand that elicited neutral brand attitudes. The authors then conducted a second pre-test to control for the possibility that a particular influencer on Instagram would elicit overly positive likeability and thus to find an influencer that elicited neutral likeability.

As hypothesized, the results of the study indicated that the presence of a sponsorship disclosure, regardless of the variation in language, produced more advertising recognition compared to no sponsorship disclosure (Evans et al., 2017). More specifically, the presence of a sponsorship disclosure that featured “*Paid Ad*” was more effective than disclosure language using “*SP*”, but was not more effective than a disclosure that used “*Sponsored*” as disclosure language. Moreover, it appeared that under circumstances where the consumer understood that the Instagram post was advertising, and they also recalled to have seen a sponsorship disclosure in that content, there was a significant negative impact on attitudes and sharing intention.

2.2.1 Sub-conclusion: The effects of sponsorship disclosures in native advertising

In studies examining the attention allocated to sponsorship disclosures in native advertising, it seems that strikingly few respondents recognize that native advertisements are sponsored. This has raised concerns about the covert nature of the format. These concerns have been addressed legally in the Danish Marketing Practices Act. To this end, the Danish Consumer Ombudsman has provided some directions for proper conduct for e.g. sponsorship disclosures in influencer marketing to accommodate the legislation, where the main direction is that the commercial nature of a sponsored post ought to be explicit. That sponsorship disclosures need to be explicit resonates with Friestad & Wright’s (1994) notion of persuasion knowledge, which provides consumers with a basis for critically assessing the validity of the assertions and claims found in advertisements.

Much research on native advertising finds that the covert nature of the format affects brand attitude negatively. This is a tendency within the disclosure literature that applies regardless of the media that the native advertisement is published in, e.g. in native news articles, television programs, and on Instagram. Various dimensions of sponsorship disclosure have been investigated throughout the literature, including wording, position, and timing of sponsorship disclosure. In relation to sponsorship disclosures on influencers' sponsored posts on Instagram specifically, research is however limited. One study by Evans et al. (2017) has however focused on sponsorship disclosure on Instagram and demonstrated a negative effect of it on the advertised brand.

Common for all of the studies related to sponsorship disclosure is that they examine its effect on attitude towards the advertised brand, a measure which arguably is qualitative by nature in the sense that it is based on a subjective perception by the individual. Interestingly, some of the studies have also included behavioral data gathered via eye tracking technology (e.g. Boerman et al., 2015; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). This technique has allowed the authors to gain insight into the actual visual attention devoted to the sponsorship disclosure, rather than solely relying on self-reported memory measures. Hence, the application of eye tracking technology has allowed the authors to use behavioral data of visual attention as the independent variable, while maintaining the qualitative measure of brand attitude as the dependent variable. This stands in contrast to much of the literature related to source credibility and attractiveness (see part I of the literature review), where both the independent and dependent variables were qualitative by nature. The application of eye tracking technology would therefore be valuable in the case of influencer marketing, as no previous research, to our knowledge, has examined the visual attention devoted to sponsorship disclosures on Instagram, and its subsequent effects on the advertised brand.

2.3 Part III: Measuring the effectiveness of marketing efforts

Much of the research hitherto dealt with in the literature review has included various measures of effect. The purpose of present section of the literature review will therefore be to dive a bit deeper into the traditional theoretical foundation that most of those measures

are built upon as well as to add a neuroscientific perspective. In this section of the literature review, we will therefore first examine the traditional and most common theoretical foundations of effect measures in marketing research. Following this, we will put the traditional perspective on marketing effectiveness into a contemporary neuroscientific perspective. Finally, the construct of attention is examined further, as this is a construct critical to the attention economy and both the traditional and contemporary perspectives on effect - and especially to present study.

2.3.1 Review of traditional hierarchy of effect theory within marketing

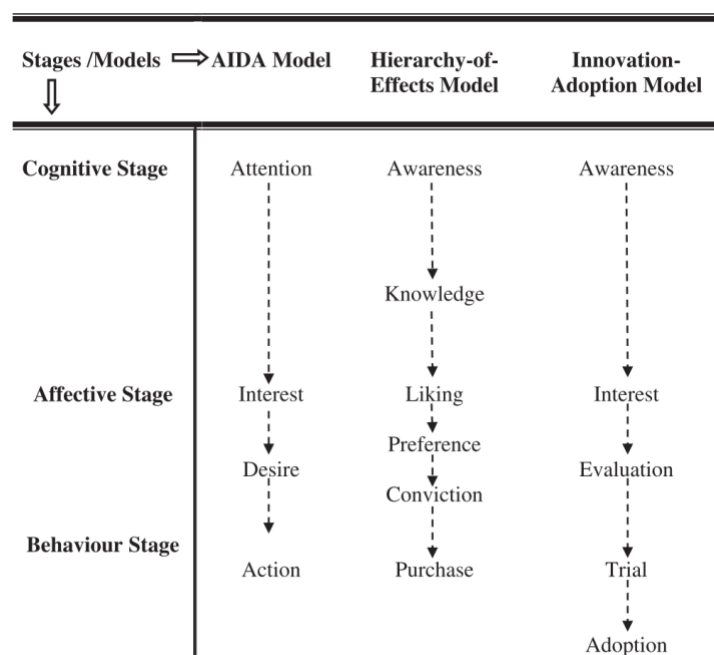
Much research has tried to understand how advertising ultimately influences consumers' purchase decisions. This is often referred to as the hierarchy of effects (Barry & Howard, 1990). This body of literature generally examines the way in which target audiences process and use advertising information to influence product and brand choices. This has been of importance to marketing and communication researchers as well as practitioners for many decades, and the first publication regarding hierarchy of effects in relation to marketing communications appeared as early as in 1898 (Barry & Howard, 1990).

One of the most well-known hierarchy of effect theories is the *AIDA model*. The AIDA model has generally been attributed to Strong (1925) and has been widely used among marketers ever since its publication (Barry & Howard, 1990). The AIDA model suggests that the consumer behavior process starts with the advertisement attracting the consumer's *attention*. This should ideally ignite the consumer's *interest*, followed by *desire* to own the advertised product, which ultimately should result in *action* of making the purchase decision. The AIDA model follows the traditional hierarchy of effects sequence, which suggests that people respond to marketing communication messages in an ordered way; cognitively first, affectively second and conatively third (Barry & Howard, 1990). In this regard, the cognitive stage is related to thinking, the affective stage is related to feeling, and the conative stage is related to behavior. However, within the hierarchy of effects literature, the order of the three stages is to some extent disputed. Krugman (1965) for instance argues that under low involvement conditions, it is more likely that the order is cognition-conation-affection, whereas Vaughn (1980) finds that for consumers who

respond more to emotion than information in a purchase situation, the order might be affection-cognition-conation.

Following the traditional sequence, Lavidge & Steiner (1961) proposed the *hierarchy of effects model*, moving from initial awareness to actual purchase through a long-term process. The authors argued that a favorable response at one step is necessary, but not sufficient for a favorable response at the next step; an argument which is central to hierarchy of effect theory to this day (Barry & Howard, 1990). The hierarchy of effect model goes from the stages of awareness and knowledge on the cognitive level, moving through liking and preference on the affective level and finally to conviction and purchase on the conative level (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Much of the hierarchy of effects literature has found the traditional sequence useful. Another popular theory using this sequence is Rogers' (1962) *diffusion of innovation theory*, which provides stages for the new product-adoption process. In this hierarchical process, the consumer is assumed to go from awareness and interest through evaluation and trial to the final stage, adoption. In *figure 1* the three main models within the body of literature of hierarchy of effects are juxtaposed one another to compare how they relate to the three stages, where the conation stage is named behavior stage.

Figure 1. Models of hierarchy of effects



(Montazeribarforoushi, Keshavarzsaleh & Ramsøy, 2017)

In the literature on hierarchy of effects, it seems that theorists have difficulty in distinguishing between cognition and affection (Barry & Howard, 1990). This is generally attributed to two reasons. First is that cognition and affection is difficult to define precisely. This might be due to the fact that the cognitive and affective systems in humans are closely related. Therefore, researchers have found it difficult to distinguish between the two stages, as the processes are separated by milliseconds (Lazarus, 1984). Assuming that the cognitive and affective stages are difficult to separate, the idea of a sequential ordering of the stages then becomes meaningless. In regards to this, Barry & Howard (1990) argue that theorists and practitioners ought to focus on how the two stages together can be considered in their influence on a particular outcome. As an integrated perspective on this, Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) view beliefs as a measure of cognition, where the evaluative implications of those beliefs are immediately assessed by the individual when the beliefs are formed, i.e. “[...] *when a person forms beliefs about an object, he automatically and simultaneously acquires an attitude towards an object*” (p. 216). The authors thus argue that cognition determines affection or in other words that beliefs determine attitude.

Secondly, theorists also have difficulties in distinguishing between the two stages, because of the difficulty in using measures which fully incorporate all possible dimensions of the two stages. Historically, advertisers have relied on measures of memory, such as recall and recognition to measure cognition, which was also demonstrated in the first two parts of present literature review (e.g. Kahle & Homer, 1985; Boerman et al., 2015). In relation to affect, many advertisers have used the concept synonymously with the concept of ‘attitude’ (Barry & Howard, 1990), as also evident from the literature review (e.g. Priester & Petty, 2003; Petty et al., 1983; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). However, as Lazarus (1984) notes, this assumption does not take into account the fact that a consumer’s self-reported attitude may simply be an intellectual choice - and hence cognition - and not solely a feeling-based preference.

In sum, it seems that there is little disagreement among theorists regarding the importance of hierarchy of effects models as a tool for measuring the effect of marketing efforts.

However, the order and sequence of the cognition, affection and conation stages seems to be disputed. Nonetheless, with many models being based on the traditional cognition-affection-conation sequence, such as the well-known AIDA model, this is the sequence that most researchers seem to agree on. As evident from figure 1, the AIDA model is distinguished by the fact that it includes attention as the initial stage of effect. Thus, this specific hierarchy of effect model encompasses a dimension that is highly relevant in the attention economy, which the other models fail to encompass, when measuring the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

2.3.2 Effect theories in the perspective of neuroscience

In spite of the popularity of the AIDA model, the advances of neuroscientific research have brought along some skepticism in regards to its applicability. In particular, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) introduce a reconceptualization of the AIDA model. The main concern is that the model was originally conceived during a period of time where knowledge about neuroscientific psychology was limited, and should therefore now be challenged by the recent and plentiful advances in neuroscientific research about the human mind and decision-making processes.

In contrast to the traditional view on effect hierarchies, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) present the argument that the AIDA model should include two parallel systems at the different stages; a conscious and a nonconscious one. Whereas the conscious system will only occur for certain levels of processing, the nonconscious processes can occur without the necessity of consciousness (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017).

In the AIDA model, attention is regarded as the initial criterion for success when measuring marketing effect, and has commonly been defined as the selection of relevant or preferential information from a particular stimulus within a given context (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that attention is interrelated with selectivity, in terms of the individual's capability to filter out irrelevant information or outright ignore distractions and so on. However, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) argue that attention is controlled by both the conscious system and the nonconscious system. Where the conscious system allows the individual to voluntarily

allocate their attention and processing resources in decision-making situations, the nonconscious system can direct attention as an involuntary response to particular stimuli (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017).

In the AIDA model, attention will ideally be followed by *interest*. However, from a neuroscientific perspective, interest does not classify as a distinct stage in the human brain (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017). Rather, it is argued that interest should be redefined as emotionally driven attention, since the processing of both emotional information and emotional functions has been demonstrated to enhance the perceived relevance features of the stimulus to the individual (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017). Similarly, while the AIDA model suggests that interest is followed by a strong desire to own or purchase a given product, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) argue that interest and desire should not be considered as two separate stages, but rather as overlapping phenomena of affection. Studies have revealed that strong positive emotional responses, such as arousal and motivation, are related to desire or brain “wanting” responses, which also leads to a stronger sense of interest. Finally, the last proposed stage of the AIDA model is the behavioral result that the three prior stages have paved the way for. However, Montazeribarforoushi et al., (2017) argues that nonconscious decisions typically are made prior to conscious feelings of choice, why these cannot always be used as predictors of behavior.

Similarly, the authors argue that the different stages may occur in a more arbitrary order. Previous neuroscientific research has demonstrated that the subjective preference for a brand affected the likelihood of detecting that particular brand when presented briefly (Ramsøy & Skov, 2014). This finding indicates that emotional responses in the form of preference towards a brand can have an interrelated influence on the way in which something is visually detected or attended to. Hence, seemingly later stages of the traditional models can evidently occur prior to earlier stages, a finding that resonates with the earlier findings by e.g. Krugman (1965).

In sum, the advances within neuroscientific research and the growing understanding of consumer behavior in recent years does not dismiss the importance of the different stages

when measuring effect. However, the traditional view of the AIDA model is largely deemed as insufficient and outdated by Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017). Yet, the authors do not provide any specific solutions to measuring effect on both the conscious and nonconscious levels. Nonetheless, in the light of the attention economy, the inclusion of nonconscious attention might provide valuable insights when measuring the effects of influencer marketing. Since attention seems to be a critical construct in both the traditional view and the advanced neuroscientific view on measuring the effect of marketing using the AIDA model, the following section will therefore go further into detail with the construct.

2.3.3 Attention as a critical construct

In both the traditional and advanced view of the AIDA model, attention seems to be considered a prerequisite for any effective marketing effort (Sacharin, 2000). Since consumers are faced with an overabundance of information and marketing messages in the extensive range of communication channels that they engage with on a daily basis, only a fraction of this information can be processed by the individual, due to the limited capacity of the human brain (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008).

The importance of attention in relation to marketing effectiveness is evidenced by the prominent position of the construct in the AIDA model, where it is regarded as a threshold for the higher-level stages. However, in the field of marketing, the amount of focus devoted to the concept of attention is very limited (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008). Perhaps the most common and prevailing method for measuring attention towards advertising is by equating it with awareness and memory, using self-report measures. However, as argued by Rosbergen, Pieters & Wedel (1997), memory measures are poor indicators of what consumers actually pay attention to. First, nonconscious attention tends to precede awareness. In other words; a stimulus may be attended to, but that does not necessarily mean that it is processed enough for it to reach the conscious stage of awareness in the mind of the individual. Hence, the stimulus may not enter the individual's memory, making it impossible to both recall and report it. Second, even in instances where the particular stimulus was attended to long enough to be processed, people tend to forget most of the stimuli that they process (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008).

As such, attention serves as a processing bottleneck of the cluttered visual environment, only allowing admittance to the visual awareness for a selected few of the sensory input (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008). This process of attention is made up of two determinants, namely *bottom-up* and *top-down attention* (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008). Bottom-up attention is a rapid and automatic form of selective attention that depends on the intrinsic properties of the sensory input, such as color and saliency compared to its context. Top-down attention, on the other hand, is a more task-dependent and controlled behavioral mechanism that enhances the processing of the particular stimulus (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008). Thus, it seems that bottom-up attention is arguably related to the nonconscious processes of the human brain, whereas top-down attention is related to the conscious ones.

In an eye tracking experiment among 230 participants, Pieters & Wedel (2007) found that participants displayed unique patterns of visual attention towards advertisements, depending on the processing goal provided by the authors, i.e. what the participants were asked to look out for when viewing the advertisements. Hence, the authors propose that the degree of informativeness of advertisements and the objects contained therein is determined by the specific processing goal that is activated in the viewer, rather than being universal. However, other research also reveal that when consumers are faced with a large amount of communication clutter, they often have a singular processing goal; to avoid advertising all together (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008). Consequently, in most cases, bottom-up attention may be the closest advertisers can get to consumers, before the top-down goal of avoiding advertising is initiated.

2.3.4 Sub-conclusion: Effect hierarchies

To conclude, it seems that there is little disagreement among theorists regarding the importance of hierarchy of effects models as a tool for measuring the effect of marketing efforts. Traditionally, effect is considered to proceed through three stages; cognition, affection, and conation. However, the order and sequence of the cognition, affection and conation stages is disputed. The most well-known and widely used models that are based on the traditional order of sequence are the AIDA model, the hierarchy of effects model, and the diffusion of innovation model. Yet, the AIDA model distinguishes itself from the

others, as it includes attention as the initial stage of effect. Thus, the AIDA model encompasses a dimension that is highly relevant in the attention economy, when measuring the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

As a consequence of the advances in neuroscientific research, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) however introduce a reconceptualization of the AIDA model. In contrast to the traditional view, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) present the argument that a contemporary AIDA model should include two parallel systems in the different stages, a conscious and a nonconscious one, and that the different stages may occur in a more arbitrary order. Furthermore, the authors argue that interest and desire should not be considered as two separate stages, but rather as overlapping phenomena of affection. While Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) call for a reconfiguration of the traditional AIDA model, they fail to provide any specific solutions or remodeling to accommodate this. However, the main proposition of including both the conscious and nonconscious processes of the human brain when measuring effect seems highly relevant.

In both the traditional view and the advanced neuroscientific view on measuring the effects of marketing communications using the AIDA model, attention seems to be a critical construct as it can be considered a prerequisite for any effective marketing effort. The most common and prevailing method for measuring attention towards advertising has been to equate it with awareness and memory using self-report measures. However, memory measures have proven to be poor indicators of what consumers actually pay attention to. Generally speaking, attention can be divided into two different processes; bottom-up attention and top-down attention. While the former is saliency-based, the latter is more task-dependent. Research has however revealed that when consumers are faced with a large amount of communication clutter, they often have a singular processing goal; to avoid advertising all together. Hence, bottom-up attention may be the closest advertisers can get to consumers, before the top-down goal of avoiding advertising is initiated.

3. Choice of method

As found in part I of the literature review, much literature has found empirical evidence demonstrating the positive effect on the advertised brand when utilizing endorsers. This is often ascribed to the credibility or attractiveness of the endorser, as a result of the halo effect. The present paper will not seek to investigate aspects such as source credibility or attractiveness further, but instead contribute in terms of the limitations to the studies applying these theories. As pointed out in section 2.1.4, the presented evidence that ascribe the persuasiveness of influencer marketing to source credibility and source attractiveness is limited to these qualitative measures and their seeming effect on the advertised brand.

As the focus of present study is on the attention that companies seek to gain by using influencer marketing, we are more interested in the actual visual attention devoted to the advertised brand in a sponsored post, and its subsequent effects on the advertised brand. Hence, present study will adopt the AIDA model's sequence of effect, where attention is considered to be the initial stage of effect, which is presumed to proceed towards the affective stage.

In relation to measuring visual attention, we can establish that previous research on the effects of sponsored posts on Instagram have only used self-reported measures of memory to determine viewers' attention. On the contrary, some studies within the general disclosure literature have applied eye tracking technology as a mean to measure the exact visual attention that participants devote, which has helped the researchers to gain insight into people's actual behavior as opposed to self-reported behavior (Boerman et al., 2015; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). Hence, eye tracking technology has enabled researchers to measure behavioral data in the form of visual attention, while maintaining qualitative measures related to the effect of visual attention on the affective stage.

For the purpose of present paper, we will argue that this method will be equally valuable in the case of influencer marketing, as no previous research, to our knowledge, has examined the effects of the visual attention devoted to brands in sponsored posts on Instagram. As such, we want to fill out this gap, by combining behavioral data gained via

eye tracking with measures of subjective perceptions towards the advertised brand on the affective level.

Therefore, present paper will utilize eye tracking to measure visual attention. Eye tracking technology allows for measuring eye movements, by recording the number of fixations or the dwell time of the eyes during an individual's exposure to a particular external stimulus (Wang & Minor, 2008). Thus, by using eye tracking, it is possible to obtain an understanding of the physiological processes and reactions at play. The adoption of eye tracking in present study is in line with Montazeribarforoushi et al.'s (2017) reconceptualization of the AIDA model, as this technology enables us to measure visual attention both on the conscious and nonconscious levels. However, eye tracking does not allow us to distinguish between the two levels of visual attention. Similarly, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) do not present a viable solution to measuring conscious and nonconscious attention separately. As a consequence, visual attention will be supplemented by brand recall, measured after the eye-tracking experiment of present study. While we are aware that consciousness and attention ought to be largely dissociated, there also exist some overlap between the two (Montemayor & Haladjian, 2015). Montemayor & Haladjian (2015) describe conscious attention as the reportable form of attention. The measure of brand recall is therefore deemed appropriate for present study to measure conscious attention. Some researchers argue that brand recall is of significant importance for companies, as brand recall achieved through advertising efforts is a critical precondition for the formation of brand attitude (Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) argues that this is because the emergence of a set of associations or connotations with the brand requires a cognitive node in memory to which individuals can attach these connotations to, i.e. the brand name. Moreover, brand recall has proved to increase the likelihood that the brand becomes part of the consumer's consideration set (Nedungadi, 1990). Other research has also found evidence that under low involvement conditions, brand recall serves as a heuristic for purchase decisions (Park & Lessig, 1981).

In relation to measuring the effect of visual attention towards the advertised brand on the affective stage, Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) proceed to argue that interest and desire should not be considered as two separate stages, but rather as overlapping

phenomena of affection. As a consequence, present paper will include the brand-related measure of brand attitude. According to Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) attitude is the amount of affect for or against some object, which is also applicable in regards to brands. Hence, we argue that this measure encompasses both affective stages of interest and desire in the traditional AIDA model. Furthermore, brand attitude as a measure of the affective stage has been a recurring measure in both the endorsement literature and the disclosure literature reviewed, including the studies applying eye tracking technology (e.g. Wojdyski & Evans, 2016; Boerman et al., 2014; Boerman et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2017). Hence, brand attitude is deemed appropriate for measuring effect on the affective level in present study. However, following the argument presented by Montazerfaboroushi et al. (2017), effect on the affective stage should ideally be measured on both the conscious level and nonconscious level. In spite of this, methods for measuring nonconscious affective responses usually demand high amounts of resources, which makes it an infeasible option in present study. Therefore, focus will only be on the conscious level of affection in the form of brand attitude.

Some researchers argue that attitudes generally are stable and enduring predispositions to behavior, which is why many marketing studies measure the effect of advertisement efforts on brand attitude (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Thus, some researchers regard brand attitude as an important predictor of buying behavior (Aaker & Keller, 1990). This assumption is generally in line with the traditional view of the AIDA model, where the final and ultimate stage is taking action. However, as the scope of present study is limited to examining branding-related effect measures of marketing efforts, measures such as sales volume will not be included (see section 1.3). Although we acknowledge that such measures tend to be the ultimate objective of companies' marketing efforts, present study will solely focus on the effects of visual attention on the affective stage.

3.1 Hypotheses

In this section, the findings from the three parts of the literature review will be synthesized into concrete hypotheses, in order to answer the research question with the chosen method.

As evident from part I of the literature review, several studies have demonstrated positive effects of perceived credibility of an influencer or celebrity endorser on brand attitude towards the advertised brand. In particular, Hovland & Weiss (1951) and Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) both demonstrated the positive effects of perceived source credibility on the advertised brand. Similarly, the reviewed literature in relation to source attractiveness also suggested a positive effect of attractiveness on the formation of positive brand attitudes (e.g. Kahle & Homer, 1985). Yet, it seems that both source credibility and source attractiveness relates to the same underlying mechanism, known as the halo effect, where an apparent quality of the endorser spills over on the advertised brand. However, many other studies also found that perceived congruence between the endorser and the brand functions as a mediating factor that can enhance the attitudinal evaluation of the advertised brand (e.g. Kahle & Homer, 1985; Solomon et al., 1992; Till & Busler, 2000).

Based on the argument that influencer marketing is not a completely new phenomenon as such, but resembles both traditional opinion leadership and celebrity endorsement strategies, it is assumed that the above findings will also hold true for present study. Thus, following the sequence of effect of the AIDA model, we expect that the more attention devoted to the brand and the influencer, the more positive effect on brand attitude as a result of the halo effect. Hence, we propose our first hypothesis:

H1: The longer fixation duration on the brand and influencer, the more positive change in brand attitude compared to the baseline level

Conversely, as evident from the second part of the literature review, much research concerned with the effects of sponsorship disclosures in native advertising finds that the covert nature of this format affects brand attitude negatively. This negative influence is generally ascribed to the notion of persuasion knowledge, which forms a basis for critically assessing the validity of the assertions and claims found in advertisements. Sweetser et al. (2016), Wojdyski & Evans (2016) and Boerman et al. (2014; 2015) all found empirical evidence of the negative effect of attention towards sponsorship disclosures on attitude towards the advertised brand. Building upon these findings, we propose our second hypothesis:

H2: The longer fixation duration on the sponsorship disclosure, the more negative change in brand attitude compared to the baseline level

In contrast to the positive effect on the advertised brand stemming from the halo effect, a negative effect known as the vampire effect also seem to prevail in the context of celebrity endorsement. In particular, Petty et al. (1983) found that under low involvement conditions, the use of celebrity endorsers in fact reduced the brand name recognition. Thus, it seems that while the attention gained from endorsers with desirable qualities can lead to a positive effect on the advertised brand, the risk exists that the endorser might end up running off with all of the attention.

The fact that an advertisement featuring a celebrity endorser will lead to a decrease in brand recall compared to the same stimulus with an unknown but equally attractive endorser, according to the vampire effect, might be explained by the findings of Priester & Petty (2003). The authors suggest that people will pay more attention to advertisements using endorsers, if they are unsure about the trustworthiness of the endorser, as they for instance would be if presented with an unfamiliar endorser. Hence, it is likely that people will invest more cognitive effort in scrutinizing the message, if they are in doubt about the accuracy of the information provided. Similarly, Dahlén et al. (2005) argued that when the information in an ad is conflicting with the existing schema in the consumers' minds, this often leads to the increased cognitive efforts of processing and elaboration which in turn leads to enhanced brand recall.

As observed, the existence of the vampire effect in the context of influencer marketing has not been confirmed, to our knowledge at least, but as influencers share theoretical foundations with celebrity endorsers, the vampire effect seems likely to occur in influencer marketing as well. Hence, we find it highly relevant to test the vampire effect in the context of influencer marketing and hypothesize:

H3(a): Exposure to a sponsored post by a familiar influencer will lead to lower unaided brand recall, compared to a sponsored post by an unfamiliar influencer

However, similar to the suggestion by Petty et al. (1983) in regards to measuring brand name recognition, we will argue that aided brand recall will be an equally relevant and appropriate parameter as unaided brand recall, since consumers will be presented with a range of options or alternatives in a real-life purchase situation in e.g. a supermarket, which will function as cues to elicit recall of the advertised brand. As Keller (1987) argues, brand-specific information conveyed in advertisements may not be readily retrievable in the consumer's memory during the purchase situations. In these instances, brand names and logos are typically the only cues available to facilitate retrieval. Thus, we will proceed to hypothesize:

H3(b): Exposure to a sponsored post by a familiar influencer will lead to lower aided brand recall, compared to a sponsored post by an unfamiliar influencer

4. Method

In the following section, the selected methodical approach to test the hypotheses of present paper will be outlined and elaborated on. First, we will go into detail in regards to the specific research design. This includes a description of the research technique, sample, stimuli and areas-of-interest. Second, present paper will account for the applied procedure for cleaning and processing of the collected data. Third, criteria of quality and ethical considerations related to the experiment are addressed.

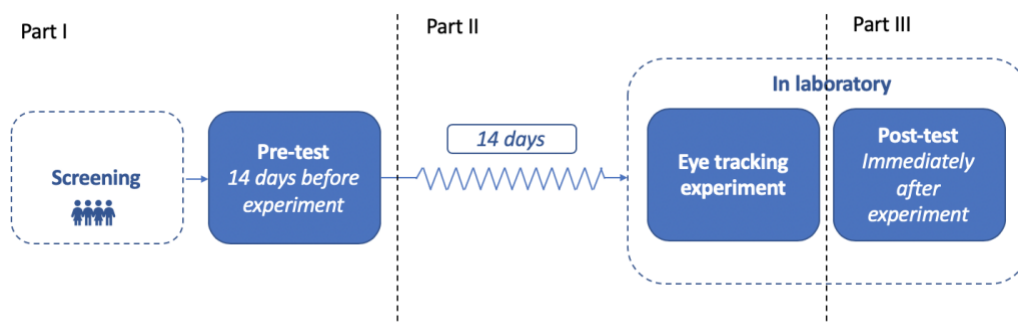
4.1 Research Design

Overall, the research design is inspired by the methods applied in two similar studies. As accounted for in the literature review (see section 2.2), Sweetser et al. (2016) examined the effects of sponsorship disclosure in native articles on brand attitude, among other factors. In order to do so, the authors made a pre-test/post-test experimental design that enabled them to identify potential changes in brand attitude among the participants after being exposed to different versions of native advertising. Similarly, the research design adopted in present paper will have a pre-test/post-test experimental design in order to measure the potential change in brand attitude towards the advertised brand, based on the

baseline level measured in the pre-test questionnaire. However, as Sweetser et al. (2016) conducted their experiment solely based on self-reported measures, the experimental design of present study will be supplemented with the research design composed by Boerman et al. (2015). As demonstrated in the literature review (section 2.2), Boerman et al. (2015) conducted an eye tracking experiment to measure participants' visual attention towards a sponsorship disclosure while watching a television program. After the experiment, brand recall was measured by asking participants whether they recalled seeing any brands in the television program, while brand attitude was measured using three 7-point semantic differential scales.

Likewise, present paper will conduct an eye tracking experiment to measure visual attention, followed by a post-test questionnaire containing questions related to both brand recall and brand attitude. The experiment will be conducted in a laboratory setting. As opposed to Sweetser et al. (2016) and Boerman et al. (2015), the present study is designed as a within-subjects experiment, i.e. where each participant tests all the conditions (Erlebacher, 1977). A within-subjects experimental design was chosen over a between-subjects design, i.e. different people test each condition so that each person is only exposed to one condition, as it may help reduce errors associated with individual differences that may impact the results of the experiment. As each participant is exposed to all the stimuli of the study, individual differences will not distort the results. Moreover, the within-subjects experiment design does not require as large a pool of participants as a between-subjects experiment (Erlebacher, 1977). Hence, the research design of present paper is composed as demonstrated in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2. *Research design flowchart*



The research design is divided into three parts. The first part of the research design consists of a screening test and a pre-test. The screening test was distributed online on various social media platforms in order to recruit participants that matched certain screening variables. These screening variables were the prerequisites for participation in the study (see section 4.1.3). The participants who fulfilled the requirements were asked to answer a pre-test 14 days before their scheduled participation in the experiment. The pre-test was distributed as a mean to create a baseline for the measures that are included in the post-test, similar to the research design of Sweetser et al. (2016). The reason for distributing the pre-test minimum 14 days before the experiment is twofold. First, the temporal delay means that the participants will likely not remember the answers they gave in the pre-test. Thus, they will be able to answer the questions in the post-test based on their immediate perceptions without being biased by their memory, as research suggests that people in general have a desire to appear consistent in their behavior (Cialdini, 2007). This may be reflected in the participants' answers in the post-test if there was not a temporal delay between the two tests. Second, the temporal delay between the pre-test and the eye tracking experiment also helps to mask the purpose of the study, which ensures that the participants are less likely to comprehend what the experiment is in fact investigating. In such an event, the comprehension of the intended purpose of the experiment will likely result in the participants changing their viewing pattern to, for instance, searching for a disclosure, if they know that this is what the researchers are interested in. As such, top-down processing is activated, as opposed to bottom-up processing, as dealt with in section 2.3.3. Hence, this might counteract the purpose of the experiment.

The second part of the research design is the eye tracking experiment. This is the part of the research design where the participants are exposed to the stimuli, and their eye movements and positions are measured accordingly. Immediately after the experiment, the participants are asked to fill out the post-test. This is the third and final part of the research design, which enables present paper to measure brand recall and compare pre-test responses with post-test responses of brand attitude and relate these to the eye positions recorded in the eye tracking experiment.

In sum, the research design enables present paper to measure a baseline level of brand attitude, and to compare this with the visual attention towards the stimuli, and the subsequent effect on brand attitude, as well as to measure brand recall.

4.1.1 Eye tracking

Eye tracking is a biometric research technique used to measure physiological activity in the form of eye positions and movements. These biometrics are widely accepted as representations of visual attention, and eye tracking is generally considered an objective research method to record and quantify visual attention (Wang & Minor, 2008).

Specifically, eye tracking technology measures visual attention on metrics such as gaze points, fixations, and saccades (iMotions, 2017). Gaze points can be considered the basic unit of measurement, as one gaze point equals a single point of raw data. When a sequence of gaze points is captured, centered on the same particular point of the stimulus, this is denoted as a fixation (iMotions, 2017). Consequently, when using eye tracking technology, it is necessary to define a minimum threshold as a demarcation of when a sequence of gaze points should be regarded as a fixation. There has been much debate on the duration threshold for fixations (Wang & Minor, 2008), however, the minimum threshold for fixations is typically set to a value of 100 milliseconds (ms) (iMotions, 2017). Hence, for present study this threshold will also apply. Besides measuring the number of fixations, it is also possible to measure the duration of each fixation and the total fixation duration. Furthermore, it is possible to measure the movement of the eyes that happen between each fixation, these are referred to as saccades.

In general, most of the modern eye tracking technology uses near-infrared light in combination with a high-resolution camera (iMotions, 2017). The purpose of using near-infrared spectrum imaging is to generate a clear contrast and demarcation of the pupil with as little noise as possible, in order to do an accurate measurement of eye movement. Infrared light is not perceivable by the human eye, and thus, illuminating the eye with infrared light allows to render the demarcation of the pupil as the light reflects from the iris, which is captured by the camera, without distressing the participant (iMotions, 2017).

Present study will utilize the Tobii T60 XL eye tracking device. The Tobii T60 XL has an accuracy of 0.5° (Tobii Technology, 2010). In the case of eye tracking technology, accuracy is defined as the average difference between the measured gaze point and the actual stimuli position. Hence, accuracy is an important indicator of the data validity during data collection, since a device with high accuracy will better pinpoint the location of the participant's actual gaze, compared to a device with low accuracy. Based on the nature of present study, the Tobii T60 XL is deemed appropriate in terms of accuracy. Furthermore, the Tobii T60 XL has a sampling rate of 60 Hz, which means that it measures visual attention 60 times a second (Tobii Technology, 2010). Hence, each gaze point captured by the Tobii T60 XL represents 16.67 ms.

The Tobii T60 XL is a screen-based eye tracking device, i.e. it is mounted below a 22" wide-screen computer monitor. Consequently, the Tobii T60 XL is a non-intrusive device, as it allows for recording of eye movements at a distance without having to attach anything to the participant. As such, it is however a requirement that participants are seated in front of the eye tracking device and remain as still as possible during the experiment. Participants are able to do a limited amount of movement with their head, as long as it is within the limits of the eye tracker's range and their face remains directed towards the device. The Tobii T60 XL eye tracking device is connected to the iMotions Biometric Research Platform software. This software allows for both designing the experimental setup, individual calibration to every participant as well as data collection.

4.1.1.1 Stimuli

In order to test the hypotheses, a Danish female influencer is chosen as an exemplifying case. The case influencer is selected to accommodate the within-subjects experimental design, as well as to reduce the complexity of the study. The influencer had 65.891 followers at the time of the data collection (March 29, 2019). The influencer is described as a 'lifestyle influencer' by the management agency that represents her career and commercial relationships. Hence, she is an influencer who balances personal posts and posts sponsored by various companies, most often related to lifestyle.

Stimuli refers to the visual material that the participants will be exposed to during the eye tracking experiment. In present study, each stimulus was shown to the participants for 6000 ms. The imposed time limit serves to adjust for the internal validity of the study in relation to comparability across stimuli (see section 4.2.1). The specific exposure duration is based on the assumption that people under normal circumstances will scroll relatively fast through their Instagram feed. As stimuli, present study will include genuine sponsored posts previously posted by the case influencer, as opposed to creating fictitious sponsored posts. This approach is chosen as the latter might result in resistance and suspicion from the participants, if they realize that the sponsored posts are fictitious. Hence, four sponsored posts that are more than three months old are chosen as the primary stimuli (see appendix A). The sponsored posts make up 13,3% of the stimuli that the participants are exposed to.

The sponsored posts feature FMCG products across four product categories; beauty, beverage, alcohol and snacks. The reason for focusing on sponsored posts featuring FMCG products is that these products are typically related to low involvement conditions, i.e. circumstances in which purchase decisions do not require much cognitive effort from the individual (Petty et al., 1983). It was under conditions of low involvement that Petty et al. (1983) found both the halo effect and the vampire effect to apply. Hence, we will expect that the positive impact on brand attitude will be greater under these conditions, and conversely lower for brand recall, similar to the findings of Petty et al. (1983). Moreover, these types of products might be more relatable for ordinary consumers as opposed to more niche products, such as high-end fashion products.

In order to test the third hypothesis, sponsored posts by unfamiliar influencers are included as well. These will be referred to as *non-followers*, i.e. influencers that the participants do not follow. The term is coined by Müller et al. (2018) who argued that the effects of influencer marketing also ought to be examined among non-followers. To make sure that the participants do not follow the non-followers, the posts are found among influencers who have between 500 and 7.500 followers, thus minimizing the likelihood of the participants following these influencers. This was later confirmed in the pre-test, where none of the participants reported to follow the non-follower influencers on Instagram. The

non-follower stimuli include four sponsored posts by the non-followers, which make up 13,3% of the total number of stimuli (see appendix A). To ensure comparability, the brands advertised by the non-followers were distributed across the same four FMCG product categories as the sponsored posts by the case influencer.

In addition to the sponsored influencer posts by the case influencer and the non-followers, the stimuli also include brand posts from four FMCG brands within the four product categories, promoting their own products. The brand posts also make up 13,3% of the stimuli (see appendix A). The inclusion of brand posts serves as a control of mere exposure, i.e. whether the brand attitude increases only due to the exposure to the brand. Research namely suggest that under certain circumstances, simple brand name exposure may be sufficient to give the brand a relative advantage, since the exposure makes consumers feel more familiar and comfortable about approaching the brand (Baker, 1999).

As all of the stimuli accounted for up until now is commercial content, these stimuli are supplemented with fillers, which consist of ordinary posts by the case influencer and five other popular Danish influencers, all of which are not sponsored content (see Appendix B). These fillers made up 60% of the total number of stimuli. This ensures that the participants will not suspect the real purpose of the study and thus pay unnatural attention to e.g. the sponsorship disclosures or brands.

All of the included posts were however slightly manipulated, as date and timestamp were removed. This was done in order to avoid potential confusion or feeling of irrelevancy among the participants. The same applied for interactive elements such as icons indicating that the picture is tagged, loading of more comments, etc., which frequent users of the platform might be tempted to click on during the experiment.

When recording visual attention with eye tracking technology, it is important to consider *the central fixation bias* (Tatler, 2008). As the name indicates, the central fixation bias relates to the fact that the first fixations tend to seek towards the center of the screen rather than at the outer edges, when being presented with a stimulus. This applies for almost every instance, independent of whether the image features are centrally placed in

the images (Tatler, 2018). Hence, there will always be an initial orientation, bringing the eyes close to the center of the screen with the first saccade after a stimulus appears. The fixation bias is accommodated by including an interslide between each stimulus, which essentially is a black screen with a white cross in the middle. The black interslide appears each time for 1500 ms. In this way, we are able to control for the first fixation on each stimulus and can therefore disregard all of the first fixations, as these naturally will be in the center of the screen. As a consequence, it is ensured that none of the stimuli have areas-of-interest in the center of the stimuli that we will examine in the data analysis.

4.1.1.2 Areas-of-interest

Within the stimuli, certain areas were of interest to test the hypotheses. These areas are referred to as areas-of-interest (AOI). Researchers have to define these AOIs in the eye tracking software as otherwise the extracted dataset would include all fixations on the stimuli. Overall, four areas are of interest to present study. These are related to the name of the influencer or brand post publisher (marked as n1 & n2); the tagging of the brand within the text next to the picture (B); the brand logo or product in the photo (L1 & L2) as well as the sponsorship disclosure (D). Due to the fact that the brand posts are promoting the brands' own products, these stimuli do not include a sponsorship disclosure. The name of the poster is divided into two, as the name both appears next to the photo in the top, and then right before the text, next to the photo. In some of the stimuli, the brand logo is featured several times, in which the AOIs are numbered accordingly. In fewer cases the brand are mentioned in the hashtags (h). Finally, some stimuli also feature the brand name in the text (IT) and in the comments (C). See *figures 3-5* for examples of each post type.

Figure 3. Stimulus & AOI example: sponsored post



Figure 4. Stimulus & AOI example: non-follower post

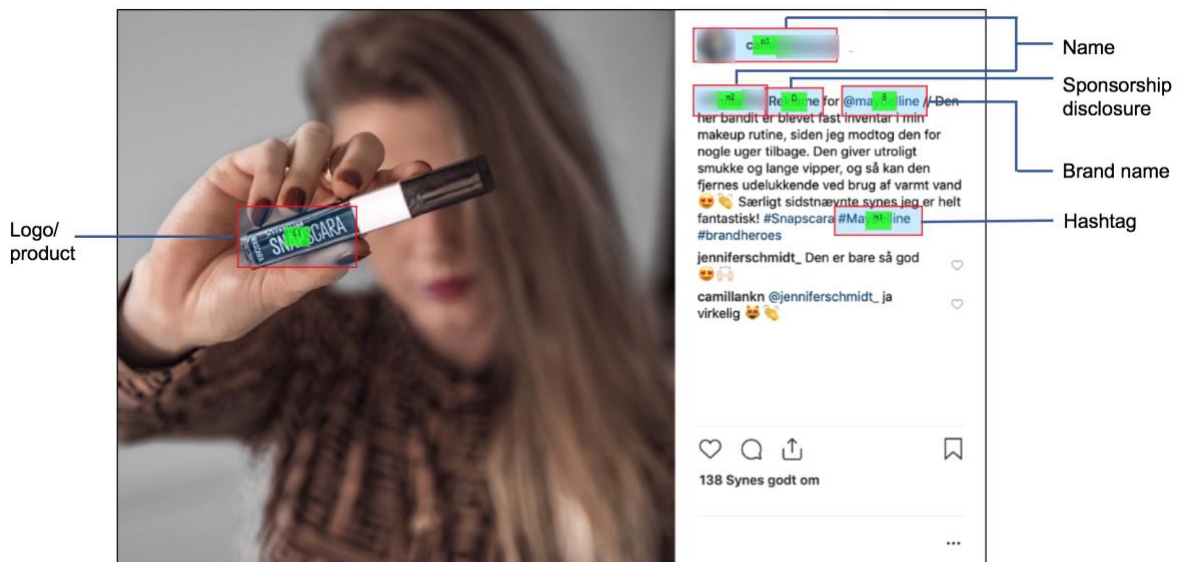
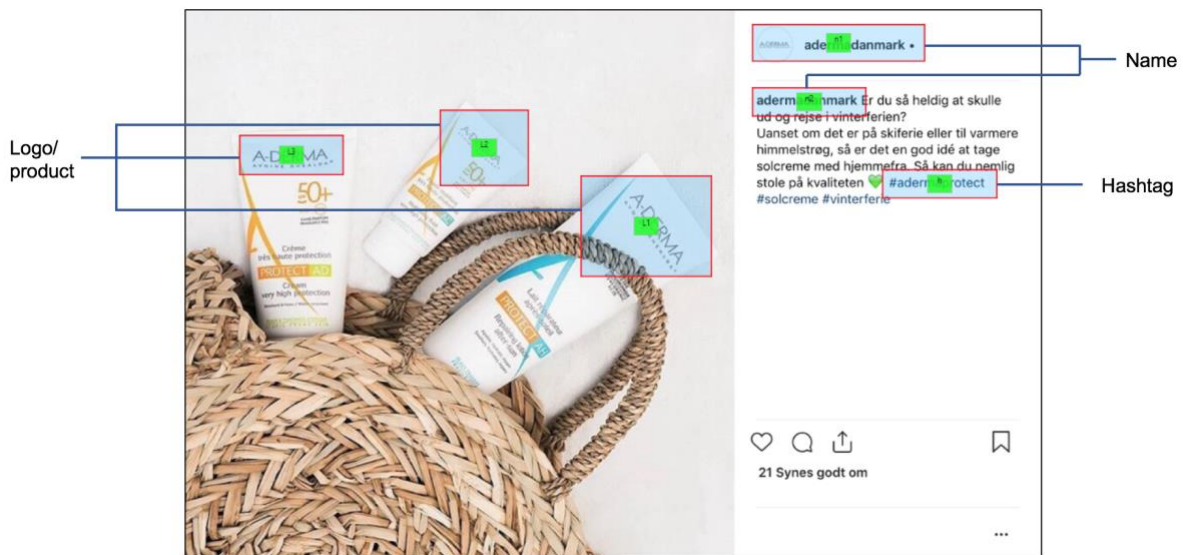


Figure 5. Stimulus & AOI example: brand post



4.1.2 Pre-test and post-test questionnaire measures

As a part of the research design, a pre-test and a post-test questionnaire were distributed among the participants. This ensured that we could measure a potential change between the baseline level stated in the pre-test, with the post-test. The pre-test and post-tests were created on the survey platform SurveyXact. As such, the pre-test first measured which brands the participants knew, where the brands that were included in the experiment were listed among others. The participants were then presented with questions that measured brand attitude (see section 4.1.2.2), related to those brands they knew. Besides these questions, other unrelated questions were included to distract the participants from the real purpose of the study.

In the post-test, the participants were asked to first list the brands they remembered to have seen in the experiment to measure unaided brand recall, and then mark the brands from a list to measure aided brand recall (see section 4.1.2.1). Finally, they were asked to evaluate all of the included brands similar to what they did in the pre-test. However, participants were faced with questions related to all of the brands included, despite their stated knowledge of them in the pre-test. This choice was made as it was assumed that being exposed to them in the experiment would be sufficient to form an attitude towards them.

4.1.2.1 Unaided & aided brand recall

In the post-test questionnaire that the participants are asked to answer immediately after the eye tracking experiment, unaided brand recall is the initial question that the participants are prompted with. Unaided brand recall refers to the participants' ability to correctly elicit brand names from memory, without any help. Specifically, the participants are asked to name as many brands as possible that they recall seeing advertisements for in the stimuli set. The question is asked as an open-ended question, i.e. the participants are required to type the brand names themselves.

After the unaided brand recall question, the participants are prompted with a question regarding aided brand recall. Similar to the prior question about unaided brand recall, the participants are in this question asked to specify which brands they recognize having seen advertising for in the stimuli set, choosing from a predefined list of options. This list includes all the advertised brands from the stimuli set, as well as a number of well-known brands that are not included in the experiment. Unrelated brands are included as a control for the possibility of participants simply selecting every brand appearing on the list.

4.1.2.2 Brand attitude

The approach to measure brand attitude in present study is adopted from Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum (1957), i.e. semantic differential measurement, and is selected based on the review of existing literature (e.g. Kamins, 1990; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Till & Busler, 2000; McCormick, 2016) and therefore deemed appropriate for the purpose of present study. Osgood et al.'s (1957) semantic differential is a type of rating scale that measures the connotative meaning of concepts. The scale has been widely used to measure attitudes, motivations, and associations, as it is designed to capture the affective and cognitive components of respondents' attributions to selected concepts on a multidimensional level (Osgood et al., 1957). As such, the participants of present study are asked to evaluate their overall impression of each brand, using a bipolar seven-point scale with verbally opposed adjectives. The use of a bipolar scale rather than a unidirectional one is based on the argument that there is a human tendency to think in terms of opposites (Osgood et al., 1957).

In general, Osgood et al. (1957) suggest that the measurement of attitudes should be based on three different factors, namely *evaluation*, *potency*, and *activity*. Throughout years of research, Osgood et al. (1957) have found these three factors as being central to the formation of attitudes. The general evaluative factor is, as the name suggests, purely evaluative, i.e. whether the participant's impression of the advertised brand is positive or negative. The potency variable serves to identify the participant's perception of the general nature of the brand. In other research applications, this factor is often associated with the power, size, weight, and toughness of the object. The activity variable is more related to the current condition of the brand, and has also been used as a descriptor of the perceived pace or excitement related to a specific object (Osgood et al., 1957). In sum, according to Osgood et al. (1957) these three factors appear to be recurring in human judgment and can be considered as the attitudinal variable of human thinking when taken together. Hence, the attitude towards a concept can be calculated as the set of averaged factor scores. Osgood et al. (1957) also argue for the application of the semantic differential technique to the field of advertising research, as it allows for comparability and enables researchers to obtain connotative judgments of different brands, products, or advertisements.

Hence, to measure brand attitude in present study, the participants are asked in both the pre-test and post-test questionnaires to answer a multi-item semantic differential measure using a 7-point scale. For the evaluative factor, participants are asked to rate their overall impression of the brands (1 = *very negative*, 7 = *very positive*). Moreover, the participants are asked to respond to the following statement "*I think that [brand name] as a brand is...*" on the 7-point scale in relation to potency (1 = *very weak*, 7 = *very strong*) and activity (1 = *very passive*, 7 = *very active*). The use of seven alternatives, i.e. the 7-point scale, rather than five, nine or eleven and so on, is based on the finding that with seven alternatives, all of them tend to be used and with roughly, if not exactly, equal frequencies. This has been found to apply in many different experiments, across a large number of subjects (Osgood et al., 1957).

4.1.3 Sample

The sample consists of 20 participants. The screening test ensured that the participants were within the target group, which is defined as female Instagram users in the age cohort of 20-29, who follow the case influencer on Instagram. The choice of female participants as focus is based on figures from 2018 presented by the Danish Ministry of Culture, which submit that the percentage of Danish women that use Instagram on a daily basis is 58%, as opposed to the percentage of men, which is 47% (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2018). Moreover, the figures also reveal that Instagram has the largest penetration in the age cohort 16-34, where 46% of internet users use Instagram on a daily basis. In comparison, the figure is only 19% for the general population (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2018). However, as the age cohort 16-34 is rather wide, it seems reasonable to argue that it can be difficult to compare 16-year-olds with 34-year-olds due to the many individual differences that assumedly will exist. Consequently, we have chosen to narrow down the age cohort of the sample in both ends of the continuum, from 16-34 to 20-29. By focusing on this rather narrow target group, the sample was more or less homogeneous, which reduces the likelihood of other variables such as age and gender impacting the results.

Furthermore, the sample also resembles the typical follower of the case influencer. According to Woomio (2019), which is a content creation platform that enables brands, agencies, and influencers to identify and develop partnerships, 86% of the case influencer’s followers are female. 77% of these are aged between 18-34. Hence, this is by far the largest demographic group among the case influencer’s followers (Woomio, 2019).

The sample was distributed as depicted in *Table 1*:

Table 1. *Sample distribution*

	Size (N)	Average age (\bar{x})
Sample	20	24.8

Finally, focusing on followers of the case influencer ensured that the participants would know the influencer, which impacts the ecological validity of the study positively (see section 4.2.1), as in 'real life' one would never see sponsored posts by an influencer they did not follow in their organic feed.

4.1.4 Procedure

As outlined in the section about research design (see section 4.1), the first part of the study started with a recruitment process using a screening test that was distributed via social media platforms. Participants had to fulfill the criteria of being female, in the age cohort of 20-29, and follow the case influencer on Instagram. However, if the participants were to know on what grounds they had been selected for the study, this might result in top-down processing instead of the desired bottom-up processing when exposed to the stimuli in the eye tracking experiment. Thus, an appropriate cover story was presented to ensure that the participants would not be biased by the actual purpose of the experiment. Participants who met the criteria were invited to participate in the experiment, which would take place approximately 14 days after the invitation. The invitation also included a unique ID assigned to each participant. Together with the invitation, the participants were asked to fill out the pre-test as soon as possible using the assigned ID.

In the second part of the study, the participants were reminded that they had a scheduled appointment the day before the experiment, and were informed where to find the laboratory in which the experiment would take place. At the day of the experiment, the participants were met outside of the laboratory, and the procedure of the experiment was reviewed in regards to how the experiment would proceed and what was expected of the participant.

Inside the laboratory, the participant was invited to sit down in front of the eye tracker and asked to sign an informed consent form. At this point, the participant was encouraged to sit as still as possible and to look at the stimuli as she would look at Instagram posts under normal circumstances. Right before the experiment was initiated, the table and chair were

adjusted to fit so that the eye tracker could identify the participant's eyes. The experiment was then conducted by only one of the researchers, in order to reduce the possibility of intimidating or stressing the participant. The researcher who was present during the experiment sat next to the participant behind a partition wall.

The first part of the experiment consisted of a calibration of the eye tracking device to the eyes of the participant. During the calibration, a dot appeared on the screen, which the participant had to follow with her eyes. After a successful calibration, the experiment was initiated, where the first slide on the screen was an introduction that briefed the participants in terms of how long each stimulus would be shown, that they should look at them as they normally would, and that they ought to fixate on the white cross between each photo. The participants could then click next when they were ready, in order to initiate the actual experiment. Once the participant clicked next, they were shown the 30 stimuli in a randomized order. Each stimulus was shown for 6000 ms before the black interslide appeared for 1500 ms, and the next stimuli was presented.

After exposure to the 30 stimuli, the participants were asked to fill out the post-test questionnaire, which was presented online on the screen in front of them. After completion of the post-test, the participants were debriefed and the actual purpose of the study was revealed. At this point they were allowed to withdraw from the experiment, if they did not want to participate under these circumstances. On parting, the participant was given a voucher for the canteen in return for participating.

4.2 Data processing

In this section of the research design, the cleaning of the raw data from the pre- and post-tests and the eye tracking experiment will be dealt with, as well as the processing of the raw data, which is necessary in order to infer any results.

4.2.1 Data cleaning

The first step of the data processing was to export and clean the raw eye tracking data output from the iMotions Biometric Research Platform (see Appendix C for cleaned eye tracking data). Data cleaning refers to the act of detecting and removing errors and

inconsistencies from the data, in order to improve the quality of the data (Rahm & Do, 2000). The data cleaning was done with Microsoft Excel and entailed the exclusion of all rows of data where the respondents' fixations were outside of the AOIs, as these were not of interest for present study. Moreover, it was ascertained that none of the recorded fixations had a duration of 6000 ms or more, since this was the maximum exposure time of each stimulus. As this was not the case for any recordings included in the data output, it was not necessary to exclude additional data rows.

Similarly, the raw survey data from the pre-test and the post-test were exported respectively from SurveyXact. The two raw data sheets were joined in Microsoft Excel by matching the respondent IDs (see Appendix C for joined survey data). For each respondent, brand attitude was calculated as the mean score of the three responses to the multi-item semantic differential measure per brand (see section 4.1.2.2). This was done for both the pre-test responses and the post-test responses. Following, the respective changes in brand attitude from the pre-test to the post-test were then calculated by subtracting the pre-test level from the post-test level. This led to either a positive or negative value that represents both the valence and magnitude of the attitudinal change.

Besides data cleaning, it was also necessary to conduct some extent of data transformation, i.e. to change the structure and representation of the data (Rahm & Do, 2000). More specifically, in the open-ended question concerning unaided brand recall, all the brands stated by each respondent were coded manually by the authors on a dichotomous scale per brand (1 = *true*, 0 = *false*). Spelling errors (e.g. "*bellevedere*") was accepted, whereas ambiguous guesses (e.g. "*some rum brand*") was not accepted, although such responses arguably indicate some level of recall. Similarly, the responses to the question concerning aided brand recall were also coded manually by the authors on a dichotomous scale for every brand (1 = *true*, 0 = *false*).

4.2.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the statistical software program JMP. In JMP, the first step was to calculate the sum of fixation durations on each AOI, which was then named total fixation duration (TFD(ms)). TFD(ms) therefore represent the total fixation duration on

each AOI, as each respondent might have looked at the same AOI more than once during the exposure. Hence, the TFD(ms) also include revisits to each AOI. The eye tracking data was then joined with the survey data based on the participants' IDs. Thus, the combined data sheet in JMP entailed the TFD(ms) belonging to each AOI, which was then re-coded into two overall AOI groups, namely *Brand + Name* and *Disclosure*. The reason for combining the AOIs into two groups was to accommodate a loss of degrees of freedom when conducting the statistical analysis on each separate AOI. In *figure 6*, the previous AOI codes are presented alongside the recoded AOI groups. As such, the 'Brand + Name AOI' group consists of all of the AOIs related to the advertised brand, as well as the name of either the influencer or the brand. The 'Disclosure AOI' group only includes the sponsorship disclosures. Additionally, the joined data sheet includes a column distinguishing between the three types of posts (Sponsored post, Non-follower post and Brand post).

Figure 6. *Recoding of AOIs into two AOI groups*

AOI	AOI code	
Sponsorship disclosure	<i>D</i>	} Disclosure AOI group
Brand name	<i>B</i>	
Name of the account	<i>n1 & n2</i>	} Brand + name AOI group
Logo	<i>L1, L2 ..</i>	
Hashtags	<i>h</i>	
Brand name in text	<i>IT</i>	
Brand name in comments	<i>C</i>	

The initial step of the statistical analysis was to check whether there were significant differences in TFD(ms) towards the two AOI groups across the three post types; sponsored posts, non-follower posts and brand posts. Similarly, it was examined whether there were significant differences in the change in brand attitude derived from the three post types. This was done by conducting a Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test, which is the

non-parametric equivalent to the one-way ANOVA. The reason for applying a non-parametric test is due to the low number of observations ($n=20$). A significant Kruskal-Wallis test will indicate that at least one of the post types is significantly different from the others on the respective parameter. In the case of a significant Kruskal-Wallis test, a Steel-Dwass method for post-hoc pairwise comparisons is applied, in order to examine which post types were significantly different from each other.

In order to test H1 and H2, JMP's Full Factorial Repeated Measures ANOVA was applied, which generates a linear mixed effects model (LMEM) analysis. This analysis was conducted across the three post types and the two AOI groups. The purpose of applying the LMEM analysis is to determine whether the independent variable included in the model is a significant predictor of the dependent variable. In this case, TFD(ms) is regarded as the independent variable, whereas the change in brand attitude is the dependent variable of the LMEM analysis. Hence, we expect that brand attitude will change when the TFD(ms) towards the specific AOI group varies.

The LMEM analysis was chosen due to the within-subjects research design (see section 4.1), as ordinary linear regression assumes that each observation is an independent measure. This is however not the case with present research design, where each respondent was tested on all conditions. Hence, the participants should be treated as random effects, which the LMEM analysis accommodates. In the LMEM analysis, the independent variable is treated as a within-subject factor; in this case, the TFD(ms). The significance level of the study, α , was set to .05, meaning that the result would be significant if the probability of other factors predicting the relationship between the two variables is equal to or below 5% ($p < .05$). Thus, with a significant result, there is less than 5% probability of making a *Type I error*, i.e. drawing a conclusion about a relationship between two variables, when no actual relationship exists (Madsen, 2012).

To test H3, and thus calculate the differences in the ability to drive unaided and aided brand recall across the three post types, the Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test was applied once again. If a significant difference was detected between the three post types in relation to unaided and aided brand recall, respectively, the Steel-Dwass method for post-hoc

pairwise comparisons was applied to examine which post types there was a significant difference between.

4.3 Quality criteria

In this section, we will reflect on the choices made to ensure the quality of present study. The first part of this section will deal with the validity of the study, whereas the second part will deal with the reliability of it. Moreover, the consequences of our choices for other quality measures will be discussed accordingly.

4.3.1 Validity

Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are drawn from the findings of a study (Bryman, 2012). Validity can be divided into several dimensions, and especially the distinction between internal validity and ecological validity is important. Where the former is related to the issue of causality and thus control of the experiment, the latter relates to the experiment's resemblance of reality. Often, the prioritization of one will be at the expense of the other, and it is thus necessary that we as researchers are aware about the consequences of our choices and prioritizations in the tradeoff between internal and ecological validity. In the following, we will outline our considerations related to this.

Concerning the internal validity of present study, certain choices were made. Since we are investigating a relationship between two variables, it is of significant importance that we eliminate any other factors that may impact the outcome. Hence, we prioritize ensuring a high level of internal validity in our experimental design by conducting the eye tracking experiment in a laboratory. In a laboratory setting, we thus had the possibility to control much of the surrounding factors that could impact the outcome of the experiment. Specifically, the laboratory setting allowed us to control the exposure duration of 6000 ms and the fact that all participants were exposed to the same stimuli, in order to ensure comparability.

Conversely, the focus on internal validity meant that some aspects of the ecological validity were less prioritized. The screen-based eye tracking technology hindered a realistic design of the experiment, as the technology could not support the interactive

features of Instagram, such as the ability to like and comment on posts, see the tagged persons in a photo, scroll unrestrictedly, and watch stories. The layout of Instagram is also different on a desktop compared to the smartphone application, where the text is presented under the photo on a smartphone, but next to the photo on a desktop. This evidently results in decreasing the ecological validity, as the present study does not take into account the preferred media type of the participants. Hence, some participants could potentially become perplexed when being presented with a layout that differs from what they normally see.

However, other measures were taken to increase ecological validity. One of which was the choice of using genuine posts by the case influencer, which ensured that the stimuli would be as realistic as possible and not evoke suspicion and resistance if for instance the posts were manipulated or fictitious. The consequence of this choice may however be that the participants were likely to have seen the particular posts at a previous point in time prior to the experiment. This could potentially have had an impact on the affective response, as the amplified halo effect of the first impression may have been eliminated (Kahneman, 2011). The screening of participants based on whether they follow the case influencer is also another choice made to ensure ecological validity. As such, the screening criteria ensured that the stimuli presented to the participants would resemble an Instagram news feed, where consumers will only be presented with content from users that they follow.

An additional consideration, particularly when conducting eye tracking, is that the validity of research based on eye movement analysis is fundamentally dependent on the quality of the eye tracking data (Holmqvist, Nyström & Mulvey, 2012). Eye movement data may contain noise, which must be accounted for. Besides the accuracy and sampling rate of the eye tracking device (see section 4.1.1), other factors may influence the data quality. For instance, participants might differ in respect to eye physiology or ability to follow instructions, e.g. fixating on the white cross when exposed to the black interslides. Furthermore, some participants may wear glasses or contact lenses, or have long eyelashes, which all hold the potential to interfere with the imaging of the eye. A common way of coping with such interferences is by excluding the participant's data all together (Holmqvist et al., 2012). In present study, however, the data quality was 98% according to

the iMotions Biometric Research Platform software, which meant that it was not necessary to exclude any participants in order to enhance the data quality, and thus the validity of the study.

Lastly, *external validity* is concerned with whether the results of a study can be generalized beyond the specific research context (Bryman, 2012). To this end, the nature of the sample selection determines the external validity in most cases, as researchers want to sample as representative as possible to be able to claim that the results are not unique to the particular group upon whom the research was conducted (Bryman, 2012). Thus, optimally, a sample is selected randomly (Bryman, 2012), which is not fully attained in present study. Our sampling could arguably be closer to a convenience sampling rather than probability sampling, as every respondent that fulfilled the sampling criteria was invited to participate. Yet, due to the demographic distribution of the population, i.e. the followers of the case influencer, where there were substantially skewed distributions in regards to age and gender (see section 4.1.3), the sample ended up rather representative as a natural fallout. However, it should be noted that the sample of present study solely included women, despite 14% of the case influencer's followers being men, which ultimately reduces the external validity of present study slightly. Moreover, some researchers have highlighted the problematics of utilizing online surveys, as internet users cannot always be equated with the general public (Bryman, 2012). However, for present study this is not considered problematic, since the examined population inherently is an online population. Despite that the sample is considered rather representative of the population, this however does not mean that the findings can be generalized beyond the population, which is important to keep in mind.

4.3.2 Reliability

In terms of the reliability of present study, this quality criterion is generally concerned with whether the results of a study are repeatable and consistent (Bryman, 2012). In quantitative research, such as the present study, the criterion most often refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept (Bryman, 2012). Hence, *internal reliability* is of importance for the researchers, as this is concerned with whether the indicators that make up the measurement scale are consistent, i.e. whether the participants' scores on any one

indicator tend to be related to their scores on the other indicators (Bryman, 2012, p. 157). Thus, internal reliability is relevant in terms of the measure of brand attitude, where present study applied Osgood et al.'s (1957) multi-item semantic differential measure using three 7-point scales. Hence, in the pre-test and post-test, three different questions were used to measure the one construct of brand attitude. To ensure internal reliability related to the measurement of brand attitude, *Cronbach's alpha* was calculated using SPSS software. Cronbach's alpha is a common measure of internal reliability, as it determines how much the items on a scale are measuring the same underlying dimension (Bryman, 2012). In present study, the scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of .855.

Reliability is closely related to *replicability*, i.e. the study's capacity to be replicated (Bryman, 2012). To this end, the set-up of the experiment in a laboratory environment under the control of the researchers, facilitates the replicability of the research. In addition, the explicitness and thoroughness of the procedure (see section 4.1.4) arguably ensures that replication of the study can be made in future research. However, the focus on a specific case influencer might result in lower reliability, since the results might differ if replicated with another influencer as the case.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Diener & Crandall (in Bryman, 2012, p.125) have broken down recurring issues concerning the transgressions of ethical principles in research into four main areas; whether there is harm to the participant; whether there is a lack of informed consent; whether there is an invasion of privacy; and whether deception is involved.

As previously mentioned, we obtained informed consent from the participants (see section 4.1.4). In the informed consent form, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the experiment at any time, that their participation would remain anonymous, and that the experiment was harmless and would be explained properly to them. As such, the informed consent functioned as a way to mitigate the four areas that are typically of ethical concern. In relation to privacy, confidentiality was maintained by assigning unique IDs in the form of random numbers to the participants, so that their

names would not be connected with any of the recorded data and thus the data processing and results. While the researchers had to make up a cover story in order to limit the participants' understanding of what the research is about so that they respond more naturally to the stimuli, the subsequent debriefing ensured that the participants were fully aware of the purpose and nature of the study and they were offered the possibility to refuse using their data in present paper. Fortunately, none of the participants chose to do so. Another ethical consideration was taken in regards to the case influencer. As the findings are not supposed to be related to a specific influencer, consequently, the influencer has been anonymized in present paper, in order to ensure that possible negative results in relation to the effect of the influencer's sponsored posts would not affect her in commercial matters.

5. Results

In this section, the results of the study are presented. First, we deal with the results related to H1 and H2, where the statistical dispersion and central tendencies are presented in relation to the eye tracking data and survey data. Subsequently, the results of the LMEM analysis are presented. Second, we will deal with the results related to H3a and H3b. This includes the statistical dispersion and central tendencies for unaided and aided brand recall, followed by the respective results of the Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test and the Steel-Dwass method for post-hoc pairwise comparisons.

5.1 Results related to hypothesis 1 & 2

5.1.1 *Statistical dispersion & central tendencies*

Table 2 summarizes the mean TFD(ms) on the two AOI groups across the three post types, as well as the respective standard deviations. The Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test found a significant difference between the three post types ($X^2 = 7.283$, $p = .026$) with a mean TFD of 1109 ms for brand posts, 1233 ms for non-follower posts, and 944 ms for sponsored posts. The Steel-Dwass post-hoc pairwise comparisons test for mean TFD(ms) between the three types of posts further revealed a significant difference between the sponsored posts and the non-follower posts, $Z = -2.592$, $p = .026$. In this case, the 'Brand

+ Name AOI' of the non-follower posts received a significantly longer viewing time across the participants, compared to the 'Brand + Name AOI' of the sponsored posts.

In relation to the 'Disclosure AOI' group, a non-parametric Wilcoxon Test revealed no significant difference between sponsored posts and non-follower posts ($X^2= 1.283, p = .257$).

Table 2. Mean TFD(ms) per AOI group across post types.

Post type	Brand + Name		Disclosure	
	Mean TFD(ms)	Std Dev	Mean TFD(ms)	Std Dev TFD(ms)
Sponsored post	944	561	293	201
Non-follower post	1233	641	317	181
Brand post	1109	637	*--	*--

* As the brand posts did not have any disclosures, no data was collected on this AOI

Table 3 summarizes the mean change (Δ) in brand attitude from the pre-test to the post-test, across the three post types, as well as the respective standard deviations. With a mean brand attitude change of .273 for sponsored posts, .272 for non-follower posts, .340 for brand posts, a Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test did not find any significant difference between the three post types ($X^2 =.898, p = .638$).

Table 3. Mean and Std Dev for difference between pre- and post-test measures

Post type	Δ Brand attitude	
	Mean	Std Dev
Sponsored post	.273	.848
Non-follower post	.272	.775
Brand post	.340	.836

5.1.2 Linear Mixed Effects Model Analysis

In order to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables of H1 and H2, inferential statistics are applied. This allows us to draw conclusions about the population from which the sample of the study was drawn. Visual inspection confirmed that the observations made in the experiment were normally distributed, hence the LMEM analysis' assumption of normal distribution was not violated.

Table 4 summarizes the results of the LMEM analysis for each post type and AOI group. The column labeled *F* gives the F-ratio of the test, followed by the *p*-value, which represents the probability to observe a more extreme value in the sample than the observed. This is followed by a column reflecting the *Estimates*, and then the *df*: DFDen column, which reflects the degrees of freedom (*df*), that is the number of values that are free to vary, and the error degrees of freedom (DFDen).

Table 4. Linear Mixed Effects Model Analysis

Effect	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Estimates	<i>df</i> : DFDen
Sponsored post x Brand + name	1.419	.255	- .000318	1, 13.22
Sponsored post x Disclosure	.165	.708	.0003844	1, 3.562
Brand post x Brand + name	.002	*--	.0000036794	*--
Non-follower x Brand + name	1.238	.280	- .000251	1, 18.8
Non-follower post x Disclosure	1.0691	*--	- .000282	*--

* Due to an insufficient number of observations, the degrees of freedom were lost, hence *p* could not be calculated

As evident in Table 4, neither of the combinations of AOI groups and post types are significant $F(1, 13.22) = 1.419, p = .255$, $F(1, 3.562) = .165, p = .708$, $F(1, 18.8) = 1.238, p = .280$, respectively. It was not possible to analyze the combinations of 'brand post x

Brand + Name AOI' and 'non-follower post x Disclosure AOI', as the degrees of freedom were lost due to an insufficient number of observations.

5.2 Results related to hypothesis 3(a) & 3(b)

5.2.1 Statistical dispersion & central tendencies

Table 5 summarizes the mean and median count of unaided brand recall and aided brand recall for each post type, as well as the respective standard deviations.

Table 5. Mean and std. dev. of aided and unaided brand recall per post type

Post type	Unaided brand recall			Aided brand recall		
	Mean count	Median count	Std Dev count	Mean count	Std Dev count	Median count
Sponsored post	0,94	1,00	0,80	1,70	1,03	2,00
Non-follower post	0,72	1,00	0,67	2,89	0,99	3,00
Brand post	1,33	1,00	1,03	2,35	0,88	2,50

5.2.2 Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test & Steel-Dwass post-hoc pairwise comparisons

To answer H3, the Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test was applied. In terms of unaided brand recall (H3a), the test did not reveal a significant difference between the three conditions, ($X^2 = 3.526$, $p = .172$). However, the Kruskal-Wallis ranked sums test for aided brand recall (H3b) did reveal a significant difference between the three conditions, ($X^2 = 11.417$, $p = .003$).

The results of the Steel-Dwass method for post-hoc pairwise comparisons for aided brand recall is summarized in Table 6. The column labeled Z gives the Z-ratio of the test, followed by the p-value.

Table 6. Steel-Dwass method for post-hoc pairwise comparisons: H3b aided Brand recall

	Z	p
NF: BP	1.772	.179
SP: BP	1.927	.131
SP: NF	-3.160	.005

As evident from *Table 7*, there are no significant differences in mean ranks between the non-follower posts and brand posts, $Z=1.772$, $p=.179$ or between sponsored posts and brand posts, $Z=1.927$, $p=.131$. However, the findings did reveal a significant difference between the sponsored posts and the non-follower posts, $Z = -3.160$, $p=.005$. Hence, aided brand recall derived from non-follower posts (2.89) proved to be significantly higher than that of sponsored posts (1.70), as evident from *Table 5*.

6. Discussion

Based on the results presented in the above section, the discussion will deal with the results related to each hypothesis respectively, and either accept or reject this. This will lead us to a discussion of potential explanations of the findings, based on a revisit to our literature review. Following this, we will engage in a more general discussion in relation to our findings.

6.1 Rejecting hypothesis 1

Based on the findings (see section 5.1.2) it is evident that total fixation duration on the brand and influencer in a sponsored post is not a significant predictor of a positive change in brand attitude. Thus, we must reject H1, i.e. that the longer fixation duration on the brand and influencer, the more positive change in brand attitude, compared to the baseline level. As such, our finding does not support our underlying assumption about the existence of the halo effect in influencer marketing.

Overall, based on a scrutiny of our literature review, it seems that there exist four potential explanations as to why no empirical evidence was found to support H1. First, a possible explanation could be related to the precondition of congruence for a positive effect of endorsements on brand attitude. As much research suggest, the halo effect may only be effective under conditions where there is a seeming proximity between the characteristics of the brand and the endorser (e.g. Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000). Since present study did not account for the congruence between the case influencer and the advertised brands, it is not possible to assess whether a congruence was in fact present. However, as evident from the literature review, there seems to be a lack of agreement among theorists in contemporary research in relation to the significance of congruence - not disregarding its potential impact on the results of present study. Yet, as present study included a genuine influencer as an exemplifying case, as well as genuine sponsored posts by her, we assume that some degree of perceived congruence between the influencer and the advertised brands ought to exist.

A second - to some extent related - explanation may be, as Kahneman (2011) finds, that in an endorsement context, the halo effect amplifies the impact of the first impression. However, as the sponsored posts used as stimuli in present study were in fact genuine posts that had already been posted on Instagram by the case influencer, it is possible that the amplified halo effect on the first impression was eliminated. Hence, it is reasonable to believe that the participants have already seen the influencer and the brand in combination, which may have affected their brand attitude accordingly at a previous point in time. As such, this might explain why there was no recording of change in brand attitude immediately after exposure to the sponsored posts during the experiment.

Third, a possible explanation could also be related to the fact that we chose to focus on low involvement products. In contrast to the findings by Petty et al. (1983) who found a significant positive effect of celebrity endorsement on brand attitude under low involvement conditions, Krugman (1965) argues in relation to hierarchies of effect, that consumers might follow a different sequence during low involvement purchase decisions. Specifically, Krugman (1965) argues that behavior may precede affect. Hence, consumers may

purchase a particular brand after becoming familiar with it and afterwards decide whether they actually like it or not (Barry & Howard, 1990). Following this line of thought, it may be that consumers become inclined to purchase a particular brand after being exposed to a sponsored post endorsing that brand. Hence, only after the product has been purchased and consumed, brand attitude will be formed. Consequently, change in brand attitude may not be readily identifiable after exposure to the sponsored post.

A fourth explanation of why no empirical evidence was found to support H1 may be related to the fact that our measure of brand attitude was based on self-report. As Lazarus (1984) points towards, self-reported attitudes may simply be based on cognition rather than actual affection. Consequently, self-reported brand attitude may not be the most appropriate measure of the affective level. Instead, when measuring the effect on the affective level in relation to brand attitude, including both the conscious and nonconscious brain responses should be considered, as argued by Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017). However, due to resource constraints in present study, this was not a feasible option.

Furthermore, as evident from the results, there was no significant difference between the three post types in regards to change in brand attitude (see section 5.1.1). Consequently, the findings of present study do not support most of the dominant literature, which generally proposes that celebrity endorsers are effective due the halo effect of their credibility or attractiveness (see section 2.1.2.3). Instead, based on our findings, it seems that sponsored posts are not significantly more effective in changing brand attitude than unfamiliar influencers as well as ordinary brand posts.

Conversely, our findings partially support the findings by Priester & Petty (2003), who suggest that if people feel unsure about the trustworthiness of the endorser, they will likely scrutinize the message in order to ascertain if it is cogent and valid. Priester & Petty (2003) further argue that unfamiliar endorsers may potentially increase the amount of attention paid to advertisements. As evident from the results (see table 2), non-follower posts received a significantly longer total fixation duration on the 'Brand + Name AOI' compared to sponsored posts. This indicates that people spend more time looking at the parts related

to the advertised brand and the endorser in instances where they feel an urge to scrutinize the advertisement due to the unfamiliarity of the endorser.

However, our findings only partially support those of Priester & Petty (2003). The authors proceed to argue that unfamiliar endorsers hold the potential to influence attitudes by increasing the amount of attention paid to the advertisement. This is supported by McCormick (2016) who also finds that an unfamiliar endorser can lead to enhanced brand attitude. As evident from table 4, we did not find any empirical evidence that the total fixation duration on the 'Brand + Name AOI' of the non-follower posts is a significant predictor of brand attitude.

Instead, the fact that we found no significant difference between the three post types in mean change in brand attitude, might be an indication of a mere exposure effect (see section 4.1.1.1). Zajonc (1968) hypothesizes that a mere exposure of the individual to a stimulus object enhances his or her attitude toward it. Hence, under certain circumstances, sole brand exposure may be sufficient to enhance brand attitude, since the exposure makes consumers feel more familiar with and comfortable about the brand (Baker, 1999). Since brand posts were included as a control for mere exposure, this control proved that there were no significant differences between the three post types in relation to mean change in brand attitude. Thus, our finding indicates the existence of the mere exposure effect. As such, the fact that we did not find significant differences between the three post types indicates that fixations on the brand and influencer is not the main driver of a positive change in brand attitude, to a greater extent than simply the mere exposure effect. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the absent change in brand attitude is limited to the short term, and that a positive effect on brand attitude might become evident in the long term.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the findings neither suggest that the total fixation duration on the brand and influencer in a sponsored post is a significant predictor of a negative change in brand attitude. As such, an alternative explanation of why we found no empirical evidence that supported our hypothesis could be that the amount of attention

paid to the brand and influencer is simply not an appropriate predictor for a change in brand attitude.

6.2 Rejecting hypothesis 2

As evident from the results related to H2 (see table 4), there was no significant evidence that longer fixation duration on the sponsorship disclosure leads to more negative change in brand attitude. Hence, we must reject H2 as well.

Overall, from our literature review we find three possible explanations for why we did not find a significant negative change in brand attitude when the participants paid attention to the disclosure. The first factor explaining this may be the notion of persuasion knowledge. As Friestad & Wright (1994) argue, consumers use persuasion knowledge to process situational information relevant to the selection of their response to persuasive attempts. However, as people will differ in terms of the level of persuasion knowledge that they possess, their responses - and hence the subsequent effect on their attitudes and behaviors - will vary accordingly (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Jung & Heo (2019) found in their study that only participants with high persuasion knowledge showed less favorable brand attitudes compared to participants with low persuasion knowledge after exposure to native advertising. However, as present study did not include persuasion knowledge as a variable on which to compare, it is possible that some of the participants possessed a high level of persuasion knowledge, whereas others may have possessed a low level of persuasion knowledge. Thus, the mean change in brand attitude might have been offset.

A second possible explanation is that the participants may not have processed the sponsorship disclosure sufficiently, despite paying visual attention to it. In their study, Boerman et al. (2014) find that when the sponsorship disclosure was displayed prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content, this led to more critical processing of the content, ultimately reducing the persuasive effect and resulting in less favorable attitudes toward the advertised brand. A review of our eye tracking data revealed that the mean time to first fixation (TTFF) for the sponsorship disclosure AOI was 2949 ms, i.e. the participants looked at the sponsorship disclosure approximately halfway through the exposure duration. Despite Boerman et al.'s (2014) suggestion about the effect of prior or concurrent

sponsorship disclosures, this did not result in less favorable brand attitude in present study. Hence, this implies that the participants may in fact not have processed the sponsorship disclosure sufficiently enough to elicit critical processing.

Furthermore, when looking at the mean total fixation duration towards the sponsorship disclosure (see table 2), visual attention devoted towards the disclosure was rather limited compared to the other AOI group. However, research has demonstrated that readers only need 50 to 60 ms to view a word in order to read it normally (Rayner, 2009). Hence, it seems that the participants in present study have had sufficient time to read the sponsorship disclosure. Nevertheless, Evans et al. (2017) found that it is only under circumstances where the consumer recall to have seen a disclosure in the content, there is a significant negative impact on attitudes. This raises the question of whether the participants in fact processed the sponsorship disclosure long enough to recall having attended to it. Research however does not seem to provide a threshold of minimum fixation duration on a particular AOI in order for individuals to generate a cognitive node in memory, and be able to recall it subsequently. Consequently, present study does not allow us to determine whether the participants in fact processed the sponsorship disclosure sufficiently in order to recall it. Provided that the participants did not manage to process the sponsorship disclosure when briefly attending to it during exposure to the stimuli, this might explain why a significant negative change in brand attitude was not found.

A third explanation of why we did not find empirical evidence to support H2, may be that visual attention devoted to the sponsorship disclosure is an inadequate proxy for recognizing a post as sponsored. As Jung & Heo (2019) find, the level of advertising recognition is not affected by the explicitness of the disclosure, but rather affected by the creative elements of the content. Hence, people are familiar with the typical formats of advertising, and therefore often recognize it without a sponsorship disclosure. However, it overall seems that neither the sponsorship disclosure nor the creative elements have provided sufficient cues for the participants to recognize the posts as being sponsored, since we found no significant evidence of negative change in brand attitude. This finding indicates that the participants might not have sufficient knowledge about sponsorship cues in relation to sponsored posts on Instagram in order to critically process it. Alternatively,

fixations on the sponsorship disclosure might simply not be an appropriate predictor of a negative change in brand attitude.

6.3 Rejecting hypothesis 3(a) but accepting hypothesis 3(b)

Based on the results related to H3a (see table 5), we found no significant difference between the three post types in relation to unaided brand recall. Thus, we must reject H3a, i.e. that exposure to a sponsored post by a familiar influencer will lead to lower unaided brand recall compared to a sponsored post by an unfamiliar influencer. In fact, there was no significant difference in the ability to drive unaided brand recall across the three post types. For both sponsored posts and non-follower posts, the participants in present study on average recalled less than one brand out of four (see table 5). A possible explanation for this may be that neither the sponsored posts by the familiar influencer nor the unfamiliar influencer were superior in conveying the brand-related information sufficiently enough for the participants to be able to report the brands directly from memory without any form of aid.

Conversely, the results did reveal a significant difference between the three post types in relation to aided brand recall. Specifically, we identified a significant difference between sponsored posts and non-follower posts, which leads us to accept H3b; that exposure to a sponsored post by a familiar influencer will lead to lower aided brand recall compared to a sponsored post by an unfamiliar influencer. As previously argued, we consider aided brand recall to be an appropriate parameter under low involvement conditions, since consumers likely will be presented with a range of options in a real-life purchase situation, which will function as cues to elicit recognition of the advertised brand. This argument underlines the importance of our finding.

The acceptance of H3(b) seems to confirm the existence of the vampire effect, i.e. a decrease in brand recall for an advertising stimulus that features a celebrity endorser versus the same stimulus with an unknown but equally attractive endorser (Erfgen et al., 2015). Thus, it seems that the vampire effect also applies to influencer marketing. Similar to the finding by Petty et al. (1983) that under low involvement conditions, the use of attractive endorsers in fact reduced the brand name recognition, our finding suggest that

for low involvement product categories, a familiar influencer is significantly worse at driving aided brand recall compared to a sponsored post by an unfamiliar influencer. Although we do not have any evidence that the non-followers included in present study are considered as equally as attractive as the case influencer, the vampire effect appears as a likely explanation to our finding. As such, the familiar influencer might be overshadowing the brand in the sponsored posts, leading to significantly lower aided brand recall, compared to non-follower posts where the unfamiliar influencer does not seem to overshadow the brand.

The fact that the significantly greater aided brand recall is driven by unfamiliar endorsers can potentially be explained by the increased cognitive effort, which the participants might have devoted to scrutinize the non-follower posts as argued by Priester & Petty (2003). Moreover, as Dahlén et al. (2005) suggest; when information in an advertisement is conflicting with an existing schema in the consumers' minds, this often leads to the cognitive effects of increased processing and elaboration and ultimately enhanced brand recall. Similarly, Wu et al. (2016) argue that when there is a mismatch between the credibility of the company and the media channel, such as an influencer, this mismatch then trigger suspicion resulting in greater perception of persuasive intent, which directs the attention towards the advertised brand. As such, this might explain why the participants were able to remember the non-followers' persuasion attempts better than the case influencer's attempts.

6.4 General discussion

In general, much of the marketing research reviewed in present paper have relied on the traditional hierarchy of effects model AIDA when measuring the effectiveness of marketing efforts (see section 2.3.1). From the traditional perspective on measuring effect, it seems that the application of an influencer has no effect at all based on the findings of present study, which indicate that sponsored posts do not drive recall nor attitude to a significantly greater degree than ordinary brand posts on Instagram. However, our findings did reveal that unfamiliar influencers are more effective in driving aided brand recall, compared to a familiar influencer. This in turn might indicate that unfamiliar influencers are only effective

at the initial cognitive stage, as no significant change in brand attitude at the affective stage was identified.

Seen from a neuroscientific perspective, both the conscious and nonconscious processes of the brain ought to be included when measuring effect. In present study, visual attention was measured via eye tracking, while conscious attention was supplemented by measures of unaided and aided brand recall. Looking at the effectiveness of influencer marketing efforts from the neuroscientific perspective, it seems that visual attention, including both conscious and nonconscious attention, alone is not an appropriate predictor of effect on the affective stage. Affect was however only measured on a conscious level, due to resource constraints. Had we had the possibility to measure nonconscious affect, we might have discovered an effect on the nonconscious affective stage.

Conversely, effect might occur in a different sequence than suggested by the AIDA model. As dealt with above (section 6.1), Krugman (1965) provides an interesting suggestion that under low involvement conditions, conation may precede affection. Hence, people may become inclined to purchase the advertised product after exposure and will then form an attitude afterwards. Consequently, the effect on the affective stage may not be possible to measure with the experimental design of present study. Similarly, contemporary neuroscientific research has demonstrated other sequences of effect than the one of the AIDA model. For instance, Ramsøy & Skov (2014) have demonstrated that the subjective preference for a brand affected the likelihood of detecting that particular brand when presented briefly. This implies that the fact that the participants attended to some brands sufficiently enough to be able to recall these brands afterwards could be an indication of preexisting positive brand attitudes. Conversely, it is a well-documented fact that intrinsic properties of sensory input such as color and saliency can drive bottom-up attention (Milosavljevic & Cerf, 2008). Consequently, the attention devoted to the appearing brands in present study may just as well be a result of the saliency of the particular brand compared to the rest of the image, and not because of an existing affection towards that brand.

While the advances within neuroscientific research does not decline the importance of attention, interest, desire, and action when measuring the effectiveness of marketing efforts, it does not seem to confirm the proposed sequentiality of the AIDA model either (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017). This is due to the fact that brain regions are activated differently based on factors such as personality, traits, and genetic variations of each and every individual (Montazeribarforoushi et al., 2017). Hence, the neurological basis behind every individual action in various contexts varies substantially. Thus, the neuroscientific perspective calls for an extensively more complex modelling of effect than the prevailing AIDA model.

In sum, when looking at the effect of the visual attention devoted to the advertised brand in sponsored posts, the field of neuroscientific research provides an important perspective on the way of measuring effect, which companies in the attention economy ought to take into consideration. This perspective is especially relevant when seeking to determine the level of attention obtained from advertising. In this regard, our findings interestingly suggest that unfamiliar influencers are significantly better at capturing the visual attention of consumers, compared to familiar influencers, to a degree where people are able to recall the brands. However, as present study finds, visual attention devoted to a particular brand in a sponsored Instagram post does not have a significant effect on the conscious affective stage.

7. Conclusion

In order to be able to answer the research question of present study, we first conducted a literature review. In the first part of the literature review, it was demonstrated that influencers differ from traditional opinion leadership and celebrity endorsement theory, as they offer companies a unique opportunity to address one of today's major commercial challenges; to be authentic. The reviewed literature in relation to the persuasiveness of endorsers demonstrated the positive effects of source credibility and attractiveness on the advertised brand, which may be ascribed to the halo effect. However, a challenging effect known as the vampire effect also seems to emerge, namely that brand recall may be reduced. Thus, it seems that while the attention gained from endorsers with desirable

qualities can lead to a positive effect on the advertised brand, the risk exists that the endorser might end up running off with all of the attention.

In spite of the demonstrated effect on the advertised brand, questions have been raised about the covert nature of influencer marketing, which is why the second part of our literature review sought to investigate the effects of this. It revealed that research concerned with sponsorship disclosures in native advertising has found that relatively few recognize native advertisements as advertising, but also that the attention devoted to sponsorship disclosures can have a negative effect on brand attitude among those who do, which is often ascribed to the notion of persuasion knowledge. The final part of the literature review served to determine what is generally considered as effectiveness of marketing efforts. It seems that most marketing research relies on the modelling of effect as a hierarchy, such as the AIDA model. However, with the advances of neuroscientific research, some theorists argue that the AIDA model should consider effect on both a conscious and a nonconscious level. Common for both perspectives is that attention seems to be a critical construct of effect, as it can be considered a prerequisite for any effective marketing effort.

Following the sequence of the AIDA model, this led us to examine how visual attention towards the advertised brand impacts the affective stage of the hierarchy. In order to measure visual attention, an eye tracking experiment was conducted in line with neuroscientific researchers' reconceptualization of the AIDA model, as this method enables us to consider both conscious and nonconscious attention. However, eye tracking does not allow us to distinguish between conscious and nonconscious attention, why the measure of brand recall was included. The chosen measure of effect on the affective stage was brand attitude, as neuroscientific research argues that interest and desire in the AIDA model should not be considered as separate stages, but rather as overlapping phenomena of affection, hence brand attitude is intended to encompass both. In present study, this was limited to the conscious level due to resource constraints.

Based on the findings of the literature review, we hypothesized that 1) the longer fixation duration on the brand and influencer, the more positive change in brand attitude compared

to the baseline level, but also 2) that the longer fixation duration on the sponsorship disclosure, the more negative change in brand attitude compared to the baseline level, as well as 3) exposure to a sponsored post by a familiar influencer will lead to lower (a) unaided brand recall and (b) aided brand recall, compared to a sponsored post by an unfamiliar influencer.

To measure the effect of visual attention on brand attitude, a linear mixed effects statistical analysis was conducted, with visual attention serving as the independent variable and change in brand attitude as the dependent variable. The findings of the statistical analysis provided no empirical evidence that total fixation duration on the brand and influencer in a sponsored post is a significant predictor of a positive change in brand attitude. Hence, the first hypothesis was rejected. Based on a scrutiny of our literature review, we found four possible explanations for this.

First, a possible explanation could be related to the precondition of congruence for a positive effect of endorsements on brand attitude, which was not controlled for in present study. A second - to some extent related - explanation may be that in an endorsement context, the halo effect amplifies the impact of the first impression, but in present study, the participants might already have seen the sponsored post prior to the experiment. Therefore, their brand attitude may already have been affected at a previous point in time. Third, consumers in low involvement situations might follow a different sequence of effect, and thus a change in brand attitude may not be recorded immediately after exposure. A fourth explanation could be that self-reported brand attitude may not be the most appropriate measure of the affective stage. Moreover, the included control measure consisting of ordinary brand posts suggests that total fixation duration on the brand and influencer might not be the main driver of a positive change in brand attitude to a greater extent than simply the mere exposure effect. Alternatively, total fixation duration on the brand and influencer might not be an appropriate predictor of a positive change in brand attitude.

In relation to the second hypothesis, no significant evidence was found to support that longer fixation duration on the sponsorship disclosure leads to a more negative change in

brand attitude. For this, we similarly found three explanations in our literature review. The first explanation might be the fact that present study did not include persuasion knowledge as a variable on which to compare participants. Thus, the mean change in brand attitude might have been offset by different levels of persuasion knowledge among the participants. A second explanation could be the fact that the participants may not have processed the sponsorship disclosure sufficiently, despite paying visual attention to it. A third explanation may be that visual attention devoted to the sponsorship disclosure may be an inadequate proxy for recognizing the post as sponsored compared to other aspects such as creative elements. Alternatively, fixation duration on the sponsorship disclosure might simply not be an appropriate predictor of a negative change in brand attitude.

Finally, our findings related to the third hypothesis revealed no significant difference in unaided brand recall between sponsored posts by familiar and unfamiliar influencers. However, our findings did reveal a significant difference in aided brand recall between sponsored posts by a familiar influencer and unfamiliar influencers. This finding seems to confirm that the vampire effect prevails in influencer marketing as well. Hence, our finding suggests that for low involvement product categories, a familiar influencer is significantly worse at driving aided brand recall compared to an unfamiliar influencer. The increased aided brand recall resulting from unfamiliar influencers can potentially be explained by the increased cognitive effort that the participants might have devoted to scrutinize the posts.

To conclude, visual attention devoted to a sponsored post by an influencer on Instagram has no significant effect on the advertised brand on the conscious affective stage. In fact, the use of a famous influencer was proved to decrease aided brand recall significantly compared to an unfamiliar influencer. Hence, present study finds empirical evidence that supports the existence of the vampire effect in the context of influencer marketing.

8. Managerial implications

In the attention economy, where attention has become one of the most valuable and scarce resources, especially for companies looking to be in the limelight, our findings seem to have important implications for practitioners. First and foremost, companies

should consider the specific objective of their marketing effort before choosing influencer marketing. The existence of a vampire effect in influencer marketing suggests that using familiar influencers is not the most viable approach, if the objective is to drive brand recall. Hence, companies might risk that the influencer overshadows the brand, why other channels may be more effective in this regard.

Conversely, if the objective is in fact to drive brand recall, the application of an unfamiliar influencer might be a decent approach, as our findings suggest that an unfamiliar influencer is more effective in doing so than a familiar one. As argued, this might be due to the increased cognitive effort demanded when presented with an unfamiliar influencer. However, it should be noted that the reason for remembering non-follower posts better than sponsored posts in present study might just as well be due to a negative association between the brand and the unfamiliar influencer, so this implication should be considered with caution. Contrarily, if the objective is to obtain a positive change in brand attitude, the findings of present study indicate that brand posts on Instagram can be equally as effective as sponsored posts as a result of the mere exposure effect. Therefore, before investing in influencer marketing, companies should consider the option of simply purchasing advertising placements on Instagram instead.

Secondly, our findings could imply the presence of a *sponsorship blindness* in influencer marketing similar to the phenomenon of *banner blindness*. Banner blindness occurs when internet users consciously or nonconsciously ignore advertising in the form of banners (Hervet, Guérard, Trembley & Chtourou, 2010). An eye tracking study on banner blindness by Hervet et al. (2010) found that despite the banners receiving visual attention by the participants, they were not able to recall the content afterwards. Since our study found similar results, namely that a familiar influencer led to significantly lower brand recall among the participants, despite them paying attention to the appearing brands, this implies that sponsorship blindness might be emerging in the context of influencer marketing. However, it seems that companies are still engaging with the practice of display advertising online, in spite of the apparent emergence of banner blindness. As such, the potential emergence of sponsorship blindness should not result in completely disregarding influencer marketing all together. Instead, companies should consider if the costs and

expenses connected to the marketing efforts matches the benefits that the companies gain from engaging with influencer marketing.

Third, our findings also raise ethical concerns in a broader societal scope. As our findings imply that neither the sponsorship disclosure nor other creative elements are sufficiently processed among our participants, it may appear that the commercial nature of sponsored posts need to be made more clear on Instagram. Although it is regulated in the Danish Marketing Practices Act, the directions by the Danish Consumer Ombudsman might need to be revised or legislation simply need to be more explicit about the consequences of violations of the law. A potential benefit for companies in this regard would be that a more explicit sponsorship disclosure will likely lead more attention towards the advertised brand, rather than the influencer capturing all of the attention. Alternatively, that the participants did not process the commercial nature of the sponsored posts sufficiently, could also suggest that consumers might not possess sufficient knowledge about the persuasive tactics employed by influencers and companies on Instagram. Therefore, they may not possess sufficient persuasion knowledge to identify when they encounter a persuasion attempt, and thus fail to elicit critical processing. As Wu et al. (2016) suggest, this might be accommodated by educating the general public about the different marketing tactics that companies utilize. This could increase the persuasion knowledge of consumers and hence activate more critical processing when encountering those tactics on for instance Instagram.

Fourth, the missing empirical evidence of a positive effect on brand attitude in present study, could also reflect a beginning stagnation in the effects of influencer marketing. While previous research has proved the positive effect of influencer marketing on brand attitude, this was not confirmed in present study. A reason for this may be a changing youth culture. As Spinks (2019) points out, youth culture tends to swing like a pendulum. The buttoned-up culture of the post-World War II period gave way to the counterculture, which gave rise to the hippie and other alternative lifestyles that moved beyond the focus on acquisition of material necessities. Conversely, the counterculture was superseded by the youth culture dubbed as the *MTV Generation*, often characterized as cynical and disaffected, evident by their distrust in authorities and political leadership (Stewart, Oliver

& Crawns, 2017). Today, this spirit has in turn been replaced by that of the *Millennials*, which is also the dominant generational user group of Instagram and what the participants of present study belong to. The core values of the Millennials are achievement, self-confidence and optimism (Stewart et al., 2017). The aspirational youth culture of the Millennials seems to go perfectly hand in hand with the emergence of influencers as instafamous celebrities, where ordinary consumers have become empowered to gather substantial audiences of followers leaving them in very influential positions. Some users even go as far as posting fake sponsored content, as a way to gain esteem from their peers (Lorenz, 2018).

Hence, it does not seem unthinkable that the future holds a radical change of directions in youth culture that could potentially disrupt influencer marketing. Some tendencies have already started to appear. For instance, *Instagram Stories*, a feature that lets users post photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours, is increasingly gaining popularity at the expense of regular posts (Wagner, 2018). As a result, Facebook, the company that owns Instagram, has announced that the business will invest substantially in this feature in the near future (Wagner, 2018). This leaves companies with a new challenge, i.e. figuring out how to best capitalize on the short and volatile format of *Stories*.

9. Limitations & future research

As often seen in scientific research, a tradeoff between ecological and internal validity has been made in present study. In terms of the experimental design, internal validity was prioritized, whereas the ecological validity was prioritized when choosing the stimuli. However, the prioritization between internal validity and ecological validity could just as well have been the other way around, or the primary focus could have been on one of the two types of validity.

As internal validity was prioritized in present experimental design, participants were exposed to the stimuli for a fixed amount of time in order to ensure equal opportunity for the participants to look at the stimuli. However, this prioritization also has some limitations due to the imposed time pressure. Research suggest that under time pressure, consumers

tend to filter out textual information more, and pictorial information less. Pieters (1999) proved, using eye tracking, that during brand choice, consumers adapt to time pressure by accelerating the visual scanning sequence, by filtering information and by changing their scanning strategy. Hence, the possibility exists that the participants of present study nonconsciously chose to filter out the textual information of the stimuli, such as the sponsorship disclosure, in favor of the pictorial information of the stimuli. Moreover, another limitation of the experimental design is that the fixed exposure time is arguably not very naturalistic compared to the actual usage of Instagram. It would be reasonable to assume that viewing time is not distributed equally across every post when browsing the Instagram news feed. In other words, it is likely that people will devote more attention to some types of posts than others. As Milosavljevic & Cerf (2008) point towards, people will often try to avoid advertising and thus, it does not seem unlikely that people will skip advertising when encountering it on Instagram.

Therefore, future research should consider a more naturalistic experimental design by for instance applying wearable eye tracking glasses, which would allow the researchers to examine the dynamic interaction between the participants and the Instagram app on a smartphone rather than on a screen-based eye tracking device. As such, this would allow the researchers to account for the interactive features of Instagram, such as Instagram Stories and the different layout of the feed on the smartphone app, which for instance allows the influencer to place the sponsorship disclosure above their photo and thus separate it from the text related to the photo.

Conversely, in terms of stimuli, present study chose to focus on ecological validity. As previously argued (see section 4.1.1.1), the stimuli were adopted directly from the case influencer's Instagram account, in order to avoid raising suspicion and resistance from the participants, as they all follow her and might have a clear idea of what type of content she would normally post and promote. This however meant that the included sponsored posts were all composed differently, and compared to the other two types of posts, had a different variety and amount of AOIs. This is a limitation when focusing on total fixation duration, as bigger AOIs or a larger amount of AOIs on the different posts evidently result in a higher likelihood of the participant fixating on the specific AOI, which naturally will

increase the total fixation duration. Future research however could benefit from the opposite, i.e. manipulating the stimuli to include an equal amount and size of AOIs. This would also accommodate the limitation that the participants might have seen the sponsored posts prior to the experiment, which might have hindered a measurable change in brand attitude in present study.

Another central limitation to present study is the sample size. Due to resource constraints and the strict screening criteria for participation, the size of the sample was rather limited. To accommodate this in future research, one could loosen the screening criteria by for instance including participants not following the influencer, or focusing on more than one influencer. An increase in the number of case influencers would arguably also increase the reliability of present study. Ultimately, with a larger sample size, the first two hypotheses of present study might have been confirmed, or the rejection of them would have been based on a more robust foundation.

In future research, a larger sample size would also allow for more granulated comparisons between the participants. For instance, present study was limited by the fact that the degrees of freedom were lost when looking at the AOIs separately. As a result, it was necessary to group some of the AOIs. A larger sample size would allow researchers to investigate whether attention is devoted to the appearing influencer to a significantly greater degree than to the advertised brand, which would arguably be a highly relevant addition to the vampire effect theory. Furthermore, a larger sample size could allow for comparisons between participants based on their pre-existing brand attitudes revealed in the pre-test. Assuming that a neutral brand attitude might be easier to change than a highly negative or positive, this could reveal if the pre-existing brand attitude in fact mediates the subsequent affective response.

A relevant addition to present study could also be to compare the participants' changes in brand attitude based on the sponsorship disclosure timing, i.e. the timing of which the participants fixated on the disclosure. As Boerman et al. (2014) found, participants exposed to the sponsorship disclosure prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content became more critical of the content, ultimately reducing the persuasive effect as well as

resulting in less favorable attitudes toward the advertised brand. Hence, future research should consider to investigate the effects of disclosure timing when viewing sponsored posts on Instagram. For instance, TTFF on the sponsorship disclosure AOI would reveal whether participants fixate on the sponsorship disclosure to begin with, midway, or in the end of their viewing path. Hence, disclosure timing could function as a variable on which to do comparisons of subsequent changes in brand attitude.

How disclosure timing might reduce the persuasive effects in a sponsored post is related to the previously dealt with persuasion knowledge, which arguably could have been accounted for in terms of measuring the participants' levels of persuasion knowledge. Consequently, future research might gain valuable insights into how participants with high vs. low levels of persuasion knowledge fixate on sponsored posts and how this in turn affect their brand attitude, as theory suggests that high persuasion knowledge results in critical processing of the persuasion attempt, and thus a negative effect on brand attitude.

Moreover, in order to further validate the results of present study, future research might try to replicate the experimental design or add to it. For instance, a between-subjects experiment with a control group that is exposed to stimuli without a sponsorship disclosure, could determine whether the disclosure in fact is important for recognizing a post as sponsored and the consequence for brand attitude. Furthermore, as the findings of present study only apply under low involvement conditions, a similar setup might show different results under high involvement conditions.

Finally, present study seeks to accommodate the advances in neuroscientific research and the reconceptualization of the AIDA model that this calls for. Therefore, we measured attention both on the conscious and nonconscious levels via eye tracking, and its subsequent effects on brand attitude on a conscious level. However, the advances within the field of neuroscience also allow for measuring affective brain responses on the nonconscious level, but due to resource constraints this was not a feasible option in present study. Therefore, future research should consider to build upon the findings of present study by measuring the effect on the nonconscious affective stage as well. On the other hand, as the neurological basis behind every individual action in various contexts

varies substantially, the neuroscientific perspective calls for an extensively more complex modelling of effect than the prevailing AIDA model. This ought to be addressed by future researchers.

10. References

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11. Appendices

Appendix A: Stimuli

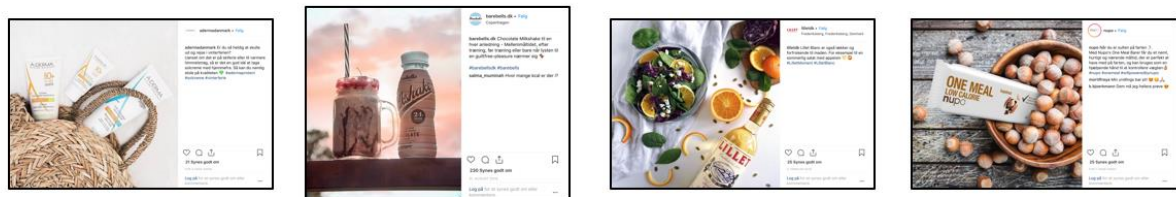
Sponsored posts



Non-follower posts



Brand Posts



Appendix B: Fillers



Appendix C: Data

Following the below link will grant access to the 1) the cleaned eye tracking data extracted from the eye tracker and 2) the combined survey data extracted from SurveyXact:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1hg2zewroha4ql0/AAD - MNwVfGikbu38xHoslDa?dl=0>