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Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude

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ABSTRACT

Findings of two experimental studies show that Instagram influencers with high numbers of followers are found more likeable, partly because they are considered more popular. Important, only in limited cases, perceptions of popularity induced by the influencer's number of followers increase the influencer's perceived opinion leadership. However, if the influencer follows very few accounts him-/herself, this can negatively impact popular influencers' likeability. Also, cooperating with influencers with high numbers of followers might not be the best marketing choice for promoting divergent products, as this decreases the brand's perceived uniqueness and consequently brand attitudes.

Introduction

Recently, brands discovered the far-reaching impact and viral growth potential of forging alliances with social media influencers to promote their products. Social media influencers are referred to as people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them. In addition, they are seen as a regard for being a trusted tastemaker in one or several niches. As brands continue to abandon traditional advertising techniques, efforts are increasingly focused on these influencers to endorse their products among their followers and beyond. These endorsements are likely to be interpreted as highly credible electronic Word Of Mouth (eWOM) rather than paid advertising as they are often seamlessly woven into the daily narratives influencers post on their Instagram accounts (Abidin 2016). This is particularly desirable for brands as it appears to be more effective than traditional advertising tactics, due to higher authenticity and credibility, which subsequently leads to lower resistance to the message (de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang 2012). Therefore, by seeding a certain message or a new product with these influencers, marketers aim to maximize the diffusion of information through their social network (Weimann 1994; Keller and Berry 2003). Through their posts, influencers may influence a disproportionately large number of others, possibly indirectly via a cascade of influence through their followers (Gladwell 2000). Today, 75% of marketers are using influencer marketing (Augure 2015).

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One of the major challenges for brands is to identify and select these so-called influencers who may have a strong impact on their target audience and influence them to try and adopt new products and help diffuse them in their social network through their posts (Momtaz, Aghaie, and Alizadeh 2011; Pophal 2016). Today, the number of followers, which reflects network size and serves as an indication for popularity, is frequently used to identify these influential nodes. Accordingly, higher numbers of followers may result in larger reach of the (commercial) message and may thus leverage the power of this specific type of word-of-mouth at scale. Regarding their commercial potential, technologies have been developed to identify and track relevant influencers for brands and connect with them (e.g. Traackr, Little Bird,…). These platforms draw up criteria such as minimum 10.000 followers in order to be suitable as brand advocate. However, to our knowledge, no research yet investigated how people perceive and evaluate influencers' numbers of followers. Moreover, the reach of the message through an influencer should not be the only criterion for successful persuasive communication. To increase the message's impact one should search for the most likeable, credible influencer who has a high value as an opinion leader. The challenge for advertisers thus becomes to select the most efficient and suitable influencer, also keeping the type of product they want to promote in consideration.

Hence, in two studies, we aim to provide more insights in the characteristics that make a social media influencer on Instagram efficient above and beyond their potential reach through their large social network. Being a social networking site that provides users with video- and photo-sharing possibilities, Instagram lends itself very well for eWOM purposes because products and brands can be visually imaged and named in the caption of the photo. Moreover, it is one of the most popular social networking sites and currently has over 500 million active users and counting (Statista 2016a). Study 1 explores which Instagram influencer is the best marketing choice in terms of number of followers. Whereas previous studies have examined influence and diffusion, mainly on Twitter (Cha et al. 2010; Weng et al. 2010), to identify a suitable brand advocate, it is essential to examine whether this number of followers indeed is a suitable indicator for doing so. There is discussion about whether or not there exists a link between number of followers and opinion leadership. Findings vary from a clear connection between number of followers and opinion leadership (e.g. Yoganarasimhan 2012; Feng 2016; Hwang 2015) to number of followers being merely an indication for popularity rather than influence (e.g. Cha et al. 2010; Romero et al. 2011). The first study contributes to this on-going debate by shedding more light on whether one's number of followers contributes to his/her opinion leader status and how it affects general likeability towards him/her. In particular, it is investigated whether one's number of followers may work as a cue – indicating one's popularity – and whether perceived popularity in turn might cause people to ascribe opinion leadership to the person in question, which eventually affects the endorser's overall likeability.

As relationships on Instagram do not always entail reciprocal activities, meaning that one can freely choose to follow an account without the need to ask the other's permission and without the other feeling obliged to follow him/her back, besides the number of followers, also the number of followees (i.e. the number of accounts the influencer follows him-/herself) and the combination of both may affect one's perceptions of the influencer. In popular literature, some 'rules' exist about the ideal 'followers/followees ratio' exist. There are even online calculators that calculate one's followers/followees ratio and explain its meaning (e.g. tffratio.com). However, to our knowledge, no study has ever examined

the impact of number of followees and the ratio between one's number of followers and followees. Therefore, it is investigated whether and how number of followees affects the relationship between number of followers and likeability. In other words, the importance of one's 'followers/followees ratio' in terms of likeability is examined.

Whereas the commercial use of influencers is a growing global marketing phenomenon due to their capacity to shape purchase decisions, little is known about how the endorsements they produce on social media platforms in exchange for payment or sponsored products and services affect attitudes towards the brands or products they endorse. Abidin (2015, 2016) did some ethnographic research on how influencers insert advertisements for products and services in the textual and visual narration of their personal, everyday lives on social media. However, experimental research on the working of influencer marketing is largely absent. Therefore, Study 2 assesses the brand effects of influencers and examines the moderating role of number of followers on the advertising effectiveness of influencers' posts. In particular, effectiveness in terms of attitude towards the brand of commercial posts containing endorsements of products with common versus divergent product designs will be investigated. The effect of product type on brand attitudes is expected to be affected by number of followers as this might have an impact on perceptions about the brand. Products with divergent product designs that may respond to people's need for uniqueness, might be perceived as less unique when posted by an influencer with a high number of followers compared to when it is promoted by an influencer with a moderate number of followers, which may eventually lower brand attitudes.

Hence, this study adds value by providing an understanding on how one's number of followers affects attitudes towards the influencer and the brands (s)he promotes. Insights are of general relevance to word-of-mouth marketing and influencer marketing in particular and contribute to literature in several ways. First, this study theoretically contributes to literature on influence and the dissemination of word-of-mouth. Also, it adds to the ongoing debate concerning opinion leadership and how to identify it. Next, this study sheds more light on how influencers determine the perception of a brand through their endorsements. In this sense, this study contributes to literature on heuristic processing and naive theories by investigating how an influencer's number of followers may affect perceptions of the uniqueness of a product and accordingly brand attitudes. Moreover, this study took into account the moderating impact of the empirically underexposed metric number of followees.

Theoretical background

The emergence of influencer marketing

It has been well recognized in marketing and consumer behaviour literature that eWOM, or the information consumers obtain from interpersonal sources, has stronger effects on consumer decision-making than traditional advertising techniques (Goldsmith and Clark 2008). A similar message is perceived as more authentic and credible when it is communicated by a fellow consumer compared to than when it would have been put forward by an advertiser. Consumers have always valued others' opinions, however, the advent and still growing popularity of social media has amplified the effects of peer recommendations, as it empowered consumers to share their opinions and experiences one-to-many.

As consumers can freely create and disseminate brand-related information and voluntarily display their brand preference to others through their social interactions, social media such as Instagram or Facebook nowadays represent an ideal tool for eWOM (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Jansen et al. 2009; Knoll 2016; Lyons and Henderson 2005).

The power of eWOM, defined as 'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet' (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 39) has been widely recognized and social media has amplified and accelerated its reach. Crucial to the diffusion of eWOM, is the identification of opinion leaders, who exert a disproportionate amount of influence on others, an idea that has already been recognized decades ago (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Through their social media activities, nowadays' digital opinion leaders or influencers, are able to influence the attitudes, decisions and behaviours of their audience of followers (Watts and Dodds 2007; Lyons and Henderson 2005). Moreover, as messages can be disseminated rapidly and easily, a viral effect or buzz might be induced. This way, their influence does not only flow to their followers, but also spreads among followers as they share the viral messages in their social networks (Thomas 2004). At the same time, nowadays consumers are not only sceptical about traditional brand-driven advertising, they are also empowered to bypass it as it is often found to be intrusive and disruptive. Consumers are able to advance forward to skip commercials or install ad-blocking software, which makes it increasingly harder for brands to reach consumers. As an answer that maximizes the advantages of word-of-mouth and bypasses shortcomings of traditional advertising techniques, such as avoidance and resistance (Fransen et al. 2015; Kaikati and Kaikati 2004), brands increasingly focus their efforts on so-called social influencers. As opposed to directly targeting the target market through all kinds of advertising, brands aim to encourage highly followed and admired influencers who are regarded as trustworthy, non-purposive opinion leaders, to talk about and recommend their products on social media platforms. This way, brands may leverage the power of word-of-mouth and market their products indirectly.

The working of influencer marketing

Influencers are content creators who accumulated a solid base of followers. Through blogging, vlogging or creating short-form content (e.g. Instagram, SnapChat, ...) they provide their followers an insight into their personal, everyday lives, their experiences and opinions. By involving influencers (e.g. by offering to test a product, organizing an exclusive event, ... or simply paying them), brands aim to stimulate influencers to endorse their products and this way build up their image among influencers' often huge base of followers, a practice that is called influencer marketing. Unlike mainstream celebrities, influencers are believed to be accessible, believable, intimate and thus easy to relate to as they share the personal, usually publically inaccessible aspects of their life with their followers and interact with them in flesh (Abidin 2016; Schau and Gilly 2003). This may generate para-social interaction, which has been described as the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with a media performer and makes consumers more susceptible to their opinions and behaviour (Colliander and Dahlén 2011; Knoll et al. 2015). As influencers' endorsements are highly personal and interwoven into the constant stream of textual and visual narration of their personal lives, they will likely be perceived as the influencer's unbiased opinions and may have relevant persuasive power (Abidin 2015). Moreover, due to

its relative newness and the inexperience of consumers to influencer marketing strategies, it is less likely to trigger persuasion knowledge which could render unfavourable attitudes (Friestad and Wright 1994; Tutaj and Van Reijmmersdal 2012).

It is important for brands to approach an influencer who is well-liked by their audience to endorse their products. Previous research for example found positive associations between attitude towards the celebrity and attitude towards the brand (e.g. Amos, Holmes, and Strutton 2008; Silvera and Austad 2004). Also, Schemer et al. (2008) found that pairing a brand with positively evaluated artists results in positive attitudes toward the brand. Moreover, brands should be careful in picking the right influencer to endorse their brand and decide who possesses the most appropriate and desired characteristics in relation to the brand, as the image of the influencer may transfer to the brand by virtue of the endorsement. As consumers use brands to communicate their identity to others and evaluate others based on their consumption behaviour (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; Reed et al. 2012), the images that the brand conveys are of high importance.

Identifying influencers

Influencer marketing consists of identifying and targeting influential users and stimulate them to endorse a brand or specific products through their social media activities. Just like in many other word-of-mouth marketing strategies, a major challenge is the identification of a suitable opinion leader or influencer (Araujo, Neijens, and Vliegenthart 2017). As higher numbers of followers may result in larger reach of the (commercial) message and may thus leverage the power of this specific type of word-of-mouth at scale, today, the number of followers is frequently used to identify influencers on social media.

Different studies have been conducted to measure online opinion leadership and identify opinion leaders. Of these, assessing one's audience size or number of followers has often been put forward as a first step to take in the quest for opinion leaders. Zhang and Dong (2008) for example developed a roadmap to identify online opinion leaders in virtual communities in which the first step is finding out who are active users with large followers. Concerning Twitter, Cha et al. (2010) proposed different types of influence a person has of which the first is the audience size of the user, referring to the number of followers a user has. A high number of followers could be advantageous to the exertion of opinion leadership as ideas are spread more widely and rapidly and consequently, interpersonal influence is enhanced. However, it remains uncertain to what extent consumers process this information and use it to assess an influencer on social media, in particular in terms of opinion leadership. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of influencers' number of followers on attitude formation, both in terms of attitudes towards the influencer (i.e. influencer likeability) as in terms of attitudes towards the brands (s)he promotes.

Study 1: assessing the likeability of an Instagram influencer

Hypothesis development

Assessing the influencer's likeability

Today, consumers face a wide range of available sources to find information in their buying decision process. The internet and the advent of social media have made it possible

to assimilate large amounts of information in a very short time and without substantial costs to the user. Yet, the abundance and diversity of information also makes it difficult for consumers to determine its value. Already in 1982, Simon stated in his theory of bounded rationality that people have limited ability to process and evaluate available information. Moreover, digital media have increased the complexity of determining credible sources and assessing a source in a digital context is more difficult than in traditional face-to-face interaction decisions. Therefore, consumers are more dependent on cues and heuristics to evaluate information sources. Due to the emergence and ever-growing popularity of social media and the plethora of information, consumers will likely use a heuristic (or peripheral) process to assess influencers on social media. As such, when encountering an Instagram account, consumers may base their judgments on peripheral cues, such as number of followers (Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994; Metzger and Flanagin 2013; Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

In line with previous research that found that people rely on cues as numbers of online contacts, friends or followers to assess one's popularity, we expect this to be the case on Instagram too. In its turn, inferences about popularity may affect evaluations of the source (Tong et al. 2008; Utz 2010; Graham 2014; Jin and Phua 2014). For instance, when a source is found to be popular, this may elicit the reasoning that if many others think something is good or correct, then it must be good or correct, which has been referred to as the bandwagon heuristic (Sundar 2008). Indeed, people are inclined to believe certain sources if others do so as well (Metzger, Flanagin, and Medders 2010). Therefore, we expect that an influencer who is perceived as popular due to its number of followers, is likely to elicit higher perceptions of opinion leadership compared to an influencer who is perceived as less popular. In its turn, we expect these perceptions to positively affect the overall likeability of the influencer.

H1: The positive effect of number of followers on overall likeability of the influencer will sequentially be mediated by perceived popularity and ascribed opinion leadership.

The moderating impact of influencers' number of followees

Besides number of followers, also the number of followees and the combination of both may affect one's perceptions of the influencer. In popular literature, some 'rules' about who to follow and the ideal 'followers/followees ratio', mostly concerning Twitter, exist. For example, a rule of thumb is that you should especially follow people with a positive ratio, people who have more followers than they follow accounts themselves. On the other hand, a user who follows many accounts him-/herself has more opportunities to learn about different topics and opinions, and thus more ability to look beyond their own social environment, which might be beneficial in terms of opinion leadership (Williams 2006). However, following too much people is not beneficial either, because the likelihood that one can keep track on all these account's updates is very small. Moreover, following a lot of people could be perceived as an attempt to be followed back by those people, thus increasing your own number of followers (Siegler 2009). On Instagram, hashtags as #followback, #follow4follow, #instafollow and others illustrate this phenomenon. On the contrary, having a lot of followers in combination with only a few accounts following may indicate that the followers are artificially collected or 'fake', which is not beneficial either (Cresci et al. 2015).

While there is a quest for the ideal 'followers/followees ratio', until today no study has investigated whether number of followees is an important asset for consumers in the evaluation of an influencer. It is likely that the assumed positive effect of number of followers on the influencer's overall likeability (see H1) might turn negative when the influencer follows few people him-/herself. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: For an influencer with a high number of followees, we expect a positive effect of number of followers on influencer likeability.

For an influencer with a low number of followees, we expect a negative effect of number of followers on influencer likeability.

Method

Participants and design

The experiment used a 2 (number of followers: moderate versus high) by 2 (number of followees: low versus high) between-subjects experimental design to test the hypotheses. A total of 117 Instagram users (74 females, M_{Age} = 29.54 years, SD_{Age} = 6.55) took part in the study in return for a small payment. We recruited participants in the United States via Amazon's mechanical turk.

Manipulation stimuli

Instagram accounts for two fictitious influencers, a male (Stephan Jones) and a female influencer (Stephanie Jones), using photos of actual influencers were created. The gender of the respondent was matched to the gender of the Instagram influencers to avoid any confounds related to gender identification. The influencer's persona and his/her posted photos were based on that of various, actual real life influencers' Instagram pages. Both influencers had a similar Instagram bio ('Stephan(ie) Jones | 24 y/o | My life in a nutshell | Fashion | Travel | Health | Food'). The selected photos were not identical but still similar for both the male and female influencer and were all lifestyle related. In this way, they were positioned in such a way that their Instagram posts could appeal to a broad audience.

As we choose to depict an influencer, his/her number of followers had to be at least of a moderate size, a number we choose to set at 2.100. In the high number of followers condition, this number was increased to 21.200 (21.2k). For the number of followees, we choose to distinguish between a low and a high number of followees condition. In the low number of followees condition, the influencer followed 32 people, whereas in the high number of followees condition the influencer followed 32.200 (32.2k) people him-/herself. We manipulated these numbers based on actual influencers' Instagram pages. To ensure that participants estimated these numbers equally, they were given an idea of the average number of followers and followees as a benchmark. Participants were requested to read the following text: 'On Instagram, some people called influencers have very large numbers of followers. Most of these influencers on average have about 2000 followers, and follow about 300 accounts themselves. For very large numbers, Instagram uses K as an abbreviation for thousand and M as an abbreviation for million. Please, take a moment to look at the Instagram profile of Stephan(ie) Jones, an Instagram influencer who gives people through Instagram a glimpse in his/her life'. Each participant was randomly

assigned to one of the four conditions by being asked to view a screenshot of an influencer's Instagram page, differing in number of followers and accounts following, and then fill out a questionnaire. An overview of the manipulation stimuli can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

Measures

The items for the manipulation checks measured participants' perceptions of the number of followers and followees. Participants were asked if they found the influencer had a very small (= 1) versus very large (= 7) number of followers and if they thought the influencer's number of followers was smaller (= 1) versus larger (= 7) than the average influencer's number of followers. Using the same statements, participants were next asked to evaluate the influencer's number of followees. Perceived popularity was measured by a five-point semantic differential, asking participants if they found the influencer 'unpopular versus popular' (1 item). Ascribed opinion leadership was measured by Flynn, Goldsmith, and Eastmans' (1996) 5-point Likert-scale (4 items; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .92$), adjusted to review others' opinion leadership. The influencer's overall likeability was measured using three items of Dimofte, Forehand, and Desphandé's (2003) scale for attitude toward the spokesperson (5-point semantic differential, $\alpha = .85$). An overview of the used measurement scales in Study 1 can be found in Appendix 3.

Results and discussion

Manipulation checks

First, both the male (M = 3.41, SD = .55) and female (M = 3.55, SD = .59, $t(115) = 1.24$, $p = .22$) endorser were perceived to be equally credible. Next, participants perceived the influencer's number of followers to be lower in the moderate (M = 4.93, SD = 1.10) than in the high number of followers condition (M = 5.86, SD = 1.08, $t(115) = -4.59$, $p < .001$). Considering the number of followees, participants perceived the influencer's number of followees to be lower in the low (M = 2.26, SD = 1.75) than those in the high number of followees condition (M = 6.11, SD = 1.32, $t(97.52) = -13.25$, $p < .001$). These results show that the manipulations are satisfactory.

Sequential mediation analysis

To test H1 and H2, we conducted a sequential mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (2013, model 6, 5.000 bootstrap resamples) with number of followers as independent variable, perceived popularity and sequentially ascribed opinion leadership as mediators and influencer likeability as dependent variable. The analysis showed a positive effect of number of followers on perceived popularity (a1 = .36, SE = .15, $p = .017$). Next, it was found that perceived popularity has a significant positive effect on ascribed opinion leadership (a3 = .24, SE = .11, $p = .029$), which consequently has a significant positive effect on likeability (b2 = .15, SE = .06, $p = .021$). Bootstrapping showed a significant indirect effect for perceived popularity (ab = .18, SE = .07; 95% CI = [.03; .33]), but not for ascribed opinion leadership (ab = .01, SE = .03; 95% CI = [−.04; .08]). Important, the serial indirect effect was significant, however small (ab = .01, SE = .01; 95% CI = [.00; .05]). From the above analysis, it appears that the indirect effect of number of followers on likeability is for the largest part explained by
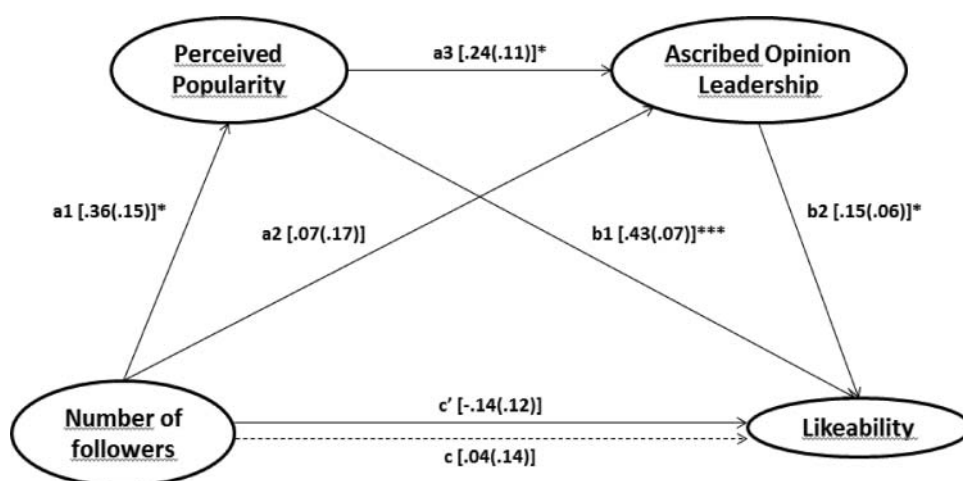
Figure 1. Illustration of the effect of number of followers on likeability through perceived popularity and ascribed opinion leadership.
Note: $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.

perceived popularity only, and for a small part by the sequential mediation through perceived popularity and ascribed opinion leadership (see Figure 1).

Moderation analysis

Addressing H2, a moderation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (2013, model 1, 5.000 bootstrap resamples) with number of followers as independent variable, number of followees as moderator, likeability as dependent variable and perceived popularity and ascribed opinion leadership as covariates was conducted. We examined whether the effect of number of followers on likeability was moderated by number of followees. The interaction term was statistically significant indicating that the effect of number of followers on likeability is contingent number of followees, B = .46, SE = .23, $p = .05$ .We further examined the conditional effect of number of followers on likeability at the two numbers of followees. When number of followees was low (32), there was a significant negative effect of number of followers on likeability, B = −.38, SE = .17, $p = .03$. When number of followees was high (32.2k), no significant effect of number of followers on likeability was found, B = .08, SE = .16, $p = .63$. These data suggest that the influencer's number of followers may have a negative effect on the influencer's likeability, but this is only the case when the influencer follows few accounts, not when the influencer follows many accounts. Both ascribed opinion leadership (B = .14, SE = .06, $p = .03$) and perceived popularity (B = .44, SE = .07, $p < .001$) had a significant positive effect on likeability (see Table 1).

Additional analyses on the moderating role of gender

As previous studies have shown that gender differences may appear when individuals evaluate luxury consumers (e.g. Dunn and Searle 2010; Dunn and Hill, 2014), this may suggest that luxury purchases of significant others may have different effects on men versus women. Hence, it was investigated whether the above findings differ between men and women. First, results reveal that the serial indirect effect of number of followers on likeability through perceived popularity and opinion leadership was not moderated by

Table 1. Tested moderation results Study 1.

	Coefficient (SE)	t	95% confidence interval
Outcome: likeability			
Constant	1.75(.33)	5.31	[1.10; 2.40]
N followees	−.16(.16)	1.00	[−.49; .16]
N followers	−.38(.17)	−2.24	[−.72; −.04]
int_1	.46(.23)	1.98	[.00; .92]
Opinion leadership	.14(.06)	2.14	[.01; .26]
Perceived popularity	.44(.07)	5.96	[.29; .59]
Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator			
N followees = low	−.38(.17)	−2.24	[−.72; −.04]
N followees = high	.08(.16)	.48	[−.24; .39]

Note: int_1 = *N* followers * *N* followees.

gender (B = −.00, SE = .01, 95%CI: = [−.04; .03]). Next, an analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (2013, model 3, 5.000 bootstrap resamples) found that the negative effect of number of followers on likeability when the influencer followed few accounts (32) him-/herself which was found in the second analysis, only applied to females (B = −.58, SE = .21, *p* = .01). In contrast, this effect was not significant for males (B = .02, SE = .28, *p* = .93).

Conclusion Study 1

Examining the influence of different numbers of followers on an Instagram influencer's likeability, Study 1 found that having more followers positively affects attitudes towards the influencer, for the most through higher perceptions of popularity and for a small part because these higher perceptions of popularity leads people to ascribe more opinion leadership to the influencer. A high number of followers may thus lead to higher perceptions of popularity, and subsequently higher likeability, but it does not mean that the influencer is automatically perceived as an opinion leader. Furthermore, results suggested the emergence of a negative relationship between number of followers and likeability when a popular influencer follows very few accounts him-/herself. However, additional analyses pointed out that this might only be true for female Instagram users. This might imply that female Instagram users are more sensitive to influencers' 'followers/followees ratio'.

As consumers have become savvy to traditional marketing techniques, brands increasingly partner up with Instagram influencers to reach their target audience. By convincing influencers to include their products in their posts, brands hope to capitalize on the influencer's status, credibility and popularity. To further elaborate on the impact of the influencer's number of followers on the effects for brands (s)he might promote through his/her Instagram posts, we conduct a second study. The aim of Study 2 is thus to examine the impact of the influencer's number of followers on consumers' attitude towards the brand of the promoted product. Moreover, the relation between number of followers and influencer effectiveness in terms of brand attitude will be investigated for products that have a standard versus divergent design.

Study 2: assessing the brand effects of Instagram influencers

Hypothesis development

As the number of followers represents the audience with whom influencers share their ideas, a higher number of followers might elicit stronger brand effects. Jin and Phua

(2014) recently illustrated this idea and found that positive tweets from celebrities with a high number of followers result in higher product involvement and buying intentions than tweets from less popular celebrities. However, we expect that the impact of the number of followers might be different according to the type of product.

Consumers in the first place evaluate products to decide whether they respond to their needs. In particular, sometimes consumers want to buy what others have bought, but at other times, they might be very attracted to unique products that are not obvious to obtain (Steinhart et al. 2014). Two opposite social needs explain these preferences, i.e. the need for uniqueness and the need for conformity (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001). However, consumers rarely have complete product information, which makes evaluation difficult. Therefore, they often make inferences to fill these gaps. These inferences have been referred to as naive theories and serve as common-sense explanations to evaluate and interpret marketing communication, products and brands (Briñol, Rucker, and Petty 2015; Deval et al. 2013; Gunasti and Ross 2009; Kardes, Posavac, and Cronley 2004). Consumers use these naive theories in forming product judgments and deciding whether a product responds to their needs. Accordingly, Deval et al. (2013) found that subtle primes in a consumer context can activate naive theories that guide consumers' beliefs about market related phenomena such as pricing, sales promotion, product popularity versus scarcity, and technical language. Marketers exploit these naive theories by emphasizing product characteristics that are likely to trigger these naive beliefs associated with desirable consumer responses when developing their communication strategies (Duncan 1990; Lynn 1992). Posavac et al. (2010), for example, found that firms that are presented as profitable, are evaluated more positively, their advertisements are considered more credible and their advertised products evoke more positive brand attitudes, and increase purchase intention. Similar, Steinhart et al. (2014) found that exposing consumers to functional products (i.e. products that enable one to achieve a certain goal or complete a practical task) triggers the naive theory of popularity, or the belief that popular products are desirable, similar to 'bandwagon' effects (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Deval et al. 2013, Henshel and Johnston 1987). Exposing them to self-expressive products (i.e. unique products, or products that enable one to diverge from others) induces beliefs in the naive theory of exclusivity, or the belief that exclusive products are desirable (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; Snyder and Fromkin 1980).

Following the naive theory of exclusivity, we expect consumers to have a better attitude towards brands with divergent product designs compared to brands with standard designs because they are perceived as more unique.

H3: Products with a divergent design evoke higher attitudes towards the brand compared to products with a standard design.
H4: The positive effect of product divergence on attitude towards the brand is mediated by perceived brand uniqueness.

However, if the product is posted by an influencer with a high number of followers, this might trigger the naive theory of popularity and thoughts that the product is rather common instead of unique. When such an influencer promotes a divergent product, product uniqueness might diminish due to the idea that many others might be interested in the product as well (Hui and Bateson 1991; Machleit, Eroglue, and Mantel 2000). Hence, we expect the positive relationship between product divergence and attitude towards the brand through perceived brand uniqueness to be weakened when the product is posted by an influencer with a very high number of followers. We hypothesize,

H5: The indirect positive effect of divergence of the product design on attitude towards the brand through perceived brand uniqueness, is weaker when the brand is promoted by an influencer with a high number of followers compared to when it is promoted by an influencer with a moderate number of followers.

Method

Participants and design

The study used a 2 (number of followers: moderate versus high) by 2 (product divergence: low versus high) between-subjects experimental design. Contrary to Study 1 in which male participants were exposed to a male influencer's profile and vice-versa, in Study 2 we decided to only include female participants, as the findings in Study 1 mainly applied to female participants and the majority of Instagram users is female (Statista 2016b). Hence, any gender confounds are avoided and females are more susceptible to social influence than males (Eagly 1983). One hundred eighteen female Instagram users from the United States recruited from Amazon's mechanical turk completed the study in exchange for a small payment ($M_{Age} = 26.92$ years, $SD_{Age} = 4.24$).

Manipulation stimuli

Participants were exposed to the same profile of Stephanie Jones as in the first study and were instructed to view her profile carefully. As in Study 1, in the moderate number of followers condition, the influencer was given 2.100 followers, whereas in the high number of followers condition, this number was increased to 21.200 (21.2k). The number of followees ($N = 320$) and number of posts ($N = 366$), was kept constant over all conditions. Again, participants were given an idea of the average number of followers and followees of an influencer as a benchmark. After viewing the profile, participants read that the influencer recently posted a picture on Instagram and participants were again instructed to view the post carefully. To strengthen the manipulation, the picture that was posted by the influencer with a moderate number of followers, had a lower number of likes ($N = 210$) than the picture that was posted by the influencer with a high number of followers ($N = 2.120$), as this controls for discrepancies between the number of followers versus amount of likes per post ratio. A post of a very popular influencer is likely to be liked by more people compared to a less popular influencer.

Divergence of the product design was manipulated based on the study of Warren and Campbell (2014). In the low divergence condition, the influencer promoted a bottle of water with a standard design of a in the United States unknown brand named NZO, whereas in the high divergence condition, the influencer promoted a drop-shaped bottle of water of the same brand. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. After being exposed to the manipulation stimuli, participants filled out a questionnaire. An overview of the manipulation stimuli can be found in Appendix 4.

Measures

First, as a manipulation check participants were asked whether they found the influencer had a very small (= 1) versus very large (= 7) number of followers. Participants' perceptions of the divergence of the endorsed product's design was measured by Warren and Campbell's (2014) three-item 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha = .88$). Participants had to evaluate

whether the design 'is different from the norm', 'is unique' and 'shows independence'. Attitude towards the brand was measured by Spears and Singh's (2004) five-item, 5-point semantic differential (α = .93). Perceived brand uniqueness (α = .93) was measured with four items that measure the uniqueness dimension of Netemeyer et al. (2004) 10-item 5-point Likert Brand Equity scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). An overview of the used measurement scales in Study 1 can be found in Appendix 5.

Results and discussion

Manipulation checks

In the average number of followers condition, participants perceived the influencer's number of followers to be lower (M = 5.56, SD = 1.08) than those participants in the high number of followers condition (M = 6.02, SD = 1.17, $t(116)$ = −2.19, p = .03). The divergence of the endorsed product's design was also correctly perceived, as the design of the standard-shaped bottle (M = 2.91, SD = .97) was evaluated significantly lower in divergence than the design of the drop-shaped bottle (M = 4.25, SD = .60, $t(116)$ = −8.94, p < .001). The manipulations were effective.

Post-test on the manipulation of the bottle design

To ensure that perceived attractiveness of the standard-shaped bottled water and that of the drop-shaped bottled water are similar and only differed in terms of perceived divergence, a post-test (N = 49; 26 females; M_{Age} = 34.53 years, SD_{Age} = 11.49) was set up. As such, next to perceived divergence (Warren and Campbell 2014; three items, 5-point Likert scale; α = .91), in a between-subjects design, participants' attitude towards the design of the bottle (Warren and Campbell 2014; two items; α = .84, 5-point Likert scale), aesthetic evaluation of the bottle (Bell, Holbrook, and Solomon 1991; four items; 5-point semantic differential; α = .94), attitude towards the product/brand (Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000; three items; 5-point semantic differential, α = .94), perceived quality of the brand (Taylor and Bearden 2002; four items, 5-point semantic differential; α = .89), evaluation of product packaging (Ghoshal, Boatwright, and Cagan 2011; one item, 5-point semantic differential), perceived product attractiveness (Page and Herr 2002; two items, 5-point semantic differential; α = .89) and perceived expressive aesthetics of the bottle (Cai and Xu 2011; five items, adapted to the packaging context, 5-point Likert scale; α = .95) were measured. An overview of the used measurement scales can be found in Appendix 6. It was found that the two bottle designs were only evaluated as significantly different in terms of perceived divergence (see Table 2).

Simple mediation analysis

To test H3 and H4, we conducted a simple mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (2013, model 4, 5.000 bootstrap resamples) with the divergence of the product design condition as independent variable, perceived brand uniqueness as mediator and attitude towards the brand as dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of divergence of the product design on attitude towards the brand through perceived brand uniqueness (ab = .57, SE = .11, 95% CI: = [.37; .81]). Exposure to the drop-shaped bottle led to higher perceived brand uniqueness (a = 1.02, SE = .17, p < .001),

**Table 2.** Results of the post-test on the manipulation of the bottle design.

	Standard design M (SD)	Divergent design M (SD)	t (df)	p
Perceived divergence	3.11 (1.11)	4.04 (.97)	−3.11 (46.99)	.003
Attitude towards the bottle design	3.77 (.91)	3.33 (1.14)	1.49 (41.90)	.144
Aesthetic evaluation	3.72 (.91)	3.91 (1.05)	−.68 (43.97)	.502
Attitude towards the product/brand	3.76 (.92)	3.72 (1.07)	.11 (43.72)	.912
Perceived quality of the brand	3.62 (.68)	3.88 (.91)	−1.10 (40.38)	.277
Evaluation of product packaging	3.73 (.96)	4.00 (1.08)	−.91 (44.31)	.366
Perceived product attractiveness	3.51 (1.15)	.78 (1.02)	−.78 (45.70)	.440
Perceived expressive aesthetics	3.53 (.99)	3.62 (1.19)	−.25 (43.03)	.803

which, in turn, positively affected attitude towards the brand (b = .56, SE = .06, p < .001). These results confirm H3 and H4 (see Figure 2).

Conditional process analysis

To test H5, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (2013, model 7, 5.000 bootstraps; 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals) with number of followers (i.e. moderate versus high) as the moderator of the effect of divergence of the product design on attitude towards the brand through perceived uniqueness of the brand. The moderated mediation index was significant (ab = -.50, SE = .20, 95% CI: = [−.93; −.15]). Based on this result, we can infer that the indirect effect of divergence of the product design on attitude towards the brand through perceived brand uniqueness differs significantly across different levels of followers. The interaction term was significantly indicating that the effect of divergence of the product design on perceived brand uniqueness is contingent on the number of followers of the influencer (B = −.91, SE = .33, p = .01).

We further examined the conditional indirect effects of divergence of the product design on perceived brand uniqueness for the two numbers of followers (Hayes 2013). Moderated mediation analysis revealed that when the number of followers was moderate, there was a significant positive effect of divergence of the product design on perceived brand uniqueness (ab = .80, SE = .15, 95% CI: = [.53; 1.12]). When the number of followers was high, the positive effect of divergence of the product design on perceived brand uniqueness was weaker (ab = .29, SE = .15, 95% CI: = [.01; .58]). Therefore, divergence of the product design has a positive effect on perceived brand uniqueness, and that effect is
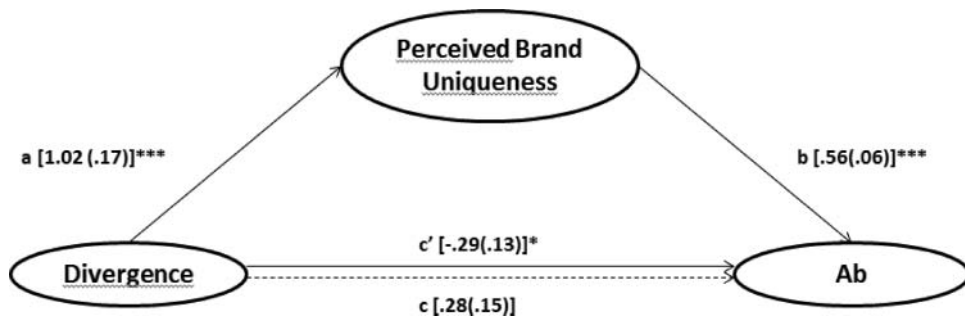
Figure 2. Tested simple mediation model.
Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 3. Tested moderated mediation model results Study 2.

|	Coefficient (SE)	t	95% confidence interval
Outcome: perceived brand uniqueness			
Constant	2.69(.15)	17.30	[2.38; 3.00]
Divergence	1.43(.22)	6.41	[.99; 1.87]
N Followers	.52(.24)	2.12	[.05; .99]
int_1	−.91(.33)	−2.75	[−1.56; −.25]
Outcome: attitude towards the brand			
Constant	1.87(.20)	9.12	[1.47; .68]
Perceived brand Uniqueness	.56(.06)	8.63	[.43; .68]
Divergence	−.29(.13)	−2.16	[−.55; −.02]
Direct effect of X on Y			
	−.29(.13)	−.16	[−.55; −.02]
Conditional indirect effects of X on Y at values of the moderator			
N followers = moderate	.80(.15)		[.53; 1.12]
N followers = high	.29(.15)		[.01; .58]

Note: Index of moderated mediation: ab = −.50, SE = .20, 95% CI: = [−.93; −.15]); int_1 = N followers * N followees.

stronger when the influencer's number of followers is moderate compared to high. Our data suggest that exposure to a product with a divergent design leads to higher perceived brand uniqueness, which, in turn, increases attitude towards the brand. However, this process is conditional on number of followers of the influencer: if the product is endorsed by an influencer with a moderate number of followers, this effect is stronger than if the product is endorsed by an influencer with a high number of followers, confirming H5 (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

General discussion

Summary of major findings and implications

This study adds value in shedding light on a specific type of endorser that has been gaining traction in marketing lately, namely social media influencers. As social media continue to gain in popularity and concerns about ad-blocking grow, influencer marketing has
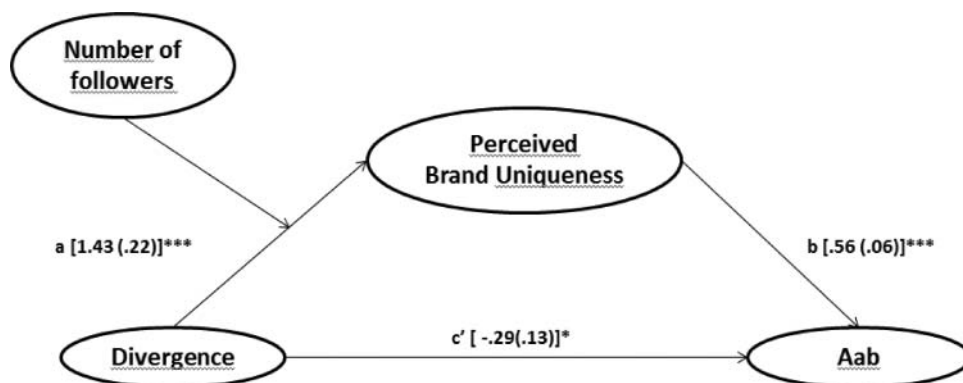
Figure 3. Tested moderated mediation model: effect of divergence on Aab via perceived brand uniqueness, moderated by number of followers.
Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

become increasingly important to brands. Rather than pushing their (whether or not personalized) ads to their target audience, brands are turning to trusted online personas to get their products and messages out to the consumer. However, despite its growing use, there has been little experimental research on the phenomenon of influencer marketing.

One of the biggest challenges in influencer marketing is the identification of the right influencers. As a metric for potential reach, today number of followers is often used as a starting point in the search for influencers. This study's findings contribute to the quest for influencer selection by indicating that an influencer's number of followers affects consumers' attitudes towards him/her (i.e. likeability) and that this is mainly explained by perceptions of popularity, in line with the findings of Quercia et al. (2011) and Romero et al. (2011). Only a small serial effect was found, indicating that these perceptions of popularity caused consumers to ascribe opinion leadership to the influencer in question. In other words, a high number of followers may not always translate into true influence. Accordingly, this study theoretically contributes to the on-going debate concerning opinion leadership and how to identify it and word-of-mouth diffusion literature.

Moreover this study is the first to include the importance of one's ratio of followers versus followees in the assessment of an influencer. It was found that a high number of followers may negatively impact influencer likeability for influencers who are following few accounts themselves. As such, this finding confirms the negative implications of the in-popular-literature-described 'hugely positive ratio's' (Siegler 2009). The current study could not provide evidence for the underlying mechanism of this effect. Future research is needed to further disentangle this effect. We expect that a low number of followees may have a detrimental impact on the trustworthiness and credibility of the endorser. A high number of followers combined with a low number of followees can be an indicator of a false account created for advertising purposes or might elicit perceptions that the influencer is mainly aiming at commercial collaborations, thus being less authentic, whereas authenticity should be precisely the strength of collaborating with influencers.

Next, this study theoretically contributes to literature on heuristic processing and naive theories. In particular, Study 2 found that consumers' attitudes towards a new, unknown brand which has not yet established brand knowledge in the consumers' mind may be influenced by a product's design and the perceptions that it evokes. Specifically, it was found that a product with a divergent design causes perceptions of uniqueness which eventually positively affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand, in line with the naive theory of exclusivity (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008). These findings are not new, however and more important, it was found that the influencer's number of followers may change perceptions in the sense that when a product with a divergent design is endorsed by an influencer with a high number of followers, perceptions of uniqueness and eventually attitudes towards the brand are lower compared to when it is endorsed by an influencer with a moderate number of followers. A high number of followers triggered the idea that the product is not that unique after all, as many others are interested in it (Machleit, Eroglue, and Mantel 2000). These findings are consistent with Hellofs and Jacobson's (1999) findings that if the market share of exclusive products grows, this may infer a loss of exclusivity for consumers. If a product with a divergent design which people purchase to stand out from the crowd, appears in a great number of Instagram feeds, the brand's perceived uniqueness will be lowered, leading to lower brand attitudes. Thus, important, when searching for an appropriate influencer, marketers must also consider the type of product

they want to promote. Although it is tempting to choose an influencer with a high number of followers in any case, this would not be the best marketing option for each product type. These insights are very important as they indicate once again that a high number of followers is not always a guarantee of success. Therefore, the topics influencers post and the audience they reach in terms of interests and activities, rather than the size of their audience might be more important to take into account.

Limitations and future research

Obviously, brands should look beyond just the number of followers and followees as they determine their ideal pool of influencers. Especially because we found that influencers with high numbers of followers do not necessarily evoke perceptions of opinion leadership. One should evaluate the topics they are posting on, the quality of the content they post, their fan engagement, photography style, etc. Future research could delve into these specific assets and how they influence the preference for a specific influencer, and more important the influencer's true influence on consumer decisions. Additionally, because meaning may transfer from people to associated brands (McCracken 1986), different influencers could evoke different effects. Future research could explore whether certain types of influencers are more likely to influence brand perceptions in a beneficial way than others. Moreover, previous research that examined transfer effects from the endorser onto the perception of products and brands, mainly in the domain of celebrity endorsement, has found that certain attributes or characteristics of endorsers may enhance advertising effectiveness (Bergkvist, Hjalmarson, and Magi 2016). Consumers' perceptions of endorsers affect the effectiveness of the message and the consumer–brand relationship (Clow et al. 2006; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2016). In particular, accompanied by a relevant fit with the endorsed products (Kirmani and Shiv 1998; Misra and Beatty 1990), personal attributes of the endorser may enhance his or her persuasiveness. As such, endorsers should be perceived as credible, attractive and they should be well liked in order to have positive effects on brand evaluations (see Bergkvist and Zhou 2016 for a review). Source credibility is driven by perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the communicator and influences consumers' attitudes (see Pornpitakpan 2004 for a review). Attractiveness refers to the endorser's physical appeal and may positively affect brand evaluations (e.g. Eisend and Langner 2010; Lord and Putrevu 2009; Till and Busler 2000), however its importance might depend on the advertised product (e.g. Kamins 1990). Moreover attractiveness goes beyond physical attractiveness, other aspects such as perceived familiarity, similarity and likeability may impact the endorser's persuasiveness (McGuire 1985; Ohanian 1991). These factors have been kept constant in both studies reported; however, they will possibly moderate the observed effects and should be included in future research.

Another factor that may impact the effectiveness of influencers' endorsements is the fit between the influencer and the brand, or the similarity or consistency between the brand and the influencer, which has been referred to as the match-up hypothesis (e.g. Kamins 1990). Also, recently Bergkvist et al. (2016) found that an important factor in celebrity endorsements is consumers' attribution of motives for the celebrity's endorsement. When an endorser was found to be merely motivated by money, this rendered less positive brand evaluations than when (s)he was seen as being motivated not only by money but

also by product quality. In this sense, future research may investigate whether different social media endorsements may evoke different perceptions about the influencers' motives among consumers and how these perceptions may affect endorsement effectiveness.

We aimed to maximize internal validity and the effects of the manipulation stimuli by creating fictitious Instagram profiles that resembled real influencer profiles as much as possible. Also we manipulated the influencer's number of followers and followees based on actual influencers' Instagram pages. Although we gave participants an idea of a typical influencer's average number of followers and followees as a benchmark, it is still possible that certain participants might have differently evaluated these numbers. Participants might have for example used the number of followers and followees of an influencer they know as a benchmark, or even their own number of followers and followees. Therefore, to improve external validity, future research could use actual Instagram profiles or even set up a collaboration with influencers and question their followers.

In Study 2 in which we focus on influencers' endorsements, to avoid confounds and create realistic manipulations, we deliberately adapted the Instagram post's number of likes according to the influencer's number of followers. This is because we expected that a low number of likes may negatively affect the credibility of the account with a high number of followers. This is because an influencer with a high number of followers can be expected to have higher number of likes on his/her posts than an influencer with a low number of followers. A low number of likes can be an indication of a low quality message for the account with a high number of followers, while it would be normal for the account with a low number of followers and that would also create a confound in the results. Future research may delve into the importance of number of likes and the relationship between one's followers and the number of likes that (s)he is able to generate. In this sense, it might be interesting to investigate the effects of an incongruence between number of followers and number of likes, both in terms of attitudes towards the influencer as in terms of attitudes towards the endorsed brand or product.

The second manipulation in Study 2 was product divergence, however, be it for a low-involvement product, namely bottled water. Findings could differ for high-involvement products. Furthermore, a bottle of water seems to be no product consumers use to signal their identity and thus purposely use in public. As people use products to signal their identity, findings might be different for typical public products. Therefore, future research should examine a wider variety of product categories and look for further differences between product types to generalize our results. Moreover, to avoid influences of consumers' established brand knowledge, the brand stimuli in Study 2 were unknown to the participants. However, consumers' evaluations may vary according to consumers' prior experiences or familiarity with the brand (e.g. Hong and Sternthal 2010). Therefore, future research should investigate whether the results also hold true for known brands that have established a strong brand image in consumers' minds and whether results differ depending on these brand images. For instance, divergent designs may only work for brands that are known for their creativity compared to more traditional brands. Also, consumers may have different preferences for divergent products. Future research should take into account these personal preferences and include certain trait variables such as "Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics" (Bloch, Brunel, and Arnold 2003) that may affect the preference for divergent product designs.

In Study 1, both males and females participated in the study. However, Study 1 indicated that the found negative effect of number of followers on likeability when the influencer followed very few accounts, only applied to females. Looking for an explanation, we found that this might be the case because females are more susceptible to social influence than males (Eagly 1983). Therefore, we choose to only allow female participants in Study 2, next to the fact that mainly females use Instagram. However, further research should delve deeper into the specific differences between men and women. Not only females are more susceptible to social influence, this is also the case for adolescents as they are very concerned about others' evaluations and feel under constant scrutiny by an imaginary audience (Steinberg and Monahan 2007). Therefore, in future research it might be interesting to focus on young Instagram users. Moreover, Instagram has a large population of young users and is considered the most important social network by American teenagers than any other network (Meeker 2015).

Another promising research direction is to explore whether the impact of influencer marketing differs depending on certain personality traits of the observer (e.g. self-esteem, need for uniqueness,…). Because people give meaning to the (commercial) messages they receive, different people may have different preferences for different types of influencers and posts including brands, according to their characteristics (Mick and Buhl 1992; Stern 1991).

To conclude, number of followers is an interesting metric in the quest for influencers, however it is not the Holy Grail of influencer marketing. Equally important is the influencer's 'followers/followees ratio', as influencers with a high number of followers but a very low numbers of followees might be found less likeable. Moreover, the type of product willing to promote through an influencer should be taken into account. When considering an influencer marketing strategy to promote divergent products, partnering with an influencer with a high number of followers might not be the best option, as this may lower the brand's perceived uniqueness and consequently brand attitudes.

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Disclosure statement

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Appendices
Appendix 1. Manipulation stimuli Study 1 female participants

On Instagram, some people called influencers have very large numbers of followers. Most of these influencers on average have about 2000 followers, and follow about 300 accounts themselves. For very large numbers, Instagram uses K as an abbreviation for thousand and M as an abbreviation for million.

Please, take a moment to look at the Instagram profile of Stephanie Jones, an Instagram influencer who gives people through Instagram a glimpse in her life.
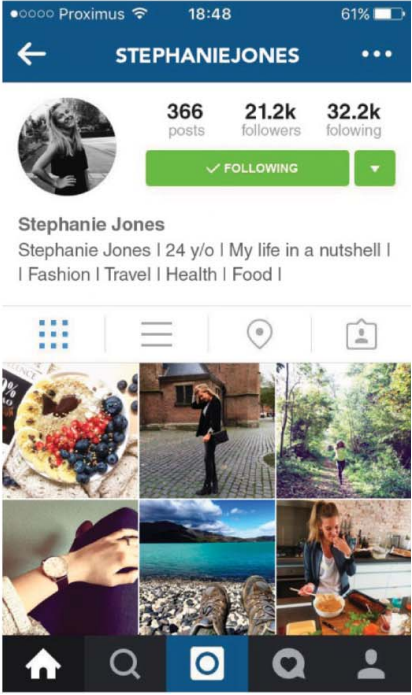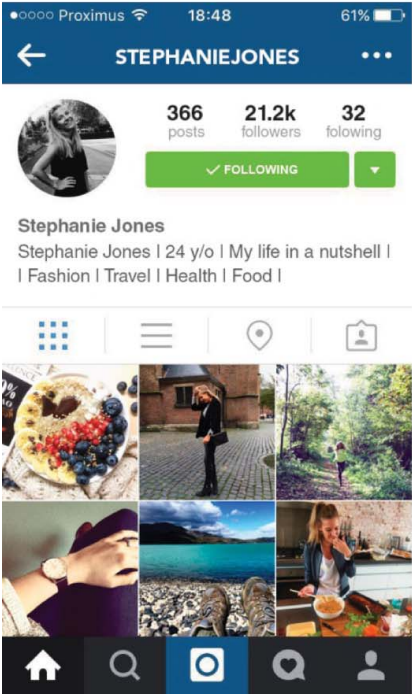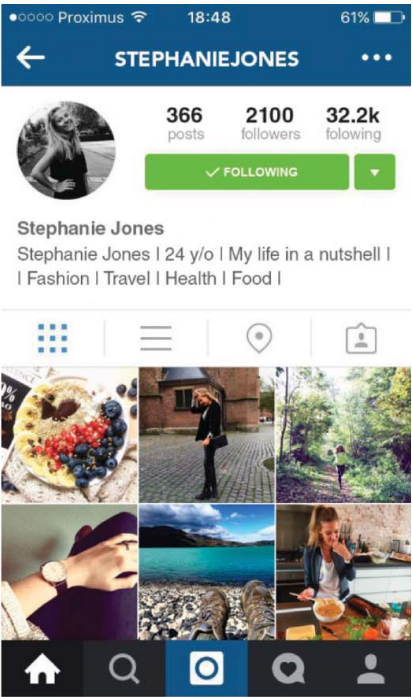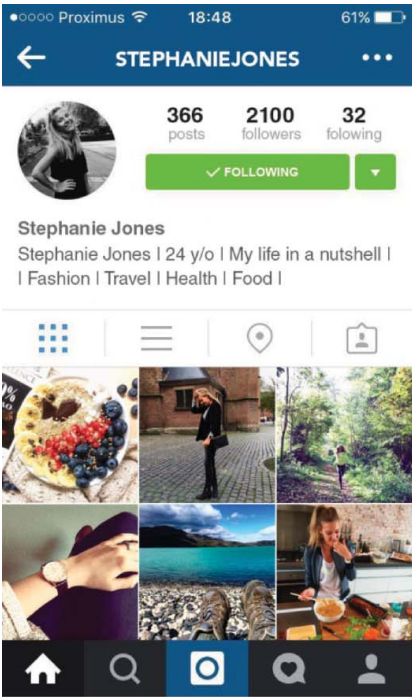
Appendix 2. Manipulation stimuli Study 1 male participants

Read the text below carefully:

On Instagram, some people called influencers have very large numbers of followers. Most of these influencers on average have about 2000 followers, and follow about 300 accounts themselves. For very large numbers, Instagram uses K as an abbreviation for thousand and M as an abbreviation for million.

Please, take a moment to look at the Instagram profile of Stephen Jones, an Instagram influencer who gives people through Instagram a glimpse in his life.

Appendix 3. Overview of used measurement scales in Study 1

Manipulation check
Stephan(ie) Jones has a … amount of followers (1 = very small; 7 = very large).
Stephan(ie) Jones is followed by … people than an average influencer (1 = less, 7 = more).
Stephan(ie) Jones follows a … amount of people (1 = very small; 7 = very large).
Stephan(ie) Jones follows … people than an average influencer (1 = less, 7 = more).

Perceived popularity
Do you find Stephan(ie) Jones…
Unpopular   O O O O O   Popular

Ascribed opinion leadership (Flynn, Goldsmith, and Eastman 1996, $\alpha = .92$)
If I'd wanted lifestyle advice, I would turn to Stephan(ie) Jones for advice.
If I would follow Stephan(ie) Jones on Instagram, I would pick products based on what she posts.
Stephanie Jones' opinion on lifestyle could have an impact on me.
Stephanie Jones could influence my opinions about lifestyle.
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Likeability of the influencer (Dimofte, Forehand, and Desphandé 2003, $\alpha = .85$)
Do you find Stephan(ie) Jones…

|		
Cold	O O O O O	Warm
Unlikeable	O O O O O	Likeable
Unfriendly	O O O O O	Friendly

Appendix 4. Manipulation stimuli Study 2

First, participants got the following instructions:

Read the text below carefully:

On Instagram, some people called influencers have very large numbers of followers. Most of these influencers on average have about <u>2000 followers</u>, and <u>follow</u> about <u>300 accounts</u> themselves. In a couple of hours they are able to collect about <u>200 likes</u>.
For very large numbers, Instagram uses K as an abbreviation for thousand.

Please, take a moment to look at the Instagram profile of Stephanie Jones, an Instagram influencer who gives people through Instagram a glimpse in her life.

Next, participants were exposed to one of the following screenshots of Stephanie Jones' Instagram profile, depending on the condition they were assigned to (moderate versus high number of followers). The screenshot was displayed immediately below the instructions.
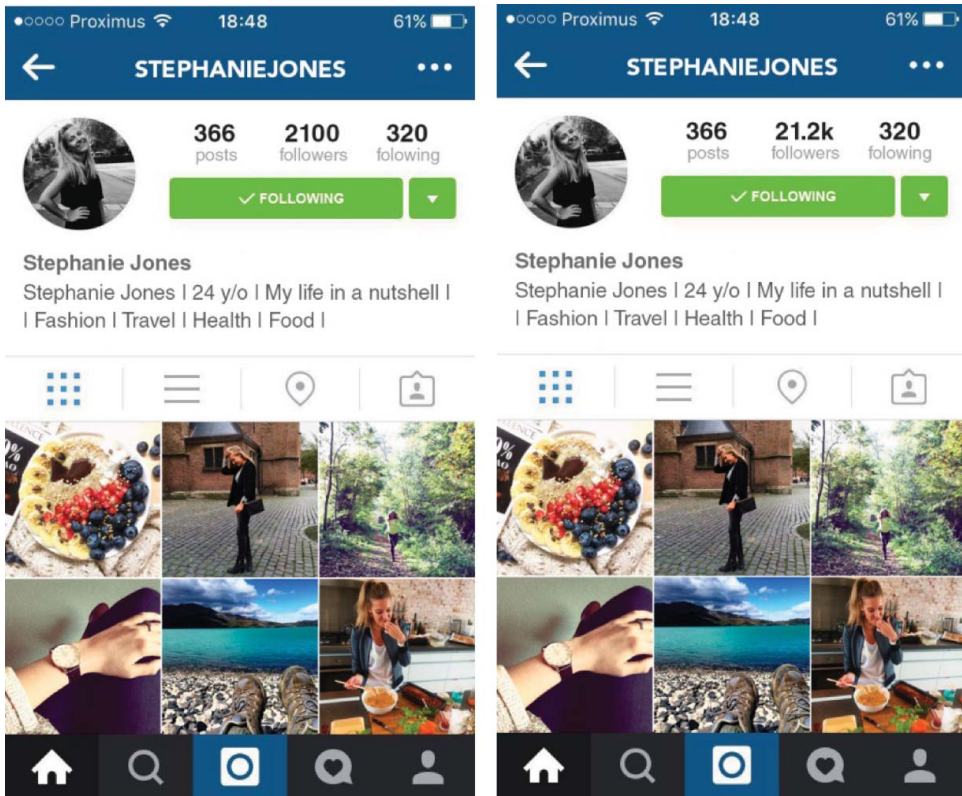
After clicking the 'next' button, participants got to see the following textbox:

Recently, Stephanie Jones posted this picture on Instagram. Please, take a moment to look at it.

Next, participants were exposed to one of the following screenshots of Stephanie Jones' posted picture, depending on the condition they were assigned to. The screenshot was displayed immediately below the instructions.

Moderate N followers, high divergence

Moderate N followers, low divergence

High N followers, high divergence

High N followers, low divergence

Appendix 5. Overview of used measurement scales in Study 2

Manipulation check *N* followers
Stephan(ie) Jones has a … amount of followers (1 = very small; 7 = very large).

Manipulation check perceived divergence of the product's design (Warren and Campbell 2014, α = .88)

The design of the water bottle
…is different from the norm.
…is unique.
…shows independence.
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Attitude towards the brand (Spears and Singh 2004, α = .93)

Do you find NZO water…

Bad	0 0 0 0 0	Good
Unfavourable	0 0 0 0 0	Favourable
Dislikeable	0 0 0 0 0	Likeable
Unappealing	0 0 0 0 0	Appealing
Unpleasant	0 0 0 0 0	Pleasant

Perceived brand uniqueness (Netemeyer et al. 2004, α = .93)
NZO is 'distinct' from other brands of bottled water.
NZO really 'stands out' from other brands of bottled water.
NZO is very different from other brands of bottled water.
NZO is 'unique' from other brands of water.
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Appendix 6. Overview of used measurement scales in post-test Study 2

Perceived divergence (Warren and Campbell 2014, α = .91)

Read the statements below carefully, and indicate how you would evaluate the design of the water bottle.
  – The design is different from the norm.
  – The design is unique.
  – The design shows independence.
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Attitude towards the design of the bottle (Warren and Campbell 2014; α = .84)
Read the statements below carefully, and indicate how you would evaluate the design of the water bottle.
  – I like the design.
  – I would like to drink water from a bottle like this.
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Perceived expressive aesthetics of the bottle (Cai and Xu 2011; α = .95)
Read the statements below carefully, and indicate how you would evaluate the design of the water bottle.
  – I like the look and feel of the bottle.
  – The bottle is visually appealing.
  – The visual design of the bottle is attractive.
  – The bottle looks pretty.
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Aesthetic evaluation (Bell, Holbrook, and Solomon 1991; α = .94)
Do you find NZO water…

Offensive	0 0 0 0 0	Enjoyable
Poor looking	0 0 0 0 0	Nice looking
Displeasing	0 0 0 0 0	Pleasing
Unattractive	0 0 0 0 0	Attractive

Attitude towards the product/brand (Aaker, Brumbaugh and Grier 2000; α = .94)
Do you find NZO water…

Bad	0 0 0 0 0	Good
Unfavourable	0 0 0 0 0	Favourable
Dislikeable	0 0 0 0 0	Likeable

Evaluation of product packaging (Ghoshal, Boatwright, and Cagan 2011)
Do you find NZO water…

Ordinary	0 0 0 0 0	Appealing
Inferior	0 0 0 0 0	Superior
Bad	0 0 0 0 0	Good
Worse than most brands	0 0 0 0 0	Better than most brands

Attitude towards the product/brand (Aaker 2000; $\alpha = .94$)
Do you find NZO water…

Bad	0 0 0 0 0	Good

Perceived product attractiveness (Page and Herr 2002; $\alpha = .89$)
Do you find NZO water…

Bad appearance	0 0 0 0 0	Good appearance
Ugly	0 0 0 0 0	Beautiful